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## Who Becomes a Target? Personality, Behavior, and Minority Status as Antecedents of Workplace Incivility

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### ABSTRACT

Workplace incivility (WI) constitutes low-intensity deviant behavior in the workplace characterized by an ambiguous intent to harm and violating mutual norms of respect. Whereas outcomes of WI are well-researched, far fewer studies have investigated its antecedents. In a cross-sectional, correlational study with two large samples ( $N = 467$  and  $N = 483$ ), we examined personality traits, conflict management styles (CMS), and markers of marginalized group status as predictors of WI as well as organizational policies and norms as moderators. Results show that agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism predicted WI, with the integrating and dominating CMS partially mediating most of these relationships. Additionally, women and individuals with non-normative gender identities reported being targeted more than men. Organizational policies and norms proved to be inconsequential. These findings emphasize the role of both individual behaviors and identity-based targeting in WI. Conflict resolution training and manager awareness may help reduce WI, particularly for vulnerable groups.

### ¿Quién se convierte en objetivo? La personalidad, el comportamiento y la condición de minoría como precursores de la descortesía en el trabajo

### RESUMEN

La descortesía en el trabajo es un comportamiento desviado de baja intensidad que se caracteriza por un intento ambiguo de hacer daño y de infringir las normas de respeto mutuo. Los comportamientos descorteses se han estudiado bien, pero los estudios que investigan sus antecedentes escasean. Mediante un estudio transversal correlacional utilizando dos amplias muestras (467 y 483 sujetos) analizamos los rasgos de personalidad, estilos de gestión de conflictos y los marcadores de la condición de grupo marginado como precursores de la descortesía, y las políticas y las normas organizativas como moderadoras. En los resultados se aprecia que la simpatía, la diligencia y el neuroticismo predicaban la descortesía y los estilos de gestión de conflictos, integrador y dominante, mediando parcialmente la mayoría de las relaciones. Además, las mujeres y las personas que tenían una identidad de género no normativa manifestaban que eran objeto de intimidación más que los hombres. Las políticas y normas de la organización resultaron intrascendentes. Los resultados destacan el papel que juegan en la descortesía tanto los comportamientos individuales como la intimidación por motivos de identidad. La formación en resolución de conflictos y la toma de conciencia de la dirección pueden contribuir a disminuir la descortesía, sobre todo en grupos vulnerables.

Many employees encounter rude behaviors in the workplace, including demeaning remarks, dismissive gestures, belittling others' contributions, and other inconsiderate acts (Pearson & Porath, 2009). Although these behaviors may initially seem relatively harmless compared to more severe forms of mistreatment, such as bullying or workplace aggression, they can mark the onset of negative interpersonal dynamics (Anderson & Pearson, 1999), ultimately impacting both the targets (Lim & Lee, 2011) and their organizations (Sakurai & Jex, 2012). These behaviors are collectively known as "workplace incivility" (WI).

WI is defined as low-intensity deviant behavior in the workplace that violates mutual norms of respect, showing a lack of regard for others and is characterized by an ambiguous intent to harm (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). In the last 25 years since the introduction of the construct, hundreds of studies on potential outcomes of experienced WI have been conducted (Han et al., 2022) and summarized in countless reviews (e.g., Schilpzand et al., 2016) as well as three recent meta-analyses (Chris et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022; Yao et al., 2022). Antecedents of WI, however, have been examined less frequently (Han et al., 2022; Hershcovis & Cameron,

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2011; Yao et al., 2022). Previous studies considered to what extent certain demographics, such as race and gender (e.g., Cortina et al., 2013) as well as personality traits (Milam et al., 2009), are associated with the experience of WI and found small associations for race and gender as well as small to moderate relationships with all Big Five factors (Han et al., 2022; Milam et al., 2009; Yao et al., 2022). Potential mechanisms that explain why individuals with certain personality traits are more likely to be targeted than others have rarely been investigated (Milam et al., 2009). Specifically, an individual's behavior in dealing with interpersonal disagreements is considered central for experienced WI (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson et al., 2000) and may constitute such a mechanism. Other demographic characteristics such as belonging to a sexual minority or not identifying with normative gender labels have also hardly been considered as potential antecedents of WI (but note Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016), although they are within the scope of Cortina's (2008) theory of selective incivility (see also Cortina et al., 2013). Moreover, to our knowledge, no study has investigated to what extent organizational rules and norms against WI may protect individuals from vulnerable groups. Finally, the majority of research on WI has been conducted in the US. Kabat-Farr et al. (2020) have pointed out the necessity of conducting research on WI in samples beyond the US context.

The goals of the current paper are thus fourfold. First, we plan to explore conflict resolution styles as a potential mechanism mediating the relationship between personality traits and experienced WI. Second, we aim to extend the application of the theory of selective incivility to additional minority groups, specifically sexual minority members and individuals with non-normative gender identities. Third, we will examine the extent to which organizational policies and norms may act as a deterrent against WI. Fourth, we seek to address the scarcity of research on WI within non-US samples. The results of our research may help clarify why individuals are targeted and identify groups at risk for experiencing WI.

## Theory

### Workplace Incivility

WI is a form of mistreatment in the workplace that is characterized by a lack of regard for others and the violation of common workplace norms (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). It can be distinguished from similar concepts such as bullying, aggression, or abusive supervision by its low intensity and ambiguous intent to harm. Moreover, WI is not a purely passive concept such as ostracism, and – in contrast to abusive supervision – is not restricted to mistreatment by superiors, but can also be enacted by colleagues or customers (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Commonly cited examples of WI include making demeaning remarks, not returning a greeting, or shutting someone out (Pearson & Porath, 2009). Importantly, the original conceptualization of WI by Anderson and Pearson (1999) does not necessarily assign stable roles of “perpetrator” and “victim” to specific individuals. The authors assume that roles may shift during a dynamic process they refer to as an “incivility spiral”, in which the uncivil behavior by one of the two parties is reciprocated by the other (Anderson & Pearson, 1999).

Due to its ambiguous intent to harm, targets of WI can never really know for sure whether a certain behavior they face is malicious or simply due to thoughtlessness on the part of the instigator (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). This may be one of the reasons why WI is consistently linked to adverse well-being outcomes (Chris et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022). For instance, experiencing WI is associated with depression (e.g., Lim & Lee, 2011), emotional exhaustion (e.g., Anjum et al., 2022), insomnia (Demsky et al., 2019), and stress

(e.g., Lim & Cortina, 2005). However, potential effects of WI are not limited to employee well-being, but WI may also affect outcomes directly relevant for organizations. Studies have found WI, amongst other things, to be negatively related to task performance and work engagement (Chen et al., 2013) as well as the intention to stay at an organization (Griffin, 2010), and positively related to counterproductive behaviors at work (Penney & Spector, 2005). A recent meta-analysis on the construct validity of WI showed that the distinction between WI and similar constructs is not merely conceptual, but WI shows discriminant and incremental validity over other forms of mistreatment (Yao et al., 2022).

There are two major frameworks offering explanations for the fact that some individuals are more likely to be targeted than others (Han et al., 2022), the “victim precipitation framework” (VPF; Aquino & Byron, 2002) and the “perpetrator predation framework” (PPF; Cortina et al., 2018). The VPF proposes that individuals are partially responsible for being targeted, either indirectly by displaying passive or submissive behaviors and appearing weak or, more directly, by antagonistic, aggressive, or irritating behaviors that others consider provocative (Aquino & Byron, 2002; Henle & Gross, 2014). The PPF, on the other hand, does not focus on the behaviors of the targets of WI but assumes that instigators choose targets based on their judgment of the potential victim's vulnerability and the probability of retribution (Cortina et al., 2018; Yao et al., 2022). The PPF is considered the superior approach as it avoids blaming the victim and focuses on the instigators (Cortina et al., 2018), but the two frameworks are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance, as far as personality is concerned, individuals with certain personality traits may experience more WI, because their behavioral dispositions translate into behaviors that are provoking others (Henle & Gross, 2014). At the same time, instigators may believe that these individuals are more vulnerable, because they seem difficult to like and/or unable to defend themselves (Tepper et al., 2011).

### Personality, Behavior, and the Experience of Workplace Incivility

This argument can be made for several of the Big Five dimensions. Individuals low in agreeableness, for instance, do not aim to get along well (McCrae & Costa, 1987) and thus may upset others by being confrontational, argumentative, or disrespectful (Milam et al., 2009). Individuals exhibiting low levels of conscientiousness tend to exhibit less normatively desirable behaviors in the workplace (e.g., Ilies et al., 2009; Judge & Ilies, 2002) and act in an unorganized and undisciplined manner (McCrae & Costa, 1987), likely causing extra work for their colleagues. Individuals with high levels of neuroticism tend to experience a higher frequency of unpleasant events (McCrae & Costa, 1987), including ambiguous situations that they may interpret negatively (Sliter et al., 2015). Their subsequent confrontational behaviors may increase the likelihood of them becoming targets of WI (Milam et al., 2009). In all these cases where behavioral dispositions translate into behaviors that are provoking others, these individuals may also be perceived as more vulnerable, because they are less likely to muster substantial social support (Barańczuk, 2019), making them easier targets for instigators of WI (Cortina et al., 2018).

Empirically, Milam et al. (2009) found individuals high in neuroticism as well as low in agreeableness to be targeted more often. The two meta-analyses that have considered antecedents of WI (Han et al., 2022; Yao et al., 2022) have both found high neuroticism and low conscientiousness to be associated with more WI, but only one meta-analysis has found low agreeableness (Yao et al., 2022) to be associated with the experience of more WI. Based on our theoretical deliberations and the extant empirical evidence, we

put forward the following hypotheses, which we will test in both samples:

H1a: Higher agreeableness is associated with lower levels of experienced WI.

H1b: Higher conscientiousness is associated with lower levels of experienced WI.

H1c: Higher neuroticism is associated with higher levels of experienced WI.

### **Personality, Interpersonal Conflicts, and the Experience of Workplace Incivility**

Following the VPF, we have indicated that the reason why individuals with certain personality traits are targeted more may, in part, be behaviors that are associated with these personality traits. One area of particular importance in the workplace is how conflicts are handled (De Dreu & Gelfant, 2008). Individual behaviors and patterns for dealing with interpersonal conflicts (Bilsky & Wülker, 2000) are referred to as “conflict management styles” (CMS). Conventionally, the literature differentiates five different CMS (e.g., Rahim, 1983), but in the context of WI, only two of them, the integrating and the dominating style, seem to be relevant (Bartlett, 2009; Trudel & Reio, 2011). The integrating style is characterized by a strong focus on both one’s own objectives and the goals of others during conflict resolution. In contrast, the dominating style is marked by a strong emphasis on one’s own goals and a minimal concern for the goals of others (Bilsky & Wülker, 2000; Rahim, 1992).

As Park and Antonioni (2007) point out, personality may influence individuals’ selection of CMS through motivational, cognitive, and emotional processes. For instance, individuals with different personality traits may be driven by different motivations, leading them to adopt different CMS based on the outcomes they prioritize and pursue in conflict situations (Park & Antonioni, 2007). Different CMS, then again, may either assuage or fuel resentment in the other party based on the degree to which the goals of others are considered and either increase or decrease the likelihood of uncivil behaviors as suggested in the incivility spiral (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). In line with these considerations, the study by Trudel and Reio (2011) found the integrating CMS to be associated with the experience of less, the dominating CMS with the experience of more WI.

Certain personality traits may naturally align with particular CMS. Individuals high in agreeableness tend to be cooperative (McCrae & Costa, 1987) and are likely to experience positive affect when engaging in cooperative behaviors toward others (Côté & Moskowitz, 1998). Furthermore, individuals high in agreeableness value positive relationships and justice (MacIntosh & Stevens, 2008), all of which is compatible with the integrating, but less so with the dominating CMS. A similar case can be made for conscientiousness. Conscientious individuals tend to possess important qualities such as problem-solving skills (D’Zurilla et al., 2011) that enable them to work towards achieving the best possible outcome for both parties (Antonioni, 1998). Also, conscientious individuals may have stronger moral values and a greater sense of responsibility toward others (McCrae & Costa, 1987) and conscientiousness is positively associated with the motivation for positive relationships and fairness (MacIntosh & Stevens, 2008). All of this indicates a preference for the integrating style and is mostly incompatible with the dominating style. Conversely, neuroticism is characterized by emotional instability, anxiety, a tendency to experience negative emotions (McCrae & Costa, 1987), poor problem-solving skills (D’Zurilla et al., 2011), and conflict avoidance (Tehrani & Yamini, 2020). Therefore, neurotic individuals are less likely to either exhibit an integrating or a dominating CMS.

Empirically, in the meta-analysis by Tehrani and Yamini (2020), agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively associated with the integrating CMS, while neuroticism showed a negative association. Only agreeableness, however, was significantly negatively related to the dominating CMS, whereas the associations of conscientiousness and neuroticism with the dominating style were not significant. Importantly, we propose that in line with the VPF, behaviors such as CMS partially explain why individuals with certain personality traits may be targeted more frequently. In accordance with the PPF, additional factors—such as the potential for retaliation—may also influence targeting and the likelihood of incivility. Based on the reasoning here and above as well as the empirical findings in previous research, we put forward the following hypotheses, which we will test in sample 1:

H2a: The negative relationship between agreeableness and experienced WI is partially mediated by increased use of the integrating CMS.

H2b: The negative relationship between agreeableness and experienced WI is partially mediated by reduced use of the dominating CMS.

H3: The negative relationship between conscientiousness and experienced WI is partially mediated by increased use of the integrating CMS.

H4: The positive relationship between neuroticism and experienced WI is partially mediated by reduced use of the integrating CMS.

### **Incivility as a Form of Modern Discrimination**

WI may not only be deliberately employed to target individuals who lack the resources to defend themselves but may also be selectively applied to members of marginalized groups. Cortina (2008) argues that WI can sometimes manifest as a reflection of both conscious and unconscious biases against women and racial minorities. The argument goes that nowadays open discrimination is on the decline due to legislation and changes in public opinion. Acts of WI may, however, be perpetrated by individuals with either implicit or explicit biases against marginalized groups. The former can maintain a nondiscriminatory self-image, whereas the latter may escape retribution for openly discriminatory behaviors, because instigators can attribute their uncivil behavior to other factors (e.g., personality) than the targets’ being part of a marginalized group or argue that the uncivil behavior was not intentional (Cortina, 2008). Cortina et al. (2013) have found in several samples that racial minority members and women reported more WI than white individuals and men. Welbourne et al. (2015) found Hispanic men (but not women) to experience more incivility compared to non-Hispanics. The meta-analyses by Han et al. (2022) and Yao et al. (2022) found significant associations between belonging to a racial minority and WI, albeit the effect was very small in both meta-analyses. It is a plausible assumption that such a pattern could also hold true for individuals with a migrant background in Germany (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2013).

Regarding gender, Settles and O’Connor (2014) found women to experience more incivility at academic conferences and the meta-analyses by Yao et al. (2022) and Chris et al. (2022) found significant but very small associations between female gender and the experience of WI. Overall, the results concerning gender are not consistent, though, as there are also studies that found men to be more affected by WI compared to women (Lim & Lee, 2011; Welbourne et al., 2015) and the meta-analysis by Han et al. (2022) did not find any significant effect for gender. However, as Chris et al. (2022) criticize, up to now, gender has only been considered as a dichotomous construct, excluding identities outside the gender binary. It is very plausible that especially individuals with non-

normative gender identities are targeted with selective WI. There are studies suggesting that individuals deviating from gender norms (e.g., assertive, dominant, and independent women) suffer more harassment compared to those behaving in a stereotypical manner (Berdahl, 2007; Cortina et al., 2013).

Individuals with sexual orientations outside the heterosexual majority are another group that could be deliberately targeted by selective WI. There is evidence from qualitative studies that sexual minorities may indeed be targeted by selective WI (Di Marco et al., 2018; Einarsdóttir et al., 2015). There is also research on microaggressions in various contexts that suggests that sexual minorities may be at risk (e.g., Beagan et al., 2021). There has been only one quantitative study on the subject of whether sexual minority members are targeted more often compared to heterosexual individuals (Zurbrugg & Miner, 2016). In a sample of academic law professors, the authors did not find sexual minority members to experience more incivility compared to their heterosexual counterparts. However, the fact that their sample consisted of a group of highly educated individuals and the low percentage of sexual minority members (11.5%) in the sample may severely restrict the generalizability of their results.

It is conceivable that individuals from marginalized groups, having faced multiple instances of discrimination early on, may later interpret ambivalent situations as uncivil due to past victimization experiences (Gollwitzer et al., 2015). This tendency could also influence their experience of WI. To better distinguish between the perception and actual experience of WI, we control for a possible tendency among minority group members to perceive ambiguous situations as uncivil (Sliter et al., 2015). Based on these considerations, we propose the following hypotheses, which will be tested in sample 2:

*H5:* Individuals with an apparent migration background (based on appearance, name, or language proficiency) are expected to report higher levels of experienced WI than those without such a background, controlling for a tendency to perceive ambivalent situations as uncivil.

*H6a:* Individuals who identify as female are expected to report higher levels of experienced WI than those who identify as male, controlling for a tendency to perceive ambivalent situations as uncivil.

*H6b:* Individuals who do not identify as male or female are expected to report higher levels of experienced WI than those who identify as male, controlling for a tendency to perceive ambivalent situations as uncivil.

*H7:* Individuals identifying as part of a sexual minority are expected to report higher levels of experienced WI than those who identify as heterosexual, controlling for a tendency to perceive ambivalent situations as uncivil.

### **Role of Policies and Norms in the Workplace**

The theory of selective incivility posits that organizational policies and behavioral norms can reduce the prevalence of openly discriminatory behavior toward minority group members (Cortina, 2008). Empirical evidence suggests that lax organizational norms and an incivility-tolerant climate are linked to the overall occurrence of workplace incivility (Han et al., 2022). However, it remains unclear whether organizational policies and norms against uncivil behavior serve to protect minority members from being targeted with incivility. Research on other forms of mistreatment, such as sexual harassment, suggests that strong organizational policies and norms are indeed associated with lower incident rates (Gallus et al., 2014). Therefore, we will test the following hypotheses in sample 2:

*H8:* The relationship between an apparent migration background and experienced WI is moderated by (a) organizational policies

and (b) norms, such that this relationship is weaker when strong policies and norms against WI are in place.

*H9:* The relationship between female gender and experienced WI is moderated by (a) organizational policies and (b) norms, such that this relationship is weaker when strong policies and norms against WI are in place.

*H10:* The relationship between non-normative gender identity and experienced WI is moderated by (a) organizational policies and (b) norms, such that this relationship is weaker when strong policies and norms against WI are in place.

*H11:* The relationship between non-heterosexual orientation and experienced WI is moderated by (a) organizational policies and (b) norms, such that this relationship is weaker when strong policies and norms against WI are in place.

## **Sample 1**

### **Method**

#### **Participants and Procedure**

Data were collected via an online survey on Unipark, a professional service provider for hosting scientific surveys, between February and April 2024. Recruitment was conducted through various channels, including social media, emails, and flyers. The survey was also shared within organizations and on a website. Potential participants were told that the topic "Interpersonal Dynamics in the Workplace" would be explored to better understand interactions with colleagues and supervisors. On the first page of the survey, participants were informed about the study, assured of the confidentiality of their answers, and told that they could cease participation at any time without providing reasons. The questionnaire contained questions on experienced WI, personality, CMS, and demographic information.

In total,  $N = 1,271$  people clicked the link to the study, and  $n = 673$  of those actually started the survey. Of those,  $n = 531$  individuals completed the relevant parts of the survey. Based on predefined exclusion criteria, we then excluded individuals who worked more than 70% from home ( $n = 48$ ) or less than 15 hours per week ( $n = 7$ ), self-employed individuals without colleagues or employees ( $n = 1$ ), individuals who had been in maternity protection for more than 4 weeks ( $n = 4$ ) during the reference period, individuals under 18 ( $n = 1$ ) and individuals with missing values on any of the relevant measures ( $n = 3$ ). The remaining  $N = 467$  participants were, on average,  $M = 36.11$  ( $SD = 13.37$ )<sup>1</sup> 2 years of age. Among the participants,  $n = 161$  were male,  $n = 296$  female, and  $n = 10$  declined to answer. The sample was highly educated, with  $n = 312$  participants holding an academic degree as their highest level of education, while only  $n = 25$  reported a secondary school certificate or lower. A majority,  $n = 321$  participants, reported working 31 hours or more per week, while  $n = 146$  worked 30 hours or less. Participants were employed across a wide range of professions, including education, training, professional development, and library services ( $n = 77$ , 17%), office and administration ( $n = 70$ , 15.7%), and management ( $n = 39$ , 8.4%). Also,  $n = 154$  participants held mid-level leadership positions,  $n = 41$  higher leadership positions, and  $n = 272$  reported no leadership responsibilities.

### **Measures**

**Experienced WI.** We assessed experienced WI with an 8-item scale by Jiménez et al. (2018) based on the adapted WI scale by Leiter et al. (2011). Participants responded on a seven-point Likert scale with response options between 1 (*never*) and 7 (*daily*). They were instructed to consider their experiences over the past six

months. Supervisor and coworker incivility were not surveyed separately, but the scale was adapted so that each item referred to both. The reliability in the validation study was  $\alpha = .91$  and in this sample  $\alpha = .82$ .

**Big Five.** We measured the Big Five personality traits using the 21-item BFI-K scale developed by Rammstedt and John (2005). The traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and extraversion were assessed with four items each, while openness was measured with five items. Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*completely true*). In the original validation studies by Rammstedt and John (2005), the reliabilities were as follows: agreeableness ( $\alpha = .59$  to  $\alpha = .64$ ), conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .69$  to  $\alpha = .70$ ), neuroticism ( $\alpha = .74$  to  $\alpha = .77$ ), extraversion ( $\alpha = .81$  to  $\alpha = .86$ ), and openness ( $\alpha = .66$  to  $\alpha = .70$ ). In this sample, the Cronbach's alphas were  $\alpha = .68$  for agreeableness,  $\alpha = .60$  for conscientiousness,  $\alpha = .76$  for neuroticism,  $\alpha = .82$  for extraversion, and  $\alpha = .71$  for openness.

**CMS.** The two CMS, integrating (6 items) and dominating (5 items), were assessed using the German adaptation (ROCI-II-D; Bilsky & Wülker, 2000) of the Rahim's (1983) Organizational Conflict Inventory. Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In the original validation study, Cronbach's alpha was reported as  $\alpha = .85$  for the integrating CMS and  $\alpha = .76$  for the dominating CMS. In this sample, we obtained Cronbach's alphas of  $\alpha = .85$  for the integrating CMS and  $\alpha = .75$  for the dominating CMS.

### Statistical Analyses

All analyses were conducted using SPSS 29. For hypotheses *H1a*, *H1b*, and *H1c*, we performed a multiple regression analysis with all Big Five traits as predictors and experienced WI as the criterion variable. For hypotheses *H2a* and *H2b*, *H3*, and *H4*, we conducted mediation analyses with the Process macro (Hayes, 2013), using experienced WI as the criterion, with agreeableness (*H2a*, *H2b*), conscientiousness (*H3*), and neuroticism (*H4*) as predictors. The integrating CMS (*H2a*, *H3*, *H4*) and the dominating CMS (*H2b*) served as mediators, while the other Big Five dimensions were included as covariates.

### Results

The level of experienced WI reported by participants was relatively low, as indicated by a mean score of 2.18 ( $SD = 0.88$ ). Table 1 provides an overview of the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all variables included in the analysis.

**Table 1.** Mean, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations between Study Variables in Sample 1

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Workplace Incivility	2.18	0.88	.82									
2. Neuroticism	2.92	0.85	.18	.76								
3. Extraversion	3.56	0.84	-.09	-.27	.82							
4. Conscientiousness	3.94	0.57	.02	-.19	.23	.60						
5. Agreeableness	3.57	0.75	-.19	-.19	.18	.20	.68					
6. Openness	3.71	0.69	-.05	.03	.21	.14	.14	.71				
7. Integrating CMS	4.28	0.47	-.17	-.14	.22	.23	.25	.27	.85			
8. Dominating CMS	2.94	0.76	.11	-.14	.22	.06	-.27	.05	-.06	.75		
9. Age	36.07	13.39	-.06	-.18	.12	.05	-.04	.06	-.02	.14	–	
10. Gender	–	–	-.07	-.21	-.07	-.15	-.09	-.19	-.09	.21	-.07	–

Note. Correlations  $\geq |.10|$  significant at the .05 level; correlations  $\geq |.13|$  significant at the .01 level; correlations  $\geq |.16|$  significant at the .001 level; alpha coefficients provided along the diagonal; gender: 0 = female, 1 = male; correlations for age  $n = 460$  and gender  $n = 457$ .

### Preliminary Analyses

After excluding cases based on the predefined criteria, we conducted Little's MCAR test, which was not significant ( $\chi^2 = 140.295$ ,  $p = .94$ ). Consequently, rather than imputing missing data for the  $n = 3$  cases with incomplete data, we applied listwise deletion, resulting in the final sample size of  $N = 467$ , as noted above.

We then checked the assumptions for multiple regression analysis, including the presence of outliers in the data. By examining the standardized residuals, leverage values, and Cook's distances, we identified a few minor outliers in the standardized residuals. However, since these outliers did not influence the results, we report our findings with the potential outliers included. No other assumptions were violated.

### Main Analyses

Hypotheses 1a-c proposed that (a) agreeableness and (b) conscientiousness would be negatively related and (c) neuroticism positively related to experienced WI. The overall regression model (Table 2) was significant ( $p < .001$ ), explaining 7% of the variance in WI. Agreeableness ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was significantly negatively associated with WI, and neuroticism ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was significantly positively associated, confirming *H1a* and *1c*. Conscientiousness was significantly associated with WI ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but in the opposite direction, leading to the rejection of *H1b*.

**Table 2.** Regression Analysis of Workplace Incivility on the Big Five Personality Dimensions (*H1a-c*) in Sample 1

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Agreeableness	-0.20	0.06	-.17	-3.55	< .001
Conscientiousness	0.15	0.07	.10	2.06	.040
Neuroticism	0.17	0.05	.16	3.41	< .001
Openness	-0.05	0.06	-.04	-0.82	.415
Extraversion	-0.03	0.05	-.03	-0.64	.522

Note. Regression model:  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F = 6.69$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Hypotheses 2-4 (Tables 3 and 4) tested indirect effects of the integrating (*H2a*, *H3*, *H4*) and the dominating (*H2b*) CMS for the associations of agreeableness (*H2a/b*), conscientiousness (*H3*), and neuroticism (*H4*) with experienced WI. Importantly, the use of the integrating CMS (overall model  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was significantly predicted by agreeableness ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and conscientiousness ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but not by neuroticism ( $\beta = -.06$ ,  $p = .186$ ). The use of the dominating CMS (overall model  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was predicted by agreeableness ( $\beta = -.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and neuroticism ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not by conscientiousness ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $p = .326$ ). The two regression models for *H2-4* with experienced WI as criterion

and all predictor variables were significant ( $p < .001$ ) and explained 8% of the variance in WI both with the integrating as well as the dominating CMS as mediator.

**Table 3.** Regression Analyses Testing the Integrating CMS as Mediator between Workplace Incivility and Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism (Hypotheses H2a, H3, and H4)

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Model 1 (integrating CMS as criterion)					
Agreeableness	0.10	0.03	.16	3.58	< .001
Conscientiousness	0.11	0.04	.13	2.93	.004
Neuroticism	-0.03	0.03	-.06	-1.33	.186
Openness	0.14	0.03	.21	4.70	< .001
Extraversion	0.06	0.03	.11	2.30	.022
$R^2 = .16, F = 17.24, p < .001$					
Model 2 (WI as criterion)					
Agreeableness	-0.17	0.06	-.15	-3.09	.002
Conscientiousness	0.18	0.07	.12	2.41	.016
Neuroticism	0.16	0.05	.16	3.26	.001
Openness	-0.01	0.06	-.01	-0.24	.811
Extraversion	-0.02	0.05	-.02	-0.36	.719
Integrating CMS	-0.24	0.09	-.13	-2.63	.009
$R^2 = .08, F = 6.81, p < .001$					
Indirect effects	Effect	Boot <i>SE</i>		Boot <i>LLCI</i>	Boot <i>ULCI</i>
Agreeableness	-0.02	0.01		-0.05	-0.00
Conscientiousness	-0.03	0.02		-0.06	-0.00
Neuroticism	0.01	0.01		-0.00	0.03

**Table 4.** Regression Analyses Testing the Dominating CMS as Mediator between Workplace Incivility and Agreeableness (Hypothesis H2b) as well as Conscientiousness and Neuroticism

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Model 1 (dominating CMS as criterion)					
Agreeableness	-0.35	0.04	-.35	-7.90	< .001
Conscientiousness	0.06	0.06	-.04	0.94	.326
Neuroticism	-0.12	0.04	-.14	-3.06	.002
Openness	0.05	0.05	-.05	1.11	.269
Extraversion	0.20	0.04	-.23	4.96	< .001
$R^2 = .17, F = 18.77, p < .001$					
Model 2 (WI as criterion)					
Agreeableness	-0.15	0.06	-.13	-2.61	.010
Conscientiousness	0.15	0.07	-.10	1.98	.049
Neuroticism	0.18	0.05	.18	3.69	< .001
Openness	-0.05	0.06	-.04	-0.93	.354
Extraversion	-0.06	0.05	-.06	-1.11	.267
Dominating CMS	0.12	0.06	.11	2.15	.032
$R^2 = .08, F = 6.39, p < .001$					
Indirect effect	Effect	Boot <i>SE</i>		Boot <i>LLCI</i>	Boot <i>ULCI</i>
Agreeableness	-0.04	0.02		-0.09	-0.00
Conscientiousness	0.01	0.01		-0.01	0.03
Neuroticism	-0.02	0.01		-0.04	-0.00

Note. The direct and indirect effects for conscientiousness and neuroticism are the results of exploratory analyses.

H2a proposed an indirect effect of the integrating CMS for the relationship between agreeableness and experienced WI. The indirect effect of agreeableness on WI via the integrating CMS was statistically significant,  $B = -0.02$  (95% BootCI [0.05, 0.00]), and the direct effect was also significant,  $B = -0.17$  (95% CI [0.28, 0.06]), suggesting partial mediation and confirming H2a.

H2b proposed an indirect effect of the dominating CMS for the relationship between agreeableness and experienced WI. The indirect effect of agreeableness on WI via the dominating CMS was statistically significant,  $B = -0.04$  (95% BootCI [0.09, 0.00]), and the

direct effect was also significant,  $B = -0.15$  (95% CI [0.27, 0.04]), suggesting partial mediation and confirming H2b.

H3 proposed an indirect effect of the integrating CMS for the relationship between conscientiousness and experienced WI. The indirect effect of conscientiousness on WI via the integrating CMS was statistically significant,  $B = -0.03$  (95% BootCI [-0.06, -0.00]), and the direct effect was also significant,  $B = 0.18$  (95% CI [0.04, 0.33]), suggesting partial mediation. Importantly, while the direct effect is positive as the total effect in H1b, the indirect effect is negative, suggesting that agreeableness is positively linked to the integrating style and thereby has a negative effect on WI, confirming H3.

H4 proposed an indirect effect of the integrating CMS for the relationship between neuroticism and experienced WI. The indirect effect of neuroticism on WI via the integrating CMS was non-significant,  $B = 0.01$  (95% BootCI [-0.00, 0.03]), leading to the rejection of H4.

### Exploratory Analyses

In addition, we conducted exploratory analyses on the dominating CMS as a mediator between conscientiousness as well as neuroticism and experienced WI (Table 4). While the indirect effect was significant for neuroticism,  $B = -0.02$  (95% BootCI [-0.04, -0.00]), it was non-significant for conscientiousness,  $B = 0.01$  (95% BootCI [-0.01, 0.03]).

## Sample 2

### Method

#### Participants and Procedure

Data were collected via an online survey on Unipark between February and April 2024. Recruitment was conducted through various channels, including social media platforms, personal contacts, flyers, posters, newsletters, and events, with targeted dissemination methods chosen to specifically reach individuals from the LGBTQ+ community. On the first page of the survey, participants were informed about the study, assured of the confidentiality of their answers, and told that they could cease participation at any time without providing reasons. The questionnaire contained questions on experienced WI, personality, incivility norms, gender identity, sexual orientation, migration status, and vignettes to assess tendencies to perceive ambivalent situations as uncivil.

In total, 2,089 people clicked the link to the study and 924 of those actually started the survey. Of those,  $n = 580$  individuals completed the survey. Based on predefined exclusion criteria, we then excluded individuals who worked less than 15 hours per week ( $n = 22$ ), or more than 70% from home ( $n = 52$ ), as well as self-employed individuals without colleagues or employees ( $n = 8$ ), individuals who have been in maternity protection for more than 4 weeks ( $n = 5$ ) during the reference period and individuals with missing values on any relevant measures ( $n = 10$ ). The remaining  $N = 483$  participants were on average  $M = 33.10$  ( $SD = 10.47$ ) years of age. A total of  $n = 35$  participants reported having an apparent migration background, while  $n = 448$  either had no migration background or one that was not noticeable. Among the participants,  $n = 200$  identified as male (including three transgender individuals),  $n = 261$  as female (including one transgender individual), and  $n = 22$  as non-binary or agender. Additionally,  $n = 300$  identified as heterosexual, while  $n = 183$  reported being homosexual, bisexual, or queer. The sample was highly educated, with  $n = 301$  participants holding an academic degree as their highest level of education, while only  $n = 27$

**Table 5.** Mean, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations between Study Variables in Sample 2

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. WI	2.34	1.06	.86												
2. Neuroticism	3.03	0.90	.23	.79											
3. Extraversion	3.55	0.85	-.00	-.30	.82										
4. Conscientiousness	3.91	0.61	-.09	-.21	.11	.62									
5. Agreeableness	3.44	0.75	-.08	-.06	.22	.05	.64								
6. Openness	3.94	0.64	.06	.14	.15	.05	.13	.68							
7. Migration background	–	–	.05	.06	.01	-.03	-.05	.08	–						
8. Sexual Orientation	–	–	.05	.16	-.01	-.07	-.11	.11	-.02	–					
9. Female	–	–	.07	.25	.03	.10	.12	.08	.07	-.06	–				
10. Non-binary	–	–	.13	.09	.00	.03	.05	.17	.02	.28	-.24	–			
11. Perception of WI	2.93	0.35	.02	.11	-.01	.16	.00	-.03	.10	-.03	.08	.05	.79		
12. Policies	3.98	1.86	-.30	-.11	.03	.08	.04	-.06	-.01	-.03	-.08	-.10	-.06	.72	
13. Norms	4.51	1.32	-.28	-.10	.10	.01	.04	.04	-.01	-.05	-.09 <sup>†</sup>	-.05	-.03	.28	.67

Note. Migration = apparent migration background; non-binary = non-normative gender identity; perception of WI = tendency to perceive WI; all correlations > |.09| are significant at the .05 level; all correlations  $\geq$  |.12| are significant at the .01 level; all correlations  $\geq$  |.16| are significant at the .001 level alpha coefficients are provided along the diagonal; migration: 0 = no or no apparent migration background, 1 = apparent migration background; sexual orientation: 0 = heterosexual, 1 = other; female: 0 = female, 1 = other; non-binary: 0 = nonbinary 1 = other; Cronbach's alphas can be found along the diagonal; <sup>†</sup>exact value  $r = .091$  and significant.

reported a secondary school certificate or lower;  $n = 362$  of the participants reported working more than 30 hours per week, while  $n = 121$  reported working between 30 and 16 hours.

## Measures

**Experienced WI.** We assessed experienced WI with the same 8-item scale by Jiménez et al. (2018) as in sample 1. In sample 2 Cronbach's alpha was  $\alpha = .86$ .

**Big Five.** We measured the Big Five personality traits as in sample 1 with the 21-item BFI-K scale developed by Rammstedt and John (2005). The reliabilities in sample 2 were as follows: agreeableness ( $\alpha = .64$ ), conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .62$ ), neuroticism ( $\alpha = .79$ ), extraversion ( $\alpha = .82$ ), and openness ( $\alpha = .68$ ).

**Migration Background.** We asked participants whether they or their parents have a migration background. The response options were: 1 (No), 2 (1 or my parents were not born in Germany, but my name, language skills, and appearance do not indicate this), and 3 (1 or my parents were not born in Germany, and this is often recognized by others through my name, language skills, or appearance). We later dichotomized the answers into “no or no apparent migration background” and “an apparent migration background”.

**Gender.** We asked participants to indicate their gender, offering a range of predefined options including “male”, “female”, “non-binary”, “agender”, “prefer not to say” and “other.” We coded “prefer not to say” as a missing value and recoded the rest of the response options into “male”, “female”, and “non-normative”.

**Sexual Orientation.** We asked participants to indicate their sexual orientation and provided the following response options: “heterosexual”, “homosexual/lesbian/gay”, “bisexual/pansexual”, “queer”, “asexual”, and “not listed here”. For the analysis, heterosexual was coded as 0, and all other responses as 1.

**Incivility Climate.** We assessed organizational policies and norms using the 4-item Incivility Climate Scale developed by Gallus et al. (2014). The scale was translated into German through a forward and backward translation process conducted by two bilingual experts. Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale includes two items measuring organizational policies and two items measuring organizational norms. Since the policy items were originally worded to indicate the absence of organizational policies, they were reverse-coded to improve

interpretability, with higher scores reflecting more organizational policies. The Spearman-Brown coefficient for the policies scale was  $r_{SB} = .72$ , and for the norms scale  $r_{SB} = .67$ .

**Incivility Perceptions.** We assessed the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations in the workplace as uncivil with a German translation of the 22-item vignette scale by Sliter et al. (2015). The vignettes and the scale were translated by the last author into German and independently back-translated by a foreign language expert. In some of the vignettes, we implemented a few minor changes. For instance, in one of the original vignettes, the participants were supposed to imagine that it was their birthday, and a coworker brought cake. We changed this into the cake being brought by the protagonist on their birthday, as this is customary in Germany. The tendency to perceive WI in the vignettes was then assessed by a four-point Likert scale, with response options between 1 (*not at all rude*) and 4 (*extremely rude*). The reliability in Sliter et al. (2015) was  $\alpha = .85$  and in this sample, it was  $\alpha = .79$ .

## Statistical Analyses

All analyses were conducted using SPSS 29. To test hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c, we again conducted a multiple regression analysis with each of the Big Five personality traits as predictors and experienced WI as the criterion variable. For hypotheses H5 through H7, we used multiple regression analysis with predictors including migration background (coded as apparent and none/non-apparent), gender (dummy-coded as male, female, and non-normative), and sexual orientation (coded as heterosexual and other) to predict experienced WI, and we controlled for the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as hostile. For hypotheses H8 through H11, we employed the Process macro (Hayes, 2013) to test (a) organizational policies and (b) norms as moderators in the relationships examined in H5 through H7.

## Results

The reported level of experienced WI was again relatively low ( $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). The tendency to perceive WI was positively associated with neuroticism ( $r = .11$ ,  $p < .02$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r = .16$ ,  $p < .001$ ), partially replicating findings by Sliter et al. (2015) for their vignette scale, as well as with having an apparent migration background ( $r = .10$ ,  $p = .03$ ). A detailed summary of means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables is presented in Table 5.

## Preliminary Analyses

After excluding cases based on the predefined criteria above, we conducted Little's MCAR test, which was not significant ( $\chi^2 = 343.170, p = .43$ ). Consequently, rather than imputing missing data for the  $n = 10$  cases with incomplete data, we applied listwise deletion, resulting in the final sample size of  $N = 483$ , as noted above.

We then assessed the assumptions for multiple regression analysis, including the identification of outliers in the data. On visual inspection, we encountered some heteroscedasticity, so we used robust standard errors (specifically HC3; Long & Ervin, 2000) for all analyses. Upon examining the standardized residuals, leverage values, and Cook's distances, we identified a few minor outliers in the standardized residuals. Removing these outliers, however, altered some of the results. Therefore, we report the findings with the outliers included but highlight instances where predictors became non-significant after the removal of outliers. We also conducted sensitivity analyses regarding the four transgender individuals, who identified as male ( $n = 3$ ) or female ( $n = 1$ ). Specifically, we ran analyses both excluding these individuals and classifying them as non-normative (i.e., grouping them with non-binary participants). As neither approach affected the results, we report only the original analyses for this aspect.

## Main Analyses

Hypotheses 1a-c posited that (a) agreeableness and (b) conscientiousness would be negatively related, and (c) neuroticism positively related, to experienced WI. The overall regression model was significant ( $p < .001$ ) and explained 7% of the variance in WI (Table 6). Agreeableness was significantly negatively associated with WI ( $\beta = -.09, p < .05$ ), whereas conscientiousness showed no significant association with WI ( $\beta = .04, p = .31$ ). Neuroticism was positively associated with WI as expected ( $\beta = .24, p < .001$ ). Thus, as in the first sample,  $H1a$  and  $H1c$  were supported, while  $H1b$  was not. However, after excluding outliers, the association between agreeableness and WI was no longer significant ( $\beta = -.08, p = .06$ ).

**Table 6.** Regression Analysis of Workplace Incivility on the Big Five Personality Dimensions ( $H1a-c$ ) in Sample 2

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Agreeableness	-0.13	0.06	-.09	-2.04	.042
Conscientiousness	-0.07	0.07	-.04	-1.02	.310
Neuroticism	0.28	0.06	.24	4.49	< .001
Openness	0.04	0.07	.02	0.53	.598
Extraversion	0.11	0.06	.09	1.72	.087

Note. Regression model:  $R^2 = .07, F = 6.67, p < .001$ .

Hypotheses 5-7 posited that an apparent migration background ( $H5$ ), identifying as female ( $H6a$ ) or not as either male or female ( $H6b$ ), and belonging to a sexual minority ( $H7$ ) would be associated with higher levels of experienced WI, while controlling for a tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as uncivil. The overall regression model was significant ( $p < .05$ ), explaining 3% of the variance in WI (Table 7). A noticeable migration background ( $H5$ ) was not associated with WI ( $\beta = .04, p = .50$ ), leading to the rejection of  $H5$ . However, identifying as female ( $H6a; \beta = .10, p < .05$ ) and identifying outside the male-female binary ( $H6b; \beta = .15, p < .05$ ) were both significantly associated with higher WI, supporting  $H6a$  and  $H6b$ . After excluding outliers, the association between the female gender and WI was no longer significant ( $\beta = .08, p = .07$ ), though. No association was found for identifying as a sexual

minority ( $\beta = .02, p = .75$ ), leading to the rejection of  $H7$ . The control variable (tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as uncivil) did not explain any variance in the experience of WI.

**Table 7.** Regression Analysis of Workplace Incivility on Migration Background, Gender and Sexual Orientation ( $H5, H6a, H6b, H7$ ) and Perception as Control Variable

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Migration	0.15	0.22	.04	0.67	.504
Female	0.22	0.10	.10	2.32	.021
Non-binary	0.75	0.34	.15	2.20	.028
Sexual orientation	0.03	0.11	.02	0.34	.746
Perception	-0.00	0.13	-.00	-0.24	.980

Note. Regression model:  $R^2 = .03, F = 2.78, p = .017$ .

Hypotheses 8-11 posited that the relationship between WI and an apparent migration background ( $H8$ ), being female ( $H9$ ), not identifying with either the male or female gender ( $H10$ ), and belonging to a sexual minority ( $H11$ ), respectively would be moderated by (a) organizational policies and (b) organizational norms, such that these relationships would be weaker when strong policies and norms against WI are in place. The overall regression models for  $H8-11$  were all significant,  $p < .001$  (Table 8 for details), but the interaction terms all were non-significant ( $H8a, B = -0.10, p = 0.44; H8b, B = 0.02, p = 0.92; H9a, B = -0.03, p = 0.59; H9b, B = -0.09, p = 0.31; H10a, B = -0.07, p = 0.77; H10b, B = -0.39, p = .15; H11a, B = 0.02, p = 0.74; H11b, B = -0.12, p = 0.18$ ).

## Exploratory Analyses

We conducted exploratory analyses regarding the moderator effects of organizational policies and norms on a subsample of  $n = 447$  who indicated to have worked for at least six months at their current employer. We chose six months, because this was the time frame referenced in the scale assessing experienced WI. This way, we wanted to make sure that the ratings on organizational policies and norms actually referred to the organization where individuals experienced the respective levels of WI. Doing so, we found a significant moderator effect of organizational norms for the relationship between non-normative gender identity and experienced WI ( $B = -0.53, p < .05$ ) and the relationship between non-normative gender identity and experienced WI was only significant for 1SD below the mean ( $B = 0.95, p < .05$ ) of the moderator. However, in this subsample, there no longer was a direct relationship between WI and non-normative gender identity ( $B = 0.10, p = .12$ ).

## Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to identify individual-level antecedents of WI and explore underlying mechanisms. We examined CMS as a mediator between personality traits and experienced WI and assessed the differential impact of WI on women, individuals with non-normative gender identities, those with a migrant background, and sexual minorities, as well as the role of organizational rules and norms as potential deterrents. As hypothesized, agreeableness was associated with less ( $H1a$ ) and neuroticism ( $H1c$ ) with more experienced WI in both samples, while conscientiousness ( $H1b$ ) predicted WI only in sample 1 and in the opposite direction than expected. The integrating CMS partially mediated the relationships between agreeableness ( $H2a$ ) and conscientiousness ( $H3$ ) with experienced WI, while the dominating CMS partially mediated the relationship between agreeableness and experienced WI ( $H2b$ ). Contrary to expectations, no mediation effect of the integrating CMS was found between neuroticism and experienced WI ( $H4$ ). Migration background ( $H5$ )

**Table 8.** Regression Analyses Testing Organizational Policies (Model 1) and Norms (Model 2) as Moderators for the Relationships between WI and the Respective Predictors (H8a–H11b)

	H8a/b: Migration Background				H9a/b: Female				H10a/b: Non-binary				H11a/b: Sexual Orientation			
	B	SE B	t	p	B	SE B	t	p	B	SE B	t	p	B	SE B	t	p
Model 1																
Migration	0.56	0.63	0.89	.376	0.15	0.21	0.74	.463	0.15	0.21	0.70	.484	0.16	0.21	0.76	.448
Female	0.15	0.09	1.66	.098	0.28	0.26	1.05	.029	0.16	0.09	1.70	.089	0.16	0.09	1.69	.091
Non-binary	0.55	0.33	1.66	.097	0.59	0.34	1.77	.078	0.80	0.95	0.84	.400	0.59	0.34	1.74	.083
Sexual orientation	0.02	0.10	0.24	.811	0.03	0.10	0.26	.795	0.03	0.10	0.27	.785	-0.05	0.29	-0.18	.860
Perception	-0.06	0.12	-0.51	.608	-0.04	0.13	-0.30	.763	-0.04	0.13	-0.29	.770	-0.04	0.13	-0.32	.748
Interaction	-0.10	0.13	-0.78	.437	-0.03	0.05	-0.54	.590	-0.07	0.25	-0.29	.773	0.02	0.06	0.33	.741
	$R^2 = .11, F = 6.25, p < .001$				$R^2 = .11, F = 6.34, p < .001$				$R^2 = .11, F = 6.24, p < .001$				$R^2 = .11, F = 6.47, p < .001$			
Model 2																
Migration	0.06	0.92	0.06	.949	0.14	0.22	0.64	.521	0.14	0.21	.64	.526	0.14	0.22	0.63	.526
Female	0.16	0.09	1.71	.087	0.56	0.41	1.36	.174	0.16	0.09	1.76	.079	0.15	0.09	1.59	.112
Non-binary	0.66	0.32	2.05	.041	0.69	0.32	2.12	.035	2.28	1.13	2.01	.045	0.63	0.32	1.98	.048
Sexual orientation	0.01	0.10	0.11	.909	0.00	0.10	0.01	.990	0.01	0.10	0.12	.899	0.55	0.43	1.28	.201
Perception	-0.02	0.13	-0.13	.894	-0.02	0.13	-0.12	.904	-0.01	0.13	-0.06	.953	-0.00	0.13	-0.03	.974
Interaction	0.02	0.19	0.10	.919	-0.09	0.09	1.02	.309	-0.39	0.27	-1.43	.154	-0.12	0.90	-1.34	.182
	$R^2 = .10, F = 5.19, p < .001$				$R^2 = .10, F = 5.05, p < .001$				$R^2 = .10, F = 5.65, p < .001$				$R^2 = .10, F = 5.13, p < .001$			

Note. Migration: 0 = no or no apparent migration background, 1 = apparent migration background; Sexual orientation: 0 = heterosexual, 1 = other; Female: 0 = female, 1 = other; Non-binary: 0 = nonbinary 1 = other; Model 1 organizational policies as moderator (a-hypotheses); Model 2 organizational norms (b-hypotheses) as moderator.

and sexual orientation (H7) were unrelated to experienced WI, whereas female gender (H6a) and a non-normative gender identity (H6b) were positively associated with experienced WI. Finally, neither organizational rules (H8a–H11a) nor organizational norms (H8b–H11b) moderated any of the relationships proposed in H5 through H7.

### Workplace Incivility, Personality, and Behavior

Our results regarding relationships between personality traits and experienced WI partially differ from those of previous studies. Although earlier research also consistently found positive associations between neuroticism and experienced WI (Han et al., 2022; Milam et al., 2009; Yao et al., 2022), only Milam et al. (2009) and one of the two meta-analyses (Yao et al., 2022) found an association between agreeableness and experienced WI. Conversely, while both meta-analyses found low conscientiousness to be associated with more WI, we found a “positive” relationship between conscientiousness and WI in sample 1 and none in sample 2. While our findings regarding agreeableness and neuroticism are compatible with both the VPF and the PPF, the conflicting results regarding conscientiousness warrant further explanation. It is conceivable that this inconsistency may reflect differences in organizational environments or dynamics. Depending on cultural or contextual factors, highly conscientious individuals may be targeted less because they display more normatively desirable behaviors in the workplace (e.g., Ilies et al., 2009) as reflected in the meta-analytic results. Alternatively, as the result of our regression analysis suggests, they may be targeted more by WI, because they may be considered as rigid and perfectionistic (Coynne et al., 2000) and thereby either annoy colleagues, when following the line of argument of the VPF, or being considered more vulnerable in line with the PPF. However, there also is a simpler, methodological explanation for the unexpected result regarding conscientiousness. When looking at the bivariate correlation between experienced WI and conscientiousness, there basically is a zero correlation between

the two constructs suggesting that a suppressor effect may have influenced the result of the regression analysis (Velicer, 1978).

The relationships between WI and agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism were all partially mediated by one of the two CMS. However, there was no indirect effect via the integrating CMS as hypothesized for the relationship between neuroticism and experienced WI and there was no indirect effect via the dominating CMS for conscientiousness in the exploratory analysis. Interestingly, the indirect effect of the dominating style for neuroticism in the exploratory analysis was negative, suggesting that a lesser use of the dominating style might be associated with slightly lower levels of experienced WI for neurotic individuals. The lack of mediation via the integrating CMS for neuroticism may be explained by the absence of a direct association between neuroticism and this CMS in our study, despite meta-analytic findings (Tehrani & Yamini, 2020) suggesting a negative relationship. A potential explanation lies in the educational background of our sample, which was above average. Highly educated individuals with neurotic tendencies may employ more sophisticated CMS, such as the integrating style, as education might provide them with the skills and knowledge to navigate conflicts more effectively (Molero Jurado et al., 2021), despite their predisposition to emotional or passive responses. As for the lack of an indirect effect of the dominating CMS for conscientiousness in the exploratory analysis, this aligns with meta-analytic results showing no relationship between conscientiousness and a dominating CMS (Tehrani & Yamini, 2020). The indirect effects we found for CMS align with the results of Milam et al. (2009) who found provocative behaviors to mediate the relationship between personality traits and experienced WI.

Overall, our results regarding relationships between personality traits and experienced WI as well as the mediation through CMS are in line with the assumption that personality may be linked to experienced WI both through specific behavioral mechanisms such as CMS, lending support to the VPF as well as other factors. The fact that in all cases where we have an indirect effect, the direct effect remains significant suggests that only a part of the association

between personality traits and experienced WI is due to CMS. This does not lend direct support to the PPF as behaviors other than CMS such as other provocative behaviors (Milam et al., 2009) may play a role, but our results are compatible with the assumption that both specific behaviors as well as perceived vulnerability are relevant. Thus, future research should assess other specific behaviors as mediators as well as their perception by WI instigators to further support the VPF and PPF.

### Incivility as a Form of Modern Discrimination and Organizational Policies and Norms

Our findings regarding WI as a form of modern discrimination align partially with prior research. Consistent with Cortina et al. (2013) and the meta-analyses by Yao et al. (2022) and Chris et al. (2022)—but in contrast to Labelle-Deraspe and Mathieu (2024)<sup>2</sup> and the meta-analysis by Han et al. (2022)—we found that women reported experiencing more WI compared to men. However, female gender was no longer significant after removing multiple outliers, highlighting the need for cautious interpretation. Additionally, the effect size was relatively small, aligning with the findings from previous meta-analyses.

As for individuals with non-normative gender identities, our findings align with the broader literature on discrimination and stigmatization against this group (see White Hughto et al., 2015 for a review). While we are not aware of any prior studies directly investigating the relationship between non-normative gender identity and WI (Chris et al., 2022), research indicates that these individuals face significant stigma and discrimination (White Hughto et al., 2015), particularly when their gender expression differs from societal expectations associated with their sex assigned at birth (Miller & Grollman, 2015). Our results suggest that, in addition to experiencing overt forms of discrimination, individuals with non-normative gender identities may also be subjected to subtler forms of mistreatment, such as WI. However, this interpretation must be approached with caution due to the low number of participants with non-normative gender identities in our sample. Notably, in the subsample of individuals employed in their organization for more than six months, non-normative gender identity was no longer a significant predictor of WI. This change could reflect a loss of statistical power, as nearly one-fifth of the individuals with non-normative gender identities were excluded from this subsample.

In agreement with Zurbrügg and Miner (2016) and Labelle-Deraspe and Mathieu (2024), we did not find evidence suggesting that sexual minority members experience more WI compared to heterosexual individuals. However, this result still warrants further explanation as the results of qualitative research (Di Marco et al., 2018; Einarsdóttir et al., 2015) and theoretical considerations based on the theory of selective incivility suggest that sexual minority members would be targeted more. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the WI encountered by sexual minority members may differ from the behaviors captured by the scale used in our study. For example, Di Marco et al. (2018) highlight experiences such as sexual insinuations and seemingly innocuous jokes directed at sexual minority members. Additionally, the organizational context may play a significant role (Einarsdóttir et al., 2015), as well as whether an individual's sexual minority status is visibly disclosed or known. Last, but not least, our sample was highly educated, which also is a potential reason why sexual minority members did not experience more WI compared to heterosexual individuals. Future research should incorporate behaviors identified in qualitative studies, examine the role of sexual minority status visibility, and explore these relationships in more diverse and representative samples.

Contrary to prior findings from Cortina et al. (2013) and meta-analyses (Han et al., 2022; Yao et al., 2022), which reported associations between racial minority status and higher levels of experienced WI, our results did not show a significant relationship between an apparent migration background and experienced WI. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that an apparent migration background does not necessarily imply visible racial differences. Since racism, which is often linked to visible markers of social group membership, may be a key factor behind increased WI experienced by racial minorities, this nuance might explain the absence of such an association in our data. Additionally, the group of individuals with an apparent migration background in our sample was quite small ( $n = 35$  participants), limiting the statistical power and generalizability of our finding. Future research should aim to include larger and more diverse samples of individuals with migrant backgrounds and gather detailed information on specific markers, such as ethnicity, that might make these individuals more vulnerable to WI.

Overall, our findings partially support the theory of selective incivility, as we have found evidence that members of some marginalized groups might be subject to experiencing more WI compared to members of the majority. However, the effects seem to be rather small which is consistent with prior literature. Our study contributes to the literature by controlling for the tendency to interpret ambiguous situations as uncivil (Sliter et al., 2015) based on past negative experiences. However, it needs to be pointed out that the relationship between experienced WI and the tendency to interpret ambiguous situations as uncivil was much lower than expected and non-significant so that it remains unclear whether our control variable actually fulfilled its intended purpose.

As the role of organizational policies and norms is concerned, the bivariate correlations between experienced WI with both policies and norms were in the small-to-medium range, which is considerably lower than the medium-to-large associations reported by Han et al. (2022). Furthermore, none of our initial moderator analyses yielded significant results, and only in the subsample of individuals who had been employed with their organization for more than six months did we find weak evidence for a moderator effect. However, this exploratory finding should be treated with caution due to the small group size of individuals with a non-normative gender identity. A potential explanation for these findings is that employees in Germany may lack sufficient awareness of the existence or application of explicit organizational policies and norms addressing WI or other forms of mistreatment. This lack of awareness could influence both the reporting of rules and norms in the study as well as their actual role as a deterrent. If policies and norms are unknown to employees, they are unlikely to deter potential perpetrators from engaging in incivility toward their coworkers. Alternatively, it is possible that many German organizations lack consistent or well-enforced policies and norms related to workplace behavior. The most direct explanation, however, is that policies and norms, even when present, may not effectively mitigate WI. Unlike more overt discriminatory behaviors, WI is ambiguous and thus difficult to regulate (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). According to the theory of selective incivility, WI may serve as a subtle means to subvert policies and norms targeting more overt forms of discrimination (Cortina, 2008). In this way, organizational policies and norms may unintentionally displace more overt forms of mistreatment without addressing the underlying causes. Future research should assess organizational policies and norms not based on participants' ratings but on official rules and guidelines for employee conduct.

### Implications

Our results have important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they suggest that individual behaviors, such as CMS, play an important role as antecedents of WI. At the same time,

individuals also appear to be targeted based on their identity. While the findings from our first sample could still be interpreted to suggest that other behaviors not assessed in our study might fully account for the relationship between personality traits and WI, the results from our second sample—that women and individuals with non-normative gender identities are targeted more—cannot be explained by specific behaviors displayed by these groups. Instead, these findings point to identity and belonging to vulnerable groups as reasons for being targeted. Therefore, our study provides evidence for both the VPF and the PPF. Moreover, our results contribute to the literature on selective incivility by corroborating the specific targeting of women and offering preliminary evidence that this theory may also apply to individuals with non-normative gender identities.

Our results suggesting that specific behaviors such as CMS seem to play a role in being targeted opens the door for potential interventions. Particularly trainings for equipping employees with effective techniques for resolving workplace conflicts (e.g., Leon-Perez et al., 2016) could help reduce the amount of WI that employees experience. However, the fact that CMS only partially explained the relationship between personality traits and WI—and that women and individuals with non-normative gender identities appear to be targeted more frequently—suggests that vulnerable groups and individuals may require additional protections. While our results did not support a significant role for organizational policies and norms, this may be attributable to a lack of employee awareness regarding such policies, as discussed above. If that is the case, making these policies better known among employees could be beneficial. In addition, a promising approach could involve increasing awareness of WI among managers and team leaders, training them to identify and intervene in situations where vulnerable individuals are targeted. Given the high individual and organizational costs associated with WI (Schilpzand et al., 2016), this proactive approach could be critical in addressing the issue. Moreover, organizations could consider implementing formalized feedback mechanisms, such as anonymous reporting systems, to help identify and address WI early on. Such mechanisms would support the identification of WI that may not be immediately visible and create a more supportive environment for employees who feel vulnerable.

### Limitations

As with any study, there are a number of limitations that should be considered. First, our cross-sectional design limits the ability to make definitive causal claims. While we can draw inferences about potential causal relationships, the data do not provide conclusive evidence of causality. Consequently, our conclusions, especially regarding the mediation effects, are preliminary and should be interpreted with caution. Future research employing longitudinal designs is needed to confirm these findings. Additionally, our study is restricted to self-report measures which can introduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future research could benefit from using alternative methods to assess constructs such as organizational policies and norms to mitigate this concern. Furthermore, the small group sizes for certain analyses (e.g., apparent migration background, non-normative gender identity) limit the robustness of our conclusions for these groups as well as the overall relatively low level of reported experienced WI. Both of our samples were highly educated, which may not be representative of the broader workforce, so generalizability of the findings remains uncertain. The Big Five as well as organizational policies and norms were assessed with very brief measures. Although the BFI-K (Rammstedt & John, 2005) is a well-established instrument designed for economic personality assessment, its reliability is impacted by its brevity. Indeed, the original authors and our own study report  $\alpha$

< .70 for three of the subscales. However, the BFI-K demonstrates strong convergent validity (Rammstedt & John, 2005), indicating that the personality traits were captured appropriately despite the slightly lower internal consistency. That said, the relatively low alpha for the conscientiousness subscale may still have contributed to the non-significance of conscientiousness in our samples. Future studies could use more comprehensive measures for the Big Five to mitigate this concern. As for organizational policies and norms, we also employed an established measure (Gallus et al., 2014). The norms subscale was slightly below  $r_{sb} = .70$ , so we cannot rule out that this may have contributed to the non-significance of our moderator hypotheses. Lastly, in sample 2, the control variable, the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as uncivil, was not associated with experienced WI, suggesting that the measure may not have adequately captured the intended construct, despite using an established scale (Sliter et al., 2015). Although we took precautions to ensure the quality of the translation, it is possible that these changes affected the validity of the measure. Regardless, future studies could consider using an alternative construct, such as hostile attribution bias (Nasby et al., 1980), which is conceptually similar but might be better suited to this context.

### Conclusion

In summary, this study provides valuable insights into individual-level antecedents of WI and CMS as an underlying behavioral mechanism for the relationship between personality traits and WI. Although the amount of WI was relatively low in both our samples, we did identify individual and group characteristics that make employees more vulnerable for being targeted with WI. As WI is proven to be associated with negative individual and organizational outcomes (Schilpzand et al., 2016) and should thus not be ignored, the results of our study offer several avenues for interventions on the individual and organizational level.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

### Authors' Contribution

Ines Bögel and Mieke Blanke contributed equally to this work and share first authorship.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Based on  $n = 460$  participants as 7 did not indicate their age.

<sup>2</sup>This study was published after we had finalized the design and commenced data collection. Consequently, its findings, particularly regarding the targeting of women and non-heterosexual individuals, could not inform the conceptualization or theoretical framework of our study.

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