



The Spiralling Effects of Witnessing Incivility in the Workplace

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Abstract

There is a growing amount of research to suggest that even being a mere witness to an uncivil interaction can cause an individual to instigate incivility. Organisations are struggling to contain and manage incivility in the workplace, and more research is needed to investigate how these behaviours spread in the first place. The current study aimed to explore the relationship between witnessing supervisor or co-worker incivility and subsequent instigating of incivility as well as the subsequent targets of incivility, to further advance the literature on incivility spirals. 201 participants from the US completed three questionnaires over a 4-week period, which measured the three types of incivility: experiencing incivility, witnessing incivility, and instigating incivility. Regression and correlational analysis showed witnessing supervisor incivility to be more significantly related to future instigation of incivility than witnessing co-worker incivility. The results also provided further insight into the theory of incivility spirals, showing that those who witness incivility are more likely to instigate incivility toward a third-party target, than the original instigator. These findings suggest that secondary incivility spirals are more common in the workplace than primary spirals, and that supervisors' actions are the primary source of incivility spirals. The results of the present study have important theoretical and practical implications and demonstrate the need for future research to explore witnessed incivility and its consequences further.

Introduction

Have you ever had a supervisor exclude you from an important conversation? Or listened to a co-worker gossip about someone else while they were out of the room? Well, you are not alone. These ‘passive-aggressive’ behaviours are classed as examples of incivility and are increasingly being seen spreading throughout workplaces like a virus, to the point where most employees have directly or indirectly experienced this sort of behaviour in their lifetime. According to the research, reports of incivility in the workplace have increased 13% since 1998, and individuals report having negative interactions with 1 in 8 co-workers (Taylor, Kluemper & Locklear, 2018). Bullying, aggression and other negative behaviours have always been present within the workplace, supported by years of research as to why individuals engage in these behaviours and how it affects others. While these are easily identifiable behaviours, smaller aggressions like gossiping, excluding or interrupting others, and being rude in general are yet to be researched more in depth.

The topic of incivility first began to garner attention following Andersson & Pearson’s paper that was published in 1999, followed by Cortina and colleagues in 2001. Since then, the number of papers published on the topic has increased greatly, however, due to the wide range of subtopics within incivility research there are still many gaps in the literature that need to be filled. Within the field of workplace incivility, a subtopic of witnessed incivility is also of interest to researchers (Porath & Erez, 2009; Holm, Torkelson, & Backstrom, 2015). That is because research conducted within the last 20 years has begun to document trends where even observing an uncivil interaction between two individuals in the workplace can lead to the same detrimental effects as directly experiencing incivility. Given the significance of these implications, there is still relatively little research that has been conducted on witnessed incivility, and even less research on the subsequent actions of those that witness incivility. Research into incivility is important due to the increasing

number of employees who report either experiencing or witnessing this behaviour in the workplace. The current study aspires to more closely examine the effects of witnessed incivility in the workplace and propose the most appropriate theoretical framework to better predict future employee interactions.

Contribution to the Literature

The present study will make three key contributions to the literature. Firstly, this study will further develop our understanding of incivility spirals, and the origins of both primary and secondary spirals in the workplace. Since the theory of incivility was first introduced by Andersson & Pearson (1999), there has been minimal advancement past the acknowledgement that incivility spirals exist. Of the research that has investigated incivility spirals further, the focus has solely been on experienced incivility (Meier & Gross, 2015; Foulk, Woolum, & Erez, 2016), and therefore the connection between incivility spirals and witnessed incivility is relatively unexplored. The majority of incivility research has remained within the dyad, that is focused solely on the assumption that incivility is an interaction between two individuals: a perpetrator and a target (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Magley & Nelson, 2017). However, by only exploring the dyad, the research is limited to understanding the actions and responses between two individuals, when there is in fact research to suggest that incivility can spread throughout an organisation. This is where the research on witnessed incivility is lacking and must be further advanced. By investigating the subsequent actions of those that witness incivility, this study will be able to provide insight into the origins of incivility spirals, and determine whether primary or secondary spirals more commonly occur within an organisation.

Secondly, the use of a short-term longitudinal study design allows us to investigate the effects of time on the relationship between witnessing incivility and instigating incivility.

Research has shown that the effects of an interaction wane over time (Meier & Gross, 2015), and therefore the behaviours of those that witness incivility should be strongest immediately following the occurrence of an interaction. By delving into the behaviours of those that witness incivility across a certain period of time, the present study is able to account for the impact time has on the development of incivility spirals.

Thirdly, the study will develop further insight into the relationship between witnessing supervisor or co-worker incivility and subsequent instigation of incivility. The literature includes a multitude of theories to predict whether witnessing supervisors', or witnessing co-workers' being uncivil is more predictive of subsequent deviant behaviour, however these theories are not always observed in practice, as seen by the inconclusive research regarding which is more predictive of instigating incivility. Some studies have found that witnessing co-worker incivility is more highly correlated with instigating incivility than witnessing supervisor incivility (Holm, 2015; Holm, Torkelson, & Backstrom, 2019), while others have found that witnessing supervisor incivility is more predictive of instigating incivility than witnessing co-worker incivility (Smidt, de Beer, Brink, & Leiter, 2016).

This study will also have practical value and will be able to provide valuable information to organisations, as witnessed incivility has been found to have profound effects on performance, motivation, helpfulness and creativity (Porath & Erez, 2009). By identifying the most common targets of incivility from those that witness incivility, it can allow organisations to understand the best way to overcome incivility. It also allows organisations to have a better understanding on how to manage and prevent this kind of behaviour by identifying the sources and patterns of uncivil behaviour.

Workplace Incivility and Types of Incivility

Incivility is defined as ‘low intensity deviant workplace behaviours with an ambiguous intent to harm the target’ (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). The key difference between incivility and other workplace behaviours such as aggression or bullying, is that with incivility, the behaviours are low intensity and ambiguous, therefore the targets have more difficulty discerning the intentions of the behaviour (Schilpzand et al., 2016).

These uncivil behaviours include a range of what most people would view as rude behaviours such as ignoring, excluding, or interrupting others; taking credit for others’ work; spreading gossip; not showing concern for other employees; being unprofessional or being condescending to name a few (Abid, Khan, Rafiq, & Ahmed, 2015). While there is a clear definition of what incivility is, due to constant changes in our society about what behaviours are socially acceptable, what may have been viewed as rude 20 years ago may now simply be a part of every-day life.

One reason behind the increase in research into incivility is likely due to an increase in the number of people who report experiencing incivility. Younger employees are more likely to report experiencing incivility than older employees (Leiter, Price, & Laschinger, 2010) who are more likely to have worked in climates where speaking up may have had severe consequences or otherwise feared losing their jobs. The increase in reporting is perhaps due to the changing social norms within our society that make it more acceptable to speak out about unfair treatment, combined with working environments and practices that have not kept up with how best to manage the current workforce.

The literature has defined three types of incivility: experienced incivility, witnessed incivility, and instigated incivility. Each of these types of incivility define the position one takes in an uncivil interaction, whether that be as the target, witness or perpetrator.

Experienced incivility is when individuals experience, or are direct victims of uncivil

behaviours. The majority of the research on incivility has focussed on experienced incivility, and there is a considerable amount of research on the effects of experiencing incivility in the workplace. Witnessed incivility has been the least researched category, demonstrated by the lack of papers published in this area (Schilpzand et al., 2016), however those that have investigated this relationship have found that even witnessing an uncivil interaction can have a significant impact on an individual, comparative to directly experiencing incivility.

Although uncivil behaviours may seem small and insignificant to some, continuously being a target of these behaviours can have a big impact on both the individual and the organisation. Those who experience incivility can suffer emotionally, affecting both their mental and physical health, which can then affect all aspects of their work including their productivity, attentiveness, and creativity (Porath & Erez, 2009). While the financial impacts of incivility are difficult to estimate, the relationship between employee well-being and outcomes such as turnover and absenteeism are well-researched, and even having just one negative interaction within the workplace can increase intentions to leave (Morrison, 2008). The results of this research will provide important insight into the consequences of incivility, and can be used to estimate the costs of incivility to an organisation.

Theories of Workplace Incivility and Implications in the Workplace

Several theories have been proposed over the years to explain workplace incivility, with each theory providing an explanation as to why individuals engage in uncivil behaviours and the consequences to these actions. Experiencing incivility in the workplace can have big impacts on employees; studies have found that being a victim of incivility can lead to decline in job satisfaction and well-being, as well as increases in depression and work-life conflict (Lim & Lee, 2011; Miner, Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Brady, 2012). Even those who observed uncivil interactions reported high levels of burnout and intentions to leave, as well as low job

satisfaction, decreased performance, helplessness, and reduced organisational commitment (Porath & Erez, 2009; Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013).

Incivility has generally been viewed as a social process, with the relationship between experiencing or witnessing incivility and instigating incivility being mediated by negative emotions (Sakurai & Jex, 2012), as well as organisational factors such as low social support and high job demands (Holm et al, 2015). One theory used to explain the process of incivility is appraisal theory, which uses a model that posits that targets form an emotional response to the incivility such as fear or anger, that then affects their behavioural responses (Porath & Pearson, 2012). The type of emotional response is influenced by the frequency and variety of incivility, as well as the instigator power; those that experience incivility more frequently are more likely to display anger or frustration (Bunk & Magley, 2013). Those that experienced anger due to experiencing incivility were more likely to show direct aggression towards the instigator, while those who felt fear from the interaction were likely to engage in indirectly aggressive behaviours, as well as higher absenteeism. These two responses are likely to be influenced by the position of the instigator, i.e. if they are a supervisor or a co-worker. Individuals may experience fear as a result of experiencing or witnessing supervisor incivility, and attempt to retaliate covertly, such as by spreading rumours (Meier & Gross, 2015). Supervisor incivility has also been found to lead to negative outcomes such as low job satisfaction, decreased well-being, and reduced organisational commitment, creating a stressful work environment affecting mental health, potentially leading to increased absenteeism and intentions to leave (Zia-ud-Din, Arif, & Shabbir, 2017).

While supervisor incivility may create fear, co-worker incivility is likely to cause individuals to feel anger toward the instigator, supported by findings that witnessing co-worker incivility is correlated with instigating incivility (Holm et al., 2015). Appraisal theory provides an explanation as to why interactions with certain individuals can lead to different

outcomes, as they develop different responses to the interaction, influencing their subsequent reactions and behaviours. While appraisal theory provides one explanation of the process of an uncivil interaction, Cortina and colleagues (2017) have identified three other possible factors that influence the relationship between experiencing or witnessing incivility and instigating incivility. The first of these include individual differences, such as underlying traits, which can determine how likely an individual is to evaluate ambiguous behaviour as being uncivil and can also influence their responses to uncivil behaviour. A second factor is stigmatised identities, such as race or gender, with studies showing that women or individuals belonging to racial minority groups are more likely to report experiencing incivility (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013). Thirdly, job or situational related factors have also been found to affect the relationship between experiencing or witnessing incivility and instigating incivility. Those with high job involvement are more likely to engage in counter-productive work behaviours due to incivility (Welbourne and Sariol, 2017), however work environment has also been found to buffer the negative effects of incivility, with those who perceive their work climate as being civil less likely to report instances of incivility (Walsh, Magley, Reeves, Davies-Schrils, Marmet & Gallus, 2012).

Another theory proposed to explain why people display uncivil behaviours towards others is the social interactionist perspective. Andersson and Pearson (1999) theorised that individuals justify engaging in uncivil behaviours as they see it as a means of preventing future attacks. One can assert their power as a way of ensuring future compliance, which explains why people who hold authority over others engage in uncivil behaviours. While this provides an explanation as to why those in supervisory or managerial positions display uncivil behaviour, it does not explain why individuals are uncivil towards their co-workers, especially those that have the same authority.

One possible explanation for co-workers instigating incivility may be due to social learning theory. A study by Holm and colleagues (2015), found a significant relationship between witnessing co-worker incivility and instigating incivility, explained by the fact that employees engage in uncivil behaviour by enacting their colleagues' behaviours. Social learning theory also provides an explanation as to why individuals instigate incivility as a result of witnessing supervisor incivility. When individuals view others, especially those who are more senior than themselves, engaging in uncivil behaviour without consequence, they are more likely to also engage in similarly inappropriate behaviours (Taylor & Pattie, 2014).

Incivility Spirals

The majority of the witnessed incivility research has focussed on observer affect, and work-related outcomes such as decreased performance, creativity and engagement (Porath & Erez, 2009). However, there is some evidence to suggest a link between witnessing incivility and instigating incivility. Research into the actions of those that witness incivility have discovered the phenomenon of incivility spirals which is the idea that if someone (Person A) displays uncivil behaviour toward another individual (Person B), then the target (Person B) is likely to retaliate against Person A, and from then on the two individuals will increasingly engage in uncivil behaviour until it escalates to aggression or resolution (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Bunk, Karabin and Lear (2011) found that the primary motive for engaging in deviant behaviours was retaliation. The idea of the incivility spiral is based on social exchange theory, where if an individual receives unfair treatment, they may 'repay' the offender through negative workplace behaviours. This idea is supported through research conducted by Reich & Hershcovis (2015), who found that those that witnessed incivility had negative work-related evaluations of the instigator and were more likely to punish the instigator if they were able to do so in a work-related capacity. Although by its very

definition incivility is ‘low-intensity deviant behaviour’, engaging in retaliatory interactions can escalate to more serious aggressive behaviours (Montgomery, Kane, & Vance, 2004)

While the majority of the research on incivility spirals focusses on experienced incivility, and the actions of those that are the direct recipients of incivility leading to primary spirals, a small amount of research has investigated the effects of witnessing incivility and the witness’s subsequent actions, which are known as ‘secondary spirals’. Whilst primary spirals are solely the interactions between the same (usually two) people, secondary spirals are the result of witnessing incivility, and occurs when those witnesses then instigate similar behaviours to others within an organisation, leading to the spread of incivility in the workplace (Doshy & Wang, 2014). This proposes that when an individual witnesses an event, they are then likely to instigate incivility and get caught up in a new primary spiral. Each time an individual who witnesses incivility then engages in uncivil behaviour, they inadvertently create a secondary spiral, which can spread in a way similar to that of a virus (Foulk et al., 2016).

Social Norms and Incivility

The spread of secondary spirals and witnessed incivility can also be explained by social learning theory, where witnessing incivility creates a social norm for what is acceptable in the organisation. As more individuals witness these uncivil interactions, the more likely these same behaviours will be repeated by other individuals throughout the organisation until the behaviour is no longer seen as deviant behaviour and becomes socially acceptable within the organisation (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). This is because witnessing others engage in uncivil behaviours can cause individuals to justify their own behaviours (Segrist, Bartels, & Nordstrom, 2018). What is socially acceptable within the workplace has also changed greatly over the past number of years, and so what may have been perceived as

normal or accepted behaviour in the workplace twenty years ago may now be viewed as rudeness or bullying. Social norms and laws have evolved so that behaviours like discrimination are now illegal and widely regarded as being immoral, which has in turn given rise to more subtle forms of aggression (Grant, 2019).

Incivility is also regarded as the violation of workplace norms of respect for others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Individuals have their own internal norms, as well as shared social norms, and so each person has a different threshold for what they view as a violation of norms (Montgomery et al., 2004). As workplace norms are defined and accepted, it is easier to view a behaviour as breaking that norm, as everyone is generally in agreement as to what behaviour is acceptable and what is not within a particular organisation. However, internal norms are unique to each individual, which may lead to one individual in the workplace interpreting another person's behaviour as being uncivil, while another may see it as acceptable behaviour.

The Present Study

The aim of this study is to specifically investigate the relationship between witnessing incivility and instigating incivility using a longitudinal method to track individual's behaviours over time. The majority of the research into incivility has viewed incivility as being a one-off event, rather than a process (Meier & Gross, 2015), and subsequently researchers have conducted 'static' studies (Cole, Shipp, Taylor, 2015). Not only do these studies employ cross-sectional methods to measure incivility but they also request individuals recall events over a long time period, with the most commonly used scale to measure incivility requiring individuals to recall events that may have occurred over a 5-year period (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). These studies do not accurately reveal fluctuations in behaviour, and the consequences of these behaviours (Cole et al., 2015). By

utilising a longitudinal design over a short period of time, it allows us to investigate incivility as a process, and whether time has an impact on the relationship between witnessing incivility and instigating incivility. Cole and colleagues also propose that for a study to be truly longitudinal, there must be three or more time periods recorded, and therefore this study will measure incivility on three occasions, separated by two-week intervals. The use of a longitudinal design also decreases the likelihood of results being affected by biases such as common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

The first question this research seeks to answer is the effects of witnessing supervisor and co-worker incivility on retaliatory behaviours over a four-week period.

Research Question 1: Is the relationship between witnessing supervisor incivility and instigating incivility, or witnessing co-worker incivility and instigating incivility stronger?

Research shows individuals with more power are more likely to confront perpetrators of incivility as it is often used as a way of maintaining status (Hershcovis, Neville, Reich, Christie, Cortina, & Shan, 2017). Therefore, those that witness incivility are less likely to engage in uncivil behaviour towards the original instigator if the instigator is a supervisor. Due to the small amount of research in this particular field, the present study will aim to investigate which relationship is more likely to occur - whether witnessing supervisors or co-workers engage in uncivil behaviours is more likely to influence the witness to then instigate incivility. These relationships will be examined both cross-sectionally and longitudinally, where participants will complete three surveys, each two weeks apart, to investigate whether the effect is immediate or takes time to develop. When investigating the relationships between witnessing supervisor and co-worker incivility with instigating incivility, it is also

important to consider the possible influence of experiencing incivility, therefore this study will control for the effects of experiencing incivility on this relationship.

This study also aims to explore a second research question, focussing on the direction of the uncivil behaviour from a witness of incivility. The question will explore whether those that witness incivility are more likely to instigate incivility toward the original instigator, or toward another target all together.

Research Question 2: Are individuals who witness incivility more likely to instigate incivility towards the original instigator or toward another individual?

Methods

Participants

This study used a longitudinal design to measure the relationship between witnessed incivility and instigated incivility. Three questionnaires were completed by participants online, and each survey was administered once every two weeks to the same participants. Participants for this survey were sourced through the online platform Lucid Limited which connects suppliers with companies running market research surveys. The study recorded 337 survey entries across the three surveys, and 201 total participants. Of the 201 participants, 136 were Male (67%), 64 were Female (32%), and 1 Prefer not to say (1%). Age of participants ranged from 21 to 72, with the mean age of 43 (SD = 9.84). Organisational tenure ranged from 0 to 44 years, with a mean tenure of 10 (SD = 10.33). All participants were full time employees currently residing in the U.S. The study recorded a 22% response rate for those that completed all three surveys. Of the 201 participants who completed the first survey, 86 completed the second survey. Following a second two-week interval, the third

survey was sent to the 86 participants who had completed the second survey, and 45 complete surveys were recorded at the end of the four-week study.

Materials

The initial survey consisted of demographic questions, including age, gender, and organisational tenure, and three incivility scales: experienced incivility, witnessed incivility, and instigated incivility. The two follow up surveys consisted of all three incivility scales. Using a longitudinal design study to investigate workplace relationships allowed for observations of the effects of witnessing incivility on instigating incivility over time. For example, a participant may witness incivility one day and then engage in similar behaviours the following day. The longitudinal design allowed us to track these interactions and capture any variation in the data that may not otherwise have presented itself in a cross-sectional study.

Experienced Incivility

This was measured using the 7 item Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001) or WIS. The time frame was adjusted so that participants were asked to recall events that had occurred over the past two weeks, instead of the original 5-year time period. Items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’.

Instigated Incivility

This was measured using the Instigated Workplace Incivility Scale (Blau & Andersson, 2005) or IWIS, which consists of 7 items, based off of Cortina and colleagues’ WIS. Items were also measured on the same 7-point Likert scale as above, and as with all of

the incivility scales in this research, participants were asked to recall incidents that occurred during the past two weeks. Further to the questions, participants were also asked to report the direction of their instigated behaviour. Participants were given three options: 'Behaviour directed towards original instigator', 'Behaviour directed towards other individual', or 'N/A' for those that did not instigate any behaviour.

Witnessed Incivility

As there are no widely used scales on witnessed incivility, the Instigated Workplace Incivility Scale was adapted to measure witnessed incivility, using a similar format to Torkelson and colleagues (2016), '*During the past 2 weeks, have you been in a situation where you have observed any of your supervisors/co-workers..?*'. This was measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

Procedure

The surveys used in this study were produced on the online platform Qualtrics, and distributed using the technology company Lucid Limited. Before the surveys were forwarded to Lucid, a number of redirects were required to be included in each survey. This was to allow those who participated in the survey to be exited from the survey at the correct stages, depending on their responses. The only criteria for those that were initially selected to partake in the study was they must be current full-time employees. The survey was structured so that any individuals wishing to participate in the study must first pass this condition. Any individuals who did not meet this condition were then redirected back to the Lucid website. The first survey was structured so that the incivility scales were alternated with the additional scales. This minimised the likelihood of individuals misreading the question at the beginning of each scale, as well as the item questions. At the completion of the survey, participants

were thanked for their time and asked to close their browser to exit out of the survey.

Information regarding the purpose of the research was presented at the beginning of the survey, including contact information for Hopeline and Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Participants were also informed that participation was voluntary and they were free to exit the survey at any point with no penalty.

Once the surveys were ready for distribution, they were forwarded to a representative at Lucid. Lucid utilises a platform called Lucid Marketplace which connected the surveys with companies running market research surveys. As this was a longitudinal survey, to ensure anonymity, the participants were matched over the three surveys using a response ID. After the first survey was distributed, the response IDs were stored in preparation for the following surveys, so only those who had responded to the first survey were eligible to participate in the second and third survey. After a two-week interval, the second survey was made available to Lucid, which was then forwarded to suppliers to send to the requested participants. Following a second two-week interval, the third survey was made available to Lucid. Participants were notified of follow up surveys through means such as SMS notifications, reminder emails, or pop-up windows on the Marketplace.

Statistical Analysis

The results of the surveys were exported to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel after the closing of the final survey. The data was examined for outliers and missing information, and one case was removed due to there being no responses recorded across all three surveys. Several participants' data was converted into the correct units before they could be analysed. After the collection of the survey results, data analysis was conducted using correlation and regression analyses. Before the regression analysis was

completed, the mean indices for all scale items were computed for each variable from each wave.

Ethical Consideration

This study and the questionnaires were approved by the Human Ethics Committee at the University of Canterbury as part of a Master's Dissertation.

Results

Following data analysis, the means, standard deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed in SPSS as shown in Table 1.

The first research question proposed at the beginning of this study was whether witnessing supervisors' or co-workers' incivility made an individual more likely to instigate incivility. As this study was also interested in exploring whether time had any impact on this relationship, both cross-sectional and longitudinal relationships were analysed. A cross-sectional regression analysis was conducted to observe whether witnessing supervisor incivility at Time 1 (T1WIS) or witnessing co-worker incivility at Time 1 (T1WIC) was more predictive of instigating incivility at Time 1 (T1IN). The analysis showed a significant positive B value for both T1WIS and T1WIC, and the model accounted for 65% of the variance in T1IN, as shown in Table 2. Further to the cross-sectional relationship, the longitudinal relationships were also analysed. A regression analysis for witnessing supervisor at Time 1 and co-worker incivility at Time 1 was run as shown in Table 2, using both Time 2 and Time 3 instigating incivility (T2IN & T3IN) data to predict instigating incivility at each timepoint. Both T1WIC and T1WIS showed positive relationships with T2IN and T3IN, with a higher R-square value at T2IN than T3IN.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability, and Pearson Correlation Coefficients

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	Mean	SD
1. Witnessing Incivility Co-worker Incivility T1	.95													3.23	1.25
2. Witnessing Incivility Supervisor Incivility T1	.91**	.96												3.23	1.28
3. Witnessing Incivility T1	.98**	.98**	.97											3.23	1.23
4. Instigating Incivility T1	.78**	.79**	.81**	.96										3.04	1.30
5. Instigating Incivility T2	.75**	.77**	.70**	.70**	.97									2.65	1.35
6. Instigating Incivility T3	.51**	.64**	.43**	.48**	.48**	.95								1.84	1.00
7. Instigating Incivility Same T1	.69**	.69**	.71**	.94**	.53**	-.21	.96							3.26	1.19
8. Instigating Incivility Other T1	.72**	.74**	.75**	.93**	.50**	.23	.80**	.88						3.35	1.07
9. Instigating Incivility Same T2	.59**	.56**	.60**	.60**	.91**	.18	.61**	.54**	.97					3.16	1.20
10. Instigating Incivility Other T2	.60**	.54**	.60**	.53**	.86**	.20	.59**	.57**	.62**	.93				2.24	1.05
11. Instigating Incivility Same T3	.29	.45	.39	.23	.34	.92**	-.34	.02	.32	.03	.95			2.54	1.08
12. Instigating Incivility Other T3	.12	.30	.23	.28	-.27	.96**	.04	.05	-.74*	-.32	.84**	.96		2.71	1.07
13. Experiencing Incivility T1	.91	.88**	.92**	.82**	.71**	.58**	.71**	.73**	.58**	.47**	.25	.22	.95	3.16	1.27

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2. Multiple & Hierarchical Regression Analysis predicting Instigating Incivility

	Instigated Incivility (Time 1)			Instigated Incivility (Time 2)			Instigated Incivility (Time 3)		
	R ²	B	P-Value	R ²	B	P-Value	R ²	B	P-Value
Step 1.	.65			.61			.41		
Witnessing Incivility – Co-worker (Time 1)		.36	.00		.34	.04		.02	.90
Witnessing Incivility – Supervisor (Time 1)		.49	.00		.52	.00		.57	.01
Step 2.	.69			.61			.43		
Witnessing Incivility – Co-worker (Time 1)					.33	.12			
Witnessing Incivility – Supervisor (Time 1)					.52	.00			
Experiencing Incivility (Time 1)					.03	.89			

Since the correlation matrix showed a high correlation between witnessing supervisor incivility and witnessing co-worker incivility (Table 1), there appeared a need to further examine the unique contribution to the variance explained. To examine the unique variance explained by witnessing supervisor incivility on instigating incivility, partial correlation coefficients were computed, showing a partial correlation of .33 between T1WIS and T1IN, representing the covariance between T1WIS and T1IN, after partialling out the variance from T1WIC. Partial correlation analyses between T1WIS and T2IN showed a covariance coefficient of .35, and the covariance between T1WIS and T3IN was .45. All correlations were significant at $p < 0.01$. Partial correlation values were also computed for witnessing co-worker incivility, showing partial correlations of .24 between T1WIC and T1IN, .24 between T1WIC and T2IN, and .02 between T1WIC and T3IN. These results show that a small, positive correlation still exists between witnessing supervisor incivility and instigating incivility at Time 1 and Time 2, even after controlling for witnessing co-worker incivility. The results also show that after controlling for witnessing supervisor incivility, the relationship between witnessing co-worker incivility and instigating incivility become

smaller, demonstrating stronger correlations between witnessing supervisor incivility and instigating incivility over witnessing co-worker incivility and instigating incivility.

To observe whether witnessing incivility still had a significant impact on instigating incivility even after controlling for experiencing incivility, experienced incivility at Time 1 (T1EX) was added at Step 2. The results showed no change in variance accounted for, and experiencing incivility was non-significant (Table 2). Even after accounting for T1EX, witnessing supervisor incivility had a significant effect on instigating incivility at Time 2.

The second research question the study aimed to answer was concerned with toward which target individuals directed their incivility – either towards the original instigator (Same) or another individual (Other). A correlation analysis was run between witnessing incivility at Time 1 instigating toward another at Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3 (Table 1). Results showed strong, positive correlations between witnessing at Time 1 and instigating Same (T1IN_Same) and instigating Other at Time 1 (T1IN_Other) as seen in Table 3, significant at $p < 0.01$. The data showed a higher correlation between T1IN_Same and T1WI, in comparison to T1IN_Other. The results showed a moderate, positive, correlation between T1WI and instigating incivility either Same or Other at Time 2, significant at $p < 0.01$, and a small, positive correlation between T1WI and Time 3 instigated incivility.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between witnessing incivility and instigating incivility, as well as further exploration into the subsequent actions of those that witness acts of incivility. The results of this research are consistent with several findings

seen in the literature surrounding incivility, as well as providing new insight into the behaviours of those that witness incivility.

The first question this study aimed to investigate was whether witnessing supervisor or co-worker incivility would be more predictive of instigating incivility. The results of this study showed that witnessing both supervisors' and co-workers' instigating incivility increased the likelihood of similar actions being undertaken by the witness, however, witnessing supervisors' rather than co-workers' was more predictive of witnesses instigating incivility. This finding is consistent with a number of theories: the first being social learning theory (Bandura, 1971). Individuals are more likely to engage in uncivil behaviours if they observe someone more senior than themselves engaging in similar behaviour (Taylor & Pattie, 2014). In the present study, those that witnessed supervisors engaging in uncivil behaviour were more likely to then instigate incivility as compared to witnessing co-workers. It may be that they have observed their superiors engage in the uncivil behaviours without consequence, and subsequently justified their own incivility (Segrist et al., 2018). Employees are also more likely to expect supervisors to adhere to workplace norms, and pay closer attention to their behaviour (Reich & Herschovis, 2015), and therefore if a supervisor displays uncivil behaviour, their subordinates are more likely to notice and replicate those same behaviours. However, as this was not measured in the present study these theoretical explanations for the relationships observed in this study are merely speculative.

A second theory to explain why the relationship between witnessing supervisor incivility and instigating may have been stronger than witnessing co-worker incivility and instigating incivility is social interactionist perspective theory (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), which posits that individuals engage in incivility as a means of preventing future attacks. This theory provides insight into this relationship as it proposes that those in more senior positions are more likely to engage in uncivil behaviour as a way of maintaining their status. The

results of the present study did not observe a difference in the mean scores for witnessing supervisor incivility and witnessing co-worker incivility, and therefore it is unlikely that individuals observed more instances of supervisor incivility than co-worker incivility as the results show participants witnessed a similar amount of behaviours from both supervisors and co-workers. These findings help to advance the literature on incivility spirals by identifying the most probable sources of incivility, which can help organisations to uncover where incivility spirals within their organisations may have originated from.

In recent years as the incivility literature further develops a better understanding of the mechanisms of uncivil interactions, incivility is being viewed as a process, rather than a one-off event (Meier & Gross, 2015). The present study aimed to explore the possible effects of time on the relationship between witnessing incivility and instigating incivility, to determine whether these interactions occurred over a short period of time or otherwise took time to develop. The results showed that the relationship between witnessing incivility at Time 1 and instigating incivility at Time 2 and Time 3 were weaker than the relationship between witnessing incivility at Time 1 and instigating incivility at Time 1. However, when separating witnessing incivility into its two dimensions of witnessing supervisor incivility and witnessing co-worker incivility, and examining the effect of just witnessing supervisor incivility at Time 1, showed that the effect increased across each wave, with witnessing supervisor incivility having the strongest association with instigating incivility at Time 3. This is contradictory to findings by Meier and Gross (2015), where the cross-sectional relationship between witnessing supervisor incivility and instigating incivility was found to be the strongest. The fact that the longitudinal relationship between witnessing supervisor incivility and instigating incivility was stronger than the cross-sectional relationship in this study may be due to other factors since the initial observation of incivility at Time 1. One

factor could be that there is a threshold for instigating incivility, and individuals will engage in uncivil behaviour after witnessing incivility a certain number of times. An individual may have repeatedly witnessed similar behaviour from the original perpetrator over the course of four weeks, where the frequency of these behaviours may have increased, leading the witness to instigate incivility after reaching a potential threshold. Another possible explanation is that the reaction to witnessing incivility shows a ‘sleeper effect’, in that it takes time for subsequent behaviours to manifest. The current study administered each survey two weeks apart, in order to increase the probability of capturing interactions whilst decreasing the potential risk of participants being unable to recall interactions. Previous studies have used differing time intervals from event-based sampling studies (Meier & Gross, 2015), to daily surveys (Vahle-Hinz, Baethge, & Van Dick, 2019), to annual surveys (Bureau, Gagne, Morin, & Mageau, 2017). If there is indeed a ‘sleeper effect’ underlying this relationship, further exploration into this phenomenon is needed to better identify the time taken for these behaviours to manifest.

The study also investigated the relationship between witnessing supervisor and co-worker incivility, and instigating incivility whilst considering the effects of experiencing incivility. Observing the longitudinal relationships from the data show that even after controlling for the effects of experiencing incivility on instigating incivility, there is a strong and significant relationship between witnessing supervisor incivility and instigating incivility. While the relationship between witnessing co-worker incivility and instigating incivility after controlling for experiencing incivility was non-significant, the effect sizes observed were larger than the effect of experiencing incivility on instigating incivility. This finding demonstrates the importance of studying the effects of witnessing incivility and suggests that

future research should place an equal amount of focus on witnessing incivility as experiencing incivility.

Research into incivility has largely taken a dyadic approach, relying on the assumption that one individual is a perpetrator while the other is a target (Cortina et al., 2017). However, studies have shown that individuals can be both perpetrators and targets (Hershcovis & Reich, 2013), implying a need to look past the dyad. The present study aimed to explore beyond the dyad by investigating incivility spirals, which provide evidence that uncivil interactions do not remain within a dyad, but rather can spread throughout an organisation (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, Foulk et al., 2016). While the presence of both primary and secondary spirals has been established in the literature, there is little research on which of these spirals more commonly occurs in an organisation. To determine whether primary or secondary spirals were more common, this study aimed to investigate who the targets of uncivil behaviour were from those who witnessed incivility. The results of this study show that individuals who witness incivility are more likely to subsequently engage in uncivil behaviour toward another individual, as opposed to the original instigator. The direction of instigated incivility suggests that secondary spirals are more common, as directing behaviour towards a third party creates a new spiral, as an individual who was not involved in the original interaction has now been caught up in a spiral. This result is consistent with the 'viral' nature of incivility in the workplace proposed by Foulk and colleagues (2016), who found that even a single uncivil interaction can spread to parties not involved in the initial interaction, and the present study was able to replicate these findings in the field. This further highlights the importance of advancing the literature on witnessing incivility, which is causative to the spread of incivility.

The relationship between witnessing supervisor incivility and instigating incivility is important to consider in the spread of secondary spirals. The individuals in an organisation shape the social norms, and so by instigating incivility, supervisors are setting a standard that uncivil behaviours are acceptable in an organisation. Therefore, the spread of incivility can also be explained by social learning theory (Sharma, 2018), where individuals learn new behaviours through observation. If they witness their superiors engaging in uncivil behaviour, they then view that behaviour as acceptable (Segrist et al., 2018), and in turn will enact the same behaviours toward others, thus leading to the creation of incivility spirals. The present study discovered that those who witness incivility and subsequently engage in uncivil behaviour are more likely to direct their behaviour toward a new target instead of the original instigator. This can be explained by the fact that of those who instigated incivility, more were influenced by witnessing a supervisor being uncivil, and so individuals are unlikely to instigate incivility towards the original instigator if the instigator is a supervisor or a superior. Instead, they are likely to direct their behaviour toward another individual, likely a co-worker, to avoid the repercussions of being uncivil to a superior (Meier & Gross, 2015), thereby leading to the creation of secondary spirals. It may also be that those who observed the original interaction were just witnessed and not direct targets, and so they may be reluctant to get involved.

While the findings of this research can be supported by existing theories, there is still no single theory that has been able to capture multiple aspects of incivility. Based on the results of this study, we propose that social learning theory is the most suited framework for capturing the most facets of witnessing incivility and is the most appropriate for explaining the process of incivility spirals.

Limitations & Future Research

A number of limitations to the study must be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. Firstly, a potential limitation of using a self-report measure is the occurrence of common method variance (CMV). CMV is the variance attributed to the measurement method, rather than the constructs the measures represent (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and can occur when the same participant rates items in a questionnaire at the same point in time (Malhotra, Kim, & Patil, 2006). CMV is a potential threat to the validity of a study (Podsakoff et al., 2003), as it can inflate correlational or causal relationships. To reduce the potential effects of CMV, a longitudinal design was used to create temporal separation between the predictor variables and the criterion variables. Furthermore, the incivility scales were separated onto individual pages within the survey to create psychological separation between the constructs measures.

Self-report methods can also give rise to social desirability bias. Incivility may be viewed as a slightly sensitive subject, and individuals may wish to paint themselves in a favourable light, by choosing to underreport instances of incivility, particularly instigating incivility. To minimise the likelihood of social desirability bias, participants were informed at the beginning of the study that all responses were to remain confidential (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and the researchers would be tracking responses over time using a response ID. A study by Berry, Carpenter, & Barratt (2012) found that self-report measures of counter-productive work behaviours (CWB) were highly correlated with other measures such as reports by co-workers and supervisors, even finding that self-report levels of CWB were higher on average than other reports. CWBs have been found to overlap with many aspects of incivility, as both describe behaviours with the intent to harm others (Penney, 2003). Thus, underreporting due to social desirability bias is unlikely in this instance, however future research would benefit from utilising other methods to observe incivility besides self-report,

such as through supervisor reports (Meier & Gross, 2015), which can not only reduce the likelihood of social desirability, but also reduce CMV (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Secondly, another potential limitation to this study is the scales that were used in the questionnaires. As discussed at the beginning, while the boundaries of what constitutes incivility have been defined, there are many different types of uncivil behaviour. The use of the Workplace Incivility Scale or WIS (Cortina et al., 2001) and the Instigated Workplace Incivility Scale or IWIS (Blau & Andersson, 2005) provides only a finite number of uncivil behaviours, and therefore there are likely to be other uncivil behaviours that were not included in the items that participants may have experienced, witnessed, or instigated over the duration of the study. As this was a longitudinal study, the length of the surveys were required to be relatively short to ensure more participation at each time point. Furthermore, for the purposes of this research, the timeframe posed at the beginning of the scale was altered to '2 weeks', instead of the 5-year time frame as per the original WIS scale. However, different time frames have been used by a number of researchers who have still yielded significant results (Cortina et al., 2017). Future studies should consider the use of other incivility scales such as the 20-item Uncivil Workplace Behaviour Questionnaire (Martin & Hine, 2005), or the scale by Penney & Spector (2005), a 43-item measure of incivility comprised of three different incivility scales, to measure incivility more accurately by capturing more aspects of uncivil behaviour. Moreover, the WIS does not measure anything other than the occurrence of uncivil behaviour, and respondents are not given the option to comment on the frequency or intensity of the behaviours (Holm, 2014). Further studies should look to include a measurement of frequency and intensity of behaviours in addition to the standard scale items, as there is a possibility that there may be a threshold for engaging in incivility as a result of witnessing or even experiencing incivility. This could be measured by

investigating the number interactions witnessed by an individual before they instigate incivility, or the level of intensity of uncivil behaviour.

Thirdly, sample size is a potential limitation to this study. Due to the voluntary nature of the study, participants were not required to complete subsequent surveys after the first survey, and therefore participation showed a drop after each wave, with 45 participants completing all three surveys. Although the study produced a significant result, future studies should use a larger sample size to increase statistical power (Sassenberg & Ditrich, 2019).

Other potential concerns for this study are the generalisability of the results. Participants were not required to input any information about their job excepting organisational tenure, and therefore their job industries are unknown. Future studies should consider including further demographic questions in their studies, as incivility may differ across industries, such as by definition or tolerance. Participants were also from the U.S., and therefore the results cannot be generalised to other countries outside of the U.S. Studies have shown culture to have influence individuals' responses to incivility (Liu, Chi, Friedman, Tsai, 2009), and therefore this study must be conducted in other countries to allow for more generalisable results.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study have further advanced the literature on incivility in the workplace and has important practical implications. To the best of our knowledge, no study has yet been conducted exploring the subsequent actions of those that witness incivility, and whether primary or secondary spirals are more common in the workplace. This study found secondary spirals to more commonly occur than primary spirals, as well as finding that witnessing incivility is a better predictor of instigating incivility than experiencing incivility.

We therefore encourage other researchers in the field to continue exploring the effects of witnessing incivility.

By conducting a longitudinal study, the present study provides further information on the relationship between witnessing incivility to instigating incivility, and time. Studies have found time to be an important factor in this relationship, as researchers have begun to view incivility as a process, rather than a single event (Cole et al., 2015). This research discovered time to be of significant importance when considering the relationship between witnessing supervisor incivility and instigating incivility, with a bigger effect seen four weeks after witnessing incivility. Past cross-sectional studies have not been able to explore the effects of time on this relationship, and therefore the results of this study add value to the literature and emphasize the importance of considering time when investigating incivility. This finding is also of practical value, as it suggests the time lag between witnessing incivility and instigating incivility can vary. This study showed that of those who witnessed supervisor incivility, the relationship between witnessing and instigating was strongest at four weeks. The reason for the delay may be that it takes longer for individuals to evaluate and react to supervisor behaviour as being uncivil, or they may imitate their behaviours after observing them being uncivil on a number of occasions.

The research suggests that in order to create a more positive work environment, organisations should invest in civility interventions (Cortina et al., 2017) such as the Civility, Respect and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW) intervention (Osatuke, Moore, Ward, Dyrenforth & Belton, 2009) which aims to improve workplace culture by increasing awareness around workplace civility. Companies have successfully implemented civility interventions to lower workplace incivility and increase organisational commitment, self-efficacy, and teamwork.

The study also found witnessing supervisor incivility to be more predictive of instigating incivility than witnessing co-worker incivility. This finding adds value to the literature, furthering Meier & Gross's (2015) research by measuring witnessing co-worker incivility as well as witnessing supervisor incivility. Witnessing supervisor incivility leading to instigating incivility may indicate a change in social norms; if an individual views a supervisor engaging in behaviour they view as being uncivil, after observing this interaction they are likely to have learnt from the supervisor that this behaviour is acceptable and engage in the same behaviour. This is an important finding for organisations, as it demonstrates the importance of leaders in shaping social norms within the workplace, to avoid creating toxic work environments which can lead to decreased productivity (Lewis & Malecha, 2011). Supervisors must lead by example in order to create healthy work environments and be aware that their actions can have a cascading negative effect when observed by their subordinates.

Conclusion

This study has made advancements to the incivility literature, specifically relating to witnessed incivility and incivility spirals. The findings of this research emphasise the importance of managing incivility, and the consequences of witnessing uncivil interactions in the workplace. While experiencing incivility can lead to primary spirals (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), this research shows that witnessing incivility leads to secondary spirals, which has an even bigger impact on the organisation due to the way that it can spread. Companies must make an effort to manage incivility at its core, and work to eliminate it where they can. They must also be conscious of the effects of time on the relationship between witnessing incivility and instigating incivility, which demonstrate that incivility can spread at a swift pace, or otherwise cause individuals to fester in their emotions which can lead to even bigger consequences.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information Letter

Witnessed Incivility in the Workplace Study Information Letter

My name is Julia Greenslade, and I am currently a student at the University of Canterbury completing a Masters in Industrial and Organisational Psychology. My dissertation aims to investigate workplace behaviours and interpersonal relationships, as well as people's reactions to it. I invite you to participate in this 5 to 10 minute online survey about employee behaviours in your workplace. The project is being carried out as part of the requirements for the research component for a Masters in Science under the supervision of Professor Katharina Naswall, who can be contacted at katharina.naswall@canterbury.ac.nz or 03 369 4332, and who will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

In order to assess workplace behaviours and relationships, and to track workplace behaviours over time, you will be asked if you wish to participate in follow-up surveys. You can discontinue your participation at any time by just notifying us or not participating.

All responses will be treated confidentially. Your data will be matched to an anonymous code which will allow us to link your responses over time. Once the final research summary is sent out (and analyses completed), your contact information will be permanently deleted, and at that point your responses will be anonymous. The final dataset will not have any identifying information about the participants. The results of the project may be published, but the presentation of the findings will include only aggregated information (i.e., summarised responses rather than individual responses).

Your participation in the surveys is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If you want to withdraw during the surveys, you can simply close the internet browser. Your participation in the survey will be confidential and known only to the research team. The data will be stored securely on password-protected computers at the University of Canterbury.

If you feel emotionally distressed at any time during or after taking part in this study, please phone a free crisis helpline such as Hopeline: 1-800-784-2433, or Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255.

Please indicate at the end of the survey if you would like to receive an interim or a final summary of the results of the research project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

Appendix B: Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS)

Cortina, L. M., Magley, V. J., Williams, J. H., & Langhout, R.D. (2001). Incivility in the workplace: Incidence and impact. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 6, 64–80

During the past 2 weeks, have you been in a situation where any of your superiors or co-workers:

1. Put you down or was condescending to you?
2. Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion?
3. Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you?
4. Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately?
5. Ignored or excluded you from professional camaraderie? (i.e. social conversation)
6. Doubted your judgement on a matter over which you have responsibility?
7. Made unwanted attempts to draw you into a discussion of personal matters?

Response options: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Many Times

Appendix C: Witnessed Incivility Scale

Adapted from Cortina, L. M., Magley, V. J., Williams, J. H., & Langhout, R.D. (2001). Incivility in the workplace: Incidence and impact. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 6, 64–80

During the past 2 weeks, how often have you witnessed supervisors exhibit the following behaviours to someone at work?

13. Put down others or were condescending to them in some way
14. Paid little attention to a statement made by someone or showed little interest in their opinion
15. Made demeaning, rude or derogatory remarks about someone
16. Addressed someone in unprofessional terms either privately or publicly
17. Ignored or excluded someone from professional camaraderie? (i.e. social conversation)
18. Doubted someone's judgment in a matter over which they have responsibility
19. Made unwanted attempts to draw someone into a discussion of personal matters .

During the past 2 weeks, how often have you witnessed co-workers exhibit the following behaviours to someone at work?

13. Put down others or were condescending to them in some way
14. Paid little attention to a statement made by someone or showed little interest in their opinion
15. Made demeaning, rude or derogatory remarks about someone
16. Addressed someone in unprofessional terms either privately or publicly
17. Ignored or excluded someone from professional camaraderie? (i.e. social conversation)
18. Doubted someone's judgment in a matter over which they have responsibility
19. Made unwanted attempts to draw someone into a discussion of personal matters .

Response options: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Many Times

Appendix D: Instigated Workplace Incivility Scale (IWIS)

Blau, G., & Andersson, L. (2005). Testing a measure of instigated workplace incivility. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 78(4), 595-614

For the following questions, please recall any events that may have occurred over the past 2 weeks.

How often did you exhibit the following behaviours?

1. Put down others or were condescending to them in some way
2. Paid little attention to a statement made by someone or showed little interest in their opinion
3. Made demeaning, rude or derogatory remarks about someone
4. Addressed someone in unprofessional terms either privately or publicly
5. Ignored or excluded someone from professional camaraderie? (i.e. social conversation)
6. Doubted someone's judgment in a matter over which they have responsibility
7. Made unwanted attempts to draw someone into a discussion of personal matters .

Response options: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Many Times

If so, who was the behaviour directed towards?

1. An individual you witnessed displaying any of the listed behaviours
2. An individual whom you did not witness engaging in any of the above behaviours
3. N/A