We All Seek Revenge:
The Role of Honesty-Humility in Reactions to Incivility

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Abstract

Based on the theoretical foundations of equity theory, we assess two potential responses to coworker incivility – an overt means of revenge (i.e., increase in interpersonal deviance) and a covert means of revenge (i.e., reduction of organizational citizenship behaviors). We examined the moderating role of the personality trait Honesty-Humility on these relationships in 322 full time employees. Using data from two points in time, we found that Honesty-Humility moderated the relationships such that respondents who were lower in Honesty-Humility were more likely to engage in overt revenge due to coworker incivility, whereas those who were higher in Honest-Humility took a different path and demonstrated the propensity to engage in covert revenge by reducing their engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors. Future research and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Coworker incivility, revenge cognitions, interpersonal deviance, organizational citizenship behaviors, equity theory

Introduction

Incivility is defined 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" (Andersson & Pearson, 1999: 457). Not only is coworker incivility harmful, the phenomenon is verging on ubiquitous as prior research found that 71% of employees in a public sector sample reported

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experiencing some form of incivility over the previous five years (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). However, incivility does not occur in isolation; rather, it can spawn reactions that contribute to a violent workplace as victims of incivility may seek vengeance (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Revenge arises from ruminating about the injustice and planning ways to harm the blamed perpetrator (Bies & Tripp, 2001). However, we know less about the wide range of vengeful responses related to coworker incivility (Cortina & Magley, 2009) such as covert hostility actions that indirectly or passive-aggressively harm the incivility perpetrator. Our goal is to explore how the personality trait of Honesty-Humility may moderate the indirect effect of incivility on overt and covert hostility responses through revenge cognitions.

Researchers have explored a number of ways in which target personality shapes reactions to coworker incivility (Restubog, Zagenczyk, Bordia, Bordia, & Chapman, 2015; Taylor, Bedeian, & Kluemper, 2012) or increases the likelihood of an individual engaging in incivility of their own. Those traits include neuroticism (Arab, Sheykhshabani, & Beshlideh, 2013; Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Taylor & Kluemper, 2012), agreeableness (Arab et al., 2013; Colbert et al., 2004; Naimon, Mullins, & Osatuke, 2013; Taylor & Kluemper, 2012; Wang, Harms, & Mackey, 2014), conscientiousness (Arab et al., 2013; Colbert et al., 2004; Taylor & Kluemper, 2012), and extroversion (Wang et al., 2014). However, most research of the intersection of incivility and personality focus solely on the Big Five personality factors. A few exceptions include thrill-seeking (Reio, 2011), narcissism (Meier & Semmer, 2013), and negative affectivity (Naimon et al., 2013). Thus, the present study builds on prior work by investigating the role of a relatively new personality trait, Honesty-Humility, as a moderator that determines *how* targets act upon their thoughts of revenge in response to insidious coworker behaviors. The personality trait of Honesty-Humility, an important sixth factor of personality (Ashton & Lee, 2005), described as truthful, just, sincere and averse to exploiting others has relevance for the behavioral mechanism targets may employ as they exercise revenge motives (Ashton, Lee, & Son, 2000).

This research makes several contributions to the literature and we use equity theory (Adams, 1963) to build a model that addresses important questions. First, does incivility motivate employees to seek revenge through overt as well as covert means? To address this question, our model proposes that incivility relates indirectly to overt and covert reactions through revenge cognitions. Though research often suggests that targets seek revenge, this notion has not been meaningfully tested. We theorize that while some will overtly seek revenge, others will seek retribution through covert means by decreasing extra-role behaviors at work. Thus, our first contribution is that we move the literature forward by considering the notion that revenge reactions to incivility may include not only proactively engaging in negative behaviors but also purposefully *withholding positive* behaviors.

While revenge may motivate an incivility target to give back what they get, personality may also be a factor in the target's equity restoration actions. Thus, the second gap in the literature we fill is: how might personality moderate a target's likelihood of acting upon vengeful thoughts and engaging in revengeful behavior? Simply witnessing incivility leads to future deviance on the part of the observer (Ferguson & Barry, 2011), yet research on the interaction of revenge cognitions and personality traits to predict reactions to incivility is limited. Using equity theory (Adams, 1963), we propose that revenge cognitions and Honesty-Humility interact to influence how targets choose to cope with incivility in the workplace. Individuals high on Honesty-Humility have been shown to perform fewer interpersonally directed deviant behaviors

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(Lee, Ashton, & Shin, 2005). However, the study of this trait is in its infancy and the field has yet to develop a broad understanding of its role in responses to incivility. Thus, our second contribution lies in theorizing how Honesty-Humility may shape the mechanism through which an incivility target seeks revenge.

Theoretical Foundations

Revenge Reactions to Coworker Incivility

Incivility is characterized as a chronic stressor (Keashly & Harvey, 2005) and daily hassle (Cortina et al., 2001) that makes the experience of incivility and its implications difficult to escape. Not only do those who experience a daily hassle such as incivility cognitively appraise it as threatening (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), but incivility targets report psychological distress long after the incivility encounter (Cortina et al., 2001). The chronic nature of incivility makes it difficult to forget, leading targets to ruminate about the mistreatment and plot a mechanism through which they can get even with the instigator.

Equity theory (Adams, 1963) suggests that incivility targets are motivated to return similar behavior in order to 'even the scales.' Being the target of rude, discourteous, or insulting behaviors violates commonly held social norms and incurs costs for the victim, such as emotional, physical, or even financial suffering (Stillwell, Baumeister, & Del Priore, 2008). These costs motivate targets to seek justice through revenge. Revenge is a basic human impulse (Marongui & Newman, 1987) and described as behavior intended to punish another in return for perceived offense (Bies & Tripp, 1996). Aquino, Tripp and Bies (2001) define revenge as "an action in response to some perceived harm or wrongdoing by another party that is intended to inflict damage, injury, discomfort, or punishment on the party judged responsible" (p. 53).

Acts of revenge often are considered deliberate, premeditated, and calculated, usually preceded by *revenge cognitions* or ruminations of harming another party (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Bradfield & Aquino, 1999). According to equity theory, revenge cognitions involve reflection and deliberately weighing the scales to determine a course of action. Ultimately, the victim's response will aim to restore equity in his or her relationship with the perpetrator in order to reciprocate the negative treatment received (Barclay, Whiteside, & Aquino, 2014; Perugini, Gallucci, Presaghi, & Ercolani, 2003) and to 'get even' (Stillwell et al., 2008).

Overt Means of Revenge

Based on equity theory, we propose that targets will act upon revenge cognitions related to coworker incivility by engaging in overt means of revenge - interpersonal deviance. Revenge cognitions occur when an individual perceives violations of trust, or perceives others as acting in ways contrary to the individual's values (Bies & Tripp, 1996). When an employee believes coworkers violate formal or informal norms of civility, they often ruminate upon the violation by replaying the scene from memory, analyzing the incident and its causes, and sometimes talking with others about what occurred. Some incivility targets may not only ruminate about getting revenge, they may actually act upon those ruminations.

Those who experience personal offenses (Aquino et al., 2001) are likely to seek overt revenge upon the perpetrator and even engage in aggressive overt actions, such as gossip (Kniffin & Wilson, 2010) or interpersonal deviance (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Interpersonal deviance can be motivated by thoughts of revenge when perceived norm-violations of incivility

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occur. For instance, an employee who experiences rudeness or exclusion by coworkers may feel emotional suffering and seek retaliation to restore equity in the interpersonal relationship. These thoughts of revenge may be acted upon through overt behaviors such as escalated forms of workplace deviance. Targets may fantasize about hurting the uncivil coworker (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Bradfield & Aquino, 1999) or causing the uncivil coworker similar distress or ostracism.

> *Hypothesis 1: The positive relationship between coworker incivility and a target's interpersonal deviance will be mediated by the target's revenge cognitions.*

Covert Means of Revenge

While some individuals may seek to restore equity through interpersonal deviance, others may choose to enact a different means of equity restoration – covert revenge. Revenge cognitions relate to revenge-seeking behavior (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999), but individuals may not always pursue revenge directly and openly. Instead, some will seek alternative ways to settle the score (Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2002). Covert revenge is characterized by behavior with the intention of engaging in aggression in a concealed manner (McIlduff & Coghlan, 2000). Further, covert revenge may help avoid directly offending other parties involved who are related to the intended target, especially if the party is of higher status (McIlduff & Coghlan, 2000).

Some incivility targets experience anger that leads to a revenge-seeking response, whereas other targets experience fear that leads to a covert hostility response such as indirect aggression, displacement on the organization (e.g., reduced work effort), or withdrawal (Porath & Pearson, 2012). One form of covert revenge mentioned in the revenge literature but seldom examined is withholding effort (see Bies & Tripp, 1996; Tripp & Bies, 1997). Incivility targets often reduce work effort on the job (Sakurai & Jex, 2012), and we theorize that incivility targets may also engage in covert revenge by reducing their extra-role helping behaviors (i.e., organizational citizenship behaviors) as a means of getting back at the offending parties (Bowling, Beehr, Semmer, Hendricks, & Webster, 2004). Prior research suggests that in work groups members may withhold 'positive talk' from a poorly behaving group member (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005).

Organizational citizenship behaviors are behaviors that are not included in formal task performance requirements, although they tend to facilitate task performance by generating a positive social-psychological work context (Organ, 1997). These behaviors are discretionary, such as volunteering to assist with duties outside your typical job or offering to help a coworker complete their tasks. These contextual behaviors are a critical component of overall job performance as they contribute substantially to supervisor performance ratings (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). However, employees may be willing to risk a detriment in their performance ratings if they believe decreasing their organizational citizenship behaviors is necessary to punish workplace incivility offenders.

Incivility victims who entertain thoughts of revenge may want to avoid acquiring that revenge directly to preclude potential negative consequences. Instead, they may aim to refrain from certain behaviors as a means of revenge. Revenge cognitions prompted by experiences of incivility still inspire vengeful action, but this action is taken through reduced voluntary behaviors, coworker assistance, and tasks outside of the formal job description. Prior research supports the notion that individuals who experience general hostility at work as well as incivility are more likely to refrain from engaging in organizational citizenship behaviors (Taylor et al., 2012), but withholding citizenship behaviors has not yet been linked to revenge cognitions as a

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particular motivation in response to incivility. Victims can view incivility as arising from the organization in general, creating what is perceived as a hostile work environment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). There is also evidence that mistreatment from coworkers influences perceptions of the organization (Eisenberger, Lynch, Aselage, & Rohdieck, 2004). Employees may seek vengeance by withholding citizenship behaviors that benefit the organization if they feel incivility is a pervasive problem across the organization or work group. Thus, similar to how justice perceptions motivate organizational citizenship behaviors at work (Cho & Dansereau, 2010), we expect perceptions of incivility to elicit revenge cognitions and motivate employees to seek covert revenge through engaging in fewer extra-role behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: The negative relationship between coworker incivility and a target's organizational citizenship behaviors will be mediated by the target's revenge cognitions.

Honesty-Humility and the Revenge Process

Finally, we explore how personality may determine whether an individual engages in overt or covert revenge in response to incivility. Honesty-Humility is defined as a trait characterized by truthfulness, fairness and a reluctance to exploit others (Ashton et al., 2000). Honesty-Humility most highly correlates with organizationally directed deviance (a negative correlation) compared to other personality factors such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, emotional stability, and intellect (Lee et al., 2005). We argue that incivility targets who are high in Honesty-Humility are more likely to use covert behaviors and those who are low in Honesty-Humility are more likely to use overt actions to carry out their revenge.

Honesty-Humility is associated with the equity-related traits of fairness and non-exploitation (Ashton & Lee, 2001). Those low in Honesty-Humility are impulsive, and impulsive individuals tend to possess a weak self-regulatory capacity (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994) and have a more intense reaction to slights by coworkers (Berkowitz, 1993). Similarly, an individual who exhibits low humility and a higher willingness to exploit others may feel a reduction in the constraints against interpersonal deviance, which may result in a higher likelihood that they will act on their revenge cognitions (Wheeler, 1966). Those low in Honesty-Humility may experience a stronger emotional response when they are the target of coworker incivility, and be more eager to restore equity with their own acts of overt behavior such as interpersonal deviance.

Not every target will act upon those revenge cognitions in the same manner. Some may choose to "lump it" or do nothing (Bies & Tripp, 1996) in response to the incivility, with some going so far as to forgive the behavior (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999). However, all actions elicit a reaction and even the most "thoughtful and evolved individual may regress in the face of demoralizing" circumstances (Johnson & Klee, 2007, p. 141). While those high in Honesty-Humility may have a less intense reaction to slights by coworkers (Berkowitz, 1993) compared to those low in this trait, they will still seek equity and fairness as Honesty-Humility relates positively to the reciprocity-related traits of fairness and non-exploitation (Ashton & Lee, 2001). Rather than engaging in overt revenge that may seek to harm an incivility instigator, those high in Honesty-Humility will seek to balance the scales of justice and seek equity through more covert means such as by withholding help from coworkers. Thus, individuals high in Honesty-Humility may not only be less likely to exploit *others*, they may also be strongly opposed to being the *target* of exploitation. It is this opposition to exploitation that may lead the individual high in Honesty-Humility to seek revenge through withholding extra-role behaviors.

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Hypothesis 3: Honesty-Humility moderates the relationship between coworker incivility and interpersonal deviance through revenge cognitions such that the positive relationship between revenge cognitions and interpersonal deviance will be stronger for those low in Honesty-Humility.
Hypothesis 4: Honesty-Humility moderates the relationship between coworker incivility and organizational citizenship behavior through revenge cognitions such that the negative relationship between revenge cognitions and organizational citizenship behavior will be stronger for those high in Honesty-Humility.

Method

Sample and Procedures

With the assistance of an online data collection service (Zoomerang), we recruited 322 participants focusing only on full-time employees. Zoomerang's online panel is configured to be demographically representative of the U.S. population and is a form of data collection used successfully in the management literature (Carlson, Ferguson, Perrewé, & Whitten, 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2013). The surveys were administered at two time periods three months apart to reduce common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). At Time 1, we administered surveys to 560 respondents. At Time 2, 328 individuals who had participated at Time 1 completed the second survey for a retention rate of 59%. Only those who participated in both surveys are included in analyses. The Time 1 survey contained measures of coworker incivility, control variables, and demographic variables. At Time 2, respondents reported revenge cognitions, Honesty-Humility, interpersonal deviance and organizational citizenship behaviors. All responses were collected anonymously. Approximately 52% of the job incumbent sample was male with an average age of 39.

Measures from Time 1

Coworker incivility. We used the 7-item incivility scale developed by Cortina and colleagues (2001) to measure coworker incivility. The scale's stem reads "During the past year how often have you been in a situation where any of your coworkers…" with a sample item being "Put you down or were condescending to you?" Responses used a 7-point scale (1=never, 7=always).

Control variables. To eliminate spurious results due to the potential influence of demographic and work characteristics, we controlled for the respondent's age, hours worked per week, and job tenure. These factors are widely used control variables, particularly in employee behavior research (Boye & Jones, 1997; Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). Each was measured with open-ended items.

Measures from Time 2

Revenge cognitions. We evaluated thoughts of revenge using the 7-item measure from Bradfield and Aquino (1999). Respondents used a 7-point scale (1=never, 7=always) with a stem

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asking, "How often have you had these thoughts about your coworkers?" A sample item is "I want to see them hurt and miserable."

Interpersonal deviance. We measured interpersonal deviance using Bennett and Robinson's (2000) 7-item scale of interpersonally directed deviance. Respondents used a 7-point scale (1=never, 7=always) with a stem asking, "How frequently do you engage in the following activities?" A sample item is "Saying something hurtful to someone at work."

Organizational citizenship behaviors. We measured organizational citizenship behaviors with a 3-item measure from Smith, Organ and Near (1983) as adapted by Wayne, Shore and Liden (1997) and used by Liden, Wayne, Jaworski, and Bennett (2004). Respondents used a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). A sample item is "I help others when their work load increases even though it may not be formally required by the job."

Honesty-Humility. We measured Honesty-Humility with the 8-item scale used by Lee, and colleagues (2005) which was based on the scale developed by Hahn, Lee, and Ashton (1999). Respondents used a 7-point scale (1=very inaccurate, 7=very accurate) with a stem asking, "How accurately do each of the below adjectives describe your personality?" Examples of the adjectives include "Frank" and "Truthful."

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for this study. To test the first two hypotheses, we used a SPSS macro developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004) to test for indirect effects. Table 2 provides the indirect effects analysis to test Hypotheses 1 and 2. Per Hypothesis 1, coworker incivility will relate indirectly and positive to target's interpersonal deviance through revenge cognitions. The bootstrap results indicate an indirect effect of incivility on the target's deviance as mediated by revenge cognitions, as the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval around the indirect effect did not include zero (.12, .26). Hypothesis 1 is supported. According to Hypothesis 2, coworker incivility will have an indirect and negative relationship with the target's subsequent covert revenge of reduced organizational citizenship behaviors as mediated by revenge cognitions. Table 2 shows that the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval around the indirect effect did include zero (-.02, .07), suggesting that an indirect effect was not present. Hypothesis 2 is unsupported.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelation Matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Control Variables										
1. Age	39.11	7.90	-							
2. Hours worked per week	40.93	5.82	.08	-						
3. Job Tenure	6.29	5.11	.29**	.07						
Hypothesized Variables										
4. Coworker incivility at Time 1	3.27	1.65	-.13*	-.03	.09	(.96)				
5. Revenge cognitions at Time 2	2.28	1.59	-.21**	-.13*	.06	.60**	(.97)			
6. Interpersonal deviance at Time 2	2.56	1.63	-.28**	-.09	.06	.53**	.78**	(.96)		
7. Organizational citizenship behavior at Time 2	5.28	1.22	.06	-.02	-.06	-.17**	-.13*	-.11*	(.91)	
8. Honesty-Humility at Time 2	5.15	.99	.29**	.11	.05	-.43**	-.66**	-.64**	.22**	(.81)

*p < .05
**p < .01

Table 2

Bootstrapped Indirect Effect Results

	Boot Indirect Effect	Boot SE	BCA LL	BCA UL
Coworker incivility on interpersonal deviance through revenge cognitions (Hypothesis 1)	.19	.04	.12	.26
Coworker incivility on organizational citizenship behaviors through revenge cognitions (Hypothesis 2)	.02	.02	-.02	.07

*p < .05
**p < .01

For Hypothesis 3 and 4, we conducted moderated mediation, or second stage moderation, following methods suggested by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007). Hypothesis 3 predicted that Honesty-Humility would moderate the indirect effect of coworker incivility on the target's interpersonal deviance through revenge cognitions such that those low in Honesty-Humility will engage in more overt revenge through interpersonal deviance. Table 3 shows the significant interaction between revenge cognitions and Honesty-Humility in predicting interpersonal deviance, indicating that the indirect effect of coworker incivility on interpersonal deviance through revenge cognitions is moderated by Honesty-Humility. Given this interaction, we probed the indirect effect by estimating the indirect effects at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the Honesty-Humility moderator. We used Preacher and colleagues' (2007) statistical significance test to compute a *z* statistic for the conditional indirect effect. The lower portion of Table 3 presents the estimates, standard errors, and z statistics of the conditional indirect effects for coworker incivility for those low in Honesty-Humility compared to those high in Honesty-Humility.

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Table 3

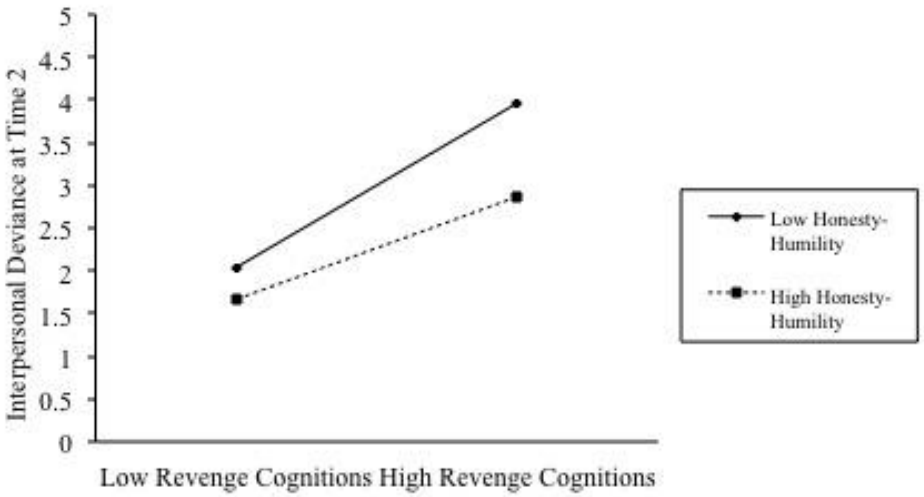
Conditional Indirect Effect Results

	Revenge Cognitions			Interpersonal Deviance			Organizational Citizenship Behaviors		
Variable	*β*	*SE*	*t*	*β*	*SE*	*t*	*β*	*SE*	*t*
Age	-.03**	.01	-2.95	-.02**	.01	-2.90	.00	.01	.31
Hours worked	-.03*	.01	-2.23	.01	.01	.54	.00	.01	-.25
Job Tenure	.02	.01	1.15	.02	.01	1.85	-.01	.01	-.86
Coworker incivility at Time 1	.51**	.04	11.50	.10*	.04	2.53	-.09	.05	1.92
Revenge cognitions at Time 2				.49**	.06	8.08	.07	.07	-1.42
Honesty-Humility				-.37	.08	-4.91	.22*	.13	2.35
Revenge cognitions X Honesty-Humility				-.11**	.04	-2.70	-.20**	.05	-4.22
				Conditional Indirect Effect	SE	Z	Conditional Indirect Effect	SE	Z
Low Honesty-Humility				.30	.04	8.28	.05	.03	.11
High Honesty-Humility				.20	.05	4.05	-.15	.06	-2.72

*p < .05, **p < .01

Results indicate that the conditional indirect effect of incivility through the target's revenge cognitions was stronger for those low in Honesty-Humility compared to those high in this personality trait. Hypothesis 3 was supported. Figure 1 demonstrates that those who are lower in Honesty-Humility are more likely to engage in overt revenge (interpersonal deviance) at Time 2 as a mechanism for seeking revenge for incivility as compared to those who are high in Honesty-Humility. The regression line slope for those low in Honesty-Humility was positive and significantly different from zero (t=3.92, p=.00). The regression line slope for those high in Honesty-Humility was positive and significantly different from zero (t=8.01, p=.00).

Figure 1. Moderating effect of honesty-humility on the overt revenge-deviance relationship.



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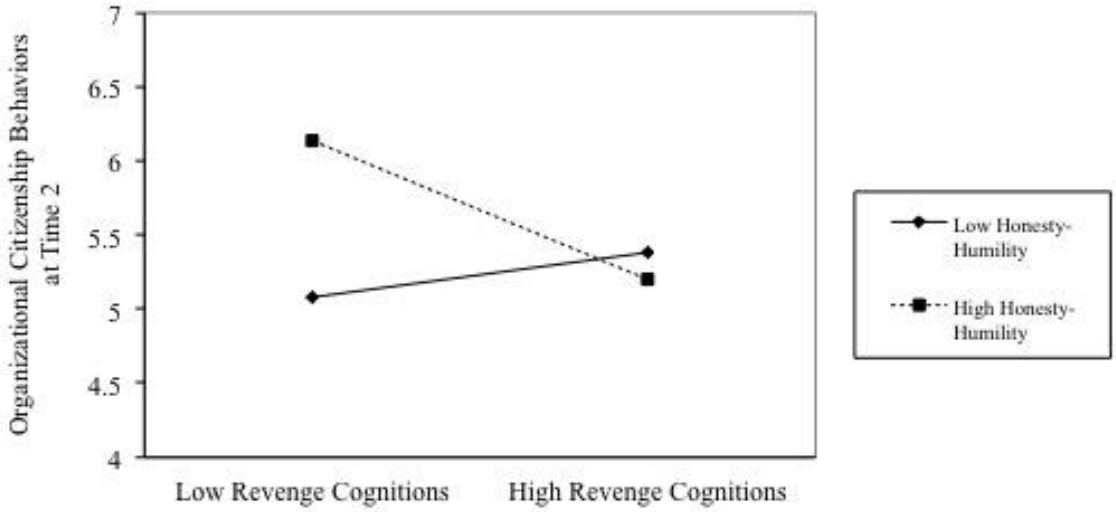
Hypothesis 4 predicted that Honesty-Humility would moderate the indirect effect of coworker incivility on the target's organizational citizenship behaviors through revenge cognitions such that when Honesty-Humility is high, the negative relationship between incivility and organizational citizenship behaviors will be stronger than when Honesty-Humility is low. The significant interaction between revenge cognitions and Honesty-Humility in predicting organizational citizenship behaviors indicates that the indirect effect of coworker incivility on organizational citizenship behaviors through revenge cognitions is moderated by Honesty-Humility. Again, we used Preacher and colleagues' (2007) statistical significance test to compute a *z* statistic for the conditional indirect effect. The lower portion of Table 3 presents the estimates, standard errors, and z statistics of the conditional indirect effect of coworker incivility on organizational citizenship through revenge cognitions for those low in Honesty-Humility compared to those high in Honesty-Humility.

Results indicate that the conditional indirect effect of incivility through the target's revenge cognitions was stronger for those high in Honesty-Humility compared to those low in this personality trait. Hypothesis 4 was supported. Figure 2 demonstrates that those who are higher in Honesty-Humility are more likely to engage in covert revenge by withholding organizational citizenship behaviors at Time 2 compared to those who are low in Honesty-Humility. The regression line slope for those high in Honesty-Humility was negative and significantly different from zero (t=-3.49, p=.00). The slope of the regression line for those low in Honesty-Humility was not significantly different from zero (t=.54, p=.59).

Figure 2. Moderating effect of honesty-humility on the overt revenge-organizational citizenship behaviors relationship.



Discussion

Research has identified many adverse effects of incivility (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Lim et al., 2008; Porath & Erez, 2007; Porath & Pearson, 2010), yet less attention has been paid to revenge and differential target responses. Building on Cortina and Magley's (1999) work on incivility responses and the theoretical framework of equity theory, our model contributes to the literature by theorizing that some targets will respond with overt

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revenge behaviors while others respond with covert revenge behaviors. Furthermore, the personality trait of Honesty-Humility is important in determining the response of choice.

First, our results suggest revenge as a key component in responding to incivility. Incivility targets ruminate about taking revenge on their coworkers, and those thoughts play a role in subsequent overt revenge (interpersonal deviance). Prior research investigated emotional strain (Chang & Lyons, 2012) and cynicism (Wilkerson, Evans, & Davis, 2008) as factors that may trigger incivility responses. Our research extends the extant literature by exploring two mechanisms through which incivility targets may choose to seek revenge. As originally suggested by Andersson and Pearson (1999), incivility from coworkers can motivate incivility targets to vengeful acts. Rather than performing deviance out of displaced aggression (Hoobler & Brass, 2006), many employees are driven to interpersonal deviance by thoughts of revenge. While revenge may be one of the more negative ways employees can cope with experienced incivility (Cortina & Magley, 2009), when employees resort to vengeful deviance the consequences are certainly worthy of attention by researchers and organizations.

Second, our study suggests that incivility targets act upon revenge cognitions and engage in interpersonal deviance but the engagement in this behavior depends upon the personality trait of Honesty-Humility. Those lower in negative affectivity are less likely to perform deviance in response to incivility (Penney & Spector, 2005). Likewise, those higher in Honesty-Humility are less likely to act on their revenge cognitions through interpersonal deviance. These individuals may be less disposed for overt revenge in that they are better able to regulate their emotional responses to incivility or to comply with organizational rules prohibiting deviance.

Third, incivility indirectly relates to organizational citizenship behaviors through vengeful thoughts, but only for those high in Honesty-Humility. It appears that when those high in Honesty-Humility ruminate about seeking revenge in response to coworker incivility, they are more likely to enact those vengeful thoughts in a covert manner and perhaps in a socially acceptable way, by reducing their extra-role behaviors.

Practical Implications

Although often regarded as minor or trivial in comparison to workplace aggression and violence, incivility cannot be ignored. Given the range of harmful outcomes for both targets and the organization, perhaps managers need to become more aware of the ambiguous yet potentially threatening behavior their employees may perform toward each other. Interestingly, the majority of incivility experiences are never reported to management or identified through formal complaint procedures (Cortina & Magley, 2009), and thus managers may need to use other informal methods to tease out incivility occurrences in order to halt workplace incivility spirals. Simply establishing positive relationships between managers and individual employees and opening lines of communication may improve the likelihood that an employee would tell his/her manager about incivility before they feel the need to seek revenge. Managers also can foster a civil atmosphere in general through setting clear expectations for interpersonal relationships at work, communicating these expectations during recruiting and orientation, and carefully enforcing organizational policies and providing corrective feedback to instigators (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000).

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Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations worth noting. First, we only explored one moderator of the incivility-revenge response relationship, and more research is needed to understand this process. Other personality factors such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, self-control, impulsiveness, and Machiavellianism might feed or dissipate revenge cognitions. Furthermore, future research might consider the moderating effect of a hostile climate on the relationships between incivility experiences, revenge cognitions, and revenge behaviors (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012).

Second, all our variables were self-report and may suffer from common method variance (CMV). Based on the advice of Podsakoff et al. (2003) we took steps to reduce potential bias. First, we collected data at two time periods, separating the independent variables from the dependent variables thus minimizing the potential impact of CMV. Second, we assured our respondents that there was no right or wrong answer to the surveys' measures to decrease evaluation apprehension. We also assessed CMV's influence using procedures described by Podsakoff et al. (2003) and Williams, Cote, and Buckley (1989). We tested a confirmatory factor analysis that included all scale items loading on their respective constructs, as well as an uncorrelated latent variable that represented a method factor. While model fit improved, the average variance explained in the items by the method factor was only 15%, well below the 25% average variance explained by method that Williams et al. reported across multiple studies, indicating CMV was not a major problem in this study. Self-report is arguably the best method of measuring behavior such as deviance, especially since some deviance may go undetected (Lee, 1993). Furthermore, in comparison to witnesses, self-raters do not tend to underreport their deviant behavior as might be suspected by social desirability bias, lending further support to the use of self-reports of deviance (Berry, Carpenter, & Barratt, 2012). Also, we are only beginning to understand how revenge can invite counter retaliation, which can then escalate and spiral into workplace violence (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Future research in this area would benefit from a more focused attempt to capture the back-and-forth process that occurs between a dyad using interviews, observation, or experience sampling method techniques. With the combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies we can better understand the complex spirals that may arise, escalate, and degenerate at work.

In conclusion, this research supports the notion that incivility targets ruminate and plot revenge in response to coworker abuse, and achieve that revenge through either overt or covert means. Furthermore, those responses are shaped by personality traits such as Honesty-Humility. This relationship is explained in part by the desire of the incivility target to restore equity (Adams, 1963). This research is a foundational step in understanding the underlying process of behaviors in response to incivility in today's organizations.

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