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# Incivility as a Communication Barrier: The Effects of Incivility Experiences, Appraisals, and Context on Employees' Constructive Voice Behavior

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Incivility as a Communication Barrier: The Effects of Incivility Experiences, Appraisals, and  
Context on Employees' Constructive Voice Behavior

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Incivility as a Communication Barrier: The Effects of Incivility Experiences, Appraisals, and  
Context on Employees' Constructive Voice Behavior

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## Abstract

In today's competitive environment, organizations and researchers alike are placing increasing emphasis on the role of communication and, more specifically, employee voice at work. However, much less is known about workplace mistreatment as an antecedent factor that might hinder this important workplace asset. The current research examined a specific antecedent factor, workplace incivility, and its effects on constructive voice and engagement using a transactional stress theory framework. Currently, no research has investigated the potential for a connection between incivility and constructive voice, limiting our current understanding of their relationship. In an initial study, psychological safety and appraisals of control were examined as parallel mechanisms by which incivility experiences may serve as a barrier to constructive employee voice. Although psychological safety mediated the relationship between incivility and constructive voice, the results were less clear for appraisals of control. A second study extended these findings by examining an expanded set of cognitive appraisals and the additional role of supervisor openness to voice in the proposed relationships. Overall, the results suggest that there is a complex relationship between incivility and constructive voice and that this may have implications for employees' engagement at work.

*Keywords:* workplace incivility, employee voice, engagement, psychological safety, appraisals, transactional stress theory

## Introduction

Workplace incivility may make employees think twice about fully investing themselves at work or going the extra mile for their workgroup or organization. Studies on workplace incivility, characterized by ambiguous, low-intensity rude behavior that violates workplace norms for respect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), have shown that incivility is related to various detrimental outcomes at work, whereby victims may reduce their helpfulness (Porath & Erez, 2007), decrease their work effort (Porath & Pearson, 2010), and cut back on collaboration and cooperation (Gill & Sypher, 2009) following instances of mistreatment. Further, research also suggests that targets of incivility may potentially reciprocate by engaging in subsequent perpetration, which can incite a spiral of incivility among colleagues (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Glomb & Liao, 2003; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). In other words, accumulating evidence supports the notion that incivility can effectively serve as a barrier to a respectful, collaborative, and productive workplace where employees can thrive.

Despite knowledge that incivility has clear costs for employees and organizations, relatively little is known about the effects of incivility on a key resource in the workplace, communication. Few would question that good communication is important for a successful workplace; communication is essential to completing most everyday tasks, maintaining social relationships, and promoting information exchange. In fact, in a recent survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), approximately 70% of employers named verbal and written communication skills as top qualities that they seek in new college graduates (NACE, 2015). In the current research, I focus on a particular form of communication, constructive employee voice, “the voluntary expression of ideas regarding new or improved work methods, procedures, and practices” (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014, p. 101).

Constructive voice is conceptualized as a type of proactive citizenship behavior that is both improvement- and challenge-oriented (i.e., geared toward positive change in the status quo: Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Thus, behaviors like employee voice “are seen as critical for organizational functioning because managers cannot possibly anticipate all opportunities for employee contribution, monitor all employee behaviors, or coerce employees into ‘going the extra mile’ for the organization” (Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008, p. 912). Further, voice has been regularly linked with increases in productivity and performance (Ng & Feldman, 2012) and decreases in employee withdrawal (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), suggesting that voice may also have implications for an employee’s engagement at work. However, unlike affiliative OCBs (e.g., helpfulness), which involve very little personal consequences for employees, challenge-oriented behaviors like employee voice carry inherent interpersonal risks (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003), making voice subject to conflict in the work environment.

Anecdotally, those in the business world have observed that toxic workplace behavior often leads to degraded communication, serving as an effective barrier to healthy interpersonal interactions (e.g., Kerfoot, 2008). In fact, Gill and Sypher (2009) go as far as to define incivility itself as a form of “destructive communication,” in the sense that it tends to degrade trust and inhibit the fostering of a respectful workplace community. The idea that incivility is itself a form of “destructive communication” suggests that such mistreatment sets the tone for future interactions and may further erode productive conversation down the line. Unsurprisingly, then, previous research has found that employees experiencing incivility may intentionally reduce their commitment, withhold assistance from coworkers, engage in fewer voluntary efforts, and reduce creativity (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000; Porath & Erez, 2007). Although it seems logical that incivility harms employee’s constructive voice at work, this assumption has not yet

been empirically tested. Thus, the current research will begin to fill this gap. If incivility harms constructive voice, why and how does this occur? Further, what are the consequences for engagement if incivility serves as a barrier to proactive communication in the workplace?

To address this research gap, I begin by examining links between uncivil experiences and employees' constructive voice, accounting for both the role of the contextual environment and individual appraisals in this process. Specifically, this research aims to: (1) explore the relationship between incivility and a specific form of communication, constructive voice, (2) expand upon current understanding of how employees appraise and experience workplace incivility, (3) determine the implications of both these appraisals and the workplace context as parallel mechanisms through which incivility prevents constructive employee voice, and (4) investigate whether these relationships ultimately have consequences for employees' engagement. In particular, I suggest that incivility may serve as a barrier to constructive voice, and, in turn, low levels of voice may affect a broader willingness to be engaged at work.

I first review the existing literature and begin to establish a common thread through the separate mistreatment and voice literatures using a transactional stress theory framework. Next, in an initial study, I investigate two potential mechanisms by which communication, in this case constructive voice, and engagement may suffer following incivility (Figure 1), focusing on the mediating role of psychological safety and control appraisals in this process. In a second study, I expand upon these relationships and explore unexpected findings from Study 1. Overall, the results illuminate potential pathways by which incivility affects constructive voice and engagement at work and consequences of this relationship for employees and organizations.

### **Incivility and Voice**

Despite anecdotal connections between incivility and constructive voice, these topics

have remained fairly independent areas of research. Although no study has examined this relationship, some guidance can be gleaned from the literature on similar topics. When scholars refer to the relationship between mistreatment and voice, they are generally referring to what is known as remedial voice, the direct communication that one has been mistreated (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008). Despite its risks, remedial voice can be helpful to employees as the goal of such behavior is generally to correct the situation and bring about relief (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008). However, research has shown that the majority of victims do not choose to address the problem through informal remedial voice mechanisms, like talking to management, and even fewer choose to do so through mechanisms like formal reporting (Cortina & Magley, 2009). Therefore, incivility is often allowed to escalate before it is reported, if at all (Gill & Sypher, 2009). Such a response may be problematic, given that Cortina and Magley (2003) found that, at high levels of mistreatment, victims who did not voice had the worst psychological and physical health outcomes.

Although the mistreatment literature has focused on remedial voice, I propose that voice may be affected in other ways as well; specifically, constructive voice may be another form of voice affected in this process. Yet, to date, no research has examined a link between incivility and constructive voice. Remedial voice and constructive voice both carry inherent interpersonal risks (e.g., potential retaliation: Cortina & Magley, 2003; fear of damaging relationships: Milliken et al., 2003) that may be particularly salient given the ambiguity surrounding incivility, but a key difference is the underlying motivation for each type of voice. In contrast to remedial voice, which is experience specific (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008), constructive voice is broader and involves actively making suggestions or proposing solutions for how to bring about improvement on a variety of topics (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Specifically, constructive

voice is prosocially motivated and reflects an interest in the well-being of the workgroup (Morrison, 2014). In contrast, remedial voice tends to be motivated by self-protection (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008). Further, whereas remedial voice is concerned with preventing personal harm, constructive voice is considered to be an extra-role behavior like organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), such that it is up to the discretion of the employee whether or not to utilize it (Morrison, 2011; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Therefore, incivility may also affect willingness to use constructive voice. If employees are reluctant to report their incivility experiences formally or informally (Cortina & Magley, 2009) and incivility is associated with a reduction in helpfulness (Porath & Erez, 2007), then employees may similarly be reluctant to utilize constructive voice when they are experiencing frequent mistreatment and this may have consequences for employees' engagement, an idea that I return to later in the paper.

*Hypothesis 1:* Employees experiencing frequent incivility will be less likely to voice constructively.

Although there may be a direct relationship between incivility and constructive voice, theory suggests that we must first consider how targets interpret their incivility experiences to get a more complete picture of why such a relationship may occur.

### **Theoretical Background**

How individuals interpret and experience stressors is central to the framework of transactional stress theory. According to the theory, a situation will be perceived as stressful if a person feels that the stressor is both personally relevant and that he or she does not have adequate resources to cope (Lazarus, 1995). Thus, we must first understand these appraisals in order to fully comprehend individuals' reactions to stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). These appraisals are affected by various factors but in general depend on both individual and

environmental influences (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Given its low intensity, ambiguous nature whereby the harmful intent of the perpetrator is often unclear (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), incivility and subsequent outcomes are subject to this cognitive appraisal process. That is, ambiguous behavior is open to interpretation, leaving employees' to rely on perceptions of the contextual environment as well as subjective appraisals of their experiences, in parallel, to determine their ability to manage their experiences (e.g., Cortina & Magley, 2009) or, in the case of the current research, decide whether or not to utilize constructive voice.

In fact, how employees appraise stressors often helps to determine the response strategy chosen (e.g., Gruber & Smith, 1995). Whereas stressors appraised as changeable tend to support problem-focused responses (i.e., making a plan), stressors appraised as unchangeable tend to support more emotion-focused responses (i.e., distancing; Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Further, the goals of these strategies tend to differ: emotion-focused responses are often utilized to regulate one's emotions and problem-focused responses are utilized to alter the person-environment relationship by addressing the problem (Folkman et al., 1986). Therefore, accounting for how employees appraise their experiences of incivility in parallel with features of the contextual environment may be important in determining exactly how those experiences may serve as a barrier to proactive communication like constructive employee voice.

### **The Parallel Role of Appraisals and Context Following Incivility Experiences**

Incivility, described as annoying and frustrating by targets, is generally thought to be appraised negatively due to its detrimental impact on employees' well-being (Cortina & Magley, 2009). According to transactional stress theory, these negative appraisals serve as explanatory mechanisms linking incivility to subsequent negative outcomes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). However, only a few studies have examined victim's cognitive appraisals following incivility

experiences (e.g., Bunk & Magley, 2013; Cortina & Magley, 2009; Marchiondo, 2013), limiting current understanding of employees' evaluations of mistreatment. Although appraisals can take many forms, I propose that one factor contributing to these negative perceptions may be individuals' appraisals of control (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1986). Previous research has shown that perceived control plays an important role in individuals' experiences of workplace stressors, whereby high control serves as a moderator and is associated with less stress and strain (e.g., Spector, 2002). In contrast, transactional stress theory takes a process approach (i.e., not to be confused with the moderating role of control described above) examining situation-specific appraisals of control and coping as mediators of the stressor-outcome relationship (Folkman et al., 1986).

When perceived control is situation specific, people consider whether they can handle the demands of the current situation (Folkman, 1984). These appraisals may be influenced by a single situation or an accumulation of stressful experiences (Folkman, 1984), such that the frequency with which employees experience incivility may have a direct impact on how much control individuals perceive that they can exert. While this conclusion seems intuitive, there is currently a lack of research directly examining incivility and appraisals of control. However, Andersson and Pearson (1999) note that incivility can build up over time and spiral out of control, threatening employees' well being. In fact, frequent incivility is associated with increased psychological distress (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) and decreased optimism (Bunk & Magley, 2013), suggesting that as incivility becomes more frequent, employees may progressively feel that their situation will not improve and is not changeable.

*Hypothesis 2:* As employees experience more frequent incivility, these experiences will be negatively related to appraisals that their situation is controllable.

If constructive voice is considered a problem-focused strategy, transactional stress theory posits that it is more likely to be utilized when the employee perceives that the situation is changeable (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987; Troup & Dewe, 2002). Along these lines, previous research suggests that victims may utilize remedial forms of voice because it increases their control over the situation (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Cortina & Magley, 2003). Similarly, then, employees who feel that they still have some control over their incivility experiences may also feel more comfortable expressing constructive voice more generally. In contrast, those who do not may have little motivation to utilize constructive voice, allowing incivility to effectively serve as a barrier to proactive communication. In fact, a recent meta-analysis demonstrated that employees under stress might be motivated to reduce their voice in order to maintain scarce resources (Ng & Feldman, 2012). Therefore, I hypothesize that employees who experience frequent incivility may feel less control over their situation and, in turn, may choose to reduce their constructive voice in order to reserve their scarce resources for in-role behaviors related to performing their job duties.

*Hypothesis 3:* Employees' appraisals of control will mediate the relationship between incivility and constructive voice.

Yet, appraisals do not occur within a vacuum. Rather, when employees evaluate their resources to handle stressors, they do so within a particular work context (Folkman et al., 1986). One contextual resource that employees may take into account following incivility, in parallel with their appraisals of control, is their individual evaluation of psychological safety, perceptions that interpersonal risks are safe to take within a workgroup (Edmondson, 1999). However, this evaluation is potentially problematic because incivility may play a role in decreasing these feelings of psychological safety in the first place. Although there is currently a lack of studies

examining the relationship between incivility and psychological safety, there is some evidence that incivility may degrade employees' feelings of psychological safety at work.

A key feature of psychological safety is that it is associated with a mentality of trust and respect (Edmondson, 1999; Roussin & Webber, 2012); yet, research has shown that incivility can actively damage these workplace resources. For example, incivility is associated with decreased trust in others (Gill & Sypher, 2009). Similarly, employees tend to be less satisfied with their supervisors and coworkers when incivility is frequent (Cortina & Magley, 2001). This degradation in trust and satisfaction is important considering that trust is a key component of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) and trust has been found to precede innovative behavior (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016), which is akin to constructive voice. Further, incivility may also serve to degrade respect. In fact, central to the definition of incivility is that it is a violation of workplace respect in which others' feelings are disregarded (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). If incivility reduces trust and respect in the workplace, then it follows that psychological safety may be hindered from developing as mistreatment becomes more frequent.

*Hypothesis 4:* Employees experiencing frequent incivility will perceive that their work environment is less psychologically safe.

Because transactional stress theory posits that it is neither the individual nor the contextual environment alone that contributes to workplace stress, rather, it is a combination of both (Lazarus & Cohen-Charash, 2001), it also follows that features of the work environment may not only work in parallel but may also directly contribute to how one appraises workplace stressors (Folkman et al., 1986). When employees evaluate their available resources to cope with a stressor, contextual resources like psychological safety may serve as an antecedent in determining whether or not employees perceive that the stressor is changeable or within their

control (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). If frequent incivility reduces individual perceptions of psychological safety, employees may in turn feel that they have one less resource with which to cope, leading to perceptions that the situation will not change.

*Hypothesis 5:* Employees' perceptions of psychological safety will mediate the relationship between incivility and employees' appraisals of control.

Therefore, employees who experience frequent incivility and feel like the situation cannot be changed may be especially motivated to reduce constructive voice if incivility has also harmed their psychological safety. As mentioned previously, although constructive voice is positive in intent, it differs from many OCBs because it is focused on changing the status quo (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Consequently, voice has the potential to be negatively received (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003), leaving employees "faced with a balancing act of trying to be prosocial and constructive...yet mindful of personal costs" (Morrison, 2011, p.385). In fact, previous research has demonstrated that primary reasons why employees fail to speak up are a fear of damaging relationships, concerns over being labeled a troublemaker, a fear of retaliation, or perceptions that nothing will change (Crant, 2000; Milliken et al., 2003; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). If employees feel that the costs outweigh the benefits of voice, then they will likely choose to remain silent. Therefore, a psychologically safe environment may also play a large role in whether or not employees are willing to voice following incivility.

In fact, previous research on voice supports the notion that a strong sense of psychological safety is an important contextual antecedent to voice behavior (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007). When psychological safety has been fostered, speaking up, asking for help, and admitting mistakes may all be perceived as less threatening (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Further, psychological safety may help employees channel task conflict

into a productive discussion of mistakes (Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown, 2012). However, there is a lack of research considering incivility as an antecedent in this relationship. By simply examining the relationship between psychological safety and voice, we limit our understanding of antecedent factors that may affect psychological safety in the first place. If incivility reduces psychological safety, employees may subsequently determine that the risks of engaging in constructive voice outweigh the benefits and may, consequently, voice less. Therefore, I hypothesize that incivility may hinder psychological safety and that this lack of psychological safety may serve as a barrier to the use of constructive voice, especially when these perceptions occur in parallel with appraisals that the situation will not change.

*Hypothesis 6:* Psychological safety will mediate the relationship between incivility experiences and constructive voice.

### **Reduced Engagement as a Consequence of the Incivility → Voice Relationship**

As mentioned previously, although employees often avoid reporting incivility (e.g., Cortina & Magley, 2009), research has not yet examined if incivility also stifles constructive voice. If employees are unwilling or unlikely to report incivility experiences, then it potentially follows that they may also be less likely to speak up with constructive suggestions following incivility experiences, even if those suggestions have the potential to benefit the workgroup. Above, I discuss how this “communication barrier” may manifest itself through the parallel mechanisms of control appraisals and psychological safety following incivility experiences. Thus, the question then becomes what are the consequences of these potential communication barriers inhibiting constructive voice? I next return to the idea proposed earlier in the paper that the relationship between incivility and constructive voice ultimately has consequences for employees’ engagement in their work.

Similar to constructive voice, employee engagement tends to be a resource valued by organizations. When incivility is infrequent, employees are more likely to collaborate and share ideas (Porath & Pearson, 2010). In contrast, frequent incivility and conflict tends to make employees less committed to seeing that their workgroup achieves its goals (Aube & Rousseau, 2005). Further, these employees are less willing to put in effort at work, more concerned with avoiding the perpetrator (Porath & Pearson, 2010), and more likely to withdraw from the workplace (Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). All of these strategies seem to suggest that employees experiencing incivility may directly respond by disengaging in various ways.

However, recent research examining the relationship between incivility and engagement has primarily focused on task engagement (e.g., Giumetti, Hatfield, Scisco, Schroeder, Muth, & Kowalski, 2013; Porath & Erez, 2007) without considering employees' overall investment of physical, cognitive, and emotional resources at work. This focus limits our understanding of potential mechanisms linking incivility to engagement, like constructive voice. As mentioned previously, reducing voice may prevent employees from gaining new resources (Ng & Feldman, 2012) that encourage them to remain engaged at work. Therefore, incivility's impact on the use or disuse of constructive voice may have implications for employee engagement.

Previous research has found that when the opportunity to voice is present, employees experience less affective detachment (Ng & Feldman, 2012), but tend to withdraw from work when voice is not an option (Colquitt et al., 2001). Further, providing employees with the opportunity to voice their opinions may help to increase employees' engagement at work (Beugre, 2010; Feinzig, Lesser, & Rasch, 2015; Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013). In other words, if employees feel that they cannot utilize constructive voice in the workplace following incivility experiences, they may consequently become less engaged. Although the few studies above

appear to underscore the importance of fostering voice for employee engagement, research on links between voice and engagement has also been somewhat limited.

In the current research I propose that if frequent incivility inhibits voice, employees may feel that their suggestions are either too costly to their resources or are no longer valued by others and disengage at work. In other words, low engagement may, in part, stem from barriers to proactive communication following incivility experiences. Low engagement may be harmful for organizations considering that high levels of engagement are associated with positive outcomes such as improved performance (Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010), increased commitment, and lower turnover intentions (Halbesleben, 2010). Specifically, I hypothesize that frequent incivility may not only directly be associated with low engagement but also that this low level of engagement may partially occur through barriers to constructive voice.

*Hypothesis 7:* Employees experiencing frequent incivility will be less engaged at work.

*Hypothesis 8:* Constructive voice will be positively related to employees' levels of engagement.

## Study 1

### Method

**Participants and procedure.** A total of 807 healthcare professionals employed by a northeastern U.S. organization were invited to complete an online survey about workplace experiences and climate. A total of 235 employees participated for a response rate of 29%. Of those 235, 47 failed to complete at least 50% of the survey and were eliminated, resulting in a final sample of 188 employees (23%). Given the modest response rate, three chi-square tests were performed to determine whether the final sample was demographically representative in terms of gender, healthcare discipline, and work location. The final sample was adequately

representative of gender  $\chi^2(1, N=156) = 1.25, p > .05$ . However, mental health providers were slightly overrepresented,  $\chi^2(3, N=184) = 11.51, p < .05$ ; this is unsurprising given that mental health providers may have a more flexible schedule compared to medical disciplines. Lastly, although many of the work locations were proportionally represented, one location was overrepresented (a very small, engaged location) and another location was underrepresented (a very large, disengaged location),  $\chi^2(16, N=181) = 30.91, p < .05$ .

Overall, the final sample was 72% female and primarily Caucasian (73.5%). Most participants were age 34 or older (86%) and had completed at least some college (97.5%). In fact, the sample was well educated with 29% holding an associate or bachelor's degree and 41% holding a professional or graduate degree. On average, participants had worked for the organization for 8.8 years.

**Measures.** All constructs were assessed via items from published measures and, unless otherwise indicated, utilized a 7-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'). Internal consistency for all multi-item measures was strong with the exception of control appraisals, which is presented in Table 1 along with inter-construct correlations and basic scale descriptive data.

**Incivility experiences.** Incivility experiences were measured using nine items adapted from the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). Participants were asked to indicate how often in the past three months that they have been in a situation in which any of their coworkers or supervisors "gave you hostile looks, stares, or sneers," "addressed you inappropriately or unprofessionally," "interrupted or 'spoke over' you," "yelled, shouted, or swore at you," "ignored you or failed to speak to you (for example, 'the silent treatment')," "made jokes at your expense," "made insulting or disrespectful remarks to

you,” “accused you of stupidity or incompetence,” and “put you down or were condescending to you.” Participants responded using a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (‘never’) to 4 (‘many times’).

***Psychological safety.*** Psychological safety was measured using three items developed by Edmondson (1999). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: “Employees in my workgroup are able to bring up tough problems and issues,” “it is safe to take risks within my workgroup,” and “my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized within my workgroup.”

***Control appraisals.*** Control appraisals were measured using three items adapted from Bennett, Lowe, and Honey (2003) and modified by Bunk and Magley (2013). These items were based on an initial appraisal measure developed by Smith and Lazarus (1993). All items were preceded by the phrase “at the time of the incivility experience that bothered you the most, how much did you...”: “consider the situation a challenge rather than a problem,” “think you would be able to make things better,” “think you would be able to deal emotionally with what was happening.” Participants responded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (‘not at all’) to 5 (‘extremely’), such that a higher number indicates higher perceptions of control.

***Constructive voice.*** Constructive voice was measured using a five-item scale adapted from Maynes and Podsakoff (2014). Statement terminology was altered to reflect self-reported rather than supervisor-reported voice behavior. Participants responded to a series of statements including “I often suggest changes to work projects in order to make them better.”

***Employee engagement.*** Engagement was measured using four items from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Participants indicated how often they felt the following ways about their job: “I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose,” “my job inspires me,” “I am proud of the work that I do,” and “I am enthusiastic about my job.”

Participants responded using a 7-point scale ranging from 0 ('never') to 6 ('always/everyday').

### **Analysis Strategy**

I tested the hypothesized model using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus version 7.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2015) and full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) method of estimation. First, I fit a measurement model to the data. A parceling strategy was utilized for multi-item measures to create indicators for the latent variables. All latent variables were locally just identified, such that each variable was represented by a total of three item parcels that served as manifest indicators. I selected a balancing approach to parceling *a priori* such that higher loading items were balanced with lower loading items (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002; Little, Rhemtulla, Gibson, & Schoemann, 2013). When parcels are constructed carefully, some benefits of parceling include higher reliability and communality and fewer parameter estimates while still producing a similar solution to non-parceled items (Little et al., 2013). The marker variable method was selected as the method of scale setting. This method sets the scale of estimation by fixing the loading of one of the indicators to 1.0 (Kline, 2011).

Model fit was assessed using two absolute fit indices, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardized root mean residual (SRMR), and two relative fit indices, the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and the comparative fit index (CFI). Previous research suggests values of .06 or lower for the RMSEA, .08 or lower for the SRMR, and .95 or higher for the TLI and CFI as indicators of acceptable model fit in SEM (Hu & Bentler, 1999). After fitting the measurement model, the hypothesized structural model was fit to the data. All hypothesized indirect effects were assessed using bootstrapping procedures in Mplus.

### **Results and Discussion**

Inter-construct correlations, internal consistency estimates, and descriptive statistics are

presented in Table 1. Overall, the five-factor measurement model provided a good fit to the data,  $\chi^2(80) = 126.83, p < .01, RMSEA = .06$  (90% C.I. [.037, .074]), SRMR = .05, CFI = .98, and TLI = .97. Further, the factor loadings for all of the indicators were statistically significant. However, one of the indicators for control appraisals, “think you would be able to deal emotionally with what was happening,” did not load as highly as the other indicators ( $\lambda = .34$ ). After fitting the measurement model, the hypothesized structural model was fit to the data. Analyses also indicated that the structural model was an acceptable fit,  $\chi^2(82) = 136.61, p < .01, RMSEA = .06$  (90% C.I. [.041, .077]), SRMR = .07, CFI = .98, and TLI = .97. Standardized path coefficients for the hypothesized structural model are presented in Figure 2.

Given the story that emerged from the data, I next discuss the hypotheses more substantively rather than in exact numerical order. Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 4 predicted that incivility experiences would be negatively related to appraisals that the situation is controllable and psychological safety, respectively. In support of Hypothesis 4, incivility had a strong negative direct effect on individual perceptions of psychological safety ( $\beta = -.62, p < .01$ ) meaning that frequent incivility may increase employees’ fears that it is not safe to ask for help or take risks in their workgroup, like constructive voice. In contrast, Hypothesis 2 was not supported; incivility did not have a direct effect on employees’ control appraisals ( $\beta = .22, p > .05$ ), suggesting that control appraisals may be influenced by something other than incivility frequency. However, psychological safety was significantly related to control appraisals ( $\beta = .35, p < .01$ ). Thus, incivility did have a negative indirect effect on these appraisals through psychological safety ( $c' = -.22, 95\% \text{ C.I. } [-.39, -.04]$ ), supporting Hypothesis 5.

Appraisals of control were significantly related to use of constructive voice ( $\beta = .34, p < .01$ ) meaning that perceptions of situational control may influence whether or not employees

choose to utilize constructive voice. However, because incivility experiences were not significantly related to control appraisals, appraisals could not serve as a direct mediator in the relationship between incivility and constructive voice; thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Further, perceptions of psychological safety were significantly related to constructive voice ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ). Therefore, incivility had a significant negative indirect effect on constructive voice through psychological safety ( $c' = -.19, 95\% \text{ C.I. } [-.33, -.05]$ ), supporting Hypothesis 6.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be a negative direct effect between incivility experiences and constructive voice. Contrary to this hypothesis, the results were just the opposite; after accounting for the mediating roles of psychological safety and control appraisals, a significant positive direct effect emerged between incivility and constructive voice ( $\beta = .32, p < .01$ ). This finding suggests that incivility may be also be appraised in some ways that serve to increase constructive voice, like a challenge for example, or that more frequent incivility removes some of the ambiguity associated with the behavior in ways that make constructive voice seem less costly. Hypothesis 7 predicted that there would be a negative direct effect between incivility and engagement. Although in the hypothesized direction, incivility was not significantly directly related to reductions in engagement ( $\beta = -.12, p > .05$ ). However, constructive voice was positively related to employee engagement ( $\beta = .22, p < .01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 8.

The findings of Study 1 suggest that psychological safety may be instrumental in influencing whether employees continue utilizing constructive voice after experiencing incivility and this may have consequences for employees' engagement. Specifically, incivility might have a detrimental impact on employees' constructive voice behavior by harming employees' psychological safety. In contrast, the role of control appraisals was less clear. Control appraisals

did not act as a significant mediating mechanism contributing to the hypothesized communication barrier. However, these appraisals did have a positive direct effect on constructive voice, suggesting that employees who feel at least some control may be more likely to develop constructive suggestions and solutions. This finding may be a doubled-edged sword considering that incivility was indirectly, negatively associated with appraisals that the situation was changeable through low psychological safety.

Overall, Study 1 demonstrated that barriers to constructive voice may prevent organizations and their employees from experiencing new improvements that have the potential to benefit the entire workplace and keep employees engaged at work. Understanding this relationship is important because low employee engagement may only be the tip of the iceberg; when incivility is particularly severe, employee withdrawal may eventually lead to higher rates of employee turnover (Pearson et al., 2001). Although Study 1 provided initial support for many of the proposed relationships, it also revealed a few unexpected results. Thus, I further explore these findings in a second study.

## **Study 2**

The goal of Study 2 was to replicate and expand upon key findings as well as address unexpected results from Study 1. In Study 1, psychological safety played a central role in the relationship between incivility and constructive voice, but the role of control appraisals was less clear. Appraisals that the incivility situation was controllable were positively related to constructive voice. However, incivility frequency was not significantly related to these appraisals. Further, contrary to hypotheses, the direct effect between incivility and constructive voice was positive rather than negative, suggesting that examining an expanded set of cognitive appraisals may help to account for both positive and negative relationships between incivility

and constructive voice.

As acknowledged earlier in the paper, appraisals come in various forms. In addition to appraisals of control, previous research has found that stressors may be differentially associated with workplace outcomes depending on whether or not the stressor is appraised as a challenge or a hindrance (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000; Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). Whereas challenge stressors tend to be perceived as more controllable and are associated with positive outcomes, hindrance stressors tend to be appraised negatively because they interfere with one's goals (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Recent research has extended this dichotomy by demonstrating that stressors may also be appraised as a threat (Tuckey, Searle, Boyd, Winefield, & Winefield, 2015). In contrast to challenge and hindrance stressors, threat stressors are associated with anticipated personal loss or harm (Tuckey et al., 2015).

Although these distinctions may seem subtle, they may make a large difference given that challenge, hindrance, and threat stressors tend to be associated with different outcomes, as mentioned above. For example, challenge appraisals may be more strongly related to positive affect whereas hindrance appraisals are associated with fatigue and threat appraisals with anxiety and anger (Tuckey et al., 2015). Further, hindrances may be more relevant for motivation-related outcomes whereas threats may be more relevant for individual well-being (Tuckey et al., 2015). This research suggests that, at least to some extent, that challenge, hindrance, and threat appraisals may be an appropriate extension of control appraisals examined in Study 1. For example, challenge stressors may be more likely to be within an employee's control because they are perceived as opportunities for growth whereas hindrance stressors may be less controllable because they are often thought to serve as a barrier or constraint (e.g., Cavanaugh et al., 2000).

However, this research has primarily focused on the idea that stressors can be explicitly

classified *a priori* as a challenge (e.g., skill demands), hindrance (e.g., organizational constraints), or a threat (e.g., role conflict) across individuals and situations (Podsakoff et al., 2007; Tuckey et al., 2015). Yet, there may be individual differences in how people appraise a stressor, and these appraisals need not be mutually exclusive (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Marchiondo, 2013; Tuckey et al., 2015; Webster, Beehr, & Love, 2011). In fact, some research supports the notion that stressors typically classified as either a challenge or a hindrance may actually be appraised in both ways, underscoring the importance of considering individual appraisals in determining outcomes (Searle & Auton, 2015; Webster et al., 2011). This approach is more consistent with transactional stress theory, which emphasizes the role of both individual and contextual influences (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Therefore, people's appraisals of their incivility experiences may determine if and how constructive voice and engagement are affected.

It is generally assumed in the literature that incivility is appraised negatively, which would fit under the category of a hindrance or a threat. Evidence seems to corroborate this assumption given that incivility has been associated with mildly negative appraisals (Cortina & Magley, 2009). However, the distinctions between challenge, hindrance, and threat *appraisals*, as opposed to explicit stressor classifications, tend not to be tested empirically, especially in regards to incivility. Therefore, it is yet to be determined whether incivility always tends to be appraised as a threat, a hindrance, a challenge, or some combination of the three and whether this distinction may differ between individuals. Given the characteristic low intensity and ambiguous nature of incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), incivility may be particularly subject to differing appraisals across individuals and these appraisals may have implications for incivility's impact on employee voice and engagement. For example, those who appraise incivility as a challenge to be overcome may be more likely to voice solutions for improving the work

environment whereas those who appraise incivility as a threat to their well-being or a hindrance to accomplishing goals may be less likely to voice because they fear the interpersonal implications or feel that attempts at change will be futile. In fact, Bunk and Magley (2013) identified a cluster of individuals with positive outlooks following incivility experiences such that they demonstrated higher levels of productive coping strategies and resiliency compared to others, suggesting that incivility is not always appraised in a solely negative fashion.

Thus, in Study 2, I examine an expanded set of cognitive appraisals as a potential explanation for both the lack of relationship between incivility frequency and control appraisals and the positive direct effect between incivility and constructive voice. Given the control associated with challenge appraisals, I hypothesize that incivility appraised as a challenge will not serve as a barrier to constructive voice. In contrast, I hypothesize that incivility appraised as either a threat or a hindrance will be related to lower levels of constructive voice given that threats involve attempts to avoid negative outcomes and hindrances involve perceptions of insurmountable barriers (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Tuckey et al., 2015). In line with these hypotheses, previous research has found that challenge and hindrance appraisals tend to be related to outcomes in different directions (Cavanaugh et al., 2000).

*Hypothesis 1:* Challenge appraisals will be positively related to constructive voice.

*Hypothesis 2:* Hindrance appraisals will be negatively related to constructive voice.

*Hypothesis 3:* Threat appraisals will be negatively related to constructive voice.

Another consideration in examining the relationship between incivility, employee voice, and engagement is the extent to which supervisors display interest in employees' ideas. In Study 1, the results indicated that constructive voice was positively related to employee engagement. However, I suggest that this relationship may be strengthened or weakened depending on

whether or not employees feel that their voices are heard. Although employee voice behavior indicates whether the employee has made a suggestion, it does not account for whether the suggestion was heard and acted upon by management. “People want and value the opportunity to voice, but once they use it, they also want it to matter” (Bashshur & Oc, 2015, p. 1536).

Previous research has shown that supervisor openness to voice is associated with a variety of positive outcomes. For example, employees who believe their voice has been heard tend to feel more valued (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988). In fact, research has shown that the relationship between voice and engagement may depend, in part, on employees’ trust in management (Rees et al., 2013). Further, people who perceive that their input has been positively received may communicate more creatively than those who do not (Beukeboom, 2009). Thus, supervisor openness to voice may help to support engagement following the expression of constructive voice. In contrast, turnover intentions tend to be higher when employees perceive that management’s willingness to make changes is low (McClellan, Burriss, & Detert, 2013), suggesting low supervisor openness to voice may serve to decrease engagement.

Therefore, it may be the case that simply using employee voice may not always be enough for employees to feel engaged at work. Rather, it may be essential that supervisors listen to and act upon employees’ suggestions once they have been voiced. Further, this supervisor openness to voice may be especially important if employees choose to voice despite experiencing frequent incivility; otherwise, supervisors who are unreceptive may serve as an additional barrier to communication and engagement. Although not specifically related to incivility, previous research examining safety-related voice supports such a hypothesis, finding that injuries were most prevalent when employees exhibiting high levels of safety-related voice were faced with a supervisor who did not listen (Tucker & Turner, 2015). In contrast, employees

with supervisors who do listen experience less emotional exhaustion, have lower turnover intentions, and engage in more OCBs (Lloyd, Boer, Keller, & Voelpel, 2015). Thus, the current study will examine supervisor openness to voice as an additional factor influencing the relationship between constructive voice and engagement.

*Hypothesis 4:* Constructive voice will be more strongly related to employee engagement when supervisor openness to voice is high.

The hypothesized model tested in Study 2 is presented in Figure 3. Overall, the goals of Study 2 are as follows: (1) to replicate the findings of Study 1, (2) to explore an expanded set of cognitive appraisals as a potential explanation for a positive direct effect between incivility and constructive voice and (3) to investigate the potential omission of a moderator further linking constructive voice to engagement. In particular, an expanded set of appraisals may help to account for the positive direct effect between incivility and voice found in Study 1 as well as support the idea that individuals may appraise a single stressor in multiple ways that offset one another. Together with Study 1, Study 2 will provide additional clarity surrounding the role that incivility may play in influencing proactive communication in the workplace.

## **Method**

**Participants and procedure.** Participants were invited to complete an online survey of workplace experiences and attitudes through snowball sampling using student recruiters in two undergraduate psychology classes. Student recruiters were asked to provide the survey link to individuals they know who are employed full-time (30 or more hours per week) and above the age of 18. Students received course credit for their recruiting efforts. As a small incentive to complete the entire survey, participants were given the opportunity to enter into a random drawing for Amazon gift cards at the end of the survey.

A total of 485 employees responded to the survey. Of those 485, 71 respondents were eliminated because they did not meet the requirement for full-time employment. An additional seven responses were eliminated because these participants indicated that they were self-employed and had neither a supervisor nor coworkers. Finally, nine were eliminated for failing to complete at least 50% of the survey. Thus, the final sample consisted of 398 employees. Participants represented a variety of occupations (e.g., custodian, line cook, dental hygienist, software engineer). On average, respondents were 39 years old ( $SD = 13.72$ ) and 63.7% were women. Of the participants in the final sample, 71.5% identified as Caucasian, 8.2% identified as Asian, 6.9% identified as African American, 5.4% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 3.3% identified as multiracial, and 4.7% identified as another race or ethnicity. A total of 0.8% of participants had less than a high school diploma, 8.7% held either a high school diploma or GED, 5.9% had completed a certificate program, 19.1% of participants had completed some college, 36.6% held either an associate's or bachelor's degree, 7.9% had completed some graduate school, and 21.1% held a professional or graduate degree. On average, participants had worked for their organizations for 9.13 years ( $SD = 9.78$ ).

Given that the participants were recruited using snowball sampling, I compared the demographics of Study 2 participants to recent census data to get an approximation of demographic representativeness. Although not a perfect comparison, participant demographics were compared with Connecticut state census data, the state in which the study was conducted. The final sample was adequately representative of gender in the civilian workforce,  $\chi^2(1, N=390) = 0.18, p > .05$ . However, those identifying as African American or Hispanic/Latino were under-represented in the final sample and those identifying as Asian were slightly over-represented. Lastly, the final sample was more educated (99.2% of Study 2 participants held a high school

diploma, GED, or higher) compared with a statewide average of 89.5%; this finding is not a surprise given that college students served as recruiters.

**Measures.** Changes made to the measures used in Study 2, as compared to Study 1, are listed below. Measures that remained the same across the two studies are not listed. As in Study 1, all constructs in Study 2 were assessed via items from published measures and, unless otherwise indicated, utilized a 7-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'). Internal consistency for all multi-item measures was strong, which is presented in Table 2, as well as all inter-construct correlations and basic scale descriptive data.

**Psychological safety.** Psychological safety was measured using the full seven-item scale developed by Edmondson (1999). Participants responded to a series of statements, such as "If you make a mistake at work, it is often held against you."

**Cognitive appraisal.** Cognitive appraisals were measured using eleven items adapted from Tuckey et al. (2015)'s distinction between threat, challenge, and hindrance appraisals. Threat appraisals were measured using three items modified from Feldman, Cohen, Hamrick, and Lepore (2004). A sample item includes: "At the time of your experience that bothered you the most, did you feel that the experience would have a negative impact on you?" Challenge appraisals were measured using four items adapted from Searle and Auton (2015) and Marchiondo (2013). A sample item includes: "'...', did you feel that it would be a learning experience?" Hindrance appraisals were measured using four items adapted from Searle and Auton (2015). A sample item includes: "'...', did you feel that the experience would limit how well you can do at work?" Participants responded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree').

**Supervisor openness to voice.** Supervisor openness to voice was measured using a ten-

item scale adapted from Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, and Dutton (1998). Statement terminology was altered to reference the respondent's immediate supervisor rather than "management above me." Participants responded to a series of statements including "Good ideas get serious consideration from my supervisor." Participants responded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree').

***Employee engagement.*** Recent research has called into question the measurement properties of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, noting that the measure may be confounded with antecedents (Rich et al., 2010). Therefore, engagement was measured using the Rich et al. (2010) job engagement scale. The scale consists of 18 items that are designed to measure three facets of engagement: physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement at work. Sample items include "I devote a lot of energy to my job (physical)," "I am enthusiastic in my job (emotional)," and "At work, my mind is focused on my job (cognitive)." Participants responded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree').

### **Analysis Strategy**

The hypothesized measurement and structural models were tested using the same procedure as Study 1. Items were parceled using the balancing approach described in Study 1 with the exception of engagement, which was parceled using a facet representative strategy given its multidimensional nature (e.g., all cognitive engagement items were parceled together; Little et al., 2002). Lastly, all indirect effects were assessed using bootstrapping procedures.

### **Results and Discussion**

Inter-construct correlations, internal consistency estimates, and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2. Overall, the eight-factor measurement model provided a good fit to the data,  $\chi^2(224) = 452.13, p < .01, RMSEA = .05$  (90% C.I. [.044, .057]), SRMR = .06, CFI = .96,

and TLI = .95. Further, the factor loadings for all of the indicators were statistically significant. After fitting the measurement model, the hypothesized structural model was fit to the data. Analyses also indicated that the structural model was an acceptable fit<sup>1</sup>,  $\chi^2(239) = 602.01$ ,  $p < .01$ , RMSEA = .06 (90% C.I. [.056, .068]), SRMR = .09, CFI = .93, and TLI = .92. Standardized path coefficients for the hypothesized structural model (excluding the interaction) are presented in Figure 4.

Study 2 replicated various findings from Study 1. Consistent with Study 1, there was a positive direct effect between incivility and constructive voice ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, it may be the case that incivility may not always discourage constructive voice, but in some cases may actually encourage it too. Further, the mediating role of psychological safety was similarly supported in Study 2. Incivility was negatively related to psychological safety ( $\beta = -.57$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and psychological safety mediated the relationship between incivility and constructive voice ( $c' = -.21$ , 95% C.I. [-.29, -.13]). If incivility leaves employees feeling less safe taking interpersonal risks, then there may be consequences for open, productive communication. Study 2 also found support for a positive relationship between constructive voice and employee engagement ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Lastly, the hypothesized negative direct effect between incivility and engagement ( $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was found in Study 2, suggesting that the non-significant, but negative direct effect in Study 1 might have simply been underpowered.

Study 2 also extended findings from Study 1 by examining an expanded set of cognitive appraisals and the role of supervisor openness to voice. Hypothesis 1 proposed that challenge appraisals of incivility would be positively related to constructive voice whereas Hypothesis 2 and 3 proposed that hindrance and threat appraisals of incivility would be negatively related to

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<sup>1</sup> This model does not include the hypothesized interaction term because traditional fit statistics are not currently available when testing for latent interactions in Mplus (Kline, 2011).

constructive voice, respectively. Contrary to Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, challenge, hindrance, and threat appraisals did not play a significant mediating role in the relationship between incivility and constructive voice. Contrary to Hypothesis 1, incivility was not significantly related to challenge appraisals ( $\beta = -.05, p > .05$ ), and challenge appraisals did not significantly affect constructive voice ( $\beta = .11, p > .05$ ). Contrary to Hypothesis 2 and 3, although incivility experiences were positively related to hindrance ( $\beta = .47, p < .01$ ) and threat appraisals ( $\beta = .41, p < .01$ ), neither hindrance ( $\beta = -.11, p > .05$ ) nor threat appraisals ( $\beta = .09, p > .05$ ), were significantly related to constructive voice. Thus, although both studies examined slightly different forms of appraisals, neither study found support for their hypothesized role as a mechanism linking incivility to constructive voice.

Lastly, Hypothesis 4 proposed that supervisor openness to voice would moderate the relationship between constructive voice and engagement. The latent moderated structural equations (LMS) method/quasi-maximum likelihood (QML) estimation was used to test this hypothesis in Mplus (Klein & Moosbrugger, 2000; Klein & Muthén, 2007; Kline, 2011). In support of this hypothesis, constructive voice and supervisor openness to voice significantly interacted to predict employee engagement ( $b = .11, p < .01$ )<sup>2</sup>. Using the Mplus LOOP plot, I plotted the relationship between constructive voice and engagement at 1 *SD* above and 1 *SD* below the zero mean of supervisor openness to voice (Figure 5). Figure 5 shows that when employees perceived higher supervisor openness to voice, their constructive voice was more positively related to engagement.

However, as noted above, a shortcoming of the LMS/QML approach used to test this hypothesis is that traditional fit statistics are not currently available when examining latent

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<sup>2</sup> Note: This method does not currently provide standardized beta weights.

interactions (Kline, 2011). In these cases, relative model fit of the main effects model versus the model containing the interaction effect can be assessed using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC; Kline, 2011), where smaller values indicate a better fitting model. A comparison of the two models showed that the interaction effect resulted in reductions in the AIC and BIC ( $\Delta\text{AIC} = 8.311$  and  $\Delta\text{BIC} = 4.324$ ; Table 3). According to Raftery (1995), a  $\Delta\text{BIC}$  greater than 2 represents positive evidence to prefer the model with the smaller BIC and a  $\Delta\text{BIC}$  greater than 6 represents strong evidence. Thus, the AIC and BIC suggest that model containing the interaction may be preferred over the main effects model.

In Study 2, then, I found that it is not necessarily individuals' appraisals of incivility experiences that impact employees' use of constructive voice, but rather it may be low perceptions of psychological safety following incivility experiences that serve as a barrier to employee's constructive voice. This finding is particularly notable given that previous research has not considered incivility as an antecedent to psychological safety or constructive voice. Further, Study 2 replicated many of the results from Study 1, providing additional support for the conclusion that incivility may serve as a barrier, and perhaps even sometimes a facilitator, to constructive voice at work. The results also revealed that employees who utilize constructive voice may be more likely to be engaged when their supervisor also acknowledges and values their voice; however, this effect was small. More research is likely necessary to assess the meaningfulness of the interaction for employee engagement.

### **Supplemental Analyses**

I also conducted a series of supplemental analyses for Study 1 and Study 2. Whereas the Study 1 supplemental analyses further examined remedial voice in addition to constructive voice, the Study 2 supplemental analyses further explored the role of social power by examining

potential demographic group differences in the proposed relationships. Across both studies, I already examined how incivility affects employees' constructive voice and engagement.

However, one may question how the proposed relationships might differ if remedial voice (e.g., "I talked with someone in a supervisory or management position") was examined

simultaneously. In a supplemental analysis, remedial voice was added to the Study 1 model.

Despite the addition of remedial voice, the substantive conclusions about constructive voice were the same. Further, the results showed that neither incivility frequency ( $\beta = .11, p > .05$ ) nor psychological safety ( $\beta = .09, p > .05$ ) was significantly related to remedial voice, and remedial voice was not significantly related to engagement ( $\beta = .08, p > .05$ ). However, control appraisals were positively linked to remedial voice ( $\beta = .42, p < .01$ ), suggesting that it may have different antecedents than constructive voice behavior; in particular, experience-specific control may be helpful for employees who are looking to remedy incivility by speaking up about their experiences. It is important to note that this analysis may have been underpowered as only 78 participants indicated that they utilized some form of remedial voice. This is consistent with research suggesting that many employees may still be reluctant to utilize remedial voice when experiencing incivility (Cortina & Magley, 2009).

For Study 2, I conducted supplemental multi-group analyses to examine whether the proposed relationships differ across race/ethnicity, gender, or organizational tenure because some research indicates that social power may play a role in incivility experiences (e.g., Cortina, 2008) and employee voice (e.g., Howell, Harrison, Burris, & Detert, 2015). First, I tested a multi-group model comparing Caucasian respondents ( $n=278$ ) to non-Caucasian respondents ( $n=111$ ). After establishing both configural and weak measurement invariance across groups (Chen, 2007; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), equality of variance and covariance constraints were placed on the

model in order to test if multi-group modeling was warranted (Card & Little, 2006). A chi-square difference test showed that the groups did not significantly differ in their variances or covariances,  $\Delta\chi^2(28) = 32.67, p > .05$ ; thus, the results suggested collapsing across race.

A multi-group analysis was also conducted for gender ( $n_{\text{male}}=140, n_{\text{female}}=249$ ). After establishing both configural and weak measurement invariance across groups, equality of variance and covariance constraints were again placed on the model to test for gender differences. A chi-square difference test showed that the groups did not significantly differ,  $\Delta\chi^2(28) = 39.311, p > .05$ ; thus, the results also suggested collapsing across gender.

Lastly, a multi-group analysis was conducted with organizational tenure. For this comparison, I created a median split. The median split resulted in the following two groups: those with five or fewer years of experience at their current organization ( $n=203$ ) and those with greater than 5 years of experience ( $n=184$ ). After establishing both configural and weak measurement invariance across groups, equality of variance and covariance constraints were again placed on the model to test for differences across organizational tenure. A chi-square difference test showed that the groups did significantly differ,  $\Delta\chi^2(28) = 55.72, p < .05$ , indicating that one or more of the equality constraints were not tenable across groups. Next, the covariance constraints were relaxed but variance constraints were maintained. When equality of variance constraints are upheld, latent correlations can be directly compared across groups (Card & Little, 2006); otherwise, the variances first need to be standardized if they are unequal (Card & Little, 2006).

The equality of variance constraints were not supported by a chi-square difference test,  $\Delta\chi^2(21) = 43.99, p < .05$ . Thus, I utilized the approach recommended by Card and Little (2006) whereby second-order latent constructs (“phantom variables” with variances fixed at 1.0) are

created that correspond to each first-order construct with variances fixed at zero. This method provides the same fit statistics as the initial model but allows latent correlations to be compared across groups (Card & Little, 2006). Next, the Study 2 structural model was then fit to each group. Finally, a series of  $\Delta\chi^2(1)$  nested model comparisons were conducted to determine what paths significantly differed across tenure. These comparisons revealed that the tenure groups significantly differed in terms of how incivility experiences were related to engagement,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 17.8, p < .05$ . Specifically, the relationship between incivility and engagement was not significant for the group with five or less years of experience ( $\beta = -.14, p > .05$ ), but it was significant and strong for the group with more than five years of experience ( $\beta = -.60, p < .01$ ).

### **General Discussion**

Across both studies, I found support for the role of incivility as a barrier to constructive voice and engagement. Employees experiencing more frequent mistreatment were less likely to feel psychologically safe, and this had consequences for employees' use of constructive voice. Rather than risk negative interpersonal reactions to their input, employees who face frequent incivility may, instead, be less likely to provide that input in the first place. Thus, in workplace environments where incivility runs rampant, mistreatment among supervisors and colleagues may not only serve to lessen employees' feelings of safety but may also prevent proactive forms of voice that have the potential to stimulate workplace growth and productive change. However, unexpectedly, more frequent incivility was also associated with a higher likelihood of constructive voice in some instances, suggesting the relationship between incivility and constructive voice may be more complex than originally hypothesized.

In recent years, organizations have been increasingly placing value on employee voice to fill important gaps and offer suggestions for workplace improvement (e.g., Burris et al., 2008).

Employees are experts in their positions, and, thus, are likely to have unique perspectives about workplace changes that will facilitate how they interact and conduct their jobs everyday. Yet, as the current research demonstrates, we cannot assume that employees will be forthcoming with such suggestions when incivility is prevalent and serves as a barrier to proactive communication. Beyond the decision to voice remedially, the current research showed that the decision to voice constructively about topics that organizations rely on to bring about improvement may also be affected by incivility experiences.

Across the two studies, support was found for the role of psychological safety in contributing to this barrier, but not for cognitive appraisals. As incivility became more frequent, employees were more likely to perceive their experiences as a threat or a hindrance but not a challenge in Study 2; however, these appraisals were not related to the use of constructive voice. Thus, these findings suggest that the relationship between incivility and constructive voice has less to do with individual differences and more to do with employees' perceptions of the social environment. It is not necessarily how individual employees interpret their incivility experiences that matter, but rather incivility's impact on a relational factor like psychological safety that has implications for whether or not employees are willing to utilize constructive voice.

Overall, this research contributes to both the incivility and employee voice literatures by examining how incivility may serve as a barrier to proactive communication. In particular, no previous research has examined the possibility of a relationship between incivility and constructive voice. Further, there is currently a lack of research examining incivility's effects on psychological safety and engagement in the workplace. Thus, to my knowledge, this two-part study is the first to fill these research gaps. Previous research has primarily focused on the importance of psychological safety as a proximal antecedent to employee voice (e.g., Detert &

Burris, 2007). Although the findings of the current research are consistent with the importance of this link, my research further suggests that the role of interpersonal mistreatment may also need to be considered to fully understand when employees will choose to speak up. In particular, one reason why employees may no longer feel safe contributing their input is that they are experiencing interpersonal mistreatment. Thus, future research may want to account for the role of interpersonal relationships and mistreatment when examining constructive voice to understand what impacts psychological safety in the first place. Notably, a workgroup climate investigation could be beneficial to better understand how experiences shape perceptions of psychological safety. For example, are employees working in more civil climates more likely to feel psychologically safe and, in turn, voice constructively than those who are not?

This research also contributes to our understanding surrounding employees' appraisals of incivility. Only a few previous studies have examined how individuals appraise incivility (Bunk & Magley, 2013; Cortina & Magley, 2009; Marchiondo, 2013). The current research expanded on these studies by examining how incivility may be appraised in a variety of other ways. Notably in Study 2, frequent incivility was more likely to be appraised negatively, in line with previous research; frequent incivility was appraised as a hindrance to accomplishing goals or a threat to personal well-being as opposed to a learning experience or challenge to be overcome. Further, these appraisals were not predictive of employees' constructive voice<sup>3</sup>. This may be a good thing given that perceptions of psychological safety may be more amenable to change than individuals' appraisals of experiences.

The findings of the current research suggest that by reducing incivility in the workplace, psychological safety may potentially be strengthened. Thus, reducing incivility experiences may

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<sup>3</sup> A supplemental Study 2 analysis also showed that challenge, hindrance, and threat appraisals were not significantly related to engagement ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $\beta = -.01$ ,  $\beta = .02$ ,  $p$ 's > .05, respectively).

be a good starting point in stimulating an open environment for employee input. Specifically, civility training might be a fruitful avenue for organizational intervention. Recent research suggests that civility may bring a variety of benefits to employees (Porath, Gerbasi, & Schoch, 2015). In fact, employees who are perceived as civil are more likely to be seen as leaders, to be sought out for work advice, and to be better performers (Porath et al., 2015). If civility is related to more advice seeking, then civility may also contribute to more open, honest communication. Further, if incivility can serve as a barrier to constructive voice, then perhaps civility can serve as a positive facilitator of employees' improvement-oriented suggestions. Therefore, organizations may be able to better harness employee suggestions by first promoting civility in the workplace; a more civil workplace may build the psychological safety necessary for employees to then feel comfortable making those suggestions. Future research should explore these possibilities.

Further, the current research has implications for more recent efforts to increase employee voice. Organizations like IBM have recently introduced the advantages of employee listening programs, which poll and solicit input from employees (Feinzig et al., 2015). These programs are geared toward providing new and innovative ways to harness employee suggestions and to ultimately foster employee engagement (Feinzig et al., 2015). Yet, the current research suggests that additional research may be needed surrounding social and relational factors that may contribute to the success of employee listening programs. Specifically, workplace incivility may be a factor that needs to be considered before implementing such programs. Although more research is needed to probe these possibilities, the current research suggests that employee listening programs could potentially be hindered from succeeding in settings where incivility is frequent. In particular, organizations may need to be more aware that incivility's impact may extend to constructive voice, stifling suggestions and improvement.

Thus, this research provides practical implications in regards to constructive voice and employee engagement. As emphasized earlier, both voice and engagement have become hot topics valued by researchers and practitioners alike. Organizational interest in these topics is no surprise given that employees who voice are more productive, perform better, and are more engaged (Colquitt et al., 2001; Ng & Feldman, 2012). In turn, employees who are more engaged are more committed to the organization and are less likely to turnover (Halbesleben, 2010). Considering incivility as a barrier to constructive communication, then, can add to the discussion surrounding what inhibits versus facilitates these valued employee resources. Further, although the interaction was small, the results suggest that having a supervisor who listens to their subordinates' input may encourage more engagement among employees. Supervisory openness to voice may potentially set the stage from which employees derive cues about how constructive voice is valued within the organization. Overall, the results of the current research suggest that organizations looking to benefit from employee suggestions for improvement and employee engagement may look toward reducing incivility and promoting a more civil, respectful, and safe environment as pathways to stimulate employee involvement.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

As is always the case, the current research has various strengths and limitations. One particular strength of the current research is that it replicated and extended the hypothesized relationships across two distinct samples. In Study 1, the proposed relationships were examined utilizing a sample of healthcare employees from a single organization. Historically, healthcare professionals have been pegged as a population that is particularly vulnerable to interpersonal mistreatment (e.g., Rowe & Sherlock, 2005). Further, some healthcare professionals have noted that voice tends to be a high risk, low reward act within healthcare culture (e.g., Attree, 2007;

Podsakoff, 2016). Strengthening the findings of Study 1, Study 2 extended the generalizability of the findings by replicating the proposed relationships between incivility, voice, and engagement in a more diverse sample of occupations.

Another strength of the current research is that it examined various forms of cognitive appraisals to get at their role in the relationship between incivility experiences and constructive voice. Previous research has shown that stressors can be appraised in a variety of ways and that these appraisals may be related to different outcomes (Webster et al., 2011). Yet, only limited research has explicitly examined the different ways in which incivility might be appraised (e.g., Marchiondo, 2013). The current research addressed this gap by testing how incivility might be appraised as a challenge, a hindrance, or a threat and the implications of these appraisals for constructive voice. After accounting for these different forms of cognitive appraisal, however, I still found that they did not significantly predict constructive voice behavior. These findings strengthen the conclusion that incivility appraisals may be less important than psychological safety for constructive voice. Thus, the impact of incivility on social and relational factors might play the greatest role in influencing constructive voice.

Lastly, I was also able to provide additional support for the proposed relationships by showing that the substantive conclusions did not change after remedial voice was added to the Study 1 model. Although previous research has suggested that employees experiencing incivility may be reluctant to utilize remedial voice to cope (e.g., Cortina & Magley, 2009), no research has examined how incivility might affect other forms of voice. Thus, the current study was the first to examine how incivility might impact employee-generated suggestions for improvement. That the proposed relationships between incivility and constructive voice were upheld, even after accounting for remedial voice, strengthens the conclusion that incivility has potential

consequences for prosocial forms of voice in addition to self-protective forms of voice.

However, the current research also had limitations. First, the most notable limitation stems from the cross-sectional nature of both studies, limiting the ability to make causal claims about the directionality of the proposed relationships. Thus, future research could strengthen these findings by examining how incivility affects constructive voice and engagement over time. A social network analysis examining the distribution and sources of incivility could also be informative in determining how constructive voice is impacted. Another limitation is that the data was collected from a single source using self-report, raising concerns around common method variance (CMV). Regardless, self-reported perceptions were the most appropriate way to measure the constructs under study given their subjective nature. However, some scholars have discussed what source should provide ratings of employee voice behavior (e.g., Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Although supervisor and self-reported ratings are positively correlated, previous research has found that employees and supervisors do not always agree with the amount of voice an employee is demonstrating (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). In fact, some research suggests that examining both supervisor- and self-rated voice may be necessary to get a complete picture of how exactly employee voice affects outcomes (Burriss, Detert, & Romney, 2013).

First and foremost, however, rating source choices should be based on theory (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Thus, self-reported voice was particularly important for the current research because the goal was to explore whether employees' incivility experiences are related to their choice to voice constructively and its consequences for their engagement. Because supervisors may not recognize the amount of voice an employee perceives he or she is exhibiting (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), it was important to focus on self-reported ratings of voice. However, future research might benefit from examining both supervisor-rated and self-rated voice to get a more

detailed picture of how incivility may impact constructive voice and engagement. For example, how might the relationship between incivility and constructive voice be impacted if the supervisor rating the employee's voice behavior is also the source of the incivility? Further, how might supervisor-rated voice interact with employee perceptions of supervisor openness to predict engagement?

Future research examining how incivility impacts multiple forms of employee voice would also be useful. The current research focused specifically on constructive voice, examining how interpersonal mistreatment might dissuade employees from making more general suggestions for improvement or proposing solutions to workplace problems. However, there is likely benefit in examining constructive voice simultaneously with other forms of voice to determine the unique effects incivility may have on each type. The current research revealed that psychological safety played an important role in discouraging constructive voice, but appraisals did not. In contrast, a supplemental analysis showed that remedial voice was affected by these individual appraisals of experiences but not by psychological safety. Future research could benefit from continuing to test such distinctions to determine where constructive voice and other types of voice diverge. For example, in addition to constructive voice, Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) proposed three other forms of voice behavior: supportive voice, defensive voice, and destructive voice. It would be interesting to determine whether incivility might hinder or facilitate these other forms of voice. If incivility affects self-protective (e.g., remedial) and constructive forms of voice, does incivility affect more deviant forms of voice as well?

This research also contributes to the incivility and voice literatures by opening up future avenues for research. In particular, the current research revealed that the relationship between incivility and constructive voice might be especially complex, such that incivility may duly serve

to both prohibit and stimulate constructive voice. Consistent with the findings of Ng and Feldman (2012), the current research aligns, in part, with the idea that stressed employees may be motivated to reduce their voice behavior to conserve scarce resources. However, although incivility might serve as a potential barrier to constructive voice through perceptions of psychological safety, more frequent incivility was also positively related to use of constructive voice. This positive direct effect was supported in both samples. However, the addition of an expanded set of cognitive appraisals in Study 2 was not sufficient to explain this effect.

Thus, future research may be able to further explore this positive relationship in a variety of ways. Drawing from Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty framework, which frames voice as a means to change dissatisfaction by bringing about improvement, this positive direct effect may potentially stem from employees' attempts to propose solutions to workplace problems. In other words, employees may be more likely to speak up with improvements when they see that things are not working particularly well, especially when they feel safe making such suggestions. Therefore, it may be useful to get more detailed qualitative information about what topics employees are constructively speaking up about and why to better understand incivility's complex relationship with constructive voice.

As noted above, Ng and Feldman (2012) found more support for the idea that employees under stress may be motivated to reduce voice to conserve resources rather than for the idea that employees are motivated to use voice to acquire resources. However, this meta-analysis did not make a distinction beyond examining "positive" forms of voice. Perhaps, then, the positive direct effect between incivility and constructive voice in the current study could also suggest the need for a more fine-grained analysis of voice where incivility is concerned. Specifically, it may be the case that the relationship between incivility and voice depends on the type of voice being

used. For example, constructive voice is prosocial and other-oriented (Morrison, 2014). Thus, it may be the case that employees experiencing incivility utilize constructive voice as a means to gain resources to provide a solution to the problem.

Lastly, the current research only examined personal experiences of incivility. However, some research has shown that victims of interpersonal mistreatment may not be the only ones to face the consequences of incivility; witnesses to uncivil behavior are affected as well (e.g., Porath & Erez, 2009). In fact in one study, those who were witnesses to incivility demonstrated poorer performance on a task and were less likely to engage in citizenship behaviors (Porath & Erez, 2009). Thus, it may not only be an employee's own experiences that act as a barrier; rather, employees who witness uncivil experiences at work may also potentially be less willing to utilize constructive voice. For example, witnessing incivility may harm an employee's psychological safety because employees have seen and remember the experiences of their colleagues; thus, they may not want to disrupt the status quo out of fear of being the next victim. In other words, employees may use witnessed incivility experiences as a means of determining or approximating how their voice behavior might be received. Research on witnessed versus experienced incivility and their relationship with voice would be useful in this regard.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, this two-study examination provides initial evidence that incivility may affect how employees choose to communicate and voice at work. The findings supported the overarching hypothesis that incivility may serve as a communication barrier inhibiting the use of constructive employee voice through psychological safety and that this relationship ultimately has consequences for employee engagement. However, these findings also raise additional questions and fruitful avenues for future research by revealing that incivility may serve to

encourage constructive voice behavior in some instances as well. Notably, because no previous research has examined the potential for a relationship between incivility and constructive voice, these initial results offer a novel contribution to the mistreatment and voice literatures that will hopefully stimulate further merging of these literatures in the future.

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## Tables

Table 1  
*Inter-Construct Correlations, Internal Consistency Estimates, and Descriptive Statistics for Study 1 Sample*

Variables ( $n = 188$ )	$M$	$SD$	1	2	3	4	5
1. Incivility experiences	1.88	1.00	.95				
2. Psychological safety	4.53	1.57	-.62**	.89			
3. Cognitive appraisal	2.99	.88	-.003	.22*	.65		
4. Constructive voice	4.89	1.40	.13	.19*	.41**	.98	
5. Engagement	5.24	1.40	-.09	.11*	.09*	.21**	.90

*Note.* Cronbach alpha internal consistency reliability estimates are presented along the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

Table 2  
*Inter-Construct Correlations, Internal Consistency Estimates, and Descriptive Statistics for Study 2 Sample*

Variables ( $n = 398$ )	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Incivility experiences	1.47	.65	.94							
2. Psychological safety	5.18	.99	-.54**	.77						
3. Challenge appraisal	3.04	1.00	-.04	.07	.91					
4. Hindrance appraisal	2.63	.96	.45**	-.35**	-.03	.88				
5. Threat appraisal	3.30	.93	.40**	-.28**	-.05	.69**	.84			
6. Constructive voice	5.31	1.26	.09	.24**	.12	-.04	.04	.94		
7. Engagement	4.17	.56	-.32**	.35**	.10	-.19**	-.13	.27**	.78	
8. Supervisor openness to voice	3.69	.75	-.45**	.50**	.10	-.20**	-.20**	.31**	.36**	.87

*Note.* Cronbach alpha internal consistency reliability estimates are presented along the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

Table 3

*Study 2 Relative Model Fit Comparison For Main Effects Versus Interaction Model*

Model	<i>df</i>	AIC	BIC
Main effects model	239	16838.043	17176.891
Interaction model	238	16829.732	17172.567

*Note.* AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion

Figures

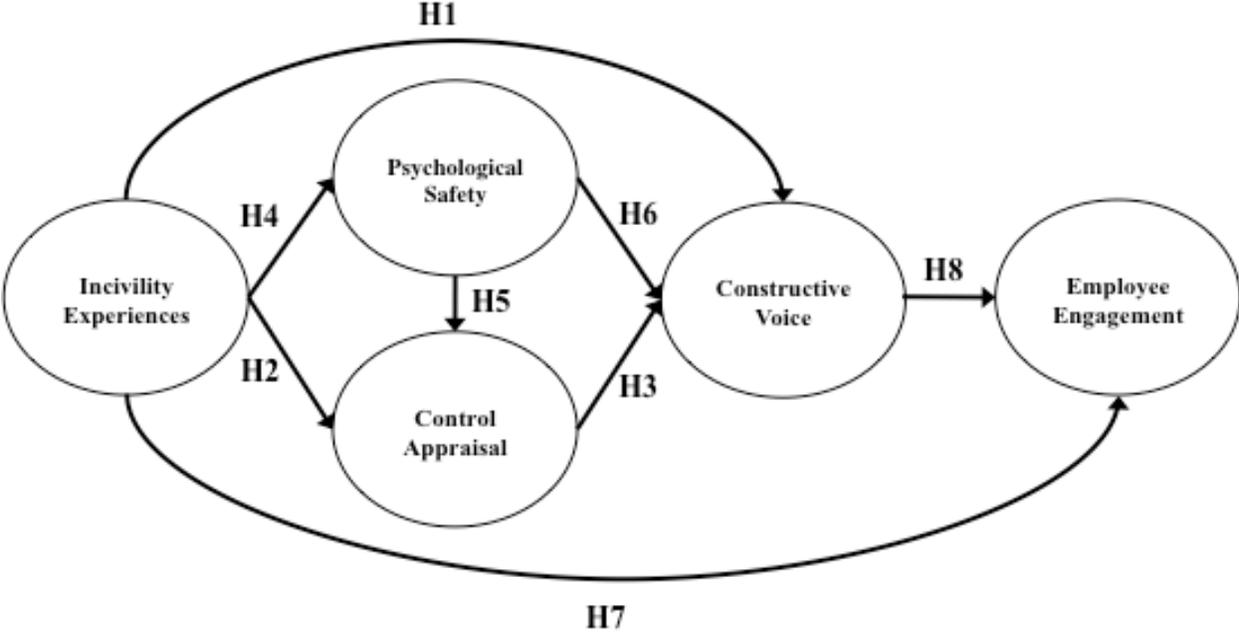


Figure 1. Full conceptual model for Study 1.

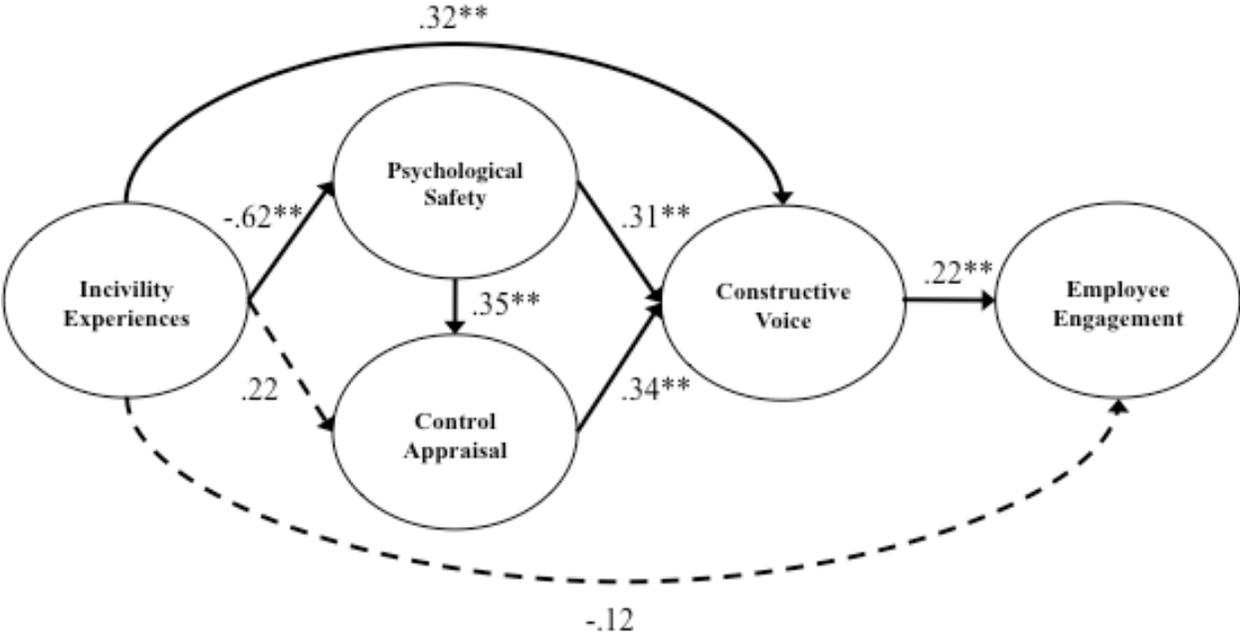


Figure 2. Standardized coefficients for Study 1 hypothesized model. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

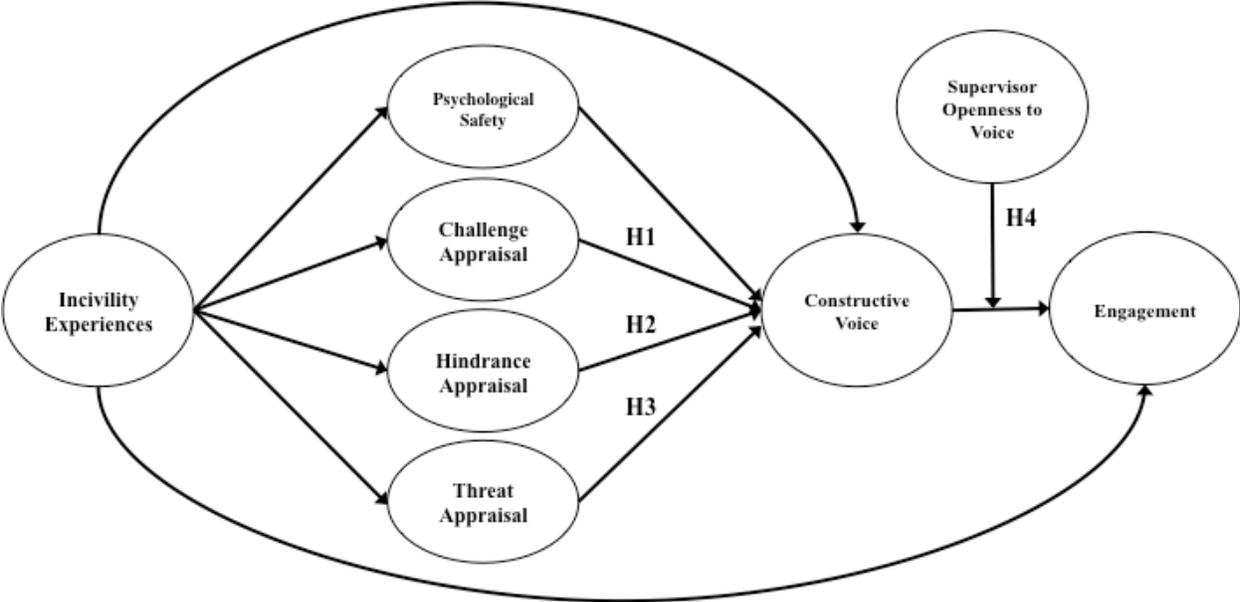


Figure 3. Full conceptual model for Study 2.

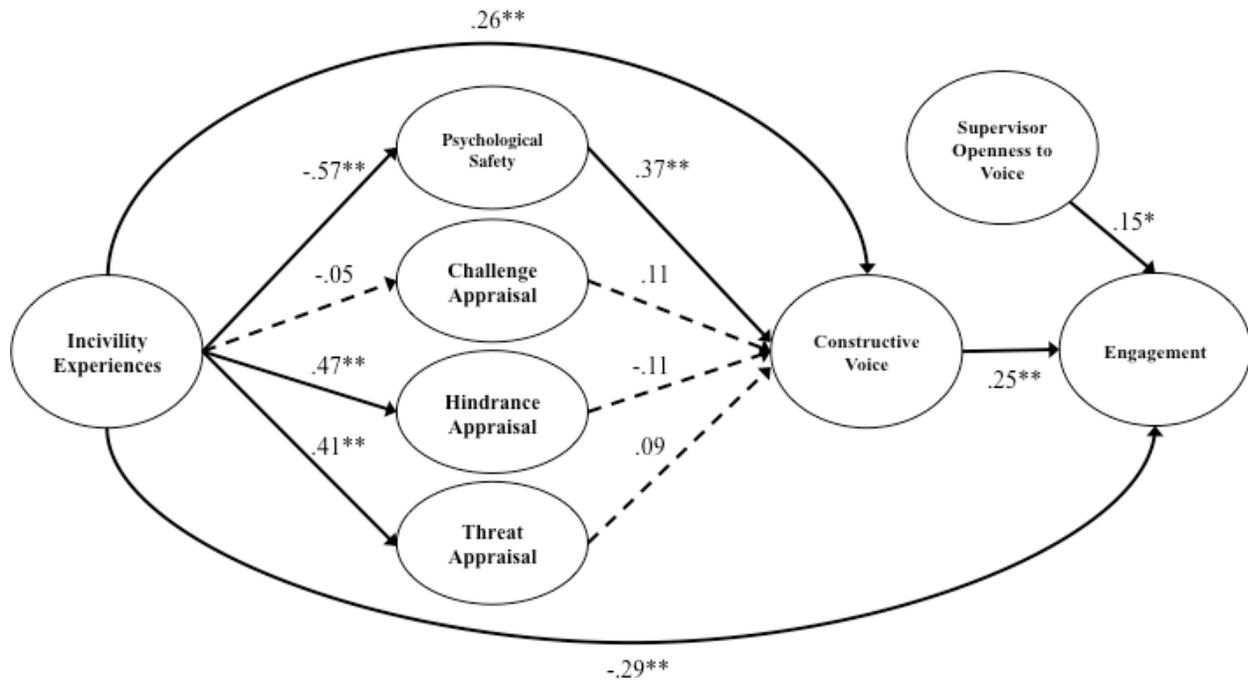


Figure 4. Standardized coefficients for Study 2 hypothesized model, excluding the interaction effect.  $*p < .05$ .  $**p < .01$

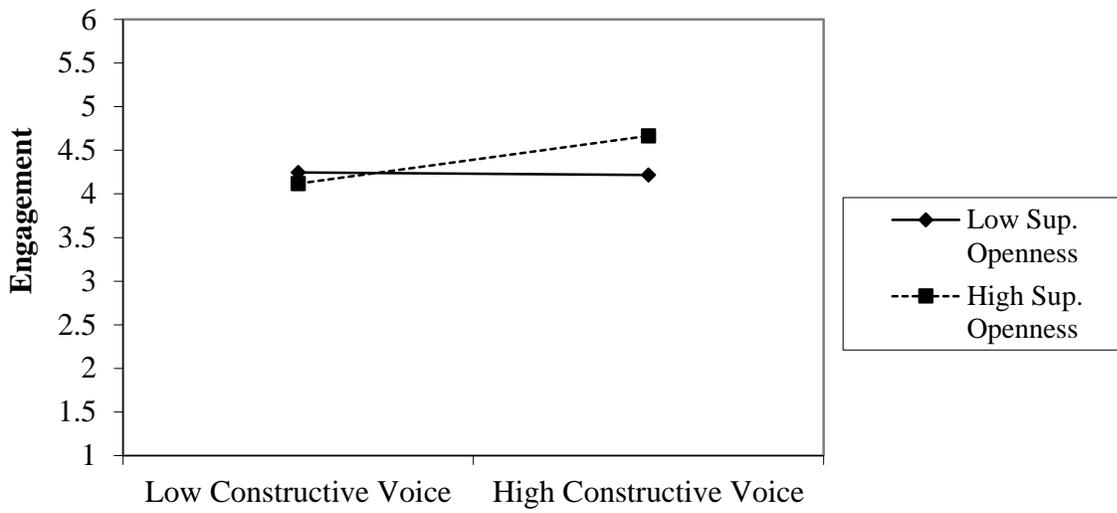


Figure 5. Interaction of constructive voice and supervisor openness to voice on engagement