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What is This?
Being different and suffering the consequences: The influence of head coach–player racial dissimilarity on experienced incivility

George B Cunningham
Texas A&M University, USA

Kathi Miner
Texas A&M University, USA

Jennifer McDonald
Texas A&M University, USA

Abstract
The purpose of the current study was to examine how head coach–player racial dissimilarity was associated with negative treatment from the head coach. Data were collected from 212 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I women’s basketball players (124 Whites, 88 African Americans). Results indicate that racial dissimilarity was associated with greater incivility when the head coach was White, but not when the head coach was African American. In addition, incivility was negatively associated with players’ commitment to the team. The authors discuss theoretical contributions and practical implications.

Keywords
basketball, diversity, gender, incivility, race

Changing national demographics, social pressures for diverse and inclusive work environments, and federal and state mandates have all worked to increase the proportion of racial minority athletes, coaches, and administrators in sport organizations today (for a review, see

Corresponding author:
George B Cunningham, Laboratory for Diversity in Sport, Department of Health and Kinesiology, Texas A&M University, 4243 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4243, USA.
Email: gbcunningham@hlkn.tamu.edu
Adair et al., 2010). While there are a bevy of benefits associated with racial diversity (Cunningham, 2009; Cunningham and Sagas, 2004; Doherty and Chelladurai, 1999), there is also considerable evidence that racial minorities frequently face prejudice and discrimination in the sport context (Hylton, 2009; Long et al., 2005; Singer, 2005a, 2005b). This is particularly the case for athletes (Hawkins, 2010). Relative to their White counterparts, racial minority athletes are more likely to be segregated to peripheral positions where decision making functions are limited (Sack et al., 2005), face stereotypes about their “natural” athletic abilities and inferior intellect (Sailes, 1993, 2000), and be marginalized by their coaches and other support staff members (Singer, 2005b). Thus, despite the many benefits of racial diversity, race relations in sport organizations are often poor.

Examination of the aforementioned studies points to several commonalities. Firstly, most researchers have focused on racial minority men while largely failing to examine the experiences of racial minority women. This is a critical omission considering (a) the large proportion of female sport participants who identify as racial minority (see DeHass, 2008) and (b) that racial minority women frequently report that their voices are silenced within sport organizations (see Bruening, 2005; Bruening et al., 2005). Secondly, much of this research focuses on participants’ experiences with overt forms of racial prejudice; however, not all forms of differential treatment are overt in nature. In fact, the social psychological literature suggests that subtle forms of prejudice are likely to be more commonplace in organizations today (Cortina, 2008; Dovidio and Gaertner, 2004). Finally, the extant literature has largely focused on the poor treatment afforded to racial minority players by White head coaches. However, just as White coaches express bias toward racial minority players, racial minority coaches might also express bias toward White players. This possibility remains unexplored.

The purpose of the current study was to address these gaps in the literature. Specifically, in focusing on women’s collegiate basketball players, we examine how player-coach racial dissimilarity is associated with incivility from the head coach. In doing so, we restrict our analyses to African American and White players, as they represent the strong majority of the participants on women’s basketball teams (DeHass, 2008). We also examine how these experiences might affect the players’ commitment to the team. In the following sections, we outline the theoretical framework and present specific hypotheses.

Theoretical framework

Incivility refers to low-level interpersonal behaviors that are rude, discourteous, and violate norms of mutual respect (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Pearson and Porath, 2009). Examples include disrupting conversations, speaking in a condescending tone, arriving late to engagements, not returning phone calls or emails, failing to introduce a newcomer, ignoring someone, giving dirty looks or stares, and being ambivalent about another person’s opinion, among others (Estes and Wang, 2008; Cortina and Magley, 2009; Pearson and Porath, 2009). Furthermore, incivility represents an ambiguous behavior, such that “it is not clear to either the instigator, target, or observers that the instigator had harmful or malicious objectives” (Cortina and Magley, 2009: 273). As such, its targets can attribute the behavior to a host of factors, including the offending party’s ignorance, oversight, or disagreeable personality (Cortina, 2008).
Research suggests that incivility is widespread. For instance, a national poll of over 2000 adults revealed that most people consider incivility to be a societal problem: 79% indicated that a lack of respect and courtesy is a national concern in America, and 73% hold that the problem is worse than it was in the past (Farkas and Johnson, 2002). Uncivil behavior is also observed in the workplace. In a multi-study analysis, Cortina and Magley (2009) observed that 75% of university employees, 54% of attorneys, and 71% of court employees reported having experienced incivility on the job. Unfortunately, examinations of incivility in the sport context are lacking, but there is related research to suggest that uncivil behavior is ubiquitous in this context as well (e.g. Pedersen et al., 2009).

**Targets of incivility**

As previously noted, one of our principal aims in the current study was to examine how head coach–player racial dissimilarity influenced incivility from the head coach. Much of diversity research is grounded in the social categorization framework (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), which holds that people classify themselves and others into social groups. These classifications can be based on any number of attributes, including race. Thus, people define themselves in terms of their social identity. They then use these classifications to distinguish between people similar to (i.e. in-group members) and different from (i.e. out-group members) themselves. All else being equal, people hold in-group members in higher regard, affording more trust, liking, and helping behaviors to them relative to out-group members. Within groups and dyads, this is thought to create “us” versus “them” dynamics and the associated inter-group bias.

These tenets have provided the theoretical undergirding for subsequent diversity research and theorizing (Cunningham, 2004, 2011a; Riordan, 2000; Sartore, 2006; Tsui and Gutek, 1999; van Knippenberg et al., 2004), and empirical work is generally supportive of these relationships. Of particular interest to the current study, researchers have shown that supervisor–subordinate similarity (akin to head coach–player similarity) is associated with more positive attitudes and ratings expressed toward the subordinate – findings observed for personality (Antonioni and Park, 2001), age and tenure (Judge and Ferris, 1993), gender (Tsui and Gutek, 1999), and race (Stauffer and Buckley, 2005).

Closer examination of these studies, however, suggests that the effects might not be uniform. For instance, Stauffer and Buckley (2005) observed that African American workers received higher ratings from African American supervisors than from Whites, but for White workers, the race of the supervisor did not influence the ratings. Similarly, Cunningham and Sagas (2005) observed that African American assistant coaches were statistically under-represented on coaching staffs led by White head coaches but not on staffs guided by African American head coaches. These patterns are contrary to what might be expected from a social categorization perspective; however, more contemporary theorizing, in the form of selective incivility theory (Cortina, 2008), sheds light on the issue.

Cortina (2008), in her exposition of selective incivility theory, argues that persons in low-status positions within organizations, such as women, racial minorities, and sexual minorities, are most likely to be the targets of uncivil behavior (see also Pearson and Porath, 2005). She draws from a multilevel perspective to explain this differential treatment, such that factors at the societal (i.e. discriminatory traditions, disparate social roles,
asymmetrical power), organizational (i.e. policy, leadership, local social norms), and individual (i.e. affective and cognitive factors) levels collectively and interactively affect who is treated in an uncivil manner and by whom. As an illustrative example, Cortina relays the scenario of employees who, despite their progressive egalitarian ideals and explicitly opposing prejudice, target women and racial minorities with disproportionate incivility. She highlights that this behavior takes place because of their implicit biases, preferences for in-group members, desire to maintain power (all individual-level factors), poor nondiscriminatory policies and ambivalence among key leaders (both of which are organizational factors), and cultural traditions disadvantaging women and racial minorities (societal factors). Thus, even among seemingly well-intentioned individuals, the confluence of multilevel factors contributes to selective incivility.

There is evidence from the sport management literature to suggest that selective incivility would occur in head coach–player relationships. Whites and men are overrepresented in head coaching positions (see Acosta and Carpenter, 2010; Zgonc, 2010) and have historically enjoyed power and privilege within the sport context. Athletes hold considerably less power, and this is particularly the case for African Americans (Hawkins, 2002; Singer, 2005b). Furthermore, few athletic department cultures are progressive and inclusive (Fink et al., 2001) and, as such, antisocial behavior directed toward racial minorities is likely to go unchecked. Racial ideologies privileging Whites players while trivializing the accomplishment of African Americans and other racial minorities also abound (Coakley, 2009; see also Cunningham and Bopp, 2010), thereby also pointing to the influence of societal factors. Collectively, this literature suggests that selective incivility should occur in sport, such that White head coaches behave in an uncivil manner toward racial minority players. As such, we hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 1:** Players racially different from their head coach are more likely to experience incivility when the head coach is White, but are less likely to experience incivility when the head coach is African American.

**Outcomes of incivility**

People who perceive that they are treated in an uncivil manner are negatively affected in a number of ways. Incivility is associated with poor health-related outcomes, such as emotional exhaustion (Kern and Grandey, 2009), embarrassment (Yamanda, 2000), depression (Cortina et al., 2001), decreased self-esteem (Yamanda, 2000), and overall physical health (Lim et al., 2008). It also has the potential to negatively affect work-related outcomes, including satisfaction with one’s supervisor, coworkers, and overall work (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008; Miner-Rubino et al., 2012; Miner-Rubino and Reed, 2010; Reio and Ghosh, 2009), turnover intentions (Lim et al., 2008; Miner-Rubino and Reed, 2010), and decreased work performance (Porath and Pearson, 2010). In the current study, we focused on the impact of incivility on players’ commitment to the team.

According to Meyer and Herscovitch (2001: 301), commitment “is a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets.” This force can take the form of multiple mindsets: affective (i.e. a desire to maintain a course of action), continuance (i.e. a perceived cost of failing to follow the course of action), and normative (i.e. a
sense of obligation to pursue a course of action). While it is multidimensional, research suggests that the affective mindset holds the strongest association with subsequent desired attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Meyer et al., 2002). As such, we focused our investigation of the effects of incivility on players’ affective commitment to the team.

We expected that coach incivility would be negatively associated with players’ commitment to the team. People who experience incivility are likely to be deeply hurt and have a sense of hopelessness (Cortina, 2008; Porath and Pearson, 2010). When the incivility comes from the head coach, feelings of betrayal and a lack of support are also likely to materialize, both of which have the potential to influence one’s commitment negatively (see Meyer et al., 2002). These dynamics should lessen one’s personal involvement and sense of identity in the team – two factors that are thought to contribute to commitment (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). Indeed, although the evidence is limited, researchers have found that employees who experience incivility are also likely to have corresponding declines in their commitment to the workplace (Porath and Pearson, 2010). This linkage is also consistent with research related to more overt forms of prejudice and discrimination, which negatively impact people’s satisfaction with and commitment to their workplace (Button, 2001; Cunningham and Sagas, 2007; Ensher et al., 2001; Sanchez and Brock, 1996). As such, we hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 2**: Head coach incivility will be negatively associated with players’ affective commitment to the team.

**Controls**

We included three controls in the present study – head coach gender, negative affect, and justice orientation – because of their potential to influence how people perceive the environment around them. For instance, supervisor–subordinate gender dissimilarity is associated with less positive attitudes expressed toward the subordinate (Tsui and O’Reilly, 1989); thus, as we focus our examination on female athletes, it is necessary to control for the gender of the head coach. People high in negative affectivity are more likely than their peers to perceive their environment as negative (Judge and Hulin, 1993; Levin and Stokes, 1989), and this could impact their perceptions of incivility and commitment to the team. Finally, people with a strong justice orientation are likely to be more attune than their peers to issues related to fairness and equity (Liao and Rupp, 2005), dynamics that might also impact their incivility ratings. Thus, we controlled for these potentially confounding variables as well.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I women’s basketball players \( N = 229 \). The sample consisted of 124 Whites (54.1%), 88 African Americans (38.4%), 5 Asian Americans (2.2%), 3 Hispanics (1.3%), 4 persons who listed “other” (1.8%), and 5 persons who did not provide their race. The distribution based on class was as follows: first year \( n = 17, 7.4\% \), sophomore \( n = 55, 24.0\% \), junior \( n = 45, \)
19.7%), senior ($n = 91, 39.7\%$), “other” ($n = 20, 8.7\%$), and 1 person who did not provide her class. The mean age was 20.53 years ($SD = 1.33$).

**Measures**

The participants received an email invitation and link to an online survey that requested them to provide their demographic information (as outlined above) and respond to items pertaining to incivility, commitment to the team, and two control variables (negative affect and justice orientation).

**Incivility.** Coach incivility toward the player was measured with 19 items from previous measures that were adapted to the coach–player context. Eight items came from the Workplace Incivility Scale (Caza and Cortina, 2007; Cortina et al., 2001), three items came from the Angry Experiences Scale (Glomb and Miner, 2002), three items came from the Uncivil Workplace Behavior Questionnaire (Martin and Hine, 2005), and five items came from the Daily Life Experience Scale (Harrell et al., 1997). Items were chosen from each measure if they were relevant to the sport context and to ensure breadth of uncivil behaviors. The items asked participants to rate, from 1 (never) to 5 (always), how frequently over the past year the coach had engaged in uncivil behaviors. Examples include “put you down or was condescending to you,” “made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you,” “ignored or excluded you,” and “expected you to be inferior.” Together, the items demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .95$).

**Commitment.** Affective commitment to the team was measured with eight items adapted from Meyer and Allen’s (1984) scale. Sample items include “I would be very happy to remain with this team while at this university” and “I do not feel like ‘part of the family’ with this team” (reverse scored). Participants responded on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability for the measure was high ($\alpha = .87$).

**Head coach race.** The race of the head coach was obtained by consulting individual coach photographs when available or the photographs of the team on the team websites. As all the head coaches in the sample were either African American or White, race was coded as either 0 = African American coach or 1 = White coach. Two raters, both White women, provided assessments and demonstrated an inter-rater reliability of .77. The raters resolved any disagreements to arrive at a consensus regarding the coach’s race.

**Controls.** We included three controls in the analyses: head coach gender, negative affect, and justice orientation. As with head coach race, head coach gender was obtained by consulting individual coach photographs when available or the photographs of the team on the team websites.

We measured negative affect with the 10-item version of Watson et al.’s (1988) Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS). Using a five-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always), participants rated the degree to which they usually felt various ways. Sample items included “distressed,” “upset,” and “guilty.” The scale’s reliability ($\alpha = .85$) was high.
Justice orientation was measured with the 16-item scale from Rupp et al. (2003). Sample items include “I hurt for people who are treated unfairly, whether I know them or not,” “I have been in public situations where I have noticed strangers being treated unfairly,” and “when I observe or hear about people being treated unfairly, I tend to think about it for a long time.” Participants responded using a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and the scale demonstrated good reliability (α = .85).

**Procedures**

Data were collected via an online survey. There are 343 NCAA Division I women’s basketball teams, each with 15 players ($N = 5145$). According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample of 357 persons is needed to generalize to a population of that size. Shih and Fan (2008) found that web surveys average a 34% response rate, although figures are lower among studies of employees. Keeping this trend in mind, we expected a response rate of around 31%, and, based on this figure, we then calculated how many athletes we would need to survey to reach the a sample of 357 (i.e. the number needed to generalize to the population), with the total coming to approximately 1150. Using team websites and university online directories, we gathered names and email addresses for 1139 NCAA Division I women’s basketball players from 99 colleges and universities across the US. Participants were recruited using email invitations to complete a survey regarding “relationships within college basketball teams.” Participation was incentivized through a random lottery. Specifically, participants were given the option of entering their email address for a chance to win one of 10 US$100 cash prizes. The emails were randomly selected and the prizes awarded following the completion of the study. Email addresses supplied for the purposes of the drawing were stored separately from other response data to ensure confidentiality.

Participants who responded within the first four weeks were requested to help recruit teammates to complete the survey. In exchange for their assistance, participants who recruited a teammate were offered one additional entry to win $100 in the random lottery, with the distribution of the funds carried out as previously articulated. In addition to these recruitment efforts, a Facebook fan page was created, which included a description of the study and participant qualifications (e.g. current Division I college basketball players only), as well as a link to the online survey and researcher contact information. To promote this page, links and recruiting language were posted on several other college basketball Facebook pages.

In all, these efforts resulted in 229 respondents (20% response rate). Low response rates are typical for web-based surveys (Denniston et al., 2010; Shih and Fan, 2008) and in research pertaining to sensitive topics, such as incivility (Berdahl and Aquino, 2009). In examining the representative nature of the sample, we compared our sample characteristics with the known characteristics of the population. According to DeHass (2008), African American women constitute 47% of Division I basketball players, a figure somewhat higher than their proportion in the current sample (38%). Further, Zgnoc (2010) reports that 21% of the head coaches of women’s Division I basketball teams are African American, and this proportion closely matches that in our sample (22%). Finally, the proportion of teams guided by women in our sample is identical to the overall population of
women’s Division I basketball teams (66%; Zgnoc, 2010). Collectively, these figures suggest that the sample is fairly representative of the overall population from which it was drawn.

Results

Descriptive statistics

As previously noted, given the low number of athletes in some racial groups, we restricted our analyses to include only African American and White women (N = 212). Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. The mean scores for both negative affect (M = 2.36, SD = .50) and incivility from the head coach (M = 2.73, SD = .72) were lower than the midpoint of the scale (3), while the players’ justice orientations (M = 3.40, SD = .46) and commitment to the team (M = 3.67, SD = .75) were both above the midpoint of the scale (3). In addition, bivariate correlations illustrate that racial minorities have greater justice orientations and less commitment to their team. Negative affect was positively associated with incivility from the head coach, while justice orientation and head coach gender were not. Incivility from the head coach was negatively associated with commitment to the team. Finally, with the exception of the association between incivility from the head coach and commitment to the team, most of the associations were small.

Hypothesis testing

The hypotheses were tested through structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS 16 software. We had a large number of items in our overall questionnaire, and researchers have shown that it is difficult to achieve good model fit when a latent factor has many item indicators (Bentler, 1980; Bollen, 1989). One way of rectifying this issue is to form item parcels, where a parcel is “an aggregate-level indicator comprised of the sum (or average) of two or more items, responses or behaviors” (Little et al., 2002: 152). Illustrative of the benefits of this approach, Alhija and Wisenbaker (2006) note that the use of parcels (a) is ideal with smaller samples, (b) reduces the complexity of the structural equation model,
and (c) accordingly, offers a way for research to more easily interpret their theory-testing models. As such, incivility, commitment, negative affect, and justice orientation were treated as three-item latent variables. As an illustrative example, for the 19-item incivility scale, the mean of the first six items represented parcel 1, the mean of the second six items represented parcel 2, and the mean of the final seven items represented parcel 3. We went through a similar process for each of the latent variables. Finally, head coach race and player race were both treated as observed variables (both coded as 0 for African American or 1 for White), as was the head coach race × player race interaction term.

Results indicate that the model fits the data well: $\chi^2 (n = 212, df = 86) = 116.31, p = .02$; $\chi^2 / df = 1.35$; confirmatory fit index (CFI) = .97; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (90% CI: .02, .06) = .04, $p_{close} = .78$. We present an illustrative summary of the findings in Figure 1. Overall, the model explained 15% of the variance in coach incivility and 26% of the variance in commitment to the team.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that players racially different from their head coach would experience incivility when the head coach was White, but not when the head coach was African American. While player race was not significant ($\beta = .21, p = .26$), head coach race was ($\beta = .26, p = .03$), as players with White head coaches experienced more head coach incivility than did players with African American coaches. The head coach race × player race interaction term was also significant ($\beta = –.38, p = .06$). Given the difficulty in detecting significant interactions in field research (Aguinis, 1995; Cohen et al., 2003; McClelland and Judd, 1993), researchers generally increase the alpha level to .10 (e.g. Harrison et al., 1998) – a practice to which we also adhere. Following Cohen et al.'s

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**Figure 1.** Illustrative summary of partially mediated structural equation model.

Notes: Model fit: $\chi^2 (n = 229, df = 86) = 122.15, p = .006$; $\chi^2 / df = 1.42$; CFI = .97; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (90% CI: .02, .06) = .04, $p_{close} = .74$. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$. 

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(2003) guidelines, we computed a simple slope analysis to examine the nature of the interaction. For African American head coaches, the relationship between player race and incivility was not significant ($B = .21, p = .17$); however, for White head coaches, the slope was significant ($B = -.24, p = .07$). Examination of the plot (see Figure 2) shows that White head coaches’ incivility toward African American players was higher than it was toward White players. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was largely supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that incivility from the head coach would negatively relate to commitment to the team. As seen in Figure 1, this hypothesis was supported ($\beta = -.51, p < .001$).

**Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to examine the extent to which (a) head coach–player racial dissimilarity was associated with incivility from the head coach, and (b) felt incivility was related to the player’s commitment to the team. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, we found that racial dissimilarity between the head coach and player was associated with greater incivility when the coach was White but not when the coach was African American. These findings are unique in the literature, as other researchers have focused solely on White head coaches’ behaviors and attitudes toward African American players (e.g. Anshel, 1990; Bruening et al., 2005; Donnor, 2005; Lawrence, 2005; Singer, 2005b). In the current study, we extended on this work by exploring whether African Americans engaged in similar behaviors, which they did not. Other researchers, albeit in different contexts, have also observed that White leaders exhibit bias while racial minorities do not – a pattern observed in performance evaluations (Stauffer and Buckley, 2005) and employee selection (Cunningham and Sagas, 2005).

**Figure 2.** Interactive effects of head coach race and player race on incivility.
The findings are also consistent with selective incivility theory (Cortina, 2008). In line with this approach, we suspect that the differences are a function of more than inter-group bias suggested by the social categorization approach (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). After all, researchers have consistently shown that all people, irrespective of race, categorize others into in-groups and out-groups (see Kinzler et al., 2010) and, as such, if incivility were solely a function of inter-group bias, we would observe an association between dissimilarity and incivility for both Whites and African Americans. However, this was not the case. Instead, there may be organizational factors, such as top leader support and the diversity culture, and societal factors, such as the history of African Americans’ marginalization in sport and society, that all contribute to how people interact with dissimilar others.

In addition, Cortina (2008) argues that incivility acts as a subtle, contemporary form of prejudice. Specifically, she posits that engaging in uncivil behavior toward out-groups members, especially those from low-status racial groups (i.e. racial minorities), offers instigators a strategy to subtly discriminate and express their prejudice. Indeed, expressing explicit forms of racial prejudice is socially unacceptable and has been for decades (Campbell, 1947), but subtle forms of prejudice, particularly those that do not reflect negatively on the instigator, are more pervasive in society (Gaertner and Dovidio, 2005; Son Hing et al., 2008). In many ways, incivility is a form of this subtle prejudice. That is, coaches can act uncivilly toward a player (e.g. make condescending comments to or ignore the player), but write off the behaviors as “typical” coach behavior and thereby become absolved of any wrong-doing. Indeed, while uncivil behaviors are seemingly subtle and innocuous, our results demonstrate that such acts of incivility are more potentially racially tinged and can have damaging effects, a point we discuss next.

Results support our second hypothesis, as greater coach incivility was negatively related to players’ commitment to the team. That is, as the occurrence of subtle, low-level forms of interpersonal mistreatment from the head coach increases, players’ affective ties to the team decrease. These findings are consistent with the notion that incivility, like other forms of prejudice and discrimination, negatively impact one’s psychological attachment to entity (Cortina, 2008; Porath and Pearson, 2010). The magnitude of this association is moderate to high (Cohen, 1988), thereby pointing to how important incivility is to players’ subsequent affective reactions.

That incivility negatively affected players’ commitment to the team should serve as a warning to coaches and administrators. Player commitment is important to consider from a humanistic perspective: given that athletes are the prime beneficiaries of the athletic department (Chelladurai, 1987), coaches have a duty to ensure that athletes’ affective reactions to the department and team are positive (for similar arguments with respect to satisfaction, see Chelladurai and Riemer, 1997). From a different perspective, ensuring athlete commitment can potentially improve team performance, as Meyer et al. (2002) observed that affective commitment was positively associated with various indices of work performance and citizenship behaviors. Thus, uncivil actions, which may decrease players’ commitment to the team, not only negatively affect the prime beneficiaries of athletics, but also have the potential to impede team performance.
The current study makes several contributions. Firstly, we examined the experiences of an under-researched population – African American women. This is particularly important considering that, although African American women represent a sizeable proportion of collegiate athletes (DeHass, 2008), their experiences are frequently taken for granted in nature (Bruening, 2005; Bruening et al., 2005; Carter and Hart, 2010). Secondly, this is the first study we could identify to investigate incivility in the sport context. Given its prevalence in various organizational contexts (Cortina and Magley, 2009), this omission is unfortunate. Finally, in grounding our work in selective incivility theory (Cortina, 2008), we extended past work by considering the prevalence of uncivil behaviors directed toward racially different others among both White and African American head coaches.

We also identified a number of implications. Given that racial dissimilarity was related to greater felt incivility (particularly among White coaches), our findings from the study point to the need for an emphasis on diversity and inclusion. One approach is to examine the department’s diversity culture. Athletic departments with proactive, inclusive diversity cultures take a broad and encompassing view of diversity, see differences among organizational members as a source of understanding and competitive advantage, have open lines of communication, have diverse leadership, and embrace different perspectives (Doherty and Chelladurai, 1999; Fink and Pastore, 1999). Researchers have found that athletic departments with diverse and inclusive workplaces enjoy corresponding increases in employee diversity, attraction of diverse fans, and employee satisfaction, among other outcomes (Cunningham, 2009, 2011b; Fink et al., 2001). In line with these findings, incivility directed toward racial minority athletes is likely to be low in departments with a diverse and inclusive culture.

In a related way, the findings also highlight the need for diversity training. Such efforts can be helpful in addressing diversity-related problems in organizations and in creating a culture of diversity and inclusion. Diversity training efforts should be linked with broader diversity initiatives (Wentling and Palma-Rivas, 1999) and should also focus on alerting people to the value that diversity brings to the workplace, thereby helping to improve and shape their diversity beliefs (Homan et al., 2007).

Despite the contributions and implications of the research, there are potential limitations. Firstly, we had a 20% response rate, which could raise concerns of non-response bias. However, as previously outlined, subsequent analyses largely allayed such trepidation. In addition, while we controlled for a number of factors, we did not collect some data that could have influenced the results. For instance, a scholarship player might be treated differently or respond to incivility differently than would a non-scholarship player. Further, we limited our analysis to a single sport (women’s basketball) in one division (NCAA Division I). It is possible that the nature of head coach–player interactions is different in other contexts.

Finally, there are several avenues for future research. Firstly, because of sample size limitations, we restricted our analyses to responses from African American and White players. There is a need, though, for understanding how other racial differences, such as a Native American playing for a White coach, might impact incivility. Secondly, researchers should also consider other diversity dimensions beyond race. As persons who differ
from the typical majority member frequently face prejudice and discrimination in sport (Fink et al., 2001), examining how other differences (e.g. sexual orientation, gender identity, religious beliefs) between head coaches and their players impact incivility could prove fruitful. In addition, we focused on the relationship between incivility and affective commitment to the team, a decision based on past research (Meyer et al., 2002). It is possible, though, that incivility might also affect other commitment forms, such as normative and continuance. Future researchers should explore this possibility. Finally, there is a need to understand how players interpret and respond to incivility. Two players can interpret a coach’s behavior differently, one understanding it to be uncivil in nature and the other not making such attributions. As it is felt incivility that is associated with subsequent outcomes, such as commitment to the team, understanding how these interpretations are made seems critical. Further, what coping strategies do they use and to whom do they turn when faced with such behaviors from their head coach? Qualitative studies might best address these issues. Given the detrimental effects of head coach incivility, such efforts are warranted.

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**Note**

1. We recognize that two people might perceive a given act differently. It is the target’s interpretation of the uncivil act that affects her or his subsequent outcomes.

**References**


Bruening JE (2005) Gender and racial analysis in sport: Are all the women white and all the blacks men? Quest 57(3): 330–349.


