
AI translation · View original & related papers at
chinaxiv.org/items/chinaxiv-202011.00139

The Spiral Effect Between Workplace Incivility and Workplace Ostracism

Authors: Siquan Zhan, Yan Yu, Yan Yu

Date: 2020-11-26T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

The spiral effect model between workplace incivility and workplace ostracism can be explained through moral exclusion theory and affective events theory. According to moral exclusion theory, experiencing workplace incivility increases the psychological distance between victims and perpetrators, subsequently leading victims to ostracize perpetrators in the workplace; from a bystander perspective, witnessing workplace incivility influences bystanders' perceptions of deontic justice and interactional justice, thereby prompting them to ostracize perpetrators, with this mediating process being moderated by altruism. Similarly, based on affective events theory, experiencing workplace ostracism elevates negative affective levels among victims, which in turn prompts them to engage in workplace incivility.

Full Text

The Spiral Effect Between Workplace Incivility and Workplace Ostracism

Zhan Siquan, Yan Yu

(Department of Psychology, School of Philosophy, Wuhan University, Wuhan 430072, China)

Abstract

The spiral effect model between workplace incivility and workplace ostracism can be explained by moral exclusion theory and affective events theory. According to moral exclusion theory, experiencing workplace incivility increases psychological distance between victims and perpetrators, leading victims to ostracize perpetrators. From a bystander perspective, witnessing workplace incivility affects bystanders' moral justice and interactional justice perceptions, prompting them to ostracize perpetrators, with this mediating process moderated by

altruism. Similarly, based on affective events theory, experiencing workplace ostracism increases negative emotions among victims, prompting them to become perpetrators of workplace incivility.

Keywords: workplace incivility, workplace ostracism, spiral effect, moral exclusion theory, affective events theory

With the development of occupational health psychology, workplace mistreatment has gradually entered public view. Workplace mistreatment is an umbrella concept that includes themes such as workplace ostracism and workplace incivility. As a type of workplace stressor, workplace mistreatment triggers negative emotions like anger and depression among employees (Li et al., 2011) and damages employees' self-esteem and self-efficacy, thereby affecting their organizational identification, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions (Hershcovis et al., 2017; Asfaw et al., 2014).

The harmful, long-term, and repetitive nature of workplace mistreatment has gradually made it a focus of occupational health psychology. As the most common forms of workplace mistreatment (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007), workplace ostracism and workplace incivility have accumulated substantial research. Most studies treat workplace ostracism and workplace incivility as simple phenomena within organizations, tending to examine their antecedents and consequences from either the victim's or perpetrator's perspective. Previous research incorporating both constructs typically positions them as independent, mediating, or dependent variables, comparing their differential effects when serving the same type of variable within a unified theoretical framework (Sulea et al., 2012; Mahfooz et al., 2017; Abubakar et al., 2018; Shah & Hashmi, 2019; Chen & Ferris, 2019; Mao et al., 2020).

Received: July 3, 2020

Corresponding Author: Yan Yu, E-mail: yanyu@whu.edu.cn

As evident, previous research has overlooked the potential reciprocal transformation between workplace incivility and workplace ostracism. Based on moral exclusion theory and affective events theory, this paper proposes a possible conceptualization of the relationship between perpetrators of workplace incivility and victims of workplace ostracism. Integrating literature and relevant theories, we propose a spiral effect model between workplace incivility and workplace ostracism.

2.1 Research Status of Workplace Ostracism

Workplace ostracism refers to employees' perception of being excluded or ignored by others in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2008). It is a covert yet pervasive organizational phenomenon. A U.S. survey found that approximately 69% of respondents reported experiencing "cold exclusion" from others (Hoel et al., 2017). Regardless of intent, ostracism produces negative consequences for individuals (Ren et al., 2018).

Research demonstrates that workplace ostracism leads to psychological and behavioral changes, including threatening fundamental needs such as self-esteem, belonging, and control; triggering high levels of negative emotions (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007); and even impairing individuals' immune systems (Cacioppo et al., 2015). It also affects organizations, as employees may exhibit disengagement, reduced performance, voluntary turnover, or counterproductive work behaviors (Ferris et al., 2008; Balliet & Ferris, 2013).

The negative consequences of workplace ostracism can be explained through theoretical models such as organizational identification theory, need-threat theory, and justice theory (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007). Some researchers have also discussed ostracism's consequences from an evolutionary psychology perspective, arguing that employees who violate organizational rules and threaten others' self-concepts face higher risks of ostracism (Scott & Duffy, 2015). Similarly, studies have found that employees displaying uncivil behavior are more likely to be ostracized by others (Schilpzand et al., 2016).

2.2 Research Status of Workplace Incivility

Andersson and Pearson (1999) differentiated workplace incivility from workplace mistreatment based on concepts of civility and incivility. Workplace incivility is a low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm, violating workplace norms of mutual respect. Common examples include interrupting others or using informal address in professional settings. Its key characteristics are: (1) violation of workplace mutual respect norms; (2) low-intensity social interaction; and (3) ambiguous intent to harm (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Due to these characteristics, experiencing incivility rarely triggers strong resistance from individuals or draws management attention. However, workplace incivility produces numerous negative effects on individuals and organizations. Research shows that victims of incivility are more likely to experience anger, fear, and other emotional reactions, which further influence behavioral responses and make them more prone to engage in uncivil behavior themselves (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Additionally, workplace incivility negatively impacts employee well-being and life satisfaction and may even trigger varying degrees of antisocial behavior (Meier & Gross, 2015). From an organizational perspective, experiencing incivility reduces employees' interpersonal and organizational justice perceptions, affecting their trust in and commitment to the organization, leading to detrimental outcomes such as reduced performance or increased turnover intentions.

2.3 Differentiating Workplace Ostracism and Workplace Incivility

Both workplace ostracism and workplace incivility share covertness and ambiguity, often causing researchers to overlook their differences and distinct effects. This oversight has blurred the theoretical distinction between the two constructs,

yet such differentiation is fundamental to model construction. This paper clarifies their differences.

The key theoretical distinction between workplace ostracism and workplace incivility lies in whether interaction occurs with the victim (Robinson et al., 2013). Research indicates that perpetrators and victims of ostracism engage in no negative or positive interactions (Ferris et al., 2017), making ostracism fundamentally an act of omission.

Workplace ostracism and workplace incivility share some antecedents, such as demographic variables, emotions and abilities, attitudes, and personality traits. However, each also has unique antecedents. Power and status are important factors leading to workplace incivility—perpetrators are more likely individuals with higher power and status in organizations, while lower-status employees are more likely to be victims (Lim & Lee, 2011). High conflict-avoidant cultural backgrounds and flat organizational structures are more likely to foster workplace ostracism. The flatter the organizational structure, the lower the interdependence among members and the fewer internal connections, reducing the psychological cost of ostracizing others and thus facilitating ostracism (Robinson et al., 2013).

Unlike workplace incivility, workplace ostracism affects fundamental needs. Experiencing ostracism reduces four basic needs: self-worth, control, belonging, and self-esteem (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007).

Research on workplace ostracism and workplace incivility often draws on different theories and perspectives, which can be categorized into three types: need-to-belong theory, interdependence theory, and event system theory.

Need-to-belong theory has been extensively applied in ostracism research, explaining its negative effects on work attitudes, well-being, performance, and sleep quality (O' Reilly et al., 2015). Some studies have found that because ostracism threatens belonging needs, it motivates individuals to attempt establishing social connections or providing benefits to their team to highlight their value (Thau et al., 2015). Williams and Sommer (1997) proposed the need-threat model, which posits that individuals have four psychological needs: belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. Belonging and self-esteem are categorized as interpersonal needs; ostracism victims whose interpersonal needs are threatened exhibit “repair” behaviors through prosocial actions to enhance psychological security and reduce organizational status damage. Control and meaningful existence are categorized as presence needs; victims whose presence needs are threatened exhibit “retaliatory” behaviors such as antisocial or aggressive actions.

The extensive use of need-to-belong theory in ostracism research contrasts sharply with incivility research, where this theory is rarely mentioned. Although belonging needs are not the focus in incivility studies, they are clearly relevant, as being a target of or exhibiting uncivil behavior may also threaten one's group belonging.

Interdependence theory has also been widely adopted in ostracism research. Not a single theory but a framework connecting multiple related theories, it advocates considering interdependent relationships between individuals and groups. These theories encompass the degree, type, and situation-specific nature of interdependence, as well as individual differences in how people approach interdependence. Research shows that interdependence type can explain ostracism's emergence—competition promotes ostracism while cooperation reduces it (Wu et al., 2015). This theory can also explain ostracism's consequences. Balliet and Ferris (2013) used a social dilemma framework to study the relationship between ostracism and citizenship behavior, finding that ostracized individuals' citizenship behavior does not decrease when they recognize long-term interdependence with colleagues and the organization.

Morgeson et al. (2015) defined organizational events using event system theory as observable occurrences between organizational entities that are bounded in space and time. Organizational events typically contain three features: event time, event strength, and event space—key elements for individuals to create or change behavior. Event strength comprises three dimensions: novelty, criticality, and disruptiveness. Research indicates that event system theory can explain role reversal among workplace incivility victims (Yan & Li, 2018). Workplace incivility breaks victims' organizational expectations (Reich & Hershcovis, 2015), representing non-routine behavior with novelty; it triggers negative emotions (Meier & Gross, 2015), demonstrating disruptiveness; and it reduces victims' perceived organizational support (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), showing criticality. Therefore, the event of workplace incivility prompts victims to engage in controlled information processing and transform themselves into perpetrators.

Additionally, domestic and international research has examined workplace incivility and ostracism through resource conservation theory, role identity theory, stress conversion theory, and social identity theory. Theoretical research on these topics is rich, yet no studies have explained the transformational relationship between workplace incivility and workplace ostracism from theoretical or empirical perspectives.

2.4 Problem Statement

Literature reviews indicate that research on workplace incivility and workplace ostracism has essentially covered their causes, mechanisms, and spillover effects. However, previous studies have typically focused on single forms of workplace mistreatment, rarely exploring relationships between different types of abuse or examining how different workplace mistreatment behaviors transform into one another and how third-party perspectives influence these transformations.

Based on literature review and theoretical analysis, this paper proposes a spiral effect model between workplace incivility and workplace ostracism, shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]. The model contains two pathways. First, from a moral exclusion perspective, perpetrators of workplace incivility become

victims of workplace ostracism. Specifically, according to Opatow's (1990) moral exclusion theory, when individuals or groups are perceived by others as violating moral values, organizational norms, and fairness climates, moral exclusion occurs. Such individuals or groups are viewed as useless, expendable, and unworthy of remaining in the organization, making harm against them acceptable, appropriate, and fair. Therefore, Path 1 examines the mechanism transforming workplace incivility perpetration into ostracism from both victim and bystander perspectives. Second, based on affective events theory, victims of workplace ostracism reverse roles to become perpetrators of workplace incivility. Specifically, according to affective events theory, this negative workplace event triggers negative affective responses, leading individuals through an affect-driven pathway to transform into workplace incivility perpetrators, thus creating a spiral effect between workplace incivility and workplace ostracism.

Figure 1 Spiral Effect Model of Workplace Incivility and Workplace Ostracism

3 From Workplace Incivility Perpetrator to Workplace Ostracism Victim

According to moral exclusion theory (Opatow, 1990), individuals in interpersonal interactions use certain criteria to judge whether others are treated fairly, typically including moral value, norms, and fairness. Furthermore, individuals distinguish target objects based on their scope of justice—a psychological boundary for differentiating targets. Objects within one's scope of justice are considered deserving of fair treatment consistent with moral norms. At this point, criteria regarding moral value, fairness, and norms control how individuals treat those within their scope. For people “within the scope of justice,” such as relatives, friends, or organizational members within the moral community, individuals exhibit strong moral obligations and demonstrate moral inclusion through: (1) believing they are fair and just, (2) willingness to allocate resources to them, and (3) willingness to make sacrifices for their well-being. When interacting with objects outside one's scope of justice, these criteria are not considered, making those outside potential targets for various forms of disrespect and deviance. However, when individuals within one's “scope of justice” engage in behaviors perceived as exceeding moral values, violating organizational norms, or destroying organizational fairness climates, moral inclusion transforms into moral exclusion. Similarly, for those already outside the “scope of justice,” harming them or witnessing their harm is not viewed as rights violations and does not trigger moral inclusion (Opatow, 1990).

Opatow (1994) conceptualized “scope of justice” in organizations as psychological distance. Psychological distance refers to the uncertainty employees feel about their relationships due to differences in values, cultural backgrounds, or conflicts, resulting in subjective feelings of intimacy or alienation. Employees characterize their psychological distance from target objects based on emotional differences. When employees exclude target objects from their “scope of justice,” it signifies increased psychological distance and a gradually alienating relationship, making

deviant behavior against them seem natural.

Based on the moral exclusion framework and existing research, this paper argues that from the victim's perspective, experiencing incivility increases psychological distance from perpetrators, leading to ostracism of perpetrators. From the bystander perspective, perpetrators have not directed incivility toward bystanders themselves, and both parties belong to the same moral community (the organization), so bystanders do not exclude incivility perpetrators from their "scope of justice," and psychological distance remains unchanged. Therefore, although both victims and bystanders may ostracize incivility perpetrators, their transformation mechanisms differ slightly. This paper discusses both perspectives separately.

3.1 Victim Perspective Under Moral Exclusion Framework

Opatow (1994) suggests that differences from the target, conflicts with the target, and the target's utility affect psychological distance. Research indicates that workplace incivility perpetrators are more likely to be individuals with high negative affect, bad tempers, and pettiness (Reio & Ghosh, 2009). Conversely, those with strong emotional management abilities, high intelligence, and greater adaptability are better at handling interpersonal relationships and less likely to engage in uncivil behavior (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Therefore, victims tend to perceive deep differences from perpetrators. The occurrence of incivility itself signifies certain conflicts between victims and perpetrators. Target utility refers to how much the target serves the individual's purposes or interests. Four-year longitudinal data show that employees with low distributive justice perceptions, low work efficiency, and high burnout are more likely to become incivility perpetrators (Blau & Andersson, 2005). If the perpetrator is a supervisor, low distributive justice leads to biased task allocation and performance evaluation, harming subordinates' interests. If the perpetrator is a colleague, low efficiency and high burnout make them a burden in team tasks, hindering individual goal achievement. Thus, incivility perpetrators typically have low utility (Walter et al., 2015). Hafer and Begue (2005) found that perpetrators' utility to victims depends not only on their performance level but also on how that performance affects victims' interests. Additionally, relationship closeness affects psychological distance; incivility reduces closeness between victims and perpetrators and even negatively impacts victims' interactions with other organizational members (Zadro et al., 2006).

In summary, workplace incivility perpetrators exhibit deep differences and conflicts with victims and have low utility to victims. After experiencing workplace incivility, victims increase their psychological distance from perpetrators. Research shows that increased psychological distance negatively affects employee relationships, typically inhibiting organizational identification and trust development (Story & Barbuto, 2011) and reducing leader-member exchange quality (Brunelle, 2013). According to social exchange theory, individuals who negatively affect interpersonal relationships or organizational identification likely

become targets of corrective behaviors like ostracism. Erkutlu and Chafra (2016) found that employees' psychological distance significantly positively correlates with workplace ostracism.

Therefore, this study proposes that incivility victims actively implement corrective behaviors targeting perpetrators. According to moral exclusion theory, workplace ostracism is one such corrective behavior resulting from moral exclusion in the workplace. This paper argues that workplace incivility increases psychological distance between victims and perpetrators, leading victims to ostracize perpetrators. The specific mechanism is shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper].

Figure 2 Mediation Model from Victim Perspective

3.2 Bystander Perspective Under Moral Exclusion Framework

Unlike victims of workplace incivility, bystanders' ostracism of incivility perpetrators is mediated through two pathways: moral justice and interactional justice, with the mediation moderated by altruism (Mao et al., 2020). The specific mechanism is shown in Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper].

Figure 3 Moderated Mediation Model from Bystander Perspective

3.2.1 Mediating Role of Moral Justice

Witnessing workplace incivility within an organization generates sympathy for victims, increases observers' anxiety and stress levels, and significantly reduces need satisfaction (Wesselmann et al., 2009). Because workplace incivility is often viewed as immoral, bystanders experience moral anger, which may even drive punitive behaviors (Li et al., 2019). Moral justice refers to organizational members' inherent tendency to make fairness judgments about uncivil behavior and respond to perceived injustice out of moral responsibility, comprising three dimensions: moral anger, moral obligation, and moral accountability (O' Reilly et al., 2015). According to deontic justice theory, when observing morally violating events, individuals' internalized moral obligations and responsibilities increase their moral justice levels, leading them to punish fairness and morality violators to uphold justice (Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). Although workplace incivility may not harm bystanders directly, the motivation to address it stems from the internal need to maintain moral justice; moral injustice arises whenever employees violate established organizational norms (Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, norm violators become salient targets for bystanders. When organizational members' workplace incivility is observed, the belief in maintaining justice becomes the driving force for bystanders to punish perpetrators, prompting them to take action.

This paper argues that after witnessing workplace incivility, bystanders perceive such immoral behavior as violating moral values, increasing their moral justice

and transforming moral inclusion of incivility perpetrators into moral exclusion. Bystanders view perpetrators as negatively affecting organizational climate and ostracizing them as morally appropriate, thus generating bystander ostracism of perpetrators.

3.2.2 Mediating Role of Interactional Justice

Justice can be interpreted at the individual level as fairness perceptions and at the organizational level as a fairness climate (Schneider et al., 2017). These levels differentially affect incivility bystanders.

At the individual level, organizational justice theory assumes that witnessing others' mistreatment arouses strong unfairness perceptions in bystanders, even when they are not directly affected (Turillo et al., 2002). In interactional justice contexts, observing others' incivility triggers more negative emotional reactions, which in turn promote unfairness perceptions. This likely creates a reinforcing effect on individual behavior, leading to increasingly strong unfairness perceptions (Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). According to regulatory focus theory, unfairness reduces individuals' emotional reflexivity, activating defensive regulatory focus systems characterized by avoiding factors detrimental to the self. When incivility occurs, the displayed emotions are typically negative. Due to low emotional reflexivity, individuals easily experience emotional conflict, triggering workplace ostracism (Gao & Le, 2016).

At the organizational level, incivility creates unfair social exchange relationships between perpetrators and victims, but interactional injustice's impact extends beyond this dyad. Because incivility is rarely stopped or punished by organizations (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), members may perceive it as organizationally sanctioned. This sanction disregards and destroys their valued interactional justice principles, creating an unfair climate. Robinson et al. (2013) demonstrated that organizational factors significantly influence ostracism; when unfair climates exist, members spontaneously choose ostracism as an intervention.

This study elaborates the relationship between workplace incivility and interactional justice through individual and organizational pathways. As discussed, witnessing workplace incivility affects both individual-level fairness perceptions and organizational-level fairness climates. Because incivility increases bystanders' unfairness perceptions and creates unfair organizational climates, bystanders transform moral inclusion of perpetrators into moral exclusion, viewing them as organizational negatives and ostracizing them as morally appropriate, thus generating bystander ostracism of incivility perpetrators.

3.2.3 Moderating Role of Altruism

Altruism refers to individuals' willingness to help others without expecting reward or personal benefit. When witnessing workplace incivility, bystanders' altruism is activated. Depending on altruism levels, individuals make different judgments about the event and adopt different behaviors. Altruism typically

has four characteristics: (1) helping others as the goal, (2) no expectation of spiritual or material rewards like honors or prizes, (3) voluntary nature, and (4) potential costs to the altruist. Research shows that altruism levels affect bystanders' moral judgments about workplace incivility and their intervention intentions (Mao et al., 2020).

When bystanders witness workplace incivility, leading to reduced moral justice and interactional justice, people typically view mistreated employees as victims and offer sympathy and support (Wesselmann et al., 2013). However, bystanders do not always provide sympathy and help (Mao et al., 2020). This study proposes that altruism moderates the two mediation pathways, representing an important factor influencing bystander behavior.

Regarding the moral justice mediation pathway, according to the social intuitionist model, individuals sequentially experience moral intuition, deontic judgment, and deontic reasoning before responding (Xu & Chi, 2007). Bystanders' moral intuition from witnessing incivility directly leads to deontic injustice judgments—a rapid, automatic process. However, from deontic injustice to action, bystanders engage in different deontic reasoning based on their altruism levels. When high-altruism individuals witness workplace incivility, their altruistic motives and moral principles are activated, directly affecting moral judgments. Altruistic motives prompt bystanders to judge the event as immoral, express sympathy for victims, show dissatisfaction and anger toward perpetrators, and actively intervene to help victims, resulting in ostracism of perpetrators. For low-altruism individuals who typically do not help others without reward and are unwilling to risk personal loss, even if witnessing incivility reduces their moral justice, their altruistic motives are not activated, so they do not actively intervene.

Regarding the interactional justice mediation pathway, workplace incivility reduces bystanders' interactional justice perceptions and destroys organizational interactional justice climates. High-altruism bystanders' altruistic motives are activated, and to restore organizational fairness climates and personal interactional justice perceptions, they actively intervene and choose ostracism as an intervention behavior. Low-altruism bystanders have low voluntary intervention intentions and fear negative consequences, so even when their interactional justice perceptions decline, they tolerate workplace incivility.

4 From Workplace Ostracism Victim to Workplace Incivility Perpetrator

Workplace affect is a key factor influencing employee attitudes, performance, and counterproductive behaviors. Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) synthesized previous research and proposed affective events theory (AET), explaining employees' emotional mechanisms through an “event-affective response-attitude/behavior” pathway. This theory can explain how workplace ostracism victims reverse roles to become workplace incivility perpetrators. Based on this

theory, this paper proposes that negative emotions mediate the transformation between workplace ostracism and workplace incivility. The specific mechanism is shown in Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper].

Figure 4 Mediation Model Based on Affective Events Theory

4.1 Mediating Role of Negative Emotions

According to affective events theory, individuals' workplace emotions are triggered by work events. When experiencing negative work events, individuals appraise the event and exhibit emotional responses. Accordingly, after experiencing ostracism, individuals cognitively appraise this event and generate emotional reactions, with cognitive appraisal preceding emotional response. AET posits that cognitive appraisal includes primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal assesses relevance—whether the event affects individual goals and values, harms interests, or violates expectations. Workplace ostracism harms employees' interests, negatively affects their goals and values, and violates organizational expectations, thereby triggering deeper secondary appraisal. Secondary appraisal is an interpretive meaning analysis typically divided into five dimensions: pleasantness, certainty, self-consciousness, attention, and work energy. Workplace ostracism reduces pleasantness and certainty while negatively affecting self-consciousness, attention, and work energy (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007). These negative cognitive appraisals trigger negative emotional responses. Negative emotions have long been recognized as important antecedents of workplace mistreatment; explicit anger and hostility are typically highly correlated with revenge desires. When individuals experience anger, they are affectively driven to engage in retaliatory behaviors. Bennett and Robinson (2003) propose that workplace mistreatment is based on instrumental and expressive motives, with instrumental motives driven by cognition and expressive motives driven entirely by affect, directly related to negative emotion release. According to the work stress model, anxiety, anger, and other negative emotions caused by environmental stress may trigger behavioral responses to stressors. Mawritz et al. (2017) found that workplace mistreatment victims experiencing negative emotions adopt different coping strategies, with retaliatory behaviors being the most common. Therefore, negative emotions resulting from workplace ostracism substantially increase the likelihood that individuals will transform into workplace incivility perpetrators and use incivility as a revenge tactic.

In summary, this paper argues that when workplace incivility perpetrators transform into ostracism victims, the negative workplace event of ostracism triggers negative emotions. According to AET's affect-driven behavior pathway, individuals may again transform into workplace incivility perpetrators, creating a spiral effect between workplace incivility and workplace ostracism.

5 Research Outlook

As society develops and modern organizational rules and regulations become increasingly comprehensive, intense conflicts and deviant behaviors face severe penalties, indirectly increasing the frequency of low-intensity, ambiguous-intent workplace mistreatment. The most representative forms are workplace incivility and workplace ostracism. Based on moral exclusion theory and affective events theory, this paper theoretically conceptualizes the dynamic transformation mechanisms between workplace incivility and workplace ostracism through literature analysis, requiring future empirical verification. Additionally, future research can explore several directions to further understand transformation relationships between different forms of workplace mistreatment and provide practical management insights.

This study focuses on workplace incivility's negative effects on victims and bystanders, leading to perpetrator ostracism, but does not elaborate from perpetrators' own perspective. Research shows that after engaging in uncivil behavior, perpetrators perceive themselves as lacking human care, develop negative self-perceptions, and exhibit reduced organizational commitment and belonging (Bastian et al., 2013). Therefore, perpetrators may adopt behaviors to reduce their immorality and guilt, such as impression management in subsequent organizational activities (Legate et al., 2015; Wesselmann et al., 2013). They may also make reparations to victims or exhibit more prosocial behaviors and sacrifices to reshape positive self-perceptions (Bastian et al., 2013; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013). Whether these reparative behaviors prevent ostracism represents a new perspective for future research on the dynamic relationship between incivility and ostracism. Additionally, most workplace incivility research focuses on its negative consequences, with less attention to its dynamic development and perceptual processes. The effects of incivility are profound—does it have long-term effects on perpetrators themselves? Current research mostly examines why perpetrators engage in incivility and its impact on victims, but dynamic questions around why victims perceive behaviors as uncivil and what triggers this perception warrant attention.

Existing workplace incivility research often adopts single or parallel multiple perspectives, neglecting multi-party interactions and game-playing processes after incivility occurs. After incivility occurs, if bystanders respond first by supporting perpetrators and directing similar uncivil behavior toward victims, will victims' retaliation be more severe? If bystanders sympathize with and comfort victims, will victims' ostracism intentions toward perpetrators decrease? If victims respond first by enduring silently, will bystanders turn a blind eye? If victims retaliate, will bystanders intervene? Therefore, workplace incivility is not a static multi-perspective analysis; any party's actions affect others' decisions, making research on multi-party interactions and game-playing essential.

Current research pays insufficient attention to how bystander characteristics affect workplace incivility's dynamic changes. Studies show that bystanders'

values, personality traits, and relevance to victims affect moral judgments about negative events, leading to different behavioral consequences (Mao et al., 2020). If bystanders hold just-world beliefs, they may reinterpret incivility to maintain internal beliefs, viewing victims' experiences as deserved and thus tolerating incivility (Hafer & Begue, 2005). Differential mode of association theory suggests that when bystanders have close relationships with victims, they feel strong obligations to help when victims suffer injustice. Therefore, bystander characteristics' role in the dynamic relationship between incivility and ostracism warrants future attention. Additionally, to ensure variable objectivity, future research could collect data from multiple sources, such as simultaneously obtaining workplace mistreatment data from subordinates and third parties, or using qualitative methods like in-depth interviews.

The theoretical foundations—moral exclusion and affective events theories—were developed in Western cultural contexts, and the empirical research cited is primarily Western. Chinese and Western cultures differ significantly. Chinese civilization is often called “an ancient land of etiquette,” with “do not look, listen, speak, or act without propriety” as a behavioral guideline for most Chinese people. In Chinese culture, “incivility” carries deeper meaning. Chinese employees' emphasis on etiquette, mutual respect, and higher behavioral standards may make them more sensitive to workplace incivility, generating stronger negative evaluations and more severe retaliation from victims and bystanders. Alternatively, because Chinese employees value interpersonal harmony and often have restrained, introverted personalities, victims may remain silent and bystanders may turn a blind eye to prevent stronger conflicts when incivility occurs. Therefore, future research should consider China's actual conditions: first, Chinese traditional culture is unique, exerting subtle yet deep influences on domestic enterprises, necessitating consideration of these cultural factors in Chinese workplace mistreatment research; second, due to different development models, Chinese and Western organizational types differ. Chinese organizations are diverse—public institutions, state-owned enterprises, party and government organs, foreign enterprises—with significant differences in organizational culture and structure, enabling comparative research on transformation relationships between workplace incivility and ostracism across different organizational types.

References

- Gao, Y., Le, J., & Peng, Z. (2016). Research on influencing factors of workplace ostracism: A moderated mediation model. *Science of Science and Management of S.&T.*, 37(04), 149-159.
- Li, Y., Nie, G., Li, Y., Wang, M., & Zhao, G. (2011). The content structure and measurement of workplace bullying. *Psychological Science*, 34(5), 1201-1208.
- Mao, Y., Pan, R., & Zhang, W. (2020). Constructing a tripartite interaction theoretical model of workplace ostracism: A social equilibrium theory perspective. *Advances in Psychological Science*, 28(02), 191-205.

Wang, D., Zeng, K., & Zheng, X. (2017). How employee unethical behavior invites coworker aggression: A deontic justice perspective. *Acta Psychologica Sinica*, 49(006), 829-840.

Xu, P., & Chi, Y. (2007). A review of the social intuitionist model of moral judgment. *Psychological Science*, 30(002), 403-405.

Yan, Y., & Li, T. (2018). The mechanism of role reversal from workplace incivility victim to perpetrator. *Advances in Psychological Science*, 26(7), 1307-1318.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv –Machine translation. Verify with original.