

Workplace Incivility as Symbolic Violence: Towards a Symbolic Reproduction Framework of Gendered Organizational Power

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Abstract

The negative impacts that incivility in the workplace can have on employee health and wellness, organizational climate and the effectiveness of the organization have made it a major topic of organizational research. Although there are many studies on the behaviour involved, the causes of, and outcomes of workplace incivility, the literature has tended to focus on the interpersonal and organizational behaviour aspects and aspects of workplace incivility have been little explored in terms of organizational power and the reproduction of gender inequality. In this regard, the present paper attempts to fill this theoretical void by repurposing the definition of workplace incivility in relation to the concepts of symbolic violence and feminist organizational theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu and feminist organizational theory. The literature has been reviewed using an integrative form of literature review that brings together the findings of literatures in organizational behaviour, sociology and gender studies to provide a conceptual framework of workplace incivility from a gender perspective. It contends that workplace incivility is a “micro-level act of symbolic domination” in a gendered organizational context rather than simply an instance of discourteous interpersonal interactions. The paper builds on this theoretical synthesis and proposes the Symbolic Reproduction Framework (SRF), which helps explain how gendered organizational structures, organizational doxa, symbolic violence, workplace incivility, and process of misrecognition interact and facilitate the reproduction of organizational inequalities. The framework builds on the discussion about incivility in the workplace, while also introducing the following dimensions: Focus on organizational processes in which authority, recognition, and legitimacy are symbolically negotiated and reproduced. The paper proposes a new conceptualisation of the political aspects of day-to-day organizational relationships combining insights from incivility research, feminist organizational theory, and Bourdieu's sociology of symbolic power. The concluding section of the study explores the implications for theory, organization, and policy, and suggests avenues for future empirical research on symbolic violence and workplace inequality in various organizational settings.

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1. Introduction

In the last 30 years, organisations around the world have become more focused on developing gender equality policies and strategies, diversity policies and initiatives, and strategies to include people with disabilities in the workplace, all aimed at building respectful and equitable working places. Decent work and gender equality are underpinned by the elimination of violence, harassment and discrimination in the world of work, which has been consistently emphasized by international organizations, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Women (UN Women). In spite of these institutional and legal developments, women still experience workplace mistreatment in subtle and persistent ways that are frequently unacknowledged, unreported, and “normalized” in the culture of the workplace.

These subtle actions can include the act of dismissive communication, not inviting others to informal networks, repeated interruptions during meetings, denying information, questioning professional competence, not recognizing contributions, and more. These common actions also mirror the definitions of gender microaggressions from the literature, which are defined as subtle, unintentional, implicit verbal and nonverbal behaviors that communicate exclusion, diminishing professional credibility, and perpetuating gender inequalities in organizational contexts (Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014). These behaviours, taken individually, may seem harmless but they can all combine to have a negative impact on employees' psychological health, professional identity, organizational commitment and career development. Recent scholarship has continued to reveal that women are more likely to experience incivility at work than men in a variety of organizational settings, making incivility an important impediment to gender equity and employee retention.

Following the groundbreaking research of Andersson and Pearson (1999), who defined workplace incivility as low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target that violates workplace norms for mutual respect, the topic has received a considerable amount of scholarly attention. They were able to differentiate workplace incivility from more overt workplace aggression because they focused on the subtle nature of incivility and the ambiguity of incivil intentions. More significantly, they suggested the idea of the incivility spiral, which they claimed could be a gradual occurrence that unfolds over time leading to increasingly negative organizational interactions (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Later studies greatly extended this area of enquiry by looking at the causes, effects and organizational costs of workplace incivility. Empirical studies have linked feelings of emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, decreased job satisfaction, decreased organizational commitment, lost productivity, absenteeism and increased intentions to quit to workplace incivility (Cortina et al., 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016). In addition to the organizational implications, researchers have begun to understand that incivility in the workplace is not the same for all employees. Among the marginalized workers, women, racial minorities, and others, there is also evidence of subtle forms of disrespect, indicating that workplace incivility often reflects broader social inequalities. A key concept is that of selective incivility by Cortina (2008) that suggests that acts of disrespect that seem neutral in themselves are often forms of contemporary gender and racial discrimination, targeting groups that have traditionally been marginalised and sufficiently ambiguous to escape formal punishment.

The literature on incivility in the workplace has grown significantly in the last 20 years, but generally the predominant focus has been in the area of organizational behaviour and industrial psychology. Most of the existing scholarship focuses on the individual, interpersonal, stressful work environment, leadership style, or organizational climate explanations of workplace incivility. Reflections on the history of the study of workplace incivility also indicate that although there has been significant progress in documenting the antecedents and consequences of incivility, more theoretical integration is needed to fully understand the persistence of this subtle mistreatment in today's organizations (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Magley & Nelson, 2017).

These views have led to some useful reflections on why and what effect uncivil behaviour has. But they tend to think of incivility at work in terms of the one-off cropping up of bad behavior between colleagues instead of a socially produced phenomenon that is the means by which organizational power relations are upheld and reproduced.

This restriction holds true especially when workplace incivility is viewed through a gender lens. Feminist organisational scholars have long maintained that organizations are not gender neutral but are created by norms, practices and power relations that are historically rooted and support masculine norms and ideals of authority, professionalism and leadership. Joan Acker (1990) in her important theory of gendered organizations, showed that gender inequalities are routinely embedded in the activities of organizations, its hierarchy and its assumptions. Thus, seemingly normal working day-to-day interactions must be analyzed in the context of the gendered structures that they are part of.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence holds a complementary theoretical view. The symbolic violence, unlike physical or direct domination, is not violent – it is subtle and is enacted through everyday practices which become natural, legitimate and unquestioned social practices. (Bourdieu, 1977; 1991). It operates in language, cultural norms, institutional practices, and in the day-to-day interactions between people, and results in unequal power relations being taken for granted as a natural social condition for both dominant and subordinate groups. In this sense, symbolic violence is an analytical tool of particular interest if we want to comprehend the persistence of workplace incivility despite the existence of formal policies that commit to equality and diversity, as well as to organizational justice.

Although the three fields of incivility research, feminist organizational theory, and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence seem to be conceptually compatible, an integrated framework has seldom been put together. Existing research has either focused on incivility in the workplace as an organizational behaviour concern, or on the issue of gender inequality from a more holistic feminist perspective, but not both issues treated as workplace incivility as a vehicle for enacting and normalizing symbolic domination. This theoretical division has hampered academic knowledge about the political implications of everyday organizational dynamics.

In this context, the present paper proposes to consider gendered workplace incivility as symbolic violence that takes place in gendered organizational structures. This study suggests that everyday interruptions, devaluations, exclusionary behavior, and subtly rude exchanges are often mechanisms of reproducing and legitimizing gendered organizational power, rather than simply discourteous interpersonal behavior. The paper combines the two theories and proposes a conceptual lens which illuminates how seemingly mundane interactions in the workplace reinforce and reproduce gender inequality.

As a method, the study uses integrative literature review as a method to synthesize the scholarly works on workplace incivility, symbolic violence, gendered organizations and organizational power. The goal of the interdisciplinary synthesis in this paper is to reinterpret an existing organizational phenomenon, as well as

to provide a theoretically informed analytical framework that will guide future empirical studies on workplace inequality, workplace culture and gender politics.

2. Methodology

An Integrative Literature Review

This paper uses an integrative literature review methodology to explore workplace incivility from a theoretical perspective of symbolic violence and feminist organizational theory. Conceptual research is well suited to an integrative review that allows for the construction of new concepts by integrating a variety of theoretical traditions and empirical results. Integrative reviews are particularly suitable for theory building according to Torraco (2005) and elaborated by Snyder (2019), in multidisciplinary fields where knowledge has been built from various academic traditions.

This study is interdisciplinary, involving research from the fields of organizational behaviour, sociology, feminist theory, management and political science. The issue of incivility in workplaces has been extensively studied in organizational behaviour, symbolic violence has largely developed in sociological theory, and feminist organizational theory has sought to study gendered organizational structures in an independent fashion. There is a lack of integration of these perspectives which offers a conceptual rationale for using an integrative review methodology.

Literature search in Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar was performed for the identification of relevant literature. The search terms used were constructed using a combination of the following key words: workplace incivility, symbolic violence, gendered organizations, feminist organizational theory, organizational power, gender politics, organizational culture, everyday sexism, microaggressions, subtle discrimination. To uncover influential publications and seminal theoretical works, further citation search in both directions was conducted.

The review was comprised of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books and foundational theoretical texts in English. Significant attention was given to seminal works that laid the conceptual groundwork for workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001), symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977, 1991), gendered organizations (Acker, 1990; Acker, 2006), and organizational power (Foucault, 1977; 1980). Current review articles and recently published empirical research was also included to reflect current discussions on gender inequality, work incivility and organizational culture.

Studies were selected and then analysed using a thematic synthesis based approach rather than a chronological approach of reviewing literature. The synthesis was guided by four broad analytical themes: (i) conceptual evolution of workplace incivility, (ii) gendered organizational structures and power relations, (iii) symbolic violence as analytic lens, and (iv) feminist re-interpretations of everyday organizational interactions. These themes were examined and critically compared to unveil conceptual convergences, limitations and gaps in existing literature.

The intent of this review is not to create a comprehensive list of previous research but rather to create a strong theoretical framework that will help to understand the subtle ways in which gendered organizational power is normalized and reproduced through incivility in the workplace. The paper provides a theoretically informed re-interpretation of workplace incivility that extends existing literature on workplace incivility beyond behavioural and psychological explanations, through combining sociological and feminist views.

3. From Behavioural Misconduct to Gendered Organizational Power: Reframing Workplace Incivility

3.1 Beyond Interpersonal Behaviour: The Evolution of Workplace Incivility Research

Over the last 20 years, the definition of workplace incivility has matured and changed. Workplace incivility is a problem of interpersonal behavior that began as a relatively minor issue and has gradually become a multifaceted organizational issue with significant implications for employee health, organizational performance and organizational culture. Despite this expanding research, much of the literature on workplace incivility remains limited to a primarily interpersonal perspective, viewing incivility as a behaviour issue. This orientation is helpful to understand what has led to the emergence of 'uncivil' behavior and what has followed it, but it provides a limited explanation of uncivil behaviour, as it fails to take into account the wider organizational or political environment in which it becomes meaningful.

The current scholarly debate around workplace incivility started with the work of Andersson and Pearson (1999) who defined low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, contrary to workplace norms of mutual respect as workplace incivility. Their conceptualisation was also a significant shift from previous research on workplace aggression in that it showed that harmful organisational interactions are not always overtly aggressive, discriminatory or violent. However, when taken in total, behaviours that may seem relatively minor like not acknowledging colleagues, interrupting conversations, ignoring them, dismissing the value of their work, saying things in a sarcastic tone or failing to acknowledge work done by colleagues can all contribute to a lack of respectful workplace relationships.

One of the most impactful contributions of Andersson and Pearson's framework was the idea that incivility in the workplace does not typically occur in isolation. The incivility spiral is a concept that describes how seemingly small incidents of rudeness can lead to escalating counteractions, which can worsen interpersonal interactions and relationships within the organization. This insight was a turning point in the focus of scholarly research from singular incidence of behaving uncivilly to the repeated impact of all the uncivil interactions that occur in the life of an organization. Later studies have confirmed this hypothesis, with findings suggesting that low intensity forms of uncivil behaviors can have significant psychological and organizational impact when they are repeated over time (Pearson & Porath, 2005; Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016).

This basic research led organizational scholars to examine the causes and consequences of workplace incivility. Previous studies have found many organizational factors linked to uncivil behaviour such as high workload, lack of clarity about roles, poor leadership, organizational change, workplace stress, and ineffective communication. On the individual level, workplace incivility has been associated with emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, anxiety, decreased job satisfaction, lower organizational commitment, lower work engagement, decreased organizational citizenship behaviour, and higher intention to leave the organization (Cortina et al., 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Schilpzand et al., 2016). These studies, in combination, have substantively proven that workplace incivility is a significant organizational problem with tangible impacts on individuals and institutions. Evidence from systematic reviews has been another source to highlight the severity of these consequences. Atashzadeh-Shoorideh et al. (2021) conducted a large-scale systematic review and meta-analysis of the studies of incivility in the healthcare sector, with consistent findings that incivility in the workplace had a consistent relationship with burnout, psychological distress, decreased job satisfaction, and decreased organizational commitment. The review was completed in nursing environments, but the review's results reflect the

critical importance of repeated and commonplace incivilities in the workplace and the importance of the impacts of incivilities on employee health and organizational functioning.

This literature has contributed greatly, but for the most part the analytical approach is still within the framework of organizational behaviour and industrial psychology. Workplace incivility is often seen as a symptom of a stressful working environment, poor management, personality traits, and/or poor interpersonal relationships. As a result, the majority of the research has been to identify the behavioural precursors, quantify individual experiences and provide organizational interventions to improve civility in the workplace. While these kinds of strategies will certainly help to understand the mechanisms by which workplace incivility can take place they are less likely to explain why some workplace interactions consistently occur in gendered patterns or why subtle or implicit forms of disrespect persist even when organizations are committed to equality and diversity.

This same behavioural perspective also leads to an implicit view of incivility in the workplace as an interpersonal issue and the importance of incivility as a behaviour. But organizational relations are never "social neutral. All workplaces are embedded in larger institutional contexts that allocate authority and legitimacy and status to people in unequal ways. As a result, what may appear at first to be routine disrespects are not just to be interpreted as the deliberate actions of the individual perpetrators. Instead, they have social relevance in the context in which they manifest, and in the power structures they embody and strengthen. It is not just a matter of an individual who has been rude, it is a systematic and continual process of excluding women from informal decision making networks, systematically asking questions about the legitimacy of women's knowledge, and questioning women's competence in their work that will affect whose knowledge is recognized and whose authority is accepted and valued during organizational life.

This observation highlights a key theoretical constraint in current research on incivility in the workplace. While the literature has made clear that uncivil behavior has a detrimental psychological and organizational impact, it has offered relatively little insight into the structural processes that help sustain the organization's inequalities. Existing understandings of workplace incivility have tended to focus mainly on its behavioural aspects, rendering it as an organizational problem rather than one that could be part of a wider system of institutional power. Thus, the political aspects of ordinary organization interactions have been underdeveloped.

Therefore from the point of view taken in this study, workplace incivility has to be seen as a socialized organizational behavior and practice whose meaning and consequences are dependent upon the distribution of power, authority and recognition within the organization. Norms that are historically formed provide a definition of what constitutes proper leadership, professionalism, communication patterns, etc., and thus influence organizational interactions. These norms affect both the actual definition of workplace incivility and its interpretation, acceptance, and/or normalization within organizational contexts. Therefore, a deeper, more critical look at the organizational structure in which incivil interactions emerge is needed to understand what is going on in the workplace.

This change does not replace behavioural research, but rather builds on it with a new theoretical question. Rather than considering only what workplace incivility is, and what effects it has, the present paper considers what workplace incivility does within gendered organizational structures.

Specifically, it asks whether everyday uncivil interactions may function as subtle mechanisms through which organizational hierarchies are maintained, professional legitimacy is distributed, and unequal gender relations are reproduced. Addressing this question requires moving beyond behavioural models of

workplace incivility toward analytical frameworks capable of explaining the relationship between everyday organizational interactions and institutional power.

It is precisely this transition that prepares the ground for the next stage of the discussion. Before workplace incivility can be reinterpreted through the concept of symbolic violence, it is first necessary to examine emerging scholarship that recognizes workplace incivility as a gendered organizational phenomenon rather than merely an interpersonal behavioural issue. The development of the concept of selective incivility represents an important turning point in this regard, as it begins to reveal the subtle relationship between everyday organizational interactions and enduring structures of gender inequality.

3.2 Selective Incivility and the Gendered Politics of Organizational Interaction

The behavioural approach has been the dominant approach in the study of workplace incivility has clearly helped to clarify the nature, antecedents and impact of uncivil behaviour in workplaces. Since the development of organizational studies scholarship has slowly grown, however, an important question has arisen: Do workplace incivilities occur randomly among organizational members, or are they systematically determined by the current relations of power and inequality? When researchers started to consider the question of why incivility happens, it became a major shift in research on workplace incivility to discuss the social and organizational environment in which uncivil interactions take place.

The research of Cortina et al. (2001) and Cortina (2008) best illustrates this change as both authors challenged the notion that incivility in the workplace is a neutral interpersonal interaction. Based on evidence from several different workplaces, Cortina stated that workplace incivility often occurs in the form of “selective incivility,” meaning that behaviours that seem to be impartial towards everyone are actually disproportionately applied to members of historically marginalised social groups, especially women and racial minorities. Selective incivility is not openly discriminatory, but rather is conveyed in subtle, ambiguous, and often socially acceptable ways that are not explicitly prohibited by explicit organizational rules and policies but nonetheless evoke feelings and messages of exclusion, disrespect and lowered professional value.

Selective incivility is important not just for the purpose of uncovering differential experiences of workplace disrespect, but as a way to show the nature of discrimination in the modern workplace. The legislative protections and organizational policies that have steadily been put in place have prevented more explicit displays of prejudice, but that does not mean that discriminatory practices have not become more subtle, indirect, and hard to detect. As a result, gender inequities are often reinforced by “small” interactions in everyday life of the organisations, which convey together the message of whose voice is listened to, whose authority is respected and whose organisational presence is legitimate.

These encounters can also be reoccurring interruptions in meetings, exclusion from informal knowledge networks, unequal access to mentoring, outright rejection of professional work, withholding of information, or a general lack of trust in professional abilities in professional circles. None of these behaviours may be legally defined as discrimination or harassment, but they collectively have an impact on participation, professional confidence and career progression within an organisation. Perhaps more significantly, they are vague and can often be read as a normal part of the workday, as opposed to a reflection of structural inequality.

This ambiguity is analytically important from a feminist standpoint, as it illuminates the inadequacy of solely considering organizational inequality as a result of explicit discriminatory behaviours. Feminist organizational scholarship has always maintained that gender inequality exists not just formally in institutional structures but also as a result of everyday organizational practices that shape acceptable

behaviour, authority, professionalism, and leadership (Acker, 1990; Acker, 2006). Organizational norms are thus not neutral nor widely felt. Instead, they are assumptions about gender, authority and competence historically shaped and that shape organizational decision-making processes and interactions in everyday life.

Therefore, workplace incivility is not fully understood without consideration of these larger organizational contexts. It's not simply an annoyance to people when a woman gets interrupted and excluded from informal organizational networks while speaking at work; when her ideas are consistently credited to men, it's a serious issue. These practices engage in the everyday production of organizational inequality by managing recognition, participation, credibility, and professional legitimacy to a greater or less degree, in a subtle way. The political significance of workplace incivility, then, is that it is a factor in deciding who is listened to, who is recognized, and who has permission to have an impact on organizational life.

The key conceptual difference is at this moment. Although there is some work on selective incivility that shows that it is often gendered, more work is needed to explain how these types of interactions have a long-lasting impact in the organization. Selective incivility, in other words, recognizes patterns of unequal treatment, but does not theory social mechanisms in detail that may help to normalize, reproduce, and normalize these patterns as routine organizational practice. Therefore, the idea, although a good idea has brought together workplace incivility with the current ideas of discrimination, it is not enough to explain why it is present even in organizations that claim to be proponents of equality, diversity and inclusion.

This constraint implies that workplace incivility needs to be studied from a perspective beyond a behaviour and/or a discriminatory pattern to a perspective of workplace relations of power as a political process. These interactions within organisations are never just about individuals, they are also about the process of negotiating and reproducing institutional authority, legitimacy and recognition. Thus, workplace incivility becomes significant not just because of the behavior itself, but because of the organizational meanings that are associated with that behavior, and because of the unequal power dynamics in which that behavior takes place. No prejudice by the individual nor organizational dysfunction can, then, account for the persistence of gendered workplace incivility. Rather, it represents broader institutional dynamics that systematically create and perpetuate unequal organizational hierarchies, and normalise these inequalities as commonplace aspects of working practice.

It is at this juncture of theory that current workplace incivility research falters in terms of explanation. Though behavioural models can account for interpersonal misbehaviour and selective incivility is capable of accounting for differential exposures, neither is sufficient to account for how subtle forms of interaction within the organization become accepted, legitimised and reproduced without the need of overt coercion. This unanswered question provides an interesting conceptual opportunity to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, which is a complex account of how domination works through "natural, legitimate and obvious" everyday practices. While not designed to supplant the work done on incivility in the workplace to date, symbolic violence builds upon it by clarifying the hidden organizational processes that perpetuate institutional inequality in gendered relations in the workplace.

In this regard, the following section challenges the interpretation of workplace incivility as being nothing more than interpersonal misbehaviour and selective discrimination, but as symbolic violence—the exercise of power, its normalisation and its reproduction in everyday interactions in the workplace.

4. Symbolic Violence as an Analytical Lens for Understanding Gendered Workplace Incivility

The previous discussion illustrates the significant advances in the documentation of workplace incivility

and the unequal distribution of incivility among organizational members in the contemporary literature. Behavioural approaches have shed light on the nature and consequences of uncivil interactions and the concept of selective incivility has shown that uncivil interactions disproportionately affect women and other marginalised groups. However, an intriguing theoretical puzzle still remains: how do small incivilities keep happening, become “normalised” and perpetuate organisational inequalities despite the fact that equality, diversity and inclusion are the values officially promoted by organisations that formally claim to value them? This question needs to be considered beyond the behavioral approaches and a clear understanding of organizational power. This broader sense of power is also consistent with Lukes (2005) '3D' understanding of power, which focuses on the hidden and indirect ways in which power is manifested, such as through the creation of perceptions, preferences and assumptions that are taken for granted. To this extent, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence is a very useful tool for analysis.

Bourdieu's symbolic violence concept was developed to account for the ways in which forms of domination are exercised without resort to direct force or coercion, but through habits, meanings and norms embedded in daily practices which are rendered as natural and legitimate (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1991). Symbolic violence is not the same as overt violence but it works exactly because it is not overtly seen as violence. It is part of the normal social processes and the routine activities of institutions, influencing the idea of legitimacy, authority, competence and social value. People may engage in such processes without being aware of the domination and the victim may feel that the unequal treatment is an accepted social norm. The symbolic violence thus perpetuates inequality by consent, habit and institutionalisation, rather than by actual force.

Power is a central concept in Bourdieu's theory, shaping the nature of legitimate knowledge, appropriate conduct and legitimate authority within a specific social sphere. One of the industries is organizations. They create formal rules and informal norms that set the terms for who speaks who speaks, who is listened to, who has credible leadership, and who's expertise is accepted and who's contribution is recognized. The organizational standards are usually expressed objectively, as merit, or as some form of meritocracy, but they are often a reflection of historically entrenched social relations which favour certain patterns of authority and devalue others. This means that organizational inequality is also enacted in everyday interactions, which can attune and de-attune recognition and participation in an unspoken manner.

The concepts of Bourdieu of habitus, field, and doxa also shed light on the processes by which incivility to others becomes part of organizational life. Habitus is the socially acquired dispositions, how people see and act in the world; and field is the structured social arena where struggles are fought over power and legitimacy. Doxa are the very basic assumptions that are so taken for granted as to be unquestionable (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In organizational contexts, these ideas can be used to account for how behaviours like repeatedly interrupting women during meetings, ignoring their work accomplishments, excluding them from informal networks, and challenging their competence are perceived as commonplace business, rather than as forms of unequal power. These practices become part of the organization's doxa (doxa = ‘the way things are done’), and are not usually subject to critical examination due to their repetition and normalization.

Misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) is another aspect of symbolic violence, in this case the relations of domination are understood as natural, inevitable, or deserved; that is, as socially constructed rather than socially given (Bourdieu, 1991). Misrecognition does not mean ignorance, it means that the unequal social order gains legitimacy by hiding the power relations it depends on. In the context of incivility in the workplace, this idea is an intriguing explanation for why subtle gendered interactions often go unnoticed

within the organization. Regularly interrupting women in meetings, excluding them from key professional networks, communicating dismissive or demeaning messages to them, or forcing them to do most of the emotional work in a marriage-like relationship are often seen as personality differences, communication styles or interpersonal misunderstandings – they are not necessarily signs of organizational inequality. Professionalism, efficiency, merit or fit with the organization is often expressed in the language of these interactions, which hides the fact that they are structural, and this allows unequal treatment to continue without it being seen as discriminatory.

In this light, workplace incivility becomes more than just rude behavior between employees. Rude actions can at the same time be symbolic actions, that communicate whose authority is legitimate, whose knowledge is recognised, and who's participation is valued in organisational life. Exclusion from informal decision making does not only cause a lack of information, it is also a symbolic expression of the organization's marginality. Questions of professional competence, if they are sustained over time, do not just destroy individual confidence, but help to build up some of the actors in organisations as less authoritative or less credible. Similarly, when women's intellectual or professional achievements are consistently ignored, it has an impact on organizational views about expertise, leadership, and institutional legitimacy. All of these practices contribute to the symbolic order of the organisation, which is continually produced by the unequal power relations in normal interaction.

It is important to note that this interpretation does not imply that all cases of on-the-job "incivility" are cases of symbolic violence. Many manifestations of uncivil behaviour can be attributed to interpersonal conflict, personality differences, occupational stress and ineffective leadership. But, if the incivility that takes place in the workplace is routinely done in a gendered way, is entrenched in the organizational culture, and is linked to unequal distributions of recognition, authority and opportunity then it becomes symbolic violence. This separation is analytically significant as it prevents the analysis of all uncivil behaviour into structural domination but also acknowledges that institutional power relations can't be separated out of organizational interactions.

This is also a reworking of feminist organisational scholarship. Joan Acker (1990; 2006) asserted that organizations are gendered institutions, and that gender inequalities are perpetuated by the seemingly gender neutral organizational processes. Bourdieu's theory underpins this approach, offering insights into how these inequalities are normalised and reproduced through symbolic processes. Complementary to the above, these processes are indicators that incivility in the workplace is not simply an organizational issue that needs to be addressed through changing the behavioural norms, it is one of the subtle processes that help maintain gendered organizational orders. Organizational civility should not be viewed as solely interpersonal politeness, but as a matter of organizational justice, recognition and allocation of symbolic power.

The theoretical significance of this perspective lies in its capacity to reposition workplace incivility within broader debates concerning organizational politics, institutional legitimacy, and gender inequality. Instead of viewing uncivil interactions as isolated behavioural events, symbolic violence encourages scholars to examine how everyday organizational practices contribute to the reproduction of institutional hierarchies while simultaneously concealing the power relations upon which those hierarchies depend. This shift from behaviour to power represents the central conceptual contribution of the present paper and provides the theoretical foundation for the integrative framework developed in the following section.

5. Towards a Symbolic Reproduction Framework of Gendered Workplace Incivility

An important weakness of the current workplace incivility research is its focus on uncivil behaviour either as an interpersonal outcome or as a form of discrimination in today's world. While these views have made a tremendous contribution to the study of workplace mistreatment, they are largely focused on the identification of patterns of behaviour and the reporting of the organisational outcomes of such mistreatment. Less focus has been placed on the institutional mechanisms that enable continued episodes of workplace incivility, and how these episodes help to perpetuate gender inequity over time.

As previously discussed, behavioural explanations are insufficient on their own to explain the continued occurrence of gendered incivility in organisations which explicitly promote equality, diversity and inclusion. Selective incivility is an effective way to illustrate that workplace disrespect is not an even phenomenon, but only partially explains how the uneven experiences of disrespect become normalised, institutionalised and reproduced over time. To overcome this limitation, a conceptual framework is needed that can link organizational behaviour, feminist organizational theory and symbolic violence together in one analytical framework.

In this regard, the Symbolic Reproduction Framework (SRF) is suggested as a conceptual model of how this relationship between the workplace incivility and the reproduction of organizational gender inequality works. The framework defines workplace incivility as not the initiation of inequities in the organization, but one of the processes by which inequities are perpetuated. The framework does not see uncivil behaviour as simply bad interpersonal behaviour, but as part of a broader process wherein the norms, expectations for institutions, and symbolic power in the workplace interact to produce unequal distributions of authority, legitimacy and recognition.

The first part of the framework is related to gendered organizational structure. As Acker (1990; 2006) argues, organisations have been historically created institutions that reflect the gendered norms of authority, competence and professionalism within their formal structures, the informal networks that develop within them, the evaluation systems they use, and the norms of leadership that are expected. Such organizational structures have an impact on how everyday interactions take place and what kinds of behaviour are deemed legitimate, authoritative and professionally appropriate.

The second component is organizational doxa based on Bourdieu's notion of 'the social unconscious'. Doxa are institutional beliefs and cultural expectations that are taken for granted as natural aspects of institutional life, called organizational doxa. Descriptions of leadership styles, professional engagement, styles of communication, emotional expression, and career paths often seem objective, merit-based, and yet also promote specific organizational identities. The assumptions are seldom challenged and are powerful devices whereby inequality gains institutional legitimacy.

The third component arises in these organizational circumstances, namely symbolic violence. Symbolic violence works through the transduction of unequal organisational structures into commonplace encounters at work. Instead of explicit discrimination, symbolic violence is based on frequent acts of exclusion, professional devaluation, dismissive communication, unequal recognition, access to organizational resources and the routine questioning of professional competence. Importantly, these practices are effective just because they seem like a normal part of life that would not attract the attention of the organization as injustice.

Gendered workplace incivility is the fourth component of the framework and is the behavioural expression of symbolic violence in daily organizational dynamics. Disrespectful interpersonal behaviours – like repeatedly interrupting during meetings, excluding from influential work circles, not informing about

work information, dismissing professional input – are not only perceived as discourtesy but as everyday manifestations of symbolic domination. It is therefore in the aggregate of these behaviours, and not their specific nature, that they are important.

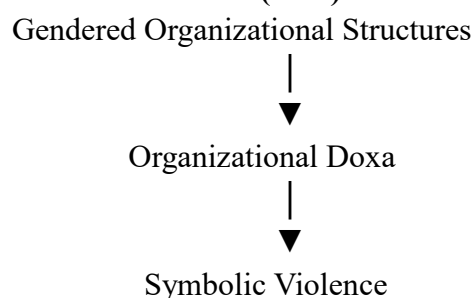
The fifth element in the framework, misrecognition and normalization, are then generated from these recurrent organizational experiences. Workplace incivility is often a situation of unclear intent, low intensity and is usually overlooked as a different form of normal conflict between colleagues instead of a sign of unequal organizational power. As a result, people who are the victims of unprofessional behavior at work might doubt their own perceptions and misunderstanding the behavior, and organizations might not be able to identify the patterns of behaviours that need to be addressed at the institutional level. Misrecognition allows symbolic violence to persist largely unperceived and to continue to influence the organization of relationships.

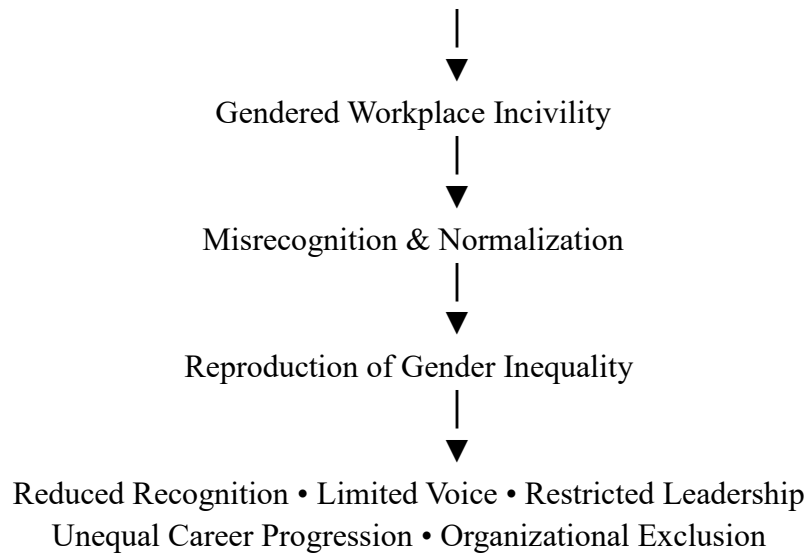
The last dimension of the framework relates to the perpetuation of gender inequality. Over time, symbolic violence and workplace incivility can impact professionals' confidence, organizational participation, access to influential networks, feelings of competence, leadership opportunities, and career progression. While the situations of incivility in the workplace might seem relatively insignificant, their impact at the organizational level is part of the reproduction process of unequal distributions of symbolic capital, institutional legitimacy and professional authority. Organizational inequality is thus created not just in the formal arrangement, but rather in the manner in which people relate to one another on a daily basis, and that continually reinforces the pre-existing relations of power.

A major contribution of the Symbolic Reproduction Framework is the shift in the focus of workplace incivility, from interpersonal behaviour to organizational politics. The framework transcends the notion of uncivil behaviour as an isolated organizational issue by highlighting how the interactions that happen in the work place contribute to the continued reproduction of institutional power relations. In so doing it creates a significant linkage between the study of workplace incivility, feminist organizational theory, and Bourdieu's sociology of symbolic power. The framework also provides a conceptual basis for potential empirical studies, outlining the organization processes in which symbolic violence can be seen, understood, and examined in different institutional contexts.

Importantly, the proposed framework should not be seen as indicating that all workplace incivilities are examples of symbolic violence. Poor organizational leadership, personality differences, interpersonal conflict, and employee stress are other potential causes of uncivil behavior. The framework proposes that systematic gendered incivility becomes symbolic violence, and that it becomes a mechanism of gendered organizational reproduction when it is taken for granted in the workplace and is a structural feature of unequal recognition and power distribution within the organization. This separation allows conceptual clarity and opens up the field of research to a more comprehensive and systemic understanding of organizational power.

Figure 1. The Symbolic Reproduction Framework (SRF)





6. Implications

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study fits the emerging body of research on workplace incivility by examining workplace incivility from a different perspective—interpersonal behaviour to organizational power. Previous research on workplace incivility has mostly focused on the behavioral aspect, which is linked to the individual, interpersonal conflict, leadership failures, and negative organizational climate (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Schilpzand et al., 2016). These views have made important contributions to the knowledge about workplace mistreatment, but have often focused on behavioural explanations rather than structural explanations. This paper proposes that the analysis of symbolic violence extends beyond the concept of an event to describe a process of power that is enacted, normalized and reproduced in day-to-day interactions in the workplace. A second theoretical contribution is the synthesis of three bodies of scholarship, which have been largely autonomous: Workplace incivility research, Feminist organizational theory, and Bourdieu's sociology of symbolic power. Previous research has identified significant relationships between experiences of incivility at work and experiences of discrimination (Cortina, 2008), in part by the notion of selective incivility. But relatively little research has focused on the symbolic processes by which these behaviours become normal in organizational contexts. The present study does so, with an interdisciplinary framework that can explain the presence of workplace incivility and its role in the reproduction of gendered organizational hierarchies. Additionally, the proposed Symbolic Reproduction Framework (SRF) builds on the existing literature by refocusing the discussion of workplace incivility on issues of organizational legitimacy, recognition, and institutional power. The framework does not just consider incivility to be a negative side effect of the organization's functioning but rather a process that is part of the ongoing reproduction of organizational inequality. The view outlined here invites future researchers to consider how authority, credibility and organizational voice are symbolically distributed in workplace interactions, in addition to looking at the frequency of the interaction in terms of behaviours or the psychological impacts. The paper also makes a feminist organizational scholarly contribution by reiterating the idea that gender inequities are not just perpetuated by explicit discrimination, but by routine organizational practices as well. As such it builds on Acker's theory of gendered organizations and expands it by the notion of symbolic violence of Bourdieu. The everyday interactions in and between organizations

are then seen as as locations of ongoing negotiation and re-construction of institutional power, not necessarily a conscious process or one that is endorsed explicitly by the organization.

6.2 Organizational and Policy Implications

This study's conceptual framework also has important policy and practice implications for the organization. Diversity programs, anti-harassment policies and inclusion programs are growing in popularity among organizations because they help to eradicate workplace discrimination. These interventions continue to be necessary but, according to the present analysis, there is little point in having formal equality policies if organisations do not consider the subtle organizational practices that feed into gender inequality. Interpersonal behaviours that are courteous should thus not be the only focus of organizational response to workplace incivility. Institutions need to carefully review the informal rules, relationships, roles, and processes that impact day-to-day working in the institution. Other behaviours like repeated interruption, exclusion from informal networks, unequal recognition of professional contribution, selective access to information and dismissive communications should not be only seen as interpersonal disagreements, but rather as signs of the organisation's culture. Leadership development programmes should also take into account that leadership is not just manifested in formal managerial decisions, but also in daily symbolism. Empirical evidence also indicates that ethical leadership has a positive impact on incivility in the workplace, particularly for women, by creating respectful workplaces and increasing employees' sense of control and fairness (Young, Hassan, & Hatmaker, 2021). A more focused attention, in turn, is needed to create truly inclusive workplaces, to the extent of recognition, participation, professional legitimacy and equal opportunity to organisational influence. Assessment of the workplace climate should involve indicators that can detect patterns of subtle exclusion, not just complaints about discrimination/harassment. From a policy standpoint, the current structure promotes the shift from the individual to the organizational aspect of workplace civility. Institutional reflection on norms, evaluation systems, informal networks, and professional cultures that can contribute to the normalisation of unequal treatment is then required in order to address workplace incivility. This practice is congruent with and supports the organization's equal opportunity, inclusion, and democratic participation policies.

6.3 Future Research

There are several lines of research to be pursued in future with the Symbolic Reproduction Framework developed in this paper. First, empirical research can investigate the degree of moderation of symbolic violence between organizational culture and workplace incivility in various occupational fields. As part of comparative research, it is worth exploring whether the mechanisms of symbols, found in this study, are similar in different educational institutions, companies, health care facilities, public administration and civil association organizations.

Secondly, future studies should focus on workplace incivility in relation to other forms of social inequality such as contractual employment, gender, disability, caste, race, ethnicity and sexuality, as well as age. These investigations would build on the existing framework by analysing the intersections between different systems of inequality in relation to organisational experiences of symbolic violence.

Lastly, a qualitative approach such as in-depth interviews, organizational ethnography and discourse analysis would be especially useful for studying the interpretative, negotiating and normalizing processes of daily life in the workplace. Such research might more precisely develop the conceptual arguments presented in this paper and add to a more sophisticated knowledge of organizational power and gender issues.

Conclusion

The negative consequences of workplace incivility on employee well-being, organization climate and institutional effectiveness has gained the attention of scholars as an important organizational phenomenon. Although it has made significant strides in the study of its behavioural traits, its antecedents and consequences, the literature on workplace incivility has tended to view it as an interpersonal or organisational behaviour issue. These views have led to important theoretical and practical understandings, but they offer partial explanations for the endurance of incivility in organizations that have a formal commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. In this paper, I have advocated for studying this paradox beyond the behavioural approach and to a deeper analysis of organizational power and gender politics.

Based on Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic violence theory and feminist organizational theory, this study has redefined workplace incivility as a subtle way in which the reproduction of and legitimization of gendered organizational power occurs. Instead of discourteous interpersonal behaviors, the paper has shown that everyday workplace interactions often serve symbolic functions that govern the recognition, professional legitimacy, organisational participation and access to authority. Rejected and regressive behaviours like frequent disruption, exclusion from informal networks, patronising tone, unequal recognition of professional work, and regular challenging of competence should be grasped as practices that are situated within wider structures of institutional power.

An important feature of this paper, and what is particular about it, is the synthesis and combination of the research on incivility at work, feminist organizational theory, and the sociology of symbolic power of Bourdieu. Although these disciplines have produced important contributions to research on organizational behaviour, gender inequality, and symbolic domination, few studies have focused on the intersections of these research areas. The aim of the paper is to make these theoretical traditions speak to one another and to enrich the existing literature on the contribution of subtle organizational practices to the maintenance and reproduction of gender inequality, by moving beyond the traditional focus on behavioural explanation. In order to help integrate this theoretically, the paper introduced the Symbolic Reproduction Framework (SRF) as a conceptual approach to the understanding of gendered workplace incivility. The framework describes how gendered organizational structures, organizational doxa, symbolic violence, incivility in the workplace, and misrecognition work together to shape unequal organizational outcomes. The focus on workplace incivility is less about the genesis of organizational inequality, and more about how it is reproduced on a daily basis by interactions in the workplace. The study brings a theoretical contribution that can inform subsequent empirical research on the relationship between the organizational culture, symbolic power and workplace inequality.

These ideas have implications for research in organisational behaviour. The study's context in the wider discussion of workplace incivility within the fields of feminist political theory, organizational sociology, and gender studies is a significant contribution. It prompts researchers to consider not only the way individuals interact with one another at work but also the political nature of these interactions by which authority, credibility and recognition are negotiated in organizations. A different lens also opens the door for organisations to think of workplace civility in terms of organisational justice instead of interpersonal etiquette, which will enhance their attempts to make workplaces truly inclusive and fair.

The present paper is subject to some limitations as is all conceptual studies. Proposed framework has been developed based on an integrative review of existing literature, and has not been tested in the field. Therefore, its propositions are theoretical and not empirical. The framework can be explored in various organizational settings, occupations and cultures with a qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods

approach in future research. Comparative analysis of the intersection between gender and caste, race/ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age and employment status may provide additional nuances to the framework and help to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of symbolic violence experienced in the modern workplace.

To conclude, this paper suggests that workplace incivility should not be limited to the definition of interpersonal or organizational problems. Rather, it needs to be understood as a subtle—but politically charged—interaction in which inequalities in the organization can be reproduced and normalized in the daily life of the professional world. This study provides conceptual support for additional scholarship and restates the need for gender equality in employment to be more than the absence of overt discrimination and to involve a critical examination of the everyday organizational practices that subtly maintain inequality.

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