

PREDICTING SERVICE EMPLOYEE INCIVILITY TOWARD CUSTOMERS:
THE ROLES OF EMPLOYEE BOREDOM, EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION, AND
ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Workplace incivility, defined as low-intensity deviant and aggressive behaviors that violate workplace norms for mutual respect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) is a pervasive problem in organizations. To date, workplace incivility research has tended to focus on incivility within organizations, such as between co-workers, rather than incivility that crosses organizational boundaries. This dissertation extends the research by examining employee incivility by service employees with potential to harm customers. Examples of employee incivility include employees disrespecting and not listening to customers.

The primary goal of this research is to explore why service employees can be uncivil toward customers, labeled employee incivility. Specifically, I focused on customers mistreating employees as a determinant of employee incivility such as asking aggressive questions and ignoring instructions. In addition, I examined five theoretically derived explanations for the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility: employee negative affect, job boredom, organizational identification, organizational disidentification and emotional exhaustion. A secondary goal of this research was to investigate the relationship between uncivil employee behavior and service employee performance.

In addition, this research examined uncivil events, rather than overall employee evaluations of incivility at work (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001). Uncivil events, or specific occurrences of incivility by customers were argued to predict instances of uncivil behavior by employees towards customers. This dissertation is one of the first studies to examine workplace incivility at this level of analysis.

Using a field study of contact center service employees and a recorded sample of their interactions with customers ($N = 68$ for employees, $N = 641$ for interactions) this study found that employee incivility was positively related to customer incivility in both interactions and across employees. Service employees who experience higher (vs. lower) levels of incivility from customers directed more uncivil behaviors toward customers. In addition, both employee job boredom and emotional exhaustion were positively related to uncivil employee behaviors towards customers. The proposed explanations (mediators) for the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility were not supported. Finally, employee incivility was negatively related to service employee performance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the front of the line, an airline customer service agent was calling out flights...he called the flights and pulled people out of line so they would not miss their flight. Those already in line, being "skipped" by the latecomers, were growing increasingly restless and annoyed.

Finally, one man approached the agent. "Why are you rewarding tardiness by letting these people go ahead of those of us who arrived early for our flight?" asked the disgruntled traveler. "I've been doing this job for 30 years," the defensive customer service agent snapped. "I think I know how to do my job." "I'll never fly this airline again," quipped the now infuriated passenger.

–D. Grossman (2004), *10 ways to lose a customer*

Incivility is a pervasive form of antisocial behavior in the workplace (Cortina, 2008).

Andersson and Pearson (1999, p. 457) defined *workplace incivility* as low intensity deviant behavior that violates workplace norms for mutual respect and is ambiguous in its intent to harm the target. They described uncivil behaviors as rude and discourteous, and displaying a lack of regard for others. Serving customers is not an easy job and despite service employees' best efforts, incivility occurs, and can have significant implications for companies.

Organizational policymakers have adopted several approaches to encourage customer service including display rules (e.g., Grandey, 2000, 2003; Grove & Fisk, 1989), electronic performance monitoring (e.g., Aiello & Kolb, 1995; Holman, 2002; Stanton & Barnes-Farrell, 1996), scripted interactions (Batt & Moynihan, 2002; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005), mystery shopping (Finn & Kayandé, 1999) and philosophies such as "service with a smile" and "the customer is always right." Despite organizational controls implemented to ensure that service employees provide a high level of service to customers (including customers, clients, patients, passengers, guests), empirical evidence suggests that service employees can often engage in behaviors, such as incivility, that contradict expected service practices and display rules.

The primary goal of this dissertation is to explore why service employees might be uncivil toward customers. Workplace incivility is an interpersonal process whereby an instigating party performs an uncivil act towards a targeted person or group (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). The target of incivility can perceive this act as interpersonally unfair and experience negative affect that drives the target to respond to the instigating party in an uncivil manner.

Andersson and Pearson (1999) described this process as an incivility spiral, recognizing that acts of incivility can continue between the parties engaging in uncivil behavior. Although they did not describe incivility spirals between an organization's customers and its service employees, research has identified customers as a potential source of and target for incivility (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007; Kern & Grandey, 2009). As an example, customer behaviors are not constrained in service interactions and customers might be uncivil towards service employees as an anger release process (Hokanson, 1961) through which they express their frustration with an organization towards an organization's representatives. Consistent with the primary goal of this dissertation, I do not examine the antecedents of customer incivility but limit my attention to the interactions between parties and antecedents of employee incivility.

I extend workplace incivility to include extra-organizational sources and targets of incivility. I define *employee incivility* as low-intensity deviant behavior by service employees with ambiguous intent to harm service recipients. This definition draws on the Andersson and Pearson (1999) concept of workplace incivility. Examples of employee incivility include ignoring customer requests, making demeaning remarks to the service recipient, and speaking rudely to customers. Customers are also capable directing uncivil behavior toward

service employees with whom they interact. *Customer incivility*, as such, is incivility by customers targeting service employees. Examples of customer incivility include customers asking aggressive questions (e.g., Are you kidding?) using a tone when speaking to an employee, and ignoring instructions. Given the controls on service employee behavior present in many service organizations, incivility between service recipients and service employees is assumed to spiral from customers to service employees.

Understanding employee incivility is an important line of inquiry for both practitioners and organizational researchers for at least four reasons. First, employee incivility can be detrimental to organizational performance. Employee incivility is likely to decrease customer perceptions of service quality given that they are the targets of this negative employee behavior. From a practical perspective, organizations frequently strive to provide high levels of customer service because of its potential impact on organizational performance (Deshpandé & Farley, 1999; Lytle & Timmerman, 2006; Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005; Singh, 2004; Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007). Alternatively, service employees who engage in incivility by ignoring service recipients could forego revenue for the organization thereby negatively affecting organizational sales and performance.

Second, service incivility might be more common than other forms of employee deviance such as physical aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1996), retaliatory behavior (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), and sabotage (Harris & Ogbonna, 2006; Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008). Several researchers have recognized that the majority of workplace deviance is of a less intense form (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Baron & Neuman, 1996; Cortina, 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2005). Baron and Neuman (1996), for example, found that

verbal and passive employee aggression was significantly more frequent than physical and active employee aggression. Several studies, in addition, have found that some employees experience workplace incivility on a daily basis (for an overview see Pearson & Porath, 2005). Existing research, however, does not focus specifically on employee incivility targeting customers, but suggests that uncivil employee behavior could be more common than other more serious forms of organizational deviance.

Third, given the low-intensity and ambiguity of intent of these employee behaviors, employee incivility could “fly under the radar” of existing controls and monitoring systems in place in organizations. As an example, electronic monitoring might record the frequency of transactions completed by a service employee. These systems, however, would be unlikely to detect whether the service recipient was treated in a polite and/or courteous manner. As an alternative, organizations could engage customers to provide feedback on whether service employees treat customers in a civil manner. Service recipients participating in this evaluation, however, might not know if employees avoided customers or if they actually listen and respond to requests. Thus, it is possible that service employees could maintain an acceptable level of task performance while uncivilly interacting with customers.

Fourth, understanding employee incivility toward customers and its relationship with customer incivility could help human resource managers recruit and select service employees. As an example, organizations could select service employees who are well suited for dealing with uncivil customers on a regular basis, such as upset customers filing a complaint with an organization.

In this dissertation, I propose to contribute to the research literature in several ways. First, I expand workplace incivility to include that which occurs across organizational

boundaries. Several researchers have alluded to the possibility of incivility spirals occurring between organizational members and organizational outsiders (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001; Grandey et al., 2007; Pearson & Porath, 2004), however, existing research fails to identify how workplace incivility targeting customers might differ from intra-organizational incivility. Existing incivility scales (Cortina et al., 2001; Martin & Hine, 2005), in addition, do not cover incivility targeting an organization's customers. A contribution of this dissertation is to help define employee incivility and to examine its relationship with customer incivility. In this dissertation, I also develop short instruments for external observers to assess both customer and employee incivility.

Second, I extend previous research on workplace incivility by exploring five theory-based situational and person difference variables that could help explain the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility. Andersson and Pearson (1999) proposed negative affect as a key mechanism underlying incivility spirals. I draw on theory related to employee boredom, organizational identification, and emotional exhaustion to address this issue. Moreover, this dissertation can potentially contribute to the workplace boredom (monotony) and to the organizational identification literatures. Most of the existing workplace boredom literature has investigated repetitive and demanding/draining jobs in non-service contexts. In this dissertation, I examine service employee boredom and consider workplaces where employees interact with customers to provide service. Thus, I specifically examine whether or not service employee experiences of boredom at work can influence uncivil interactions with customers.

Research suggests that organizational identification and organizational disidentification are important to employee behavior (Elsbach, 1999; Elsbach &

Bhattacharya, 2001; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). To date, research has examined the antecedents of an expanded model of identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). In this dissertation, I address a gap in research that has overlooked the consequences of individual identification with organizations and examine the implications of identification with the organization on workplace incivility. I explore both identification and disidentification with organizations and investigate workplace incivility as a consequence of these dimensions of identification.

This dissertation also advances workplace incivility research methodology. A concern regarding previous research on interactions between individuals at work is the level of specification. To date, workplace incivility research has asked employees to report their perceptions or beliefs about the overall level of incivility that they have experienced at work over a period of time ranging from two weeks (Kern & Grandey, 2009) to one year or more (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Cortina et al., 2001) rather than incivility that they experience in specific interactions. This is analogous to an important distinction made by Cropanzano et al. (2001) who noted that individuals can base their evaluations of treatment at work on social entities, a general evaluation of interactions or the organization as a whole, or specific occurrences of behaviors at work that they referred to as events. Incivility, in addition to being an entity-level construct also consists of specific events of rude and discourteous behavior in interactions. This dissertation is one of the first studies to examine workplace incivility at the event level of analysis.

A second methodological consideration of this research was to explore factors that predict employee incivility toward customers beyond perceptions of organizational fairness. Andersson and Pearson (1999) argued that workplace incivility is closely connected to

individual perceptions of interactional injustice. Justice from supervisors or other sources within the organization could serve to buffer employee responses (e.g., Greenberg, 2006) to customer mistreatment of employees. Moreover, research on customer mistreatment of employees has identified that these customer behaviors influence employee behavior even after accounting for sources of justice within the organization (Skarlicki et al., 2008). To account for the connection between workplace incivility and organizational justice, this dissertation identifies the unique effect of customer incivility on service employees accounting for justice originating from within the organization.

In this dissertation I also attempt to understand why, despite considerable efforts by employees and organizations to ensure civil interactions, service employees might engage in incivility directed towards customers. I argue that customer incivility predicts incivility directed toward customers. To meet my research objectives, I conducted a field study of customer service employees from a service organization in eastern Canada. I asked these employees, through a series of focus groups, to identify uncivil behaviors that they experienced from customers and uncivil behaviors that they directed toward customers. Following these meetings, I developed a survey instrument to assess individual differences amongst employees. I also collected a digitally recorded sample of interactions between customers and employees such that a team of research assistants was able to evaluate both customer and employee incivility in the interactions. As such, an additional contribution of this research is to have external observers evaluate the incivility that occurs between customers and employees.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. In Chapter 2, I provide a literature review of workplace incivility, job boredom, organizational identification and emotional exhaustion as well as develop relevant hypotheses. In Chapter 3, I outline the research methodology. The results are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains a detailed discussion of the results, limitations, and future directions of this research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

How customers interact with an organization's employees can influence how these employees respond to customers. Employee incivility is an important issue for organizations because of its potential influence on individual performance and because it might be more common than other types of deviance in organizations. In the following sections, I define incivility and explain why customer incivility is likely to relate to employee incivility. I discuss the underlying theoretical mechanisms that help explain why some service employees might respond to customers in an uncivil manner. Following this, I argue that several theory-based individual variables, job boredom, organizational identification, organizational disidentification and emotional exhaustion, could influence the relationship between customer incivility and service employee incivility. Figure 1 provides an overview of the main theoretical mechanisms proposed in this research

Overview of Workplace Incivility

Workplace incivility refers to low-intensity deviant behavior with an ambiguous intent to harm the target in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Examples of workplace incivility include making derogatory remarks about and being condescending toward coworkers. Andersson and Pearson (1999) described interpersonal incivility as a process whereby an instigating party performs an uncivil act towards a targeted person or group. The target of incivility can perceive this act as interpersonally unfair and experience negative affect that drives the target to respond to the instigating party in an uncivil manner. The authors described this process as an incivility spiral, recognizing that acts of incivility can continue between the parties engaging in uncivil behavior. Although they do not specifically describe the incivility spirals that occur between an organization's

customers and its service employees, research has identified that customers might represent a source of incivility for service employees that could have negative consequences for employees (Kern & Grandey, 2009) or lead employees to engage in counterproductive behaviors (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Cortina et al., 2001; Grandey et al., 2007).

Common customer actions directed toward service employees that employees can perceive as workplace incivility include making demeaning, derogatory, or condescending remarks, refusing to follow instructions, not paying attention in service interactions and raising their voice (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Martin & Hine, 2005). Theorists have also argued that boundary-spanning employees can actively target customers for revenge or retaliation for perceived injustices (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997; Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Reynolds & Harris, 2006; Skarlicki et al., 2008). The construct of workplace incivility, as such, could be extended to include *customer incivility*, representing workplace incivility from customers targeting service employees (e.g., Kern & Grandey, 2009), and *employee incivility*, indicating incivility directed by service employees towards their customers.

Andersson and Pearson (1999) conceptualized incivility as a specific form of *employee deviance* (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), which, is a subset of *antisocial employee behavior* (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997). Incivility comprises rude and discourteous behaviors, and as such, numerous deviant and antisocial behaviors are not considered incivility. First, incivility is highly distinct from physical aggression and violence (Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2001). Thus, if a service interaction escalates to the point of a physical exchange between parties, these actions would no longer fall under incivility.

Second, given its low-intensity, incivility does not often warrant legal attention and managers rarely intervene in workplace incivility (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2005). Moreover, workplace incivility can also be minor behaviors that employees do not consider worth reporting to managers (Cortina & Magley, 2009). Sexual harassment, in contrast, is not considered incivility given the legal ramifications and management interventions associated with this behavior. For another example, if a service employee or customer threatened the other party, this behavior would not be considered incivility but rather higher-intensity deviance.

Third, by definition, workplace incivility is directed toward another person or group of people. Organizations can be negatively affected by incivility, however, behaviors targeting the organization are not considered incivility. This implies that behaviors such as sabotage, abusing a company's satisfaction guarantee or placing a bomb threat against an organization are not acts of customer incivility. Similarly, from the service employee's perspective, behaviors such as intentionally damaging company equipment are not service incivility even though customers might witness or be affected by this behavior.

Finally, intent to harm plays a key role in distinguishing incivility from other deviant behaviors. Andersson and Pearson (1999) noted that intent to harm is a characteristic of incivility as the instigator, target, and/or observers of incivility might indicate that an uncivil behavior was not intentional. Uncivil behaviors, however, can be intentional, but incivility could also be attributed to ignorance, oversight, personality and subconscious behaviors (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, 2008; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). Retaliation and sabotage, for comparison purposes, are distinct from incivility since they have a more obvious intent to harm even though retaliation and sabotage behaviors can be

relatively minor (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Neuman & Baron, 1997).

Researchers have developed at least two measures of workplace incivility, the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS, Cortina et al., 2001) and the Uncivil Workplace Behavior Questionnaire (UWBQ, Martin & Hine, 2005). The WIS is a unidimensional scale that was designed to assess the frequency of respondent perceptions of disrespectful, rude, or condescending behaviors from superiors or coworkers. Respondents indicate the frequency over the past 5 years, on a scale ranging from never to most of the time, that they have been the target of workplace incivility. Specific items identifying acts of workplace incivility in the scale include “Put you down or was condescending to you”, “Doubted your judgment on a matter over which you have responsibility”, and “Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you.”

Martin and Hine (2005) proposed a broader construct of workplace incivility than is measured by the WIS. They argued that a multi-dimensional model of workplace incivility could more accurately reflect employee experiences of uncivil treatment at work. This 17-item scale identifies four dimensions of uncivil behavior: hostility, privacy invasion, exclusionary behavior, and gossiping. Similar to items in the WIS, uncivil behaviors identified in the UWBQ also focus on behaviors occurring between individuals within organizations. Respondents indicate the frequency over the past year, on a scale ranging from never to very often, that they have experienced certain treatment at work. Sample items from each of the four dimensions of the UWBQ include: “Raised their voice while speaking to you” (hostility), “Took items from your desk without prior permission” (privacy invasion), “Avoided consulting you when they would normally be expected to do so” (exclusionary behavior), and “Talked about you behind your back” (gossiping).

Antecedents and Consequences

Empirical research has identified relationships between employee experiences of incivility and individual and organizational outcomes. Employee perceptions of workplace incivility are positively related to job and work withdrawal, psychological distress and turnover intentions and negatively related to psychological well being, health satisfaction, and satisfaction with all aspects of employment including supervisors, coworkers, pay, and benefits (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008; Martin & Hine, 2005). Research also suggests that workplace incivility can affect organizational functioning. For example, employee perceptions of incivility in organizations are proposed to be related to lowered morale and productivity, and increased sabotage, slowdowns, tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover (Neuman & Baron, 1997; Pearson et al., 2001).

Researchers have recently started to examine the effects of customer incivility on service employees' reactions. In one study, Kern and Grandey (2009) examined the relationship between service employee emotional exhaustion and customer incivility and found that employee perceptions of customer incivility were positively related to emotional exhaustion. Moreover, additional research relevant to this dissertation is studies of customer mistreatment of employees given that interpersonal incivility is defined as a mild form of deviance and aggression in the workplace. In addition, service employees are more likely to experience mild forms of aggression and deviance at work such as incivility given the sporadic nature of severe instances of interpersonal mistreatment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Baron & Neuman, 1996).

Customer mistreatment of employees has been shown to have implications for both the service employees interacting with customers and for organizations. Researchers have

found that customer mistreatment of employees, under labels including customer interactional injustice, customer aggression, dysfunctional customer behavior, customer-related social stressors, and deviant customer behavior, is positively related to service employee behaviors including emotional labor (Rupp & Spencer, 2006), sabotage (Skarlicki et al., 2008), emotional exhaustion (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Deery, Iverson, & Walsh, 2002; Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004) and absenteeism (Grandey et al., 2004). At the organizational level, qualitative research has identified that customer mistreatment of employees can increase service employee workload and could also have negative financial implications for organizations by increasing recruitment, retention and turnover costs (Harris & Reynolds, 2003).

Incivility Theory

Research on interpersonal injustice (Bies & Moag, 1986) provides the dominant theoretical framework for understanding incivility spirals. Interactional justice reflects the quality of interpersonal treatment employees receive at work (Bies, 2001; Bies & Moag, 1986). When norms concerning interpersonal treatment at work, including demeanor and politeness, are not met, interactional unfairness occurs (Bies, 2001; Bies & Moag, 1986). Similarly, Andersson and Pearson (1999) indicated that individuals experiencing uncivil behaviors from their coworkers are subject to interpret this incivility as unfair. They argued that employee perceptions of interactional injustice can stimulate negative affect and the desire to react negatively toward the instigator of the unfairness in the target of uncivil behavior at work (Berkowitz, 1993; Bies & Tripp, 1996; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Thus, individuals respond to incivility as a result of the negative affect they experience from being the target of interactional injustice at work.

Because customer incivility has potential implications for employee behavior in service interactions, understanding the effect of customer incivility on service employees and employee responses to incivility directed towards customers is an important topic for researchers and service managers. Specifically, service employees perceiving higher levels of customer incivility might be more prone to respond to these customers in a manner detrimental to the organization. In the following paragraphs, I examine, one such customer directed behavior, employee incivility, as a response to customer incivility.

Customer Incivility Hypotheses

Customer Incivility → Employee Incivility

In the following paragraphs I draw on two main concepts supporting a relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility. First, at least two groups of researchers have found that customers can be a potential source of interactional injustice at work. Rupp and Spencer (2006) described customer interactional injustice as situations involving interactional mistreatment of employees by customers. Examples include treating employees in a disrespectful or demeaning way, or ignoring employee instructions. These authors argued that acts of mistreatment by customers served as affective events for service employees. They drew on affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) to suggest that these affective events generated specific emotions in service employees. These emotions, in turn, lead to affectively driven service employee behaviors.

Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker (2008) similarly recognized customers as potential source of interactional injustice for service employees. They drew on the moral perspective of justice to argue that service employees subject to customer interactional injustice might consider customer interactional injustice as a violation of moral rules of

conduct. These violations of social and moral norms motivated service employees to engage in sabotage directed at customers to punish customers for their interactional unfairness. Given the organizational controls in service environments previously mentioned, service employees might engage in mild forms of retaliation, such as incivility, to respond to their perceptions of customer interactional injustice.

Second, the causal reasoning model of deviance (Martinko, Douglas, Harvey, & Gunlach, 2007) indicates that individuals who attribute negative events to external factors beyond the individuals' control feel anger and frustration towards the source (people or organizations) of these negative events. These emotions promote retaliation and deviance directed at the perceived causal source of the negative emotions. This implies that service employees exposed to customer incivility might target customers for retaliation if employees believe that customers are responsible for the incivility that they direct towards employees.

A growing body of qualitative and empirical research supports the presence of a relationship between customer mistreatment of service employees and employee responses to this mistreatment directed at customers. As an example from the marketing literature, Harris and Reynolds (2003), in a qualitative study of hospitality industry employees, found that employees took the opportunity for revenge, by yelling at customers, to retaliate for perceived injustices. Alternatively, Skarlicki et al. (2008), in a sample of call center customer service representatives, found that employee perceptions of customer interactional injustice were positively related to employee sabotage directed at customers, even after controlling for intra-organizational sources of injustice. Sabotage behaviors in this research included examples such as hanging up on the customer and informing a customer that a problem was resolved even when the employee choose not to resolve the problem.

I propose that customer incivility could be the cause of negative emotions for service employees. Consistent with the target similarity framework (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007) that indicates that employees can react to felt injustice by altering their behaviors and social exchange toward the party they perceive as responsible for their felt injustice, service employees could react to incivility from customers because they perceive uncivil customers to be a source of injustice. As an example, a customer who insults a service representative could both anger the service representative and be responsible for his or her actions. Service employees, in turn, might respond to customer incivility as a result of the negative affect or emotions they experience from their perceptions of unfair behaviors by customers. In the case of being insulted by the customer, the service employee might respond to this incivility with his or her own insult directed at the customer, thereby responding to incivility with incivility. As such, service employees who experience more incivility from customers might be more likely to engage in employee incivility. This logic yields the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Customer incivility is positively related to employee incivility.

State negative affect refers to individual feelings of negative emotion or mood at a given time rather than the individual disposition to experience negative emotions or moods (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003). Given the central role of state negative affect in incivility spirals as described by Andersson and Pearson (1999), I also propose that this state mediates the relationship between customer and service incivility. Individuals perceiving higher levels of customer incivility will report higher levels of negative affect than those experiencing less uncivil treatment from customers. This increase in negative affect will cause service employees perceiving higher levels of customer

incivility to engage in higher levels of service incivility when compared to service employees reporting less customer incivility. This reasoning yields the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Negative affect partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility directed toward customers.

BOREDOM

One factor that might help explain why service employees engage in incivility toward customers is boredom. Employees who are bored at work can seek to change the repetitiveness of their work to alleviate boredom (Lee, 1986; O'Hanlon, 1981) and might use incivility as a mechanism to increase the variability of their work (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002). In the following sections, I provide an overview of boredom research, followed by a discussion of the underlying theoretical mechanisms that explain individual experiences of boredom. I then relate boredom to the service context. Last, I develop hypotheses incorporating employee boredom into service incivility outcomes.

Overview of Boredom

Boredom is an important emotion in psychology, education and human resources because of its potential influence on individual behaviors and attitudes including performance, turnover, job satisfaction and on desire to change perceived sources of boredom (Kass, Vodanovich, & Callender, 2001; Lee, 1986). Boredom has been discussed as both a state (e.g., Davies, 1926; Lee, 1986; Wyatt, Fraser, & Stock, 1929) and a trait (e.g., Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Kass et al., 2001). As a state, boredom is defined as a negative state of low arousal and dissatisfaction, and occurs as a reaction to monotonous, or inadequately stimulating, situations where the pattern of sensory stimulation is nearly constant or highly repetitive (Kass et al., 2001; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; O'Hanlon, 1981). Individuals can experience boredom within minutes of starting an activity, especially if they have had frequent experience with the activity. Moreover, boredom can be transitory, and an individual can alternate between perceptions of boredom in one instant and not in the next, and what one individual perceives as boring might not be to another individual in the same

situation. As a trait, boredom proneness refers to the tendency to experience situations as boring, and has been found to vary considerably across individuals (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; O'Hanlon, 1981).

Early research shows that job boredom is related to individual irritability, hostility, and job dissatisfaction. As examples, Bartlett (1943) and Stave (1977) found that pilots completing boring missions in a flight simulator reported feelings of irritability.

Alternatively, Robinson (1975), in a study of secondary school students reported that teachers described bored students as more hostile than other students. In addition, Caplan, Cobb, French Jr., van Harrison and Pinneau Jr. (1975), in a study of American workers, found that boredom was strongly related to overall job dissatisfaction.

Antecedents and Consequences

In this early research, boredom was typically assumed to either exist as an affective response to repetitive tasks, or was measured using single item self-report scale (Kass et al., 2001). Lee (1986) developed the Job Boredom Scale as a measure of state boredom that evaluates employees' satisfaction, interest and connectedness with their jobs. This scale consists of 17 5-point Likert-type items including "Does monotony describe your job?", "Do you find the job dull?" and "Does your job go by too slowly?"

In the present research I explored the role of state, rather than trait, boredom. State boredom was studied because bored employees can choose to alter their work environment to relieve boredom (Lee, 1986; O'Hanlon, 1981). In addition, state boredom indicates employee perceptions of feeling bored with their work rather than the predisposition to become bored. State job boredom has received limited empirical attention in recent research (Vodanovich, 2003). Lee (1986), found that higher individual boredom was significantly associated with

lower job satisfaction in a sample of clerical workers. More recently, state job boredom has been found to be related to higher absenteeism in a sample of manufacturing employees (Kass et al., 2001). This sample also indicated that higher job boredom was related to longer organizational tenure.

Boredom Theory

O'Hanlon (1981) provided an initial theoretical outline for boredom as a unique psycho-physiological state drawing on the concepts of arousal, habituation, effort and stress. Under this framework, job tasks provide sensory stimulation for individuals and this stimulation results in arousal. After repeated exposure to job tasks, individuals become habituated to the stimulation received from these tasks. *Habituation* is a decrease in arousal from job tasks in response to repetitive sensory stimulation and can be the beginning of boredom. *Arousal*, through habituation, can ultimately fall below the level required for efficient task performance. Individuals in a monotonous task situation whose arousal drops given the repetitiveness of the task can fail to perform the assigned tasks. Individuals whose arousal has dropped have to exert more effort to complete tasks than individuals who have not had a similar drop in arousal. *Boredom* is described as the conflict between habituation to repetitive tasks and the effort to maintain a satisfactory level of arousal to perform tasks. In more general terms, when a person is bored, he or she is not aroused enough to complete tasks effectively and has to exert effort so as to be able to complete tasks.

Workers whose arousal drops below the minimal level required to ensure adequate performance have choices as to how to maintain or restore arousal. They can (a) do nothing and risk performance failure, (b) leave the environment that is providing inadequate stimulation, or (c) enliven the situation in some way. If these workers are constrained to

remain in the environment or to follow established routines, the available option is to exert effort to maintain arousal at a level capable of allowing task performance. Thus, boredom becomes highly relevant to employees who have limited stimulation, few job opportunities or who have limited options for changing job tasks.

Service employees are particularly susceptible to boredom for at least three reasons. First, they frequently work in environments where repetitive interactions with customers are common and where the variety of content of the interactions can be limited (e.g., taking orders, checking in passengers). Examples of individuals working in repetitive jobs include telephone customer service agents, airport gate agents, hospitality employees (such as waiters and servers) and nurses. Given the repetitiveness of these interactions, service employees are likely to become habituated to the type of interactions to which they receive exposure and to experience a decrease in arousal from this job stimulus.

Second, service employees are constrained in their interactions with service recipients. These constraints can include organizational display rules guiding the expression of emotions in service interactions (Grove & Fisk, 1989), and electronic performance monitoring (e.g., Aiello & Kolb, 1995; Stanton & Barnes-Farrell, 1996). Even the mantra “the customer is always right” can limit service employee behaviors. Constraints can contribute to both service employee boredom and responses to boredom by habituating employees to the interactions they experience and by limiting how they can maintain the arousal required to sustain performance.

Third, boredom as previously described, occurs when employees have to exert effort to sustain their arousal to effectively perform repetitive tasks. Customers in service interactions, compared to manufacturing tasks as an example, provide an immediate

mechanism for detecting employee performance falling below an accepted level. Service employees interacting with customers, therefore, face increased monitoring that requires them to maintain a minimum acceptable level of performance. This, in turn, increases the potential for them to experience boredom since they have to exert greater effort to maintain arousal to perform repetitive tasks to which they have become habituated. Greater service employee effort is needed since customers in the service interaction can immediately detect if a bored service employee's performance falls below an acceptable level.

In summary, service employees are likely to experience boredom at work since many service environments include repetitive tasks, constraints on service interactions and increased performance monitoring, requiring effort from employees to maintain arousal. Given the likelihood of boredom in service environments, this is an important topic for organizational researchers and service managers. In the following paragraphs, I examine employee incivility as a response to service employee boredom.

Boredom Hypotheses

State Boredom → Employee Incivility

Several components of O'Hanlon's (1981) theoretical framework suggest that service employees have the potential to engage in service incivility when bored. O'Hanlon indicated that one component of boredom is an individual's assessment of the perceived source of the boredom. In service interactions, customers represent an important source of boredom given that customers can be a key source of repetition in this environment. At least two researchers, O'Hanlon (1981) and Lee (1986), have also indicated that workers experiencing boredom are motivated to change the environment and vary their activities to reduce the monotony they

experience at work. O'Hanlon (1981), in addition, proposed that employees who are constrained in how they respond to boredom can attempt to enliven their environment.

Engaging in incivility directed towards customers is one mechanism that service employees could use to bring entertainment and variation to their workplace. Research on the hospitality industry, for instance, indicates that service employees use customers as a means of amusement and entertainment. Harris and Ogbonna (2002, p. 170) identified that service employees can “act in a manner that is deliberately intended to patronize, belittle, or condescend to customers without leaving the server open to complaint” as a public form of service disruption that provides entertainment for both the employee performing and for the coworkers witnessing the act. Bored service employees then, might be more likely to seize the opportunity to respond to customers in an uncivil manner as a means of enlivening their work and relieving their boredom.

Employee incivility represents one possible behavior that service employees could direct at customers to provide variation in service interactions and that also directly targets one perceived source of repetition and boredom in their jobs. In addition, since employee incivility is a mild form of aggression, service employees might even be able to engage in incivility targeting customers while still adhering to display rules and performance requirements constraining behaviors in these environments. This reasoning yields the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Service employee state job boredom is positively related to incivility directed towards customers.

Customer Incivility → State Boredom → Employee Incivility

Research indicates that (a) interpersonal mistreatment of service workers by customers appears to be commonplace in many service organizations, and that (b) repeated exposure to customer incivility might contribute to service employee boredom. In a study of healthcare employees, for instance, Reynolds and Harris (2006) reported that all of the participants were able to recall at least two incidents of interpersonal mistreatment over the past two days. Grandey et al. (2004) investigated customer mistreatment of telephone customer service representatives, alternatively, and found that employees reported on average 10 incidents a day of being targets of customer verbal aggression. Moreover, in a study of ambulance control room employees, participants reported an average of 7 percent of customer interactions on a shift were verbally abusive (Sprigg, Armitage, & Hollis, 2007). Research suggests that incivility might be more prevalent for service employees than these more severe forms of mistreatment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Baron & Neuman, 1996).

Drawing on boredom theory, state job boredom occurs when employees have to perform a repetitive task at an acceptable performance level and they have to exert effort to maintain the arousal required to perform the task at this level. Uncivil interactions with customers alter service employee performance requirements. As noted earlier, the increased performance requirements in these interactions stem from organizational display rules that frequently require service employees to engage in emotional labor, rather than display authentic emotions, in these interactions. If the performance requirements for a repetitive task increase, without a decrease in any of (a) the repetitive nature of the task, (b) the employee's habituation to the task, or (c) the effort required to complete the task, then a service employee in this situation would have to exert more effort to maintain his or her arousal level in order

to meet this increased performance requirement. This effort to maintain arousal, is by definition, state job boredom and increases in the effort to maintain arousal imply increased boredom for employees. State job boredom, as such, is one potential psychological outcome for service employees who interact with uncivil customers and increased exposure to customer incivility could result in increased service employee boredom.

Incorporating early arguments indicating a possible relationship between service employee state job boredom and employee incivility implies that service employee boredom could also mediate, at least partially, the relationship between customer incivility and service incivility. Although I propose boredom as a potential mechanism influencing the relationship between customer incivility and service incivility, other mechanisms could also exist. For instance, researchers have shown that negative affectivity and service employee emotional exhaustion are related to individual propensities to engage in counterproductive work behaviors and could influence this relationship (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002, 2006; Penney & Spector, 2005). Therefore, I predict partial, rather than full, mediation for this relationship.

Hypothesis 4: Boredom partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility toward customers.

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

One factor that might help explain why employees engage in service incivility concerns their level of identification with the organization to which they belong. In the following sections, I provide an overview of organizational identification, and a related construct, organizational disidentification, and I discuss the underlying theoretical mechanisms that explain why employees identify, or disidentify, with organizations. I then relate organizational identification to employee incivility. Next, I develop hypotheses incorporating service employee organizational identification into uncivil service employee behaviors directed towards customers.

Overview of Organizational Identification

Organizational identification refers to a psychological state reflecting the link between the employee and the organization. Identification is a central concept in organizational behavior research because of its potential to explain and predict attitudes and behaviors in the workplace (Edwards, 2005). Several explanations of organizational identification appear in the research literature, most agreeing that identification involves an individual coming to see an organization as being definitive of one's own self and integrating beliefs about the organization into one's identity (Pratt, 1998).

Two definitions of organizational identification are frequently used in the identification literature. First, Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined organizational identification as a specific form of social identification and an individual's perception of oneness with, or belongingness to the organization. Under this approach, individuals perceive themselves as being psychologically intertwined with the fate of the organization and have incorporated the organization's values and attitudes into their own values and attitudes.

Second, Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) refined initial definitions of organizational identification in an attempt to resolve the confusion of organizational identification with other concepts. These authors (p. 239) defined organizational identification as the degree to which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization. This definition focuses on the overlap of attributes between the individual's self concept and those of the perceived organizational identity. Assumed under this definition is that organizational identification indicates the degree to which people come to see the organization as part of themselves and that the individual's self-concept has many of the same characteristics he or she believes define the organization as a social group. As an example, Dutton et al. described a 3M salesman that displays his organizational identification when he describes himself as innovative and successful similar to the 3M organization.

Pratt (1998) proposed two different "paths" by which individuals identify with organizations (1) by identifying and joining organizations that they see as similar to themselves, and (2) by changing to become more similar to an organization. Inherent in both paths is that individual perceptions are important in organizational identification. Individual perceptions can influence what individuals identify in the organization as similar to themselves, or how similar they perceive themselves to be to the organization. As an example, two individuals might share a similarity to an organization, however, these individuals could have different perceptions of the strength of this similarity and different ratings of their identification with the organization as a result. Thus, individual perceptions can influence organizational identification such that identification with organizations varies across individuals.

Recent models consider a relatively broader range of possible forms of attachment to organizations (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Dukerich, Kramer, & Mclean Parks, 1998; Elsbach, 1999; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004) incorporating two dimensions of organizational attachment (1) identification and (2) an orthogonal construct disidentification (Dukerich et al., 1998, p. 245). Disidentification is distinct from not identifying with an organization (Elsbach, 1999). Disidentification is defined as the active differentiation and distancing of oneself from the organization (Dukerich et al., 1998) and occurs when an individual defines him or herself as not having the same attributes or principles that he or she believes define the organization (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Disidentification is an active separation from the organization whereas identification is a need for inclusion with and a reduced need to distinguish oneself from the organization. Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) described potential acts of employee disidentification as including employees concealing their place of employment from others and emphasizing characteristics that distinguish themselves from other members in the organization. Employee disidentification is undesirable for organizations because it represents feelings of conflict with the organization (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

Recent models of organizational attachment cross low and high levels of identification and disidentification, as shown in Figure 2, to describe four states of organizational identification: apathetic or neutral identification (low identification, low disidentification), focused or strong identification (high identification, low disidentification), focused or strong disidentification (low identification, high disidentification) and ambivalent or conflicting identification (high identification, high disidentification, Dukerich et al., 1998; Elsbach, 1999; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

Apathetic or neutral identification occurs when employees define themselves neither in terms of the organization and its identity, nor in terms of their differentiation from the organization (Dukerich et al., 1998). In this quadrant, the organization is not central to an employee's identity, and employees might not care whether they maintain their membership in the organization. This condition, in most cases, would be considered a suboptimal state of employee identification for organizations because employees are neutral toward the goals, values and vision of the organization and less likely to engage in behaviors that would benefit the organization.

Simultaneous identification and disidentification by employees with the same organization represents conflicting, or ambivalent organizational identification (Dukerich et al., 1998; Pratt, 2000). Such individuals are in a state of conflicting identification: they identify with the organization on some dimensions, but disidentify on others. An example of this is an individual who identifies with a firm's customer focus but disidentifies with its environmental practices. Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) proposed that ambivalent identification might (1) needlessly consume employees' cognitive and emotional resources that could otherwise benefit the organization, and (2) prevent employees from performing beyond the minimum required level of job performance. They argued that most organizations would encourage positive identification with the organization but discourage disidentification resulting in a mixed message to and increased stress for ambivalent employees.

Focused disidentification occurs when no overlap exists between the individual and the organization, and the individual has a strong need to distinguish him or herself from the organization by emphasizing differences from the organization (Elsbach, 1999). Elsbach (1999) explained that in this case the individual and organization identities are opposing

forces that repel one another. As an example, an employee who disidentifies with an organization could perceive that he or she is clearly different from the organization and not identify with the goals and mission of the organization. From the organization's perspective, focused disidentification by members with the organization would be a suboptimal form of employee identification given that employees might focus their efforts on activities that do not support the organization, such as supporting an alternative organization or publicly criticizing the organization (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Focused identification, alternatively, occurs when an individual strongly identifies with an organization and there is no motivation for the member to establish a difference between the member and the organization (Dukerich et al., 1998). In this quadrant, the identity of the member and the organization are interchangeable with the emphasis on collective rather than individual interests. Organizations could benefit from focused identification in that members adopt the goals, values, and mission of the organization and would engage in behaviors that support the organization and its goals (Elsbach, 1999; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Kulik, 2005).

Two measures of organizational identification have been widely used over the last twenty years (Edwards, 2005): the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (Cheney, 1982) and the Organizational Identification Scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Cheney (1982) developed the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ) to assess three components of organizational identification – membership, loyalty, and similarity. The original scale consists of 25 items measuring aspects of identification including: value congruence, perceived homogeneity of organizational member values and concern for the fate of the organization. Edwards (2005), in a review of organizational identification concepts and

operationalizations, proposed that the OIQ might assess psychological concepts that go beyond organizational identification, and might also identify its potential antecedents and outcomes.

Mael and Ashforth's (1992) organizational identification scale has become one of the most widely used scales in organizational identification research (Edwards, 2005). The scale consists of 6 items designed to measure individual perceptions that they share experiences with a psychological group. The scale was originally designed to assess alumni identification with their alma mater, however, the scale has been modified to reflect other organizational settings (e.g., Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002). Respondents indicate on a 5-point Likert scale the extent to which they agree or disagree with 4 statements tapping evaluative and two items asking for affective identification (van Dick, 2001). Items in the original scale include "This school's successes are my successes", "I am very interested in what others think about (name of school)" and "When I talk about this school, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'."

In response to calls for expanded conceptualizations of organizational identification, Kreiner and Ashforth (2004), in an exploratory study, tested a measure of each of the four quadrants identified in Figure 2. This measure incorporated the Mael and Ashforth (1992) 6-item scale for identification, and three separate 6-item scales for each of disidentification, ambivalent identification, and neutral identification. Sample items to assess disidentification included "I am embarrassed to be part of this organization" and "I have tried to keep the organization I work for a secret from people I meet" while sample items used to evaluate ambivalent identification included "I feel conflicted about being part of this organization" and "I'm torn between loving and hating this organization". Neutral identification,

alternatively, contains items such as “This organization doesn’t have much personal meaning to me” and “I give little thought to the concerns of this organization.”

Antecedents and Consequences

Studies on organizational identification have explored its organizational and individual level antecedents. Research has shown a positive relationship between organizational identification and antecedents such as organizational distinctiveness, organizational prestige, individual need for organizational identification, satisfaction with the organization, tenure and positive affectivity (Bell & Menguc, 2002; Hall & Schneider, 1972; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Riketta, 2005; Schneider, Hall, & Nygren, 1971).

Empirical research suggests that organizational identification has implications for individuals and for organizations (Elsbach, 1999). Studies show that organizational identification is positively related to individual work-related attitudes including job satisfaction and motivation (Alpander, 1990). Cooperation and participation in extra-role, prosocial behaviors have also been found to be positively related to employee identification with organizations (Dukerich et al., 2002; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Organizational benefits from employee identification with the organization include reduced employee absenteeism (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) and turnover (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Studies have found that individuals who identify more with their organizations show increased in-role and extra-role performance over individuals with lower identification (for an overview see van Dick, 2001). These performance results have been found for self-reports of effort and productivity (Meyer et al., 1993), objective indicators of performance such as sales (Bashaw & Grant, 1994) and manager perceptions of performance and perceived promotability (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989).

Research on the expanded models of organizational identification has also begun to appear in the identification literature. To the best of my knowledge, the focus of this research has been on the antecedents of the different dimensions of identification. Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) examined antecedents of identification, disidentification, ambivalent identification and neutral identification. The antecedents in their research included organizational reputation, organizational identity strength, positive and negative affectivity and need for organizational identification. Their research found differences in the antecedents of the four quadrants. As examples, positive affectivity was positively related to identification and neutral identification, but was unrelated to the other two forms of identification. Alternatively, negative affectivity was positively related to disidentification, whereas organizational reputation was negatively related to this dimension, but neither organizational reputation nor negative affectivity were related to other dimensions. These results support the discriminant validity of the multiple dimensions in expanded models of identification. While this research focused on antecedents of the four quadrants, Kreiner and Ashforth suggested the additional benefit of the expanded model could be the ability of the different dimensions to predict cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes of identification by employees.

Authors often use the terms organizational identification and organization commitment interchangeably as these concepts are closely related (Edwards, 2005; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). This has led to an important research stream investigating the similarities and differences between organizational identification and the conceptually and operationally related construct of organizational commitment. As Edwards (2005) indicated, both

constructs describe similar psychological states. Some conceptualizations of organizational commitment include identification as a sub-concept.

Organizational commitment is defined as the strength of an individual's identification with, involvement in, and loyalty towards an organization (Cook & Wall, 1980; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Recent reviews by Pratt (1998) and van Dick (2004) provided support for the difference between commitment and identification. The first difference stems from the definition of the concepts, commitment is an attitude towards an organization, whereas identification implies a deeper connection to the organization including the Ashforth and Mael (1989) notion of a perceived oneness of the member with the organization. Second, empirical research has found a strong correlation between identification and commitment (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Riketta, 2005), however, confirmatory factor analyses suggest a difference between the concepts such that organization identification and commitment fit a two-factor model better than a single-factor model (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Tetrick, 1992). Finally, identification and commitment develop from different sources given the different antecedents associated with each concept (for an overview and comparison of the antecedents of organizational identification and organizational commitment see Riketta, 2005). In summary, while organizational identification is similar to organizational commitment, they are sufficiently distinct, and studying identification and its dimensions could shed light on service employee behaviors directed towards customers.

Organizational Identification Theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides the dominant theoretical framework for understanding organizational identification (Edwards, 2005). Social identity theory proposes that people tend to assign themselves and others as being

members of particular groups or categories and draw on this categorization in the construction of their self-concept. A second component of this theory is that people compare themselves with other people based on membership in particular groups. Self-image and self-esteem have key roles in social identification theory such that individuals are motivated to ensure that their categorization is a source of positive identity and that their group compares well with other categories.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggested that individuals who identify with their organization categorize themselves into a social category (the category being the organization for which they work), and that “organizational identification is a specific form of social identification” (p. 22). They also indicated, drawing on social identification theory, that individuals identify with organizations as a means of enhancing self-esteem and that organizational identification involves an individual’s perception that he or she is psychologically intertwined with the fate of the organization. Dutton et al. (1994) extended the theoretical connection between social identity theory and organizational identification by suggesting that strong organizational identification occurs when an individual’s identity as a member of an organization is more salient than alternative identities and that the individual’s self concept has many of the characteristics that he or she believes define the organization as a social group. Their approach also draws on social identity theory as the mechanism through which members incorporate aspects of an organization’s identity such as goals, values or characteristics into the individual’s self-concept. Based on social identification theory, service employees who identify with their organization are likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization, including service behaviors, and are also likely to be motivated to support the organization’s goals and interests.

As discussed above, organizational identification has implications for organizational and employee outcomes and understanding the consequences of service employee identification and disidentification in service environments is an important topic for researchers and service managers. Specifically, organizational identification could influence service employee behavior directed towards customers. In the following paragraphs, I examine, one such customer directed behavior, employee incivility, as a response to service employee attachment to their organization.

Organizational Identification Hypotheses

Organizational Identification → Employee Incivility

Two key concepts drawing on organizational identification theory support a potential relationship between service employee organizational identification and employee incivility. First, organizational identification can motivate individuals to serve an organization (Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994). Ouchi (1981) suggested that congruence between employee and organization goals and values can motivate employees to behave in ways that are consistent with the organization's objectives. Thus, in a service context, higher levels of organizational identification, and the associated incorporation of the organization's identity into the individual self-concept are likely to motivate service employees to engage in behaviors that support the organization's service goals. Second, Dutton et al. (1994) indicated that organizational identification aligns individuals' interests and behaviors with interests and behaviors that benefit the organization. Thus, service employees who identify with their organization are likely to behave in ways that benefit the organization and its customers as they can view these behaviors as beneficial to themselves.

A growing body of empirical organizational identification research supports the

presence of a relationship between employee identification with an organization and individual behavior. As an example, Dukerich et al. (2002) argued that strong organizational identification could lead individuals to consider behaviors that benefit the organization as benefiting themselves such that employees could alter their behavior to reflect organizational goals and values. Their research found a positive relationship between physician organizational identification and both cooperative and organizational citizenship behaviors. In addition, research has shown a positive relationship between employee organizational identification and both in-role and extra-role performance (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Riketta, 2005 for a meta-analysis) and public praise of the organization (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Empirical research also suggests that organizational identification might influence how members of an organization interact with organizational outsiders. For instance, Efraty and Wolfe (1988) examined the effect of organizational identification on service employee performance in several healthcare organizations. They found that as employee organizational identification increased, three measures of task performance in interactions with clients – task involvement, investment of effort and performance effectiveness – also increased. Dukerich et al. (2002), alternatively, considered interactions between organizational members and outsiders in their measure of physician cooperative behavior as it included an item relating to physician cooperation with patients. Finally, at least two groups of researchers have investigated the relationships among organizational identification, organizational citizenship behavior and customer perceptions of service quality (Bell & Menguc, 2002; van Dick, Grojean, Christ, & Wieseke, 2006). This research identified that organizational citizenship behavior mediates the relationship between organizational

identification and customer perceptions of service quality. These empirical findings indicate that service employees can alter their behavior towards customers depending on their level of identification with their organizations.

The relationship between organizational identification and behaviors that do not benefit the organization is less well defined. The theory underlying organizational identification indicates that an employee who strongly identifies with an organization would be likely to reduce behaviors that did not benefit the organization. Employee incivility represents a mild form of “dark-side” behavior in organizations that is directed towards customers. Employee incivility is likely to be contrary to an organization’s goals and mission regarding how the organization would chose for service employees to interact with service recipients. Thus, an employee who exhibits strong identification with an organization is likely to avoid engaging in uncivil behaviors directed towards customers as this would contradict the organizational goals and values that they have internalized into their own identity. This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: Organizational identification is negatively related to employee incivility toward customers.

Organizational Disidentification → Employee Incivility

Elsbach and Bhattacharya (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001) described organizational disidentification as a mechanism to preserve individual self-concept wherein an individual separates his or her identity from the organization’s identity. They proposed two key consequences of individual disidentification with organizations: counter-organizational actions and public criticism of the organization. Individuals, they argued, are motivated to engage in counter-organizational actions, such as attempting to harm

the organization and supporting alternative organizations, as a mechanism to avoid cognitive dissonance associated with acting inconsistently with their established beliefs. Thus, if an individual did not support the goals, values and/or mission of the organization to which they belong, the individual might experience cognitive dissonance with respect to membership in this organization and engage in behaviors to relieve this dissonance.

They presented public criticism of the organization, alternatively, as a more immediate and convenient form of self-affirmation and a means of protecting an individual's social identity. As such, individuals who disidentify with the organization might engage in public criticism of the organization to enhance their social identity by reinforcing separation of their identity from the organization's identity. In summary, Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001, p. 403) identified that "organizational disidentification appears to motivate actions that protect the individual from identity threats and affirm the individual as someone who opposes the organization."

Few empirical research studies exist investigating the consequences of organizational disidentification. Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001), however, examined individuals' cognitive relationships, including disidentification, with the National Rifle Association. Using a combination of archival data, focus groups and survey data, they found that disidentification with this organization was related to behaviors supporting an opposing organization and to public criticism of the organization. This research, however, did not examine the consequences of employee disidentification with their employing organization.

Service employee incivility represents one possible employee reaction to disidentification with an employing organization for at least three reasons. First, service incivility could provide employees with a mechanism to express the distinctiveness of their

identities from the organization's identity by violating the norms (values/goals/mission) in place in the organization. As previously explained, employee incivility can be a violation of the workplace norms in organizations. A service employee, for example, who is uncivil to a customer violates an organizational norm like "service with a smile" or treat others as you would like to be treated. This action could be considered a display towards customers of how the identity of the individual is separate from the identity of the organization by indicating that the behaviors of the individual (e.g., uncivil behavior) do not represent the attributes that define the organization (e.g., superior customer service).

Second, service incivility is a mild form of counter-organizational behavior by service employees. Given prior theorizing and empirical research suggesting that employees who disidentify with their organization might engage in behavior against the organization, employee incivility could be an example of this behavior that targets customers as a means of damaging the organization. In addition to this, Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001, p. 402) indicated that the difficulty of individual responses to disidentification can affect employee actions. Employee incivility could be an easier form of service employee counter-organizational action because it is a mild action and because the frequency of many service interactions provides ample opportunity to engage in this behavior.

Third, Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) described disidentification as a form of negative relational categorization wherein the individual can categorize the organization as a rival or enemy. Given this categorization of the organization, it could be argued that a service employee might treat customers in an uncivil manner because of their association with an organization to which the individual disidentifies. The individual might then consider that he

or she is in conflict with individuals associated with this organization, including customers, leading to uncivil behaviors directed toward these people.

In summary, service incivility might be one mechanism service employees use to separate their identities from the organizational identity of organizations with which they disidentify. This mechanism would allow these employees to maintain their self-concept in the face of identity threats driven by working for an organization that's identity they do not share. As previously noted, organizational identification can motivate individual behaviors directed towards individuals outside of the organization. The combination of a need for these service employees to separate their identities from the organizational identity and the possibility of targeting organizational outsiders as a means of making this distinction leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7: Organizational disidentification is positively related to employee incivility toward customers.

Customer Incivility → Organizational Identification/Disidentification → Employee Incivility

Research indicates that individual identification with an organization is subject to change including change over time and change in response to various attributes of the work environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Wan-Huggins, Riordan, & Griffeth, 1998). A key example of individual identification changing over time considers employee tenure with the organization. An employee who has recently joined an organization is not expected to identify with an organization to a similar degree as an employee who has invested years with the same organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; for a meta-analysis see Riketta, 2005). Alternatively, research indicates that individuals cognitively evaluate the attributes of their work environment including job and role characteristics such as achievement, challenge

(Brown, 1969), role conflict and role ambiguity (Wan-Huggins et al., 1998) to determine whether they personally benefit from membership in an organization (Hall & Schneider, 1972; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Wan-Huggins et al., 1998).

I propose that service employees can consider their interactions with customers as a component of the work environment when assessing the attractiveness of their membership in an organization. This implies that employee exposure to customer incivility could be related to employee identification or disidentification with their employers. As described above, both organizational identification and disidentification are also predicted to be related to employee incivility. These potential relationships between employee perceptions of customer incivility and organizational identification and disidentification and between these variables and employee incivility suggest that dimensions of identification might mediate the relationship between customer mistreatment and uncivil behaviors by employees targeting customers. In the following paragraphs I examine both organizational identification and disidentification as potential mediators of the customer service, employee incivility relationship.

Service employee perceptions of customer incivility were expected relate to organizational identification for two reasons. First, Wan-Huggins, Riordan, and Griffeth (1998) argued that motivating job characteristics (i.e., autonomy, variety) could be related to organizational identification. They indicated that these job characteristics could increase employee perceptions of control in the workplace and strengthen their emotional bond with the organization. While these authors did not find empirical support for their arguments, they called for further research into the relationship between job characteristics and organizational identification.

Building on this logic, I propose that customer incivility acts to discourage, rather than motivate service employees, thus affecting their emotional bond with the organization. As an example, customer incivility might highlight service employees' lack of control in the workplace and reinforce emotional display rules in the organization, given that service employees are typically required to provide high levels of customer service to all customers including those who are uncivil. Customer incivility, as a result, could weaken service employee emotional bonds with organizations and be negatively related to organizational identification.

Second, affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) posits that employee experiences of events at work stimulate specific emotions, which can in turn develop into affectively driven behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behavior (e.g. Fisher, 2002), and attitudes such as organizational commitment (Wegge, van Dick, Fisher, West, & Dawson, 2006). These affective events include interactions where employees feel they are treated unfairly. Several researchers have identified anger as a common individual consequence of employee perceptions of injustice in the workplace (Clayton, 1992; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Mikula, 1986; Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999). In addition to this, field and lab research has identified that mistreatment by customers is related to anger among service employees (Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002) and research subjects role-playing service employees (Rupp & Spencer, 2006). Thus, I propose that because of the anger that service employees can experience at work resulting from customer incivility, service employees might view this anger as a drawback of employment with the organization rather than a benefit of membership and result in decreased service employee perceptions of identification with their employer.

This logic indicates a potential relationship between customer incivility and service employee organizational identification. Earlier arguments, also suggest a relationship between organizational identification and service incivility. Combining these relationships indicates that service employee organizational identification might mediate, at least partially, the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility. I propose partial mediation recognizing the potential for other mediators in the relationship (i.e. service employee boredom, organizational disidentification). Individuals perceiving higher levels of customer incivility will report lower levels of organizational identification than those experiencing less uncivil behavior from customers. This decrease in organizational identification in turn will cause service employees perceiving higher levels of customer incivility to engage in higher levels of service incivility as compared to those reporting less customer incivility. This yields the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 8: Organizational identification partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility toward customers.

I propose that customer incivility could be related to organizational disidentification given the interactional injustice, and the associated negative affect, that targets of incivility can experience (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) in an investigation of antecedents of the four dimensions of an expanded model of organizational identification argued that negative affectivity has been found to be inversely related to work adjustment. They proposed that individuals higher in negative affectivity would be more likely to disidentify with an organization because these individuals tend to have negative perceptions of people and organizations and are more likely to focus on negative experiences and attitudes. This research identified a positive relationship between negative affect and

organizational disidentification. Drawing on this logic, I propose that organizational disidentification might also partially mediate the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility. Individuals perceiving higher levels of customer incivility will report higher levels of organizational disidentification than those experiencing less uncivil behavior from customers. This increase in organizational disidentification will cause service employees perceiving more customer incivility to engage in higher levels of employee incivility as compared to those reporting less customer incivility.

Hypothesis 9: Organizational disidentification partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility toward customers.

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

Service employees' emotional resources and the potential for emotional exhaustion are factors that might also help explain why employees engage in incivility toward customers. In the following section, I review literature on emotional exhaustion and I discuss the underlying theoretical mechanisms that can explain antecedents and consequences of service employee emotional exhaustion. I then explain how emotional exhaustion relates to service incivility. I develop hypotheses incorporating emotional exhaustion into the relationship between customer incivility and uncivil responses by service employees.

Overview of Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion refers to the individual stress dimension of the job burnout syndrome (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) It involves a chronic state of physical and emotional depletion that can result from excessive job demands and continuous hassles (Shirom, 1989; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Zohar, 1997). In addition to exhaustion, job burnout also consists of an interpersonal dimension labeled cynicism, and a self-evaluative dimension labeled inefficacy. Cynicism or depersonalization is an attempt by service employees to distance themselves from the organization and service recipients in order to mitigate work demands. This distance is argued to enable service employees to consider and respond to service recipients in an impersonal manner (Maslach et al., 2001). Inefficacy, in contrast, is a service employee's loss of a sense of accomplishment and/or effectiveness at work. All three components of job burnout are potentially important, however, a growing body of research suggests that emotional exhaustion is the key dimension of burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Shirom, 1989; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998) and this is the focus of this study.

Emotional exhaustion is an important topic for organizational research because it has consequences for both individual well being and organizational functioning (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach et al., 2001). It is a type of strain that can result from workplace stressors (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) and a state of emotional and physical depletion (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Maslach, 1982). To support this, a growing body of research has linked emotional exhaustion to individual consequences including physiological problems, depression, sleep disturbances, and negative health behaviors (e.g., alcohol consumption, drug use, Kahill, 1988; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Melamed, Shirom, Toker, Berliner, & Shapira, 2006; Shirom, Westman, Shamai, & Carel, 1997). With respect to organizational functioning, emotional exhaustion is related to negative work attitudes (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Leiter & Maslach, 1988), counterproductive work behavior (Jones, 1981; Mulki, Jaramillo, & Locander, 2006; Rowe & Sherlock, 2005) turnover intentions (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986), voluntary turnover (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998), and lower job performance (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Wright & Bonett, 1997; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI, Maslach & Jackson, 1981) is the most widely used measure of burnout (Byrne, 1991; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Maslach et al., 2001; Taris, Le Blanc, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2005). The scale was originally designed for use in human service occupations, subsequently, the concept has been extended to other occupations including teachers, clerical staff and information technology workers (Maslach et al., 2001). The MBI consists of 22 items designed to measure the three dimensions of the burnout syndrome. Employees completing the measure indicate their perceptions of both the frequency and intensity with which each item is experienced. The

scale ranges from “a few times a year” to “every day” for frequency and from “very mild, barely noticeable” to “very strong, major” for intensity. Researchers have found high correlations between the frequency and intensity measures (Brookings, Bolton, Brown, & McEvoy, 1985; Gaines & Jermier, 1983), and as such, the revised version of the MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) includes only the frequency dimension. The emotional exhaustion component of the scale consists of nine items describing employee feelings of being emotionally overextended or exhausted by their work. Items in the exhaustion subscale include “I feel emotionally drained from my work,” “I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day,” and “I feel I’m working too hard on my job.”

Antecedents and Consequences

Studies have explored individual, job related, and organizational antecedents of emotional exhaustion. Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and antecedents including role conflict, role ambiguity, task complexity, emotion regulation, workload, and perceptions of increased customer abuse and demands (Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999; Deery et al., 2002; Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner, 2005; Ito & Brotheridge, 2003; Leiter & Maslach, 1988). A negative relationship has been found between emotional exhaustion and job-person fit, participative leadership, autonomy, psychological well-being, and supervisory support (Ito & Brotheridge, 2003; Mulki et al., 2006; Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). Research also indicates that age relates to emotional exhaustion, such that younger individuals experience more emotional exhaustion than their older counterparts (for an overview see Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

Empirical research suggests that emotional exhaustion has implications for individual and for organizational functioning (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach et al., 2001). At the

individual level, emotional exhaustion is positively related to sleep disturbances and alcohol and drug use and negatively related to psychological health (Kahill, 1988; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Considering organizational functioning, emotional exhaustion has been found to be positively related to turnover intentions, voluntary turnover, and counter-productive work behaviors (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 1986; Jones, 1981; Mulki et al., 2006). Alternatively, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior beneficial to the organization and to supervisors, and job performance are negatively related to employee emotional exhaustion (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Wright & Bonett, 1997; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Given that incivility is low-intensity deviant behavior, empirical research indicating a relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee deviance is particularly relevant to this research. Mulki, Jaramillo, and Locander (2006) examined the relationship between emotional exhaustion and deviant behaviors directed at the organization including taking longer breaks than acceptable, misusing sick leave and ignoring supervisor instructions. These authors suggested that emotionally exhausted employees can be less satisfied with their jobs and this lack of job satisfaction can lead to decreased organizational commitment. Decreased commitment was argued to predict employee deviance because employees with lower levels of commitment care less about the firm's well being and future, and employees can engage in deviance as a way of coping with their frustration and dissatisfaction with the organization. They found that the impact of emotional exhaustion on organizational deviance was through employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment. They concluded that job attitudes act as a filter to determine whether or not emotional exhaustion leads to employee deviance.

Emotional Exhaustion Theory

The initial theoretical framework underlying emotional exhaustion resulted from research on emotion, arousal, and individual responses to arousal (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach & Jackson, 1984). From its inception, research recognized that the relationships between service providers and recipients are the important core of service occupations (Maslach, 1976; Maslach et al., 2001). Initially, emotional exhaustion was grounded in relational transactions in the workplace rather than as an individual stress response. Through interviews with health care professionals, Maslach and Jackson (1984) concluded that there was something unique about service roles that could result in service employee emotional exhaustion and burnout. Emotional exhaustion was described as a state wherein service employees' emotional resources were drained or "used up" as a result of the emotional demands imposed by other people (Maslach, 1982). Emotionally exhausted service employees can no longer give of themselves or be as responsible for service recipients as they had previously functioned (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

More recently, researchers have advanced conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a framework providing insight into emotional exhaustion (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). Conservation of resources theory is rooted in the assumption that people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and stress results when individuals experience potential or actual loss of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Hobfoll (1989) described four major categories of resources within this framework: personal characteristics (e.g., occupational skills, self-esteem); object resources (e.g., car, home); condition resources (e.g., seniority, job experience); and energy resources (e.g., time, money, knowledge). Potential or actual depletion of these resources is argued to lead to a negative

state which can include individual dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression, or psychological tension.

Based on conservation of resources theory, service employee emotional exhaustion can be viewed as a resource-depleted state driven by the stress and the associated resource loss of interacting with service recipients. Conservation of resources theory also posits that emotional exhaustion should require adaptive responses from individuals to protect or replace threatened resources (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). I propose that service employees can alter their behavior towards customers as an adaptive mechanism to maintain and possibly recover depleted emotional resources. Thus, understanding how emotionally exhausted service employees interact with service recipients is an important topic for service managers and organizational researchers. In the following paragraphs, I examine, one such customer directed behavior, employee incivility, as a response to depletion of service employee emotional resources.

Emotional Exhaustion Hypotheses

Emotional Exhaustion → Employee Incivility

Three key concepts emerge from the conservation of resources perspective that support a relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee incivility. First, emotionally exhausted employees can reduce their level of effort as a mechanism to maintain resources (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). Several researchers have identified a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and job performance (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). From a conservation of resources perspective, emotionally exhausted employees have had their resources drained and can engage in withdrawal behaviors, such as reducing their level of performance as a mechanism

to maintain their remaining physical, social, emotional and status resources (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004).

Adhering to organizational practices in service environments, such as display rules and treating customers in a civil manner, is a common component of service employee performance. Engaging in employee incivility, by definition, is a departure from display rules, and a reduction in individual performance and commitment to organizational practices. Service employees engaging in incivility targeting customers could conserve remaining resources by reducing the amount of effort they expend on the job.

Alternatively, employee incivility could allow service employees to vent their true feelings at the source of the uncivil treatment they experience. Expressing actual emotions, rather than those filtered by display rules and organizational practices, can allow service employees to maintain resources by easing the emotional dissonance and self-alienation that is often present in service interactions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Thus, emotionally exhausted employees could engage in customer-directed incivility as a mechanism to maintain their already depleted resources.

Second, emotionally exhausted individuals might be more irritable and demanding in interpersonal interactions. Research has identified a relationship between negative affectivity and emotional exhaustion (Thoresen et al., 2003). Trait negative affect indicates the dispositional tendency to experience negative affective states over time and is characterized by consistent feelings of emotions including anger, hostility, anxiety, and subjective stress (Watson & Clark, 1984; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; Watson & Pennebaker, 1989). Watson and Clark (1984) indicated that high negative affectivity individuals are more hostile, demanding and distant than those with low scores in these measures. Negative affectivity, is

also related to both organizational and interpersonal deviance (Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999). These findings suggest that emotionally exhausted individuals could be prone to engage in employee incivility given its relationship with negative affectivity.

Third, research on job burnout suggests that emotional exhaustion can be strongly related to the second dimension of job burnout: cynicism or depersonalization (Lee & Ashforth, 1990; Maslach, 1976; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 2001). As noted earlier, cynicism or depersonalization represents the negative or cynical attitudes that service employees frequently feel towards their clients (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) and can be associated with negative, callous, or detached responses to service recipients (Maslach et al., 2001). Maslach et al. (2001) indicated that service employees can use cynicism to maintain emotional distance from service recipients as a mechanism to help service employees function effectively at work. Employee incivility could potentially represent a manifestation of service employee detachment from customers used by service employees to sustain depleted resources. Thus, emotionally exhausted employees might engage in more employee incivility than less exhausted employees because of an increased need to sustain remaining resources.

The theory underlying emotional exhaustion indicates that an employee could engage in employee incivility to both sustain and/or recover depleted resources. Service employees could withhold effort, and thereby be less civil to customers, as a means of conserving resources. Alternatively, emotionally exhausted employees could engage in incivility to recover resources. As an example, service employee incivility might allow employees to display true feelings to service recipients and thereby increase employee status and self-esteem resources. In addition to this, emotionally exhausted employees, as previously

described, can engage in counterproductive work behaviors (Mulki et al., 2006). Service incivility is similar to minor interpersonal counterproductive work behaviors (Fox & Spector, 1999; Robinson & Bennett, 1995) such as withholding effort, refusing to cooperate, or acting foolish in front of customers. Thus, an employee that exhibits a high degree of emotional exhaustion could have an increased need to maintain and/or restore resources as compared to less emotionally drained employees and could engage in more counterproductive work behaviors. The following hypothesis draws on this logic:

Hypothesis 9: Emotional exhaustion is positively related to employee incivility toward customers.

Customer Incivility → Emotional Exhaustion → Employee Incivility

Empirical research suggests that service employee exposure to resource drains such as customer-instigated aggression and dysfunctional customer behaviors can increase service employee emotional exhaustion (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Deery et al., 2002; Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Grandey et al., 2007; Harris & Reynolds, 2003). To my knowledge, research has only recently started to address the relationship between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion. Kern and Grandey (2009) found that increased employee perceptions of uncivil behaviors by customers were related to increases in service employee emotional exhaustion. A related construct, customer mistreatment of employees, is also associated with higher levels of service employee emotional exhaustion (Grandey et al., 2004; Rupp & Spencer, 2006). Alternatively, researchers have identified a positive relationship between workplace incivility and psychological distress, and a negative relationship between workplace incivility and both psychological well-being and health satisfaction (Cortina et al., 2001; Martin & Hine, 2005).

Marketing and services research offers similar insights into customer demands on service employee resources. This literature refers to “dysfunctional customer behavior,” a term encompassing customer behaviors that intentionally or unintentionally disrupt service interactions including “deviant customer behavior” (Mills & Bonoma, 1979); “aberrant customer behavior” (Fullerton & Punj, 1993); “problem customers” (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994); and “consumer misbehavior” (Fullerton & Punj, 1997). As an example, Harris and Reynolds (2003) found that sustained hospitality service employee exposure to dysfunctional customer behavior was related to feelings of degradation and to stress disorders. They also found dysfunctional customer behavior to be related to service employee use of emotional labor to diffuse customer behaviors and as a coping mechanism. Emotional labor allowed service employees to psychologically distance themselves from dysfunctional service interactions and allowed service employees not to have to display their true emotions to customers. Emotional labor has been shown to be related to emotional exhaustion (e.g., Grandey, 2003; Zapf, 2002).

Integrating conservation of resources theory with the findings from research on customer-initiated aggression, workplace incivility, and dysfunctional customer behaviors suggests that customer incivility could be a threat to service employee resources. This research also indicates that prolonged exposure to customer incivility might lead to resource depletion and emotional exhaustion in service employees.

This body of research indicates a potential relationship between customer incivility and service employee emotional exhaustion. Previously, I argued for a relationship between emotional exhaustion and service incivility. Combining relationships between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion and emotional exhaustion and employee incivility

implies that service employee emotional exhaustion might mediate, at least partially, the relationship between customer and employee incivility. I propose partial mediation recognizing the potential for other mediators in the relationship (i.e. service employee boredom, organizational identification and disidentification). Individuals perceiving higher levels of customer incivility will report higher levels of emotional exhaustion than those experiencing less uncivil behavior from customers. This increase in emotional exhaustion in turn will cause service employees perceiving higher levels of customer incivility to engage in higher levels of employee incivility as compared to those reporting less customer incivility. This yields the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 10: Emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility toward customers.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

Last, I explored the relationship between service incivility and individual performance. I expected that engaging in incivility targeting customers is associated with lower performance for at least two reasons. First, customers targeted by employee incivility might directly influence employee performance by choosing not to interact with these employees thereby affecting measures of employee performance such as sales or completed transactions. Alternatively, customers might indirectly influence individual performance by reporting uncivil employee behavior to representatives from the organization (e.g., supervisors, service managers). This customer feedback could then be incorporated into lower employee performance ratings.

Second, service incivility might be negatively related to performance because incivility prevents employees from performing behaviors such as customer focused organizational citizenship behaviors (Schneider et al., 2005) that are normally associated with individual performance in service roles. Service employees directing incivility at customers, as such, might receive lower performance ratings than other employees given that they are not engaging in behaviors required for performance in their role.

Moreover, research has found that workplace incivility diminishes individual motivation, productivity and performance (Pearson & Porath, 2005). I expect employee incivility might have a similar relationship with employee performance, yielding the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 11: Employee incivility toward customers is negatively related to individual performance.

Summary of Hypotheses

The following list provides a summary of the hypotheses in the chapter.

Hypothesis 1: Customer incivility is positively related to employee incivility toward customers.

Hypothesis 2: Negative affect partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility toward customers.

Hypothesis 3: Service employee state job boredom is positively related to employee incivility directed towards customers.

Hypothesis 4: Boredom partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility toward customers.

Hypothesis 5: Organizational identification is negatively related to employee incivility toward customers.

Hypothesis 6: Organizational disidentification is positively related to employee incivility toward customers.

Hypothesis 7: Organizational identification partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility toward customers.

Hypothesis 8: Organizational disidentification partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility toward customers.

Hypothesis 9: Emotional exhaustion is positively related to employee incivility toward customers.

Hypothesis 10: Emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility toward customers.

Hypothesis 11: Employee incivility toward customers is negatively related to individual performance.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Participants

I conducted a field study of customer service representatives employed in a contact center in eastern Canada ($N = 81$). This center provided inbound call center services to the parent organization's clients. Employees participating in this study responded to three major types of client inquiries: product warranty, insurance claims and financial services. Call center agents handled between 60 and 80 calls per day and the average call was approximately 5 minutes in length with call duration varying from less than 2 minutes to more than 15 minutes. Eighty nine out of a total of 260 (34%) employees responded to the invitation to participate in this research. Eight employees did not return surveys. Of the 81 respondents, 59 (73%) were women, and 22 (27%) were men. Their average age was 36.8 years and the average tenure with the organization was 3.2 years. The contact center's vice president of customer services confirmed that these demographics were representative of the organization's contact center employees.

I conducted this research in a contact center for three reasons. First, employees in many service organizations can interact more with customers than with other employees (Rafaeli, 1989). Contact center employees have frequent interactions with customers giving them ample opportunity to experience incivility from customers. Grandey, Dickter, and Sin (2004), reported that call center employees experience customer verbal aggression, a construct similar to customer incivility, an average of 10 times per day. Moreover, research indicates that in a call center setting, even as few as two bad interactions with customers can affect customer service employee performance for an entire shift (Korczynski, 2003) making research on customer incivility particularly important in these organizations. Second, contact

centers tend to have electronic performance systems, including digital recording of interactions, to monitor employee activity and adherence to organizational policy in customer interactions (Batt, Doellgast, & Kwon, 2005; Holman, Chissick, & Totterdell, 2002; van Jaarsveld, Frost, & Walker, 2007). I selected a contact center to take advantage of this technology. Specifically, this research site recorded all interactions between customers and employees, which allowed for external observers to assess customer and employee incivility in interactions rather than relying on employee self-reports of behavior, thereby reducing both self-report and common method bias. Third, contact centers and service organizations are a large component of the North American economy, one in which customer service and customer behaviors in service interactions are important to organizational effectiveness (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 2003), thereby making research in this environment relevant to many organizations.

Customer service representatives were given a letter from the researcher inviting them to participate in this study. I administered a paper survey in a company meeting room over a period of four days. I scheduled my time at the research site to allow employees working all shifts, including weekends, to be able to participate in the research. Employees who agreed to participate in the research signed a consent form and authorized this researcher to access (1) performance records, and (2) a digitally recorded sample of their interactions with customers. Upon returning the survey, customer service employees were given a pass to a local movie theater. All employees were assured confidentiality and that the information they provided would be used solely for research purposes.

Procedures

This research was conducted using a combination of survey research and quantitative coding (Weingart, Olekalns, & Smith, 2004) of interactions between customers and employees. Quantitative coding is a process through which researchers can generate quantitative data about behaviors from video or audio recordings and involves two main steps (1) deciding which behaviors to evaluate in the data and developing a coding mechanism to assess these behaviors, and (2) analyzing the data according to the coding mechanism. Two reasons guided my thinking on the choice of this method. First, survey research is an effective tool in assessing the individual variables included in this analysis such as state boredom or emotional exhaustion. Individual self-reports, in response to validated survey instruments, can identify an employee's beliefs about his or her current psychological state. Second, I expected uncivil behaviors to be recognized by trained observers. Previous field research on the influence of customers on employees has tended to focus on employee perceptions of both customer and employee behaviors (Holmvall & Sidhu, 2007; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Skarlicki et al., 2008). Quantitative coding of behaviors in interactions addresses this limitation of existing research and a combination of methodologies seemed likely to allow for an objective assessment customer and employee incivility and reduce common method variance.

I collected two random samples of calls from the organization. The organization's customer service quality supervisor provided the recorded interactions in a digital format. The first sample (referred to as pre-survey) contained 30 calls and was assembled prior to conducting interviews and focus groups and to administering the survey. These calls were used to develop background information on the organization, to prepare for focus groups, to

develop the survey instrument, and to train research assistants. Following the collection of the survey data, the customer service quality manager provided a sample of at least eight employee interactions with random customers (referred to as post-survey) for each employee who (1) completed the survey component of this research, (2) regularly took calls from customers and (3) took calls in English. In 13 instances, respondents did not meet these requirements (e.g. trainers, team leaders, took calls only in French). These employees were omitted from the research. The initial sample of calls consisted of 641 recorded interactions and represented more than 49 hours of transactions. After listening to the interactions, 153 were omitted from the analysis because (1) there was no customer in the interaction (i.e., the agent called to leave a message with a customer), (2) the employee was making a personal call, (3) the caller was another employee of the organization, or (4) the call was in French. On average, the sample had 7.2 calls for each employee remaining in the research. Calls were then randomly ordered and put on to digital audio players for coding. This process allowed me to avoid order effects that might have occurred if the recordings were coded as they were provided by the organization and the habituation effects that could have occurred if all recordings for one employee were evaluated consecutively.

Two pairs of judges (four judges total) were extensively trained to rate customer and employee interactions on several dimensions using 5-point Likert scales. More specifically, one pair of judges was trained to evaluate customer behaviors and the second pair of judges to evaluate employee behaviors. The author, who has professional experience in the call center industry, including assessing and designing call quality evaluations, conducted the training. Customer and employee behavior judges were trained separately such that each pair of judges did not know what specific items the other pair was evaluating. Training consisted

of 4 two-hour sessions (a total of 8 hours) in which raters were trained on the coding mechanism, listened to and rated calls from the pre-survey sample, and discussed ratings discrepancies (both between judges and between the trainer and judges). Judges were provided with an extensive codebook that included definitions and examples of behaviors for each item in the analysis. Training was scheduled with at least one day between each session, and judges were assigned to evaluate calls from the pre-survey sample between training sessions. Prior to evaluating the post-survey call sample, judges had scored and discussed each of the 30 calls from the pre-survey sample at least once, and some of the calls more than three times.

Once trained, each judge rated all of the post-survey interactions, and agreement was calculated using the average deviation (AD) index (Burke & Dunlap, 2002; Burke, Finkelstein, & Dusig, 1999). The overall ADs from the mean (median) were 0.41 (0.24) and 0.28 (0.16) for customer and employee incivility respectively. Average deviation values ranged from 0.16 to 0.59 (0.09 to 0.37) across all items rated by customer judges and 0.13 to 0.40 (0.07 to 0.25) across all items rated by employee judges. Details of the items in each scale are included in the Measures section. Interpretation of the AD value is that on average a pair of judges deviated from the mean of their ratings by 0.41 units and 0.28 units for each of the customer and employee incivility scales. Note that all of these AD values, for both scales and individual items are below the "c divided by 6" guideline (where c is the number of categories in the scale (five) so the value is 0.83, Burke & Dunlap, 2002; Burke et al., 1999). Given the agreement between judges, I averaged the ratings for each pair of judges to form a rating for customer and employee incivility in each interaction.

Measures

Customer and Employee Incivility

As described above, I assessed customer and employee incivility by coding audio recordings of customer and employee interactions. Separate pairs of judges assessed either the customer or employee incivility in each interaction in a random sample of calls. These incivility scores were used to identify the extent of the incivility that employees experience from customers or directed towards customers in their interactions at work.

I developed measures of customer and employee incivility for this research site because existing workplace incivility scales reflect intra-organizational sources and targets of incivility and incivility in face-to-face interactions (Cortina et al., 2001; Martin & Hine, 2005). I used the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) to develop these measures because this approach has been shown to generate content-valid measures of behavior (Levine, Ash, Hall, & Sistrunk, 1983). I interviewed team leaders, quality supervisors and managers and conducted four focus groups of 3-4 subject matter experts (i.e., customer service representatives). In the interviews, I asked managers to identify specific examples of how customers were uncivil to employees over the telephone and to identify negative service behaviors that they had witnessed employees perform in response to uncivil customers. I asked focus group participants to identify examples of (1) customer behaviors that they had experienced in the last month that they considered uncivil or rude, and (2) behaviors that they directed toward uncivil customers in the past month. The trained judges and I also identified uncivil employee and customer behaviors by analyzing the pre-survey sample of calls. The following incidents are representative of the customer incivility and employee incivility in this research site.

Customer incivility (example: speaking aggressively, using a tone).

Employee: Now in order to assist with that, you (customer cuts off the employee)

Customer: DON'T PUT ME any place or else you're going to be sorry.

Employee incivility (example: blunt, short with the customer)

Employee: Sir, as I have explained to you, I do not have your statement. What I have here is what your creditor has asked for. Your creditor is asking for \$20 a month. That is what we pay, no more, no less.

Customer: Twenty dollars a month and the premium.

Employee: No sir!

The interview and focus group process generated 15 distinct examples of customer incivility and 13 examples of employee incivility. I reduced the list of incidents based on specific exclusion criteria. My intent was to capture behaviors that conform to current definitions of workplace incivility (low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, violation of workplace norms for mutual respect, Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001) that could be observed in interactions. Items with nonnormal (skewed) distributions were eliminated, as were items that did not occur in the post-survey sample of calls. For example, subject matter experts identified that customers swearing at employees was uncivil but this did not occur in the post-survey interaction sample. I rewrote the incidents into two behavioral scales and provided these scales to judges to evaluate interactions.

The final customer incivility scale consisted of four items. Each judge worked independently and assessed the following customer behaviors in interactions using a 5-point

Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (in all of the interaction): (1) speaking aggressively towards the employee, (2) using a tone when speaking to the employee, (3) sounding disinterested during the call, and (4) asking an aggressive question (i.e., Really? Are you kidding?). A multilevel confirmatory factor analysis supported a single underlying dimension for customer incivility ($\chi^2[8] = 12.83, p = .17, CFI = .99, RMSEA .03, \text{within-level } \alpha = .69$). The scale items were averaged to form the measure such that larger numbers signified higher (vs. lower) levels of the variable.

The other two judges evaluated employee incivility in the interactions using a 5-item scale. Each judge was asked to "Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following..." (1) The employee treated the customer with respect (reverse coded), (2) The employee got blunt with the customer, (3) The employee did not listen to the customer, and (4) The employee was short with the customer. The anchors for this Likert-type scale also ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (in all of the interaction). A second multilevel confirmatory factor analysis supported a single underlying dimension for the measure ($\chi^2[8] = 9.17, p = .33, CFI = .99, RMSEA .02, \text{within-level } \alpha = .70$). Items were averaged to form the measure such that larger numbers signified higher (vs. lower) levels of employee incivility.

Performance

The organization's director of operations provided an archival measure of employee performance for survey respondents. This measure consisted of an overall rating of employee performance, expressed as a percent, with higher scores indicating better performance. The measure comprised a combination of employee call management skills (e.g., listening, call control), use of information systems, decision quality, and customer service and sales skills. Calls were evaluated on a random basis by company monitors who were specifically trained

to rate service employee performance and whose primary job responsibility was to evaluate employee interactions with clients.

Employees were aware that their calls could be monitored, however, they were unaware of which calls were evaluated. All employees had a sample of calls evaluated by monitors each month. The performance score provided by the organization was an average performance score for survey respondents for the two months following survey administration. Three employees left the organization during this period and the organization did not provide performance scores for these individuals.

Although employees in this research site specialized into three different business units (product warranty, insurance claims and financial services) their individual interactions with clients were evaluated according to similar performance criteria. Each unit, however, had different performance targets due to specific challenges present when interacting with the unit's clients. Table 1 provides a summary of the raw performance scores and performance targets for the employees who participated in this study. To increase the comparability of performance ratings among the three different business units the ratings were standardized to provide a measure of employee performance relative to their client group.

Mediating Variables

Items in the following scales were averaged to form the measure. Moreover, all scales were written such that higher (versus lower) scale scores indicate higher levels of the construct.

State job boredom. State job boredom refers to individual perceptions regarding the boredom they experience at work and can vary across individuals and job situations. Typically, jobs comprised of repetitive tasks and requiring limited skills can be perceived as

boring. Survey respondents completed the 17-item job boredom scale (Lee, 1986) to indicate their levels of state boredom. This measure includes assessments of employees' satisfaction, interest and connectedness with their jobs. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Participants indicating higher scores on this measure report greater state job boredom as compared to those with lower scores.

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is a chronic state of physical and emotional depletion (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 2001). This study measured customer service employee emotional exhaustion using items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory for human service occupations (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The emotional exhaustion component of this scale consists of nine Likert-type items indicating employee feelings of being emotionally overextended or exhausted by their work. Respondents indicated the frequency with which they experienced each scale statement using a 6-item scale (1= a few times a year, 6 = every day). Higher (versus lower) respondent scores indicated their perception of feeling more emotionally exhausted from their work as compared to respondents with lower scores.

Organizational identification. Organizational identification refers to an individual psychological state reflecting the link between an employee and the organization. Mael and Ashforth's (1992) organizational identification scale is widely used in organizational identification research (Edwards, 2005) and a version modified to reflect employing organizations was implemented in this study. Respondents indicated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with six items on the scale including "This organization's successes are my successes" and "When someone praises this organization it feels like a personal compliment."

Organizational disidentification. Organizational disidentification is defined as the active differentiation and distancing of oneself from the organization (Dukerich et al., 1998). Individual disidentification with the organization was measured using six items specifically developed by Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) to measure disidentification from an employing organization. Respondents indicated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) the extent to which they agree or disagree with scale items such as “I am embarrassed to be a part of this organization” and “I find this organization disgraceful.” Employees with higher scores on this scale, as compared to those with lower scores, disidentify more with their employer and are more likely to report attempting to conceal their place of employment and to emphasize characteristics that distinguish themselves from other members in the organization (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

State negative affect. As noted earlier, state negative affect refers to individual feelings of negative emotion at a given time or in response to an event (Thoresen et al., 2003). State negative affect was measured using ten negative affect items from the PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced emotions including hostility and irritation using a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) when dealing with a customer who treated them in an uncivil manner. Respondents with higher scores on the scale perceive that they experience more negative emotions resulting from customer incivility than those reporting lower scores on this measure.

Control Variables

Gender. I controlled for gender in my analyses. Research has found that each of emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1982, p. 58; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Wright & Bonett,

1997), aggression (Baron, Neuman, & Geddes, 1999), and incivility (Cortina et al., 2001) are related to gender. Of specific interest to the current study are findings that indicate that women report higher levels of emotional exhaustion and experience a greater frequency of uncivil behaviors than men. Gender, as such, was controlled for using a self report binary indicator (0 = male, 1 = female).

Boredom proneness. Boredom proneness refers to the individual predisposition to experience boredom and is a trait, or individual difference, rather than a temporary state. Farmer and Sundberg (1986) described boredom-prone individuals as incompetent at maintaining and discovering interesting ways to spend their time. These individuals perceive that most tasks require high levels of effort and they experience varying degrees of depression, distractibility, irritability, hostility and amotivation (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Robinson, 1975; Smith, 1981). I used the Boredom Proneness Scale (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986) to assess service employees' propensity to experience boredom. The scale consists of 28 Likert-type items assessing the degree to which individuals agree with statements including "I find myself with time on my hands, nothing to do" and "In situations where I have to wait, such as a line or queue, I get very restless." Each item was measured with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never; 5 = frequently) rather than true-false responses (e.g., Dahlen, Martin, Ragan, & Kuhlman, 2004; Kass et al., 2001; McLeod & Vodanovich, 1991; Rupp & Vodanovich, 1997). Individuals responding with higher scores on this measure are less competent at discovering interesting ways to spend their time and perceive tasks as requiring high levels of effort (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Robinson, 1975; Smith, 1981).

Organizational justice. One goal of this research was to explore factors that predict employee incivility beyond perceptions of organizational fairness. Thus, in my analyses, I

controlled for Colquitt's (2001) validated *distributive, procedural, interpersonal* and *informational justice* scales. All scale statements used a 5-point response scale with anchors of 1 = to a small extent through 5 = to a large extent. Higher scores on each of these scales indicate that employees perceive the organization's decisions, procedures, and interactions to be more fair when compared to employees reporting lower scale scores on these measures.

Job demands. The job burnout literature theorizes that emotional exhaustion might be related to individual job demands (Jackson, Turner, & Brief, 1987; Maslach et al., 2001). Empirical research has found that higher workload (e.g., more clients, customers), as compared to lower workload, is positively related to emotional exhaustion (Deery et al., 2002; Jackson et al., 1987). The conservation of resources framework also suggests that heavier workload might increase resource threat and/or depletion on the part of service employees. Employee perceptions of the extent to which they regard their job demands as excessive was measured using the 7-item work demands scale (Caplan et al., 1975). Respondents indicated their agreement with scale statements using a five point response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) such that individuals reporting higher scale scores (vs. lower) perceived their work as more demanding than individuals with lower scores on this measure.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Analytic Strategy

The data available for inclusion in this study consisted of employee survey responses ($N = 68$) and coded interactions between customers and employees ($N = 488$). I used multilevel modeling techniques to test my hypotheses given the clustered nature of the data with interactions as Level 1 and customer service employees as Level 2 variables. The intraclass correlation (ICC) for customer incivility was .11 and for employee incivility was .16. These ICCs can be interpreted as the percentage of between-person variance and indicate that there is clustering at Level 2 of both customer and employee incivility in interactions. This also suggests that a single-level (OLS) regression of these data could be misleading because where nontrivial ICCs are present the assumption of independent errors associated with OLS regression is likely violated resulting in downward biased standard error estimates (e.g., Heck & Thomas, 2009; Singer, 1998). Control variables (gender, trait boredom, job demands, distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice and informational justice) were measured at the individual level and were entered into models at Level 2.

I had complete data for all Level 1 variables, however, for Level 2 variables data were missing on a least one variable for 13 individuals. To deal with the problem of missing Level 2 data I conducted two analyses (1) using listwise deletion, and (2) using full-information maximum likelihood (FML) estimation to include all records with complete information on the independent variables. The results for both analyses were consistent and since the complete case approach is a more direct approach for dealing with missing data I report these results. This approach however, has two key disadvantages. First, listwise deletion decreases the number of records available for analysis. Second, using a complete

case approach can also lead to biased results (Heck & Thomas, 2009). Unless otherwise noted, in the following complete case analyses the reduced N for interactions (Level 1) was 405 and N for customer service employees (Level 2) was 55. The average cluster size was 7.36 interactions per customer service employee.

I analyzed data using Mplus (Version 5.21) with the multilevel add-on (Muthén & Muthén, 2009) and grand-mean centered scores. To obtain proper estimates of model deviance I used maximum likelihood parameter estimates with standard errors and a χ^2 test statistic that were robust (MLR) to non-normality and non-independence of observations (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2007). The majority of the hypotheses in this study involved testing mediation, where the mediation occurred across levels in a multilevel model (a relationship between two Level 1 variables mediated by a Level 2 variable). To do this, I tested the indirect effect between customer incivility and employee incivility through Level 2 mediator variables (Bauer, Preacher, & Gil, 2006; Duncan et al., 1997; Heck & Thomas, 2009; Krull & MacKinnon, 2001; Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher, 2009) and implemented a modified version of Preacher and colleagues' Mplus syntax for testing multilevel mediation models (Preacher, 2009). Results are presented with two-tailed significance levels, using an alpha of .05.

Analyses

The means, standard deviations, correlations and reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) for all the study variables are given in Table 2. Hypothesis 1 stated that customer incivility was positively related to employee incivility toward customers. I used nested multilevel models to test this hypothesis at the interaction level of analysis, accounting for interactions clustered around customer service employees. In the first model, I tested a

random intercept model with estimates of the effects of customer incivility and all control variables constrained to zero. In the second model, I relaxed the constraints on the control variables and in the third model I removed the constraint on customer incivility. To test for significant differences between models I calculated adjusted loglikelihood values and difference tests using scaling correction factors obtained using the MLR estimator in Mplus. These steps allowed me to arrive at a χ^2 distributed test statistic (Satorra, 2000; Satorra & Bentler, 1999). As shown in Table 3, customer incivility in interactions explained significant variance in employee incivility in interactions, incremental to intra-organizational sources of justice, $b = 0.20$, $p < .001$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [0.12, 0.28], $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 40.19$.

Each of the direct and mediated effects of separate mediators was tested in its own model. Table 4 summarizes these analyses grouped by the mediating variable. Starting from the left, the first three columns identify the variables used in the analysis. The fourth column provides the unstandardized regression coefficient for each level of analysis and the fifth column identifies the 95% CI for the estimate. At Level 1, this estimate identifies the relationship between customer and employee incivility in interactions. At Level 2, this estimate indicates what is often referred to as the context effect (e.g., Heck & Thomas, 2009) or in the case of this study, the effect of the level of customer incivility that the employee experiences on the level of incivility that the employee directs towards customers at the employee rather than at the interaction level. The difference between these estimates is that one identifies relationships in interactions while the other focuses on relationships across employees and allows for the possibility of different effects of customer incivility at each level. The mediating variables in this study were all at Level 2 and as such the Level 1 estimate of the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility in

interactions does not change depending on the mediator variable in the model. As can be seen in Table 4, customer incivility is positively related to employee incivility in interactions and across employees (further supporting Hypothesis 1).

The sixth and seventh columns indicate the unstandardized regression coefficient and 95% CI for the relationship between customer incivility and each of the mediators. In both single-level and multilevel mediated models, this has been referred to as the ‘a-path’ (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Krull & MacKinnon, 2001). The unstandardized regression coefficients and 95% CI for the “b-path”, or the relationship between the mediator and employee incivility, are shown in the eighth and ninth columns, and columns ten and eleven contain estimates for the mediated effect.

Hypothesis 2 stated that service employee state negative affectivity explains (mediates) the relationship between customer incivility and uncivil behaviors by employees directed towards customers in one-on-one interactions. As shown in Table 4, this hypothesis was not supported. Customer incivility did not predict service employee negative affectivity, nor was there a significant relationship between employee negative affectivity and employee incivility.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 concerned the role of state job boredom as a predictor of employee incivility and as a mediator in the customer incivility → employee incivility relationship. Results for these hypothesis tests are shown in Table 4. I found support for Hypothesis 3, such that an increase in employee job boredom was associated with an increase in uncivil behavior by the employee directed toward customers, $b = 0.06$, $p = .04$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.12]. The data did not support Hypothesis 4; job boredom did not mediate the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility. While there was evidence

that job boredom predicted employee incivility toward customers, customer incivility was not related to employee job boredom.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that employee organizational identification was negatively related to incivility towards customers in service interactions. Extending this to organizational disidentification, Hypothesis 6 suggested that employee disidentification would be positively related to employee incivility. As shown in Table 4, neither of these hypotheses was supported. Organizational identification did not predict employee incivility nor did organizational disidentification.

Hypotheses 7 and 8 focused on whether organizational identification and disidentification mediated the relationship between customer and employee incivility. The mediated analyses did not support these hypotheses. Customer incivility was not related to an employee's organizational identification. Moreover, it was not significantly related to employee incivility and as such, it did not mediate the relationship. Similar results were found for organizational disidentification. It was also not significantly related to uncivil customer behaviors nor was it significantly related to employee incivility. Therefore, it did not mediate the customer incivility → employee incivility relationship.

Service employee emotional exhaustion was the focus of Hypotheses 9 and 10. Hypothesis 9 stated that an increase in employee emotional exhaustion would be accompanied by an increase in employee incivility towards customers. I found support for this hypothesis such that employees who reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion were also found to engage in higher levels of incivility targeting customers, $b = 0.03$, $p = .04$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.05]. Hypothesis 10, predicting that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility was not supported.

Hypothesis 11 examined the relationship between employee incivility and performance, positing that employee incivility relates negatively with employee performance. To test this hypothesis, I used the nested models approach, first testing a random intercept model with estimates of the effects of employee incivility and control variables constrained to zero. I followed this by testing a model estimating the control variables and a third model identifying the effect of employee incivility on performance. As before, I calculated adjusted loglikelihood values and difference tests using scaling correction factors to arrive at a χ^2 distributed test statistic (Satorra, 2000; Satorra & Bentler, 1999). Results from these analyses are shown in Table 5. I found partial support for this hypothesis, customer incivility was negatively related to service employee performance, even after accounting for intra-organizational sources of justice, $b = -0.15$, $p = .08$, 95% CI [-0.33, 0.02], $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 3.04$.

Summary of Results

In summary, I investigated three main research questions: (a) does incivility from customers towards service employees predict incivility from employees targeting customers (Hypothesis 1), (2) which individual employee differences explain this relationship (Hypotheses 2 through 10), and (c) does service employee incivility targeting customers affect employee performance (Hypothesis 11)? Figure 3 provides a summary of the research findings.

I found evidence at both the interaction and employee levels of analysis that increased customer incivility is related to increased uncivil behavior by employees targeting customers. This study also found evidence for relationships between each of employee state job boredom and emotional exhaustion and uncivil behaviors targeting customers. Employees

who reported high levels of boredom on the job were found to engage in more incivility towards customers as compared to employees who were less bored. Moreover, employees who were emotionally exhausted engaged in higher (vs. lower) levels of incivility towards customers. Contrary to expectations, however, none of state job boredom, emotional exhaustion, organizational identification, organizational disidentification or state negative affect mediated the customer incivility → employee incivility relationship. Customer incivility was not found to significantly predict any of these mediating variables, and subsequently, the indirect effects of customer incivility on employee incivility through mediators were not statistically significant. Finally, I found partial support for a relationship between employee incivility and service employee performance. Employee incivility was negatively related to performance, however, the relationship was only significant using a more liberal alpha level (.10).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The central question that I set out to study in this dissertation was why, despite organizational controls implemented to ensure that employees provide high quality service to customers, empirical evidence suggests that service employees can engage in incivility targeting customers. A secondary question in this research was how employee incivility was related to individual performance. The findings from this dissertation are summarized by the following five points:

- (1) Uncivil employee behaviors targeting customers are positively related to uncivil customer behaviors targeting employees. That is, employees who are the target of even minor interpersonal mistreatment from customers can respond to this mistreatment by being uncivil to customers. These results were found at both the one-on-one interaction level and across employees.
- (2) Employees who are more bored at work engage in higher levels of incivility targeting customers than employees who are less bored.
- (3) Emotionally exhausted employees engage in higher (vs. lower) levels of incivility targeting customers.
- (4) Increased levels of employee incivility targeting customers appear to be (weakly) related to decreased levels of service employee performance.
- (5) In the current sample, none of job boredom, emotional exhaustion, organizational identification, organizational disidentification or emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility.

I address the theoretical implications of my findings regarding these central questions and then provide an overview of the practical implications of this study. I close with a discussion of the strengths, limitations and directions for future research arising from this dissertation.

Theoretical Implications

This research makes at least three contributions to workplace incivility research. First, I extend workplace incivility theory to include incivility directed toward extra-organizational incivility targets. Current incivility literature does not describe incivility by employees targeting an organization's customers, however, research has identified customers as a source of incivility for employees (Kern & Grandey, 2009) and a potential target for employee incivility (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007). The current study is one of the first to examine incivility directed outside of the organization. Workplace incivility, as such, appears to be a broader construct than defined previously in that it is relevant both inside and across organizational boundaries.

Second, I found that one reason why employees are uncivil to customers is how customers treat employees. Employees subject to incivility from customers directed uncivil behaviors towards customers. This is an important finding for incivility theory because it suggests that incivility occurs even in the presence of organizational control systems, such as electronic performance monitoring, meant to deter this employee behavior. In addition, employee incivility toward customers was found to occur even in an organization that enforced display rules guiding the expression of emotion in service interactions.

One potential explanation for why service employees can be uncivil to customers in the presence of these organizational controls draws on the deontic justice framework (Folger,

2001). Skarlicki et al. (2008) found that employees sabotaged customers in response to customer interpersonal injustice and argued that this sabotage occurred as result of the violation of moral norms of social conduct associated with this injustice. It is possible that employees view customer incivility as violation of the norms of acceptable conduct in service interactions and engage in incivility targeting the customer as a means to enforce social norms in these interactions. Additional research is warranted to identify effective organizational practices to discourage negative service employee behaviors targeting customers. As an example the uncivil employee behaviors identified in this research were minor, but noticeable, incidents in service interactions. It is possible that organizations need to expand the behaviors that they observe and monitor to include minor behaviors in order to improve the overall quality of service that employees provide to customers.

Third, the research reported in this dissertation raises an important question for future incivility research, that being as to whether uncivil events or entity-level (Cropanzano et al., 2001) perceptions of incivility in an employee's work environment drive employee attitudes and behaviors. To date, workplace incivility research (Kern & Grandey, 2009) and more general research on customer interpersonal injustice (Skarlicki et al., 2008) has focused on entity-level perceptions of employee treatment at work. The current study, however, identifies that incivility at the interaction or event-level is related to both behaviors during events and to entity-level customer and employee behaviors. Thus, more research is needed to untangle specific effects of uncivil interactions from the overall uncivil atmosphere in a work environment. More simply put, workplace incivility theory needs to address how employees develop their perceptions of incivility to understand if judgments about incivility are based on one, or a few, key uncivil events rather than overall experiences. Building on

this point, a question remains concerning whether “objective” incivility (assessed using external observers) or “perceptions” of incivility influence employee behaviors. It is possible that objective uncivil events are less relevant to an employee’s response than perceptions of incivility, which raises concerns about construct validity. Future research should include measures of both actual and perceived incivility as a means to clarify how incivility impacts individual behavior.

To the best of my knowledge, this research was also one of the first studies to explore the performance implications of uncivil employee behaviors. Given the support, albeit weak, for a relationship between increased employee incivility targeting customers and decreased employee performance, this suggests that the effects of incivility are not only detrimental to the individuals involved in uncivil interactions but could also extend to the organization. A gap in incivility theory appears to exist to explain the relationship between incivility and performance. Explanations of this relationship were not explored in this research and this represents an important area for theoretical development and future research.

This dissertation also contributes to the job boredom literature, and to both human resource management and organizational justice research. This research was some of the first to examine job boredom in service organizations. Job boredom was found to negatively influence service employee behaviors directed towards customers. Boredom theory posits that bored employees can actively attempt to alter their work environments to reduce boredom and vary their activities at work (Lee, 1986; O’Hanlon, 1981). Combining boredom theory with service research proposing that service employees can use customers as a source of entertainment (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002) suggests that in services, customers play a key

role in employee job boredom and might be negatively affected by employee attempts to relieve boredom.

The finding that customers negatively influence customer service in service exchanges has implications for human resource management research. Customers participate in the production of services (Chase & Tansik, 1983; Mersha, 1990) yet are outside of organizational boundaries. The role of customers in the quality of customer service that they receive suggests that organizational policymakers could consider expanding the organization's human resource practices aimed at employees to the organization's customers. As an example, frontline employees normally receive training to improve the quality of the service that they provide to customers. Organizational policymakers could consider training customers as a mechanism to improve the quality of customer service.

A final contribution of this research involves the integration of workplace incivility theory with organizational justice research. Workplace incivility theory draws on the organizational justice literature such that incivility is argued to lead to interpersonal injustice (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). In this study, I controlled for employee perceptions of interpersonal injustice originating from within the organization. The effect of customer incivility on employee incivility was present, even after accounting for the potential buffering effects of justice originating within the organization. This finding is consistent with research on customer interpersonal injustice (Skarlicki et al., 2008) identifying that injustice, and now incivility, from customers might be distinct from justice perceptions originating within the organization. For service occupations, it appears, justice research needs to clearly differentiate the effect of the organization on the employee from the effect of the customer.

The nonsignificant findings in the dissertation merit discussion. Each of organizational identification and disidentification were proposed to be related to employee incivility. Two potential explanations exist for why these relationships were not present in this data. First, identification theory suggests that employees in an organizational setting exhibit a wide range of attachment to and/or disidentification from the organization. The mean identification score (standard deviation) in my sample was 3.39 (.72) while the mean disidentification score was 1.75 (.76). Further examination of the distributions of these scores revealed that less than 25% of identification scores were lower than 3.00 while only 25% of disidentification scores were higher than 2.10. The sample of employees participating in the research, as such, might not have contained employees with low identification and high disidentification whom identification theory would predict exhibit uncivil behavior towards customers. Moreover, the management practices in the organization reinforced this pattern of relationships by selecting employees who were likely to fit the environment and encouraging those that disidentified once hired to exit the organization.

Second, organizational identification and disidentification assess an employee's commitment to or detachment from the organization. The employee behaviors investigated in this research target customers rather than the organization. It is possible that employees can overlook their attachment to or detachment from the organization in their interactions with customers. Customer orientation (Brown, Mowen, Donavan, & Licata, 2002; Saxe & Weitz, 1982), or a revised version of organizational identification assessing employee attachment to customers might more accurately predict employee incivility toward customers.

In addition, the proposed mediated effects were not present in this research. In each of the mediated analyses, the relationship between customer incivility and the employee

individual difference was not statistically significant. It is possible that the effect of customer incivility on the employee individual differences is an indirect effect that occurs through an intervening variable. Drawing on the event and social entity framework (Cropanzano et al., 2001), customer incivility at the event-level as measured in this research could predict employee perceptions of customer incivility at the entity-level. For customer incivility to influence the targeted individual differences the employee might have to perceive event-level incivility as incivility in his or her work environment. Thus, employee perceptions of uncivil events as incivility could intervene in the relationship between customer incivility and employee individual differences.

Building on this, a potential theoretical implication arising from the identification of event-level instances of incivility and recognizing that these uncivil events did not predict the individual differences examined in this research, it is possible that the effects of incivility are cumulative. Thus, a second reason why I might not have found evidence for the mediating effects of individual differences on incivility between customers and employees is that I examined employee exposure to incivility in a small sample of events and did not capture the effect of prolonged exposure to incivility.

Drawing on the organizational toxicity framework (Frost, 2003), employees exposed to organizational toxins are argued to be able to withstand low-levels of or short-term exposure to toxins. In large doses or long-term exposure, organizational toxins have negative consequences for employees including emotional outbursts, rude and abrasive behavior, disturbed sleep, and withdrawal from the organization (Frost, 2003; Goldman, 2008; Stein, 2007). It is possible that customer incivility functions like an organizational toxin and employee responses to customer incivility develop over prolonged or substantial exposure to

this toxin. Future research is needed to examine how employees respond to different levels of exposure to customer incivility and to integrate customer incivility into the organizational toxicity framework.

In this dissertation, I was able to find a relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility at the event-level of analysis using a small sample of events. This indicates that the research reported in this dissertation is a strong test of this finding. Moreover, this is a stronger test of the effects of customer mistreatment on service employees than similar research based on cross-sectional studies (e.g., Holmvall & Sidhu, 2007; Skarlicki et al., 2008) and research reporting findings based on self-reports and single source data (e.g., Cortina & Magley, 2009).

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this research are fourfold. First, this research identifies that customer incivility is related to uncivil employee behaviors targeting customers. This result was observed in one-on-one interactions suggesting that if customers mistreat employees, employees are likely to respond to the customer in a manner that is detrimental to both customer service quality and to the organization. Managers and customer service supervisors should consider training employees on organizationally sanctioned responses to uncivil customer behavior so that employees can maintain customer service quality in these interactions. Moreover, employees were found to be uncivil to customers in response to customer incivility even after accounting for employees' perceptions of justice within the organization. This suggests that rather than altering conditions within the organization one approach to ensuring customer service quality might be to alter customer behaviors in interactions with employees.

Second, job boredom was positively related to employee incivility towards customers. In essence, bored employees did not provide as high a level of customer service as employees who scored lower on this measure. Many customer service employees, including those in this study, engage in highly repetitive work tasks. Customer service managers need to monitor service employee boredom from repetitive tasks and consider interventions to reduce repetitiveness. Managers could implement job rotation so that service employees spend time in non-service roles. Alternatively, jobs could be structured to increase task variety. For instance, in this research site, managers could expand service jobs to handle inquiries from multiple clients rather than specialize employees to one type of client. These actions could decrease uncivil employee behaviors towards customers.

Third, service employees who experience higher (vs. lower) levels of emotional exhaustion engaged in more incivility targeting customers. Customer service supervisors, as such, should actively monitor frontline worker emotional exhaustion and consider interventions such as job rotation to help service employees protect and recover cognitive resources. Interestingly, some actions that could help alleviate employee job boredom would also help mitigate service employee emotional exhaustion.

Fourth, the results show that employee incivility towards customers was negatively, albeit weakly, associated with employee performance. As such, if managers are able to reduce the level of incivility that service employees direct towards customers this could have the benefit of improving employee performance. Managers could be trained to identify employee incivility and should intervene when they witness these employee behaviors, even if these behaviors are minor and might not violate accepted practices in the organization as a mechanism to improve employee performance.

Strengths of the Research

Existing research on workplace incivility and incivility between customers and employees has focused on overall perceptions of incivility (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Cortina et al., 2001; Kern & Grandey, 2009). The current study was based on incivility in interactions and specific uncivil behaviors between customers and employees. Future research should consider specific assessments of workplace incivility and the analysis of interaction data could improve our understanding of incivility in organizations.

In addition, this study used independent observers to assess incivility rather than employee self-reports of uncivil acts targeting customers or perceptions of incivility from customers. This decreased self-report bias and provided a more accurate assessment of incivility in interactions between customers and employees. Additional research should examine the relationship between employee perceptions of incivility (as instigator or target) and actual incivility at work.

Finally, this research had independent assessments of uncivil customer and employee behaviors. The key advantage of having separate judges evaluate each type of incivility was to avoid common method bias which can be a source of measurement error and threaten the validity of the conclusions about relationships between measures (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Ideally, customers would evaluate incivility from employees, however, the procedure used in this dissertation is a first step in this direction without directly contacting customers.

Study Limitations

One potential limitation of this research is the generalizability of these findings to different types of interactions. The interactions between customers and employees in this

organization were over the telephone. Incivility in these exchanges had to be observable in audio recordings. Future research is needed to investigate whether these findings extend to face-to-face interactions. Moreover, the research methods and scales implemented in this study took advantage of the fact that interactions in this environment were recorded. Extending these methods and/or scales to evaluate video recordings or real-time interactions requires future work.

A second potential limitation regarding the generalizability of these results stems from the nature of the interactions in the research site. Customer incivility in this contact center was relatively infrequent. Moreover, employees in this sample were extensively trained and management actively coached employees to provide high-quality customer service which made employee incivility relatively uncommon. This, in conjunction with my earlier observation that employees in this research site both identified and did not disidentify with their organization, limits how these findings could generalize to other environments. For instance, how these findings generalize to organizations where employees are subject to increased levels of incivility, such as in an outbound or outsourced contact center or a customer complaint department requires future research. Moreover, how these findings generalize to organizations where employees are not attached to their employer is also open to investigation. These limitations, however, do make the results identified in this analysis a strong test of the customer incivility → employee incivility relationship given that the results hold even in this environment.

Third, it is possible that my results were affected by response bias. The sample was heavily skewed toward females (73% of research participants and 73% of interactions). Previous research has identified that women experience a greater frequency of incivility than

men (Cortina et al., 2001). To mitigate this, I controlled for the effect of gender in my analyses, however research should investigate if the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility is consistent across sexes. In addition, it is possible that the employees who choose to participate in my research were not representative of all employees in this organization. Employees who were more committed to the organization might have decided to participate. In addition, employees who were concerned about their interactions with customers might have chosen to participate. I attempted to mitigate these biases by targeting recruitment materials to all employees and having team leaders invite all of their employees to participate. I also indicated to participants that the focus of this research was on service interactions rather than on customer incivility to decrease the probability of recruiting employees who were strictly interested in using this project as a means to vent their anger regarding uncivil treatment from customers.

A fourth potential limitation that warrants attention concerns interaction level assessments of incivility as compared to overall incivility judgments. In order to obtain an unbiased evaluation of customer incivility in this environment, I used ratings of incivility from a small sample of calls for each employee. It is possible that (a) the incivility in these calls was not representative of the overall level of incivility experienced by respondents, and (b) that interaction level incivility does not accurately reflect overall incivility. In the case of the first condition, researchers working with samples of interactions need to arrive at a balance between a manageable sample size and a sample that is representative of customer and employee behaviors. As for the second condition, it is possible that overall employee assessments of customer civility or how civil an employee is to customers are based on a few

key events, or on specific interactions. As previously mentioned, future research should examine the relationship between uncivil behaviors and employee perceptions of incivility.

The causality of these findings is also a potential limitation of this research. It is possible that employee incivility predicts customer incivility. For instance, customers might be uncivil to an employee if they perceive that the employee does not provide service in a polite manner. The following three points, however, support the causal direction of the relationship specified in this research. First, employee behaviors in these interactions were constrained, whereas customer behaviors were not. Employees were subject to discipline if they were observed being uncivil to customers. Employees, as such, were not likely to initiate incivility. Second, in the interviews and focus groups, managers, supervisors and customer service employees indicated that customers, rather than employees, were the source of incivility. Finally, I asked the judges who were coding the interactions to identify which party, the customer or the employee, conducted the first uncivil act in an interaction if the judge observed incivility in the interaction. In 89% of the interactions where the judges observed incivility, they reported the customer as the initiator. While it is not possible for me to address the causal nature of the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility, these points support the specified direction of the relationship.

Future Directions

An initial direction for this research would be to address the causal direction of incivility between customers and employees. One way to address this would be to conduct a laboratory experiment where research subjects were asked to simulate being either a customer or employee in service interactions and to manipulate whether the customer or

employee engages in incivility. The response of the other party could then be observed and the causality of the relationship evaluated.

Alternatively, in field study, a qualitative evaluation of a sample of uncivil interactions between customers and employees should help address this gap in the literature. Using a sample of interactions, observers could evaluate two related questions (1) who initiates incivility, the customer or the employee, and (2) whether an uncivil response occurs later in the interaction. In addition, it is possible that the sequence of uncivil events in interactions is more complex than one where the customer instigates incivility and the employee responds. Future research could examine the sequence of incivility using a time-series of data collected throughout an interaction rather than looking at an interaction as a whole. Each of the laboratory study, a qualitative evaluation of interactions, or an examination of time-series data would provide guidance to workplace incivility researchers regarding the causal direction of incivility between customers and employees.

A second direction for this research would be to evaluate the content of uncivil interactions to identify different types of customer and employee incivility and the effects of different types of incivility. Research has identified interpersonal and informational dimensions of interactional injustice. It is possible that either customer or employee incivility is multidimensional. As an example, customer incivility might consist of rude behaviors such as using insulting language and behaviors that prevent service employees from helping customers. Content analysis of uncivil events would allow researchers to more specifically examine incivility that occurs between customers and employees and the effects of participating in uncivil interactions.

An underlying assumption of the current research was that incivility in one interaction was independent of incivility occurring in subsequent interactions. It is possible that an employee who experiences incivility from one customer could be uncivil to that customer or to subsequent customers. In the current study, I used a random sample of calls to evaluate incivility. A third area for future research could examine a sample of consecutive calls and investigate if the effects of incivility in interactions contaminate or spill-over to future interactions.

This research examined the effect of customer incivility on employee incivility at the interaction level of analysis and the proposed mediators were not specific to individual service interactions. Future research could examine employee reactions during interactions, including emotions, rather than more general variables such as emotional exhaustion. How the employee felt or acted during the interaction might be more likely to explain this customer incivility, employee incivility relationship at the interaction level of analysis. One approach to conducting this research would be to collect data from employees concerning specific interactions by having the employee answer survey questions about their last interaction. This would allow for the creation of a dataset that contained incivility measures and mediators that were all at the interaction level of analysis.

Two additional directions for this research are to (1) identify additional variables that explain the customer incivility, employee incivility relationship, and (2) examine individual difference variables that could moderate this relationship. The current research unsuccessfully examined five theoretically derived mediators of the effect of customer incivility on employee incivility. An alternative variable that might explain this relationship is individual appraisal of customer incivility as stress (Kern & Grandey, 2009) such that

experiencing customer incivility increases employee stress which in turn is related to uncivil employee behaviors targeting customers. Alternatively, the mediated relationship might not be a single-step mediated relationship but a multiple-step mediated model (Hayes, in press).

Potential moderators of the relationship include variables examined in this study as mediators. For instance, organizational identification could moderate, rather than mediate the path between customer incivility and employee incivility. Employees who identify with the organization and experience customer incivility might not respond with their own incivility because of their attachment to the organization and civil interactions with customers would be in the best interest of the organization. Employees who are not attached to the organization, or, in this case, do not identify with the organization, might instead respond to incivility with incivility.

Job boredom is also a potential moderator of the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility. Rather than lead to job boredom, as would occur in a mediated relationship, it is possible that an employee subject to incivility might engage in incivility targeting customers when they are also bored at work. As an example, the employee who is not bored would be able to perform at his or her normal level (without being uncivil to customers). However, when subject to incivility and bored, the employee might respond to customer incivility as a mechanism to relieve boredom.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this dissertation was to explore why customer service employees can be uncivil to customers in service interactions. I found that one reason for employee incivility is in response to customer incivility. When service employees experience uncivil treatment from customers, they engage in incivility toward customers. This study also found

that both employee boredom at work and emotional exhaustion were also associated with increased employee incivility. Unfortunately, the theoretically derived explanations for the relationship between customer incivility and employee incivility tested in this study were not supported. None of employee negative affect, job boredom, organizational identification, organizational disidentification or emotional exhaustion explained (mediated) the relationship between customer and employee incivility.

A second goal of this dissertation was to examine the implications of employee incivility for the organization. This research identified that increases in uncivil employee behaviors targeting customers are associated with decreased service employee performance. As such, employee incivility warrants attention from organizational policymakers given that it is detrimental to employee performance.

Theoretically, these findings highlight the importance of examining customer behaviors in service interactions and identify one employee response targeting customers. As such, this was one of the first studies to expand the workplace incivility framework beyond the organization to consider incivility across organizational boundaries. From a managerial perspective, this research indicates that customers should receive increased attention from managers given that customer behavior can influence employee behaviors in service exchanges and also employee performance. In addition to this, this research found that employee boredom and emotional exhaustion are both related to negative service employee behaviors targeting customers and that managers in service organizations should consider interventions to decrease both employee boredom and emotional exhaustion.

Organizational research is increasingly considering customers as an important topic of investigation in areas including multifoci justice research (Cropanzano et al., 2001; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002), moral identity research (Skarlicki et al., 2008) and workplace incivility research (Kern & Grandey, 2009). This dissertation continues this focus on customers as a first attempt, although unsuccessful, to develop explanations for incivility spirals across organizational boundaries between customers and employees. This dissertation, could however, serve as a starting point for future research attempting to untangle this relationship.

Table 1

Raw Performance Score by Business Unit

Business unit	N	M	SD	Min	Max	Target ^a
Financial services	27	.87	.04	.74	.92	.86
Insurance claims	16	.95	.03	.87	.99	.91
Product warranty	28	.95	.02	.91	.99	.90
Overall	71	.92	.05	.74	.99	NA

Note: Performance scores are expressed as a percentage (out of 1.00). Min = minimum; Max = maximum.

^aThis indicates the organization's targeted customer service representative performance level for the business unit.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliability Estimates for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Customer incivility	1.27	0.32	.80														
2. Employee incivility	1.18	0.16	.68 ***	.70													
3. Gender ^a	0.73	0.45	-.07	-.00	–												
4. Distributive justice	3.34	1.06	.43 ***	.20	.03	.96											
5. Procedural justice	3.30	0.69	.44 ***	.16	.07	.65 ***	.87										
6. Interpersonal justice	4.25	0.84	.15	-.12	-.04	.24	.44 ***	.96									
7. Informational justice	4.07	0.90	.17	-.04	.00	.31*	.51 ***	.82 ***	.93								
8. Job demands	3.34	0.76	-.17	-.05	.16	-.54 ***	-.41 **	-.27*	-.37 **	.83							
9. Trait boredom	2.42	0.41	-.24	-.04	-.35 **	-.39 **	-.42 **	-.17	-.10	.06	.82						
10. State boredom	2.84	0.68	-.13	.12	-.30 *	-.15	-.19	-.17	.03	-.20	.67 ***	.92					

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
11. Emotional exhaustion	2.41	1.29	-.19	.07	-.24	-.49***	-.49***	-.32*	-.16	.37 **	.59***	.49***	.93				
12. Organizational identification	3.39	0.72	.37 **	.19	.31 *	.38**	.50***	.23	.33 *	-.06	-.49***	-.38**	-.36 **	.84			
13. Organizational disidentification	1.75	0.76	-.22	-.00	-.13	-.48***	-.69***	-.48***	-.53 ***	.36 **	.42 **	.29 *	.55 ***	-.57***	.92		
14. Negative affect	2.12	0.74	-.04	.10	-.04	-.02	-.07	-.08	.04	-.00	.51***	.42 **	.30 *	-.18	.19	.84	
15. Performance	0.03	0.91	.01	.08	.36 **	.24	.24	.03	.13	-.06	-.34*	-.17	-.19	.26	-.17	-.25	–

Notes: *N* for Level 1 (interactions) was 405; *N* for Level 2 (employees) was 55. CI = confidence interval. For customer incivility and employee incivility, I computed the mean incivility score across interactions for each individual and correlations were calculated across individuals. Internal reliability coefficients (alphas) appear in bold along the diagonal.

^aGender is coded as 0 (*males*) and 1 (*females*).

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Table 3

Multilevel Model Estimates Predicting Employee Incivility

Predictor variables	<i>b</i>	95% CI	Model Deviance	Model $\Delta\chi^{2a}$ (Δdf)
Random intercept model	0.00	[-0.03, 0.04]	-258.53	
Controls			-255.06	7.87 (7)
Gender	-0.01	[-0.10, 0.09]		
Trait boredom	0.02	[-0.05, 0.09]		
Job demands	0.01	[-0.04, 0.06]		
Distributive justice	0.04	[-0.03, 0.10]		
Procedural justice	0.02	[-0.05, 0.09]		
Interpersonal justice	-0.03	[-0.12, 0.06]		
Informational justice	-0.02	[-0.09, 0.05]		
Customer incivility	0.20 ***	[0.12, 0.28]	-227.18	40.19 *** (1)

Notes: *N* for Level 1(interactions) was 405; *N* for Level 2 (employees) was 55. CI = confidence interval.

^a χ^2 difference test based on loglikelihood values and scaling correction factors required for estimates obtained using the MLR estimator (Satorra, 2000; Satorra & Bentler, 1999).

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Table 4

Multilevel Estimates of Direct, Indirect, and Mediated Effects of Customer Incivility Predicting Employee Incivility

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable	Mediator	Direct path		Mediator on predictor (a) ^a		Criterion on mediator (b) ^a		Mediated effect (ab) ^a	
			<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i> _(a)	95% CI	<i>b</i> _(b)	95% CI	<i>b</i> _(ab)	95% CI
Level 1 (interactions)										
Employee incivility	Customer incivility		0.18***	[0.10, 0.26]						
Level 2 (employees)										
Employee incivility	Customer incivility	State boredom	0.74***	[0.34, 1.14]	-1.21	[-3.78, 1.37]	0.06*	[0.01, 0.12]	-0.07	[-0.26, 0.12]
Employee incivility	Customer incivility	Emotional exhaustion	0.70***	[0.31, 1.09]	-1.83	[-6.81, 3.15]	0.03*	[0.01, 0.05]	-0.05	[-0.21, 0.11]
Employee incivility	Customer incivility	Organizational identification	0.75***	[0.33, 1.17]	1.16	[-0.51, 2.82]	-0.02	[-0.11, 0.07]	-0.03	[-0.16, 0.11]

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable	Mediator	Direct path		Mediator on predictor (a) ^a		Criterion on mediator (b) ^a		Mediated effect (ab) ^a	
			<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i> _(a)	95% CI	<i>b</i> _(b)	95% CI	<i>b</i> _(ab)	95% CI
Employee incivility	Customer incivility	Organizational disidentification	0.73***	[0.37, 1.09]	-0.93	[-3.41, 1.59]	-0.01	[-0.07, 0.07]	0.00	[-0.06, 0.06]
Employee incivility	Customer incivility	Negative affect	0.72***	[0.35, 1.09]	-1.44	[-3.54, 0.66]	0.02	[-0.04, 0.08]	-0.03	[-0.15, 0.08]

Notes: *N* for Level 1(interactions) was 405; *N* for Level 2 (employees) was 55. No level one control variables were included in these models.

Level 2 controls: gender, trait boredom, job demands, distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice and informational justice and were included in Level 2 regressions predicting employee incivility. CI = confidence interval.

^aPath notation adapted from Baron and Kenny (1986) and Krull and MacKinnon (2001).

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Table 5

Multilevel Model Estimates Predicting Employee Performance

Predictor variables	<i>b</i>	95% CI	Model Deviance	Model $\Delta\chi^2$ ^a (Δdf)
Random intercept model	0.00	[-0.03, 0.04]	70.81	
Controls			77.22	13.96 ** (5)
Job demands	0.03 ***	[0.01, 0.04]		
Distributive justice	-0.00	[-0.02, 0.01]		
Procedural justice	0.01	[-0.02, 0.03]		
Interpersonal justice	-0.01	[-0.03, 0.02]		
Informational justice	-0.00	[-0.02, 0.02]		
Employee incivility	-0.15 †	[-0.33, 0.02]	79.30	3.04 † (1)

Notes: *N* for Level 1 (interactions) was 436; *N* for Level 2 (employees) was 59. CI = confidence interval.

^a χ^2 difference test based on loglikelihood values and scaling correction factors required for estimates obtained using the MLR estimator (Satorra, 2000; Satorra & Bentler, 1999).

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

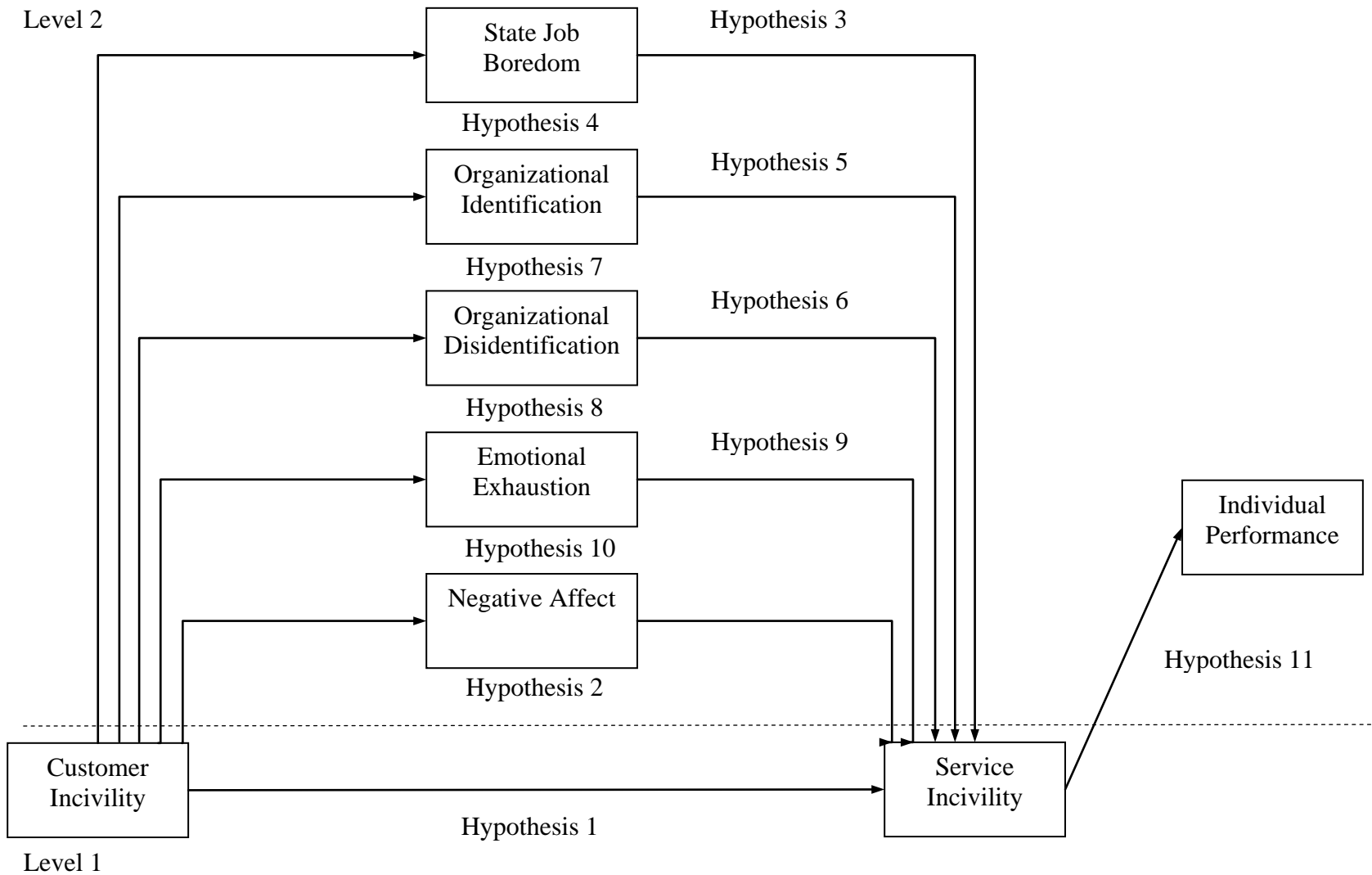


Figure 1: Theoretical model; direct and mediated effects of customer incivility on service incivility and individual performance.

		<u>Identification</u>	
		Low	High
<u>Disidentification</u>	Low	Neutral (Apathetic) Identification	Strong (Focused) Identification
	High	Strong (Focused) Disidentification	Ambivalent (conflicting) Disidentification

Figure 2: The expanded model of identification. (Adapted from Dukerich et al., 1998; Elsbach, 1999; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

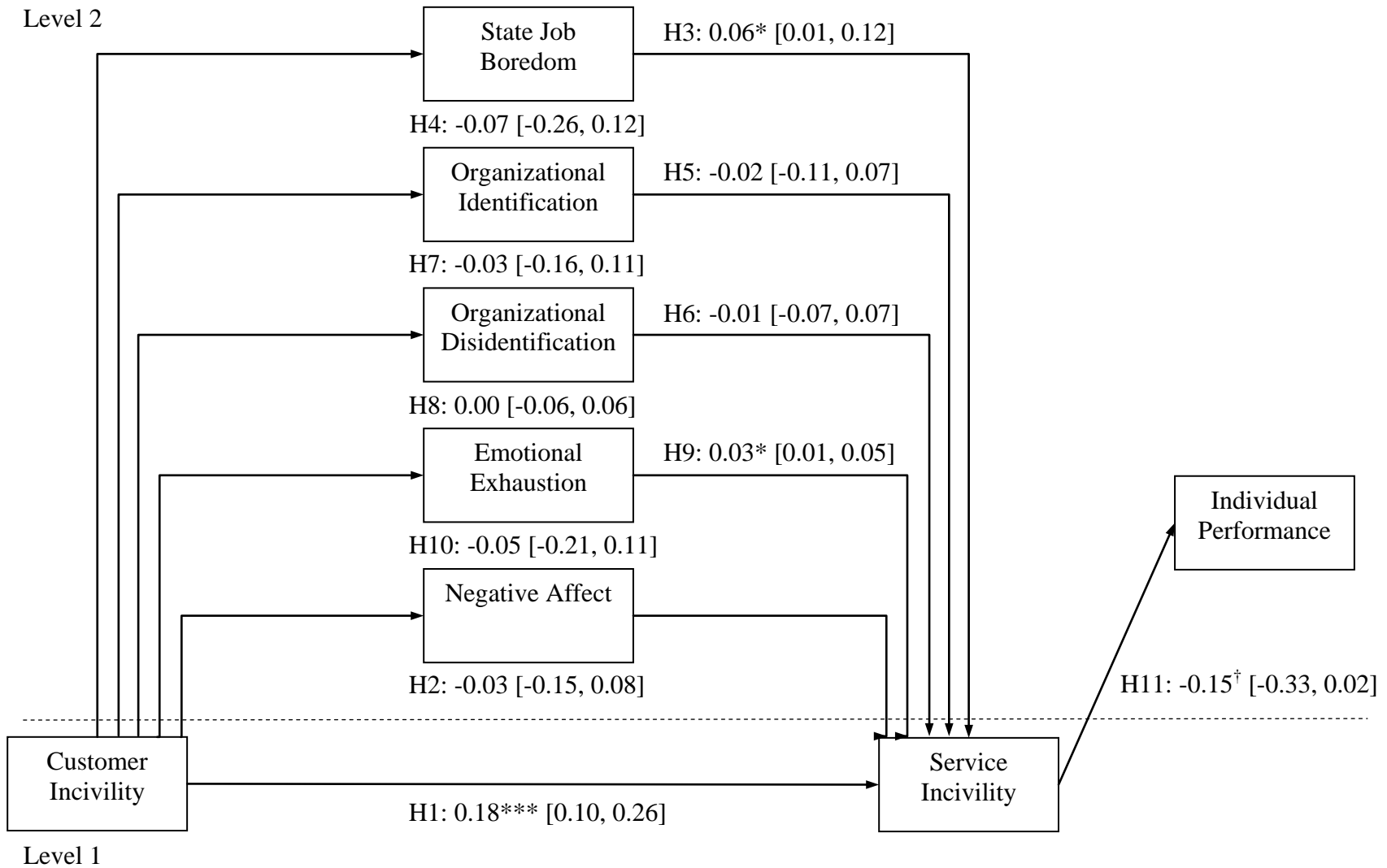


Figure 3: Direct and mediated effects. [†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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