The “I” in team: Coach incivility, coach gender, and team performance in women’s basketball teams

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\section*{A B S T R A C T}

Incivility is common across many sport contexts, yet empirical examination of its influence is lacking, especially when it comes to the influence of incivility on team emergent states and performance. The purpose of the present study was to address this topic by investigating the effects of leader incivility toward team members on team outcomes. The authors also examined team cohesion and psychological safety as potential mediators of the leader incivility-performance relationship and leader gender as a moderator of these mediational relationships. Participants included players from 52 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I female college basketball teams whose experiences of incivility were aggregated to the team level. As predicted, results revealed that leader incivility related to lower team cohesion, lower psychological safety, and lower objective team performance. Additionally, psychological safety mediated the incivility-performance relationship, as hypothesized. Based on these findings, the authors point to several implications, including emphasizing civility among leaders, instituting organizational policies designed to deter incivility, establishing reporting mechanisms, and implementing interventions and training.  

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\section*{1. Introduction}

Sport is a context where rude and discourteous behaviors are common. Some commentators have suggested that arrogance and pomp are deeply embedded into the fabric of sport (Abrams, 2016). John McEnroe, for example, won many tennis championships but was also “renowned as one of the most rude and egotistical loudmouths in the world of tennis” (Trelford, 2000). Sports parents are also to blame. News outlets commonly report on parents abusing opposing players, referees, or coaches. The problem is so pervasive that sport psychologists Small and Smith (2013) offered guidelines and developed a research-based video for parents of youth sport participants. In response to poor behaviors among parents, some youth leagues, Chugiak Youth Sports Association in Alaska, have developed codes of conduct for parents (Chugiak, n.d.). The uncivil behaviors are not limited to the court or field, however. In 2017, an Australian Football League chief executive had to address allegations that the workplace culture was one of “arrogance and rudeness” (Walsh, 2017). In response to such complaints, league officials considered a review of how it showed respect and responsibility toward others, especially women.

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The aforementioned examples, and scores of others like them, tell of incivility in sport. In the work setting, incivility refers to “seemingly inconsequential inconsiderate words and deeds that violate conventional norms of workplace conduct” (Pearson & Porath, 2009, p. 12). Pearson and Porath estimate that most people (96%) have experienced some form of incivility at work, though the frequency varies greatly. Given its pervasiveness, researchers have examined incivility across a variety of contexts, including the legal profession, universities, service sectors, and law enforcement (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Pearson & Porath, 2009; Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). The available evidence suggests experiencing uncivil behaviors is associated with decreases in one’s psychological, physical, and occupational well-being (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). In the one study we identified in sport, Cunningham, Miner, and McDonald (2013) found that racial dissimilarity influenced felt incivility, which in turn, was associated with decreased commitment.

A common theme among the extant research—both inside and outside of sport—is the focus of incivility on individual outcomes. Though such research has contributed to the understanding of incivility and its influence, we suggest it only tells part of the story. Sport organizations are increasingly organized around groups and teams (Cunningham, 2015; Kerwin, Walker, & Bopp, 2017), an important distinction because (a) experiences of individual team members can influence those of other team members (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007) and (b) individual experiences can take on shared team properties (Dixon & Cunningham, 2006). Furthermore, given that leaders in sport organizations can have a meaningful influence on the units they direct (Ferkins, Skinner, & Swanson, 2018; Welty Peache, Zhou, Damon, & Burton, 2015), there is a particular need to examine team leaders’ incivility within sport organizations, including the influence of that incivility on the functioning and performance of the team.

The purpose of the present study was to examine how team leader incivility toward team members was associated with team cohesion and team psychological safety and, in turn, team performance. We also investigated how these relationships may differ as function of the gender of the team leader. We test our hypotheses in a sample of college women basketball players. In these highly interdependent teams, we expected leader (i.e., coach) incivility to relate to lowered team cohesion and team psychological safety as well as lowered team performance (i.e., fewer wins). We offer an overview of the proposed model in Fig. 1.

2. Theoretical framework

From an organizational perspective, teams are groups of interdependent individuals working together to complete a common organizational goal (Sundstrom, DeMeuse, & Futrell, 1990). Building upon years of team research and countless definitions, Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006) defined a team as a collection of two or more people who interact with one another to achieve a common goal. Team members engage in organizationally relevant tasks within a given work environment, and although they have varying roles and assignments, the team members are dependent upon one another for the completion of their work (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006).

A number of authors have offered frameworks for understanding how teams function (e.g., Cohen & Bailey, 1997; McGrath, 1964). Earlier models focused on various inputs, processes, and performance outcomes. Building on and extending this work, Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, and Jundt, (2005) developed the input-mediator-output-input (IMOI) model. Ilgen et al.’s model offers a specific focus on the multilevel nature of team inputs. They also focus on mediators, instead of processes. The distinction is an important one because mediators represent emergent states that develop over the lifespan of the team—they are not processes. Examples include cohesion, satisfaction, psychological safety, and commitment, among others (Ilgen et al., 2005). Organizational scholars have recognized the value of Ilgen et al.’s reconceptualization of team functioning, using it to frame their own reviews and analyses (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008; Mathieu, Hollenbeck, & Ilgen, 2017). In the current study, we were particularly interested in understanding the role of inputs (coach gender, coach incivility, and the interaction thereof) on emergent states or mediators (cohesion and psychological safety) and an outcome (team performance). Thus, Ilgen et al.’s model served as an ideal framework to develop our hypotheses.

2.1. Input: Leadership in teams

In articulating their framework, Ilgen et al. (2005) suggested leaders can play a critical role in shaping team emergent states and team performance. Welty Peache et al. (2015) arrived at the same conclusion in the development of their
multilevel model. Team leaders form team experiences and interactions through a process of influencing and moving team members toward a collective goal (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Yukl, 2006).

Ilgen et al. (2005) primarily focused on how leaders help develop emergent states, but leaders can also behave in ways that detract from team functioning and effectiveness. In the sport context, pressures for success and results may influence leaders’ decisions to engage in unethical behavior (Sagas & Wigley (2014) or for “darker traits of leadership” to emerge, including hubris and narcissism (Welty Peachey et al., 2015, p. 579). As we previously discussed, the sport world is also one where incivility is rampant, and thus, we focus on how leader incivility may negatively influence team emergent states and team performance—an importance extension of previous models.

2.1.1. Top-down incivility
Uncivil behavior directed toward lower-status individuals by someone of higher status represents top-down incivility (Caza & Cortina, 2007). Researchers have shown that top-down incivility is common in organizational contexts and is especially detrimental for targets. For example, Pearson and Porath (2009) reported that about 60% of incivility instigators in numerous samples had higher organizational status than the target. Caza and Cortina (2007) found that when university students experienced incivility from instigators at higher levels of the institution (e.g., faculty, staff) they reported higher perceptions of injustice. These perceptions, in turn, were associated with dissatisfaction, disengagement, and lowered academic performance. Moreover, top-down incivility can leave targets with a sense of disempowerment and helplessness as they lack the resources to actively address and eliminate the incivility (Pearson & Porath, 2009).

2.1.2. Incivility and performance
We examined the linkage between coach incivility and team effectiveness. Researchers focusing on teams have offered a variety of conceptualizations (Mathieu et al., 2008; Salas, Stagl, & Burke, 2004). Focusing specifically on sport, Chelladurai (1987) noted that effectiveness is a multidimensional, and the relevance of the different dimensions likely depends on the perceiver. Other researchers have adopted a similar perspective when examining, for example, performance of national sport governing bodies (Winand et al., 2010) or sport organizations in the non-profit and for-profit sectors (Nowy, Wicker, Feiler, & Breuer, 2015). Recognizing the importance of Chelladurai’s contribution, we focus on wins as the primary measure of performance. Focusing on the outcomes of the team is consistent with the theoretical framework driving the research (Ilgen et al., 2005). Furthermore, other authors have adopted winning metrics and similar athletic performance measures when considering the effectiveness of high-level intercollegiate athletic teams (Cunningham, 2009,2011; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005).

Though researchers have firmly established the link between incivility and psychological outcomes, the relationship with performance has garnered only modest attention. Porath and Erez (2007) found that experiencing incivility lowered targets’ performance on anagram and creativity tasks, and inhibited creativity and flexibility when performing the tasks. These detrimental effects on performance were mediated by a disturbance to targets’ concentration and short-term memory capability. These findings suggest that experiencing incivility can cause targets to lose focus, which then negatively affects their task performance. Porath and Erez (2009) documented that simply observing incivility hindered individual task performance; individuals who observed uncivil behavior were also less likely to demonstrate creative thinking strategies and less likely to help others around them. Other researchers have similarly reported that incivility diminishes individuals’ productivity, motivation, work effort, time at work, creativity, information sharing, and helping behaviors (Pearson & Porath, 2009; Porath, Gerbasi, & Schorch, 2015). Further, Arthur, Herdan, and Yang (2011) found that higher levels of incivility climate (defined as a shared perception that incivility is commonplace) predicted lower teamwork behaviors. Subsequently, lower teamwork was related to lower customer satisfaction, which resulted in decreased organizational financial performance. These results demonstrate the potentially negative effects of incivility on both individual and organizational performance.

Missing from this scholarship is a focus on how team leader incivility is associated with team performance—a gap we address in our current study. To develop our hypotheses, we draw from related research, including that showing a link between leader behavior and team performance (Kellett, 1999). For example, Burke et al. (2006) meta-analytically examined how various leadership styles affected team performance outcomes (e.g., effectiveness, productivity). Their findings revealed that task-focused leadership behavior (e.g., transactional, initiating structure) predicted team effectiveness and team productivity but that leader behavior that was more person-focused (e.g., transformational, motivational) had an even bigger impact, especially on team learning. Vidyarthi, Anand, and Liden (2014) similarly reported that positive interpersonal leader behavior predicted employees’ individual performance, especially within highly interdependent teams. Finally, in a randomized trial of medical teams, Riskin et al. (2015) found that rude behavior from an outside observer of the team negatively affected team performance. These findings highlight the importance of civil behavior on team performance outcomes. Based on the aforementioned research, we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** Coach incivility will be negatively associated with team performance.

2.2. Cohesion and psychological safety as emergent states in teams
Ilgen et al. (2005) proposed that team outcomes (e.g., performance) are influenced through both inputs (e.g., leader incivility) and mediating emergent states, such as team cohesion and team psychological safety. Team cohesion refers to social and task aspects of a team that bond group members (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Doherty & Carron, 2003;
Salas, Grossman, Hughes, & Coultas, 2015). Pearson and Porath (2009) purported that when incivility occurs in teams, members may begin to feel disconnected from and care less about the team. This relationship might stem from feelings of betrayal, psychological contract breach, or negative affect toward the leader. This disconnect symbolizes an antithesis to team cohesion. Germane to this discussion, Morrison (2008) found that the presence of poor interpersonal relationships at work was negatively related to team cohesion.

Team psychological safety refers to a shared belief among team members that the team provides a safe environment for taking interpersonal risks such as asking a question, reporting an error, seeking feedback, or proposing a new idea (Edmondson, 1996). Researchers suggest negative leadership behavior can adversely affect team members’ perceptions of psychological safety. For example, Edmondson (1996) found that nursing team members who had leaders who discouraged group members’ input reported more fear in revealing and being reprimanded for making mistakes (i.e., felt less psychologically safe). Other researchers have shown that leader inclusiveness (defined as words and deeds by a leader that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others’ contributions) significantly and positively predicted psychological safety within the team (Hirak, Peng, Carmeli, & Schaubroeck, 2012; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Further, inclusive leaders minimize status differences within the group leading to greater team psychological safety (Edmondson, 2003; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Based on this previous research, we proposed the following:

**Hypothesis 2.** Coach incivility will be negatively associated with team cohesion.

**Hypothesis 3.** Coach incivility will be negatively associated with team psychological safety.

### 2.3. Team emergent states and team performance

We also suspected that the two emergent states would hold significant associations with team performance. Cohesion is especially critical for the performance of teams that are highly task interdependent (Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995; Sundstrom et al., 1990). In interdependent teams, like sport teams, cohesion is thought to influence both group (e.g., communication, coordination) and individual (e.g., persistence, intensity) motivation factors to influence team performance. Indeed, meta-analytic findings document that team cohesion predicts team performance (Beal et al., 2003; Gully et al., 1995). For example, in a meta-analysis of 46 studies in sport, Carron, Colman, Wheeler, and Stevens, (2002) found that cohesion held a moderate to large relationship with performance. The effects were particularly strong among women’s teams—the context for our research (see also Eys et al., 2015). This research shows that highly cohesive teams (in terms of both social and task cohesion) perform better than teams who have less of these characteristics.

Though scholars have not examined the relationships among incivility, cohesion, and team performance, we did identity related research suggesting that cohesion mediates the relation between interpersonal mistreatment and outcomes. For example, Raver and Gelfand (2005) found that team cohesion mediated the link between ambient mistreatment and team performance such that groups that reported higher levels of sexual harassment within the team were less cohesive and subsequently had lower financial performance. In a study of team-sport players, Al-Yaaribi and Kavussanu (2017) found that antisocial behaviors among teammates were associated with lower task cohesion, which in turn, predicted athlete burnout. These findings demonstrate the importance of team cohesion on team performance along with its role as a mediator in the mistreatment-performance relationship. Therefore, we hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 4.** Team cohesion will be positively associated with team performance.

**Hypothesis 5.** Team cohesion will partially mediate the relationship between team-leader incivility and team performance.

Psychological safety is a key element in the development of players (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004) and teams. Edmondson (1996) purported that team psychological safety may influence team performance in that team members tend to choose their actions within the team on the basis of the level of risk they attach to them (Edmondson, 2003). If team members perceive that undesirable consequences (e.g., being ridiculed, ignored) may result from taking some action (e.g., questioning team procedures, strategies, or assumptions) they may refrain from engaging in them, which may negatively affect team performance. Conversely, when team members believe they are encouraged and supported to challenge the status quo, they may feel more comfortable pursuing risky, uncertain, and innovative ideas, which could result in better team performance. As Cunningham, Pickett, Melton, Lee, and Miner, (2014) commented, “psychologically safe environments allow differences to manifest themselves and be a source of learning and effectiveness” (p. 409). Indeed, teams with higher psychological safety perform better than those who feel less psychologically safe (Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown, 2012; Hirak et al., 2012; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). The more psychologically safe team members perceived their team to be, the more likely they were to ask their teammates for advice, to see them as friends, and the less likely they were to report negative interactions with them (Schulte, Cohen, & Klein, 2012). Team psychological safety also mediates the relationship between positive team leader behavior and enhanced team performance (Hirak et al., 2012; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011). Hence, we made the following predictions:

**Hypothesis 6.** Team psychological safety will be positively associated with team performance.
Hypothesis 7. Team psychological safety will partially mediate the relationship between team-leader incivility and team performance.

2.4. Team leader gender as a moderator

In addition to examining the effects of leader incivility on team emergent states and performance, we examine leader gender as a moderator of the relationship between leader incivility and team outcomes. Welty Peachey et al. (2015) noted that a number of researchers have examined gender and leadership in sport. Examples include stereotypes women encounter in sport (Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009), the gendered nature of sport leadership positions (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010), and the multilevel factors affecting women’s experiences in leadership roles (Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2008).

Empirical work on how gender might affect these relationships is mixed, however. Welty Peachey and colleagues have shown that effective leadership helps fueled performance gains in sport settings, irrespective of the gender of the follower or of the leader (Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011, 2012). Others have explicitly examined how dissimilarity influences leader-follower interactions. For example, research suggests that leaders have more positive relationships with their subordinates (Bakar & McCann, 2014; Konrad, Cannings, & Goldberg, 2010; Vecchio & Brazil, 2007) and rate their subordinates’ performance more positively (Varma & Stroh, 2001) when they share the same gender. Further, research in the sports context suggests that experiences of incivility may be less frequent when coaches and players are demographically similar (Cunningham et al., 2013). Duffy and Ferrier (2003) found that leader-follower gender similarity attenuated the relationship between negative leader behavior and lower follower affective organizational commitment but had no effect on followers’ perceptions of supervisor trust. At the same time, other investigations suggest that leader-follower gender similarity has little effect on outcomes (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Marelich, 2002; Kacmar, Harris, Carlson, & Zivnuska, 2009) and that team demographic characteristics fail to influence team-related outcomes (Stewart, 2006). There is also meta-analytic evidence that team gender diversity negatively affects team performance (Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, & Briggs, 2010). Because of the conflicting research in this area, we make no formal hypotheses regarding leader gender as a moderator of the relationship between team leader incivility and team outcomes. Instead, we offer several research questions and conduct exploratory analyses regarding the effects of leader gender.

Research Questions 1–3. Does leader gender moderate the relationship between leader incivility and (a) team performance, (b) team cohesion, and (c) team psychological safety?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and procedures

As part of a larger study, participants came from a sample of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I women’s basketball teams recruited to participate in an online “team interactions” survey in the summer of 2010. College basketball teams are particularly useful for understanding team interactions because of the high interdependence in these types of teams, making them analogous to action teams in organizational settings (Sundstrom et al., 1990). In addition, the NCAA has set forth a number of rules and guidelines to set a consistent standard among different schools regarding recruitment, funding, and practice schedules. These standards provide a level of uniformity across teams.

There are 343 NCAA Division I women’s basketball teams, each with 15 players (N = 5145). According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), researchers need a sample size of 357 to generalize to a population of that size. In addition, research shows web surveys average a 34% response rate (Shih & Fan, 2008), and response rates tend to be somewhat low for research pertaining to sensitive topics, such as incivility (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009). Based on these guidelines, we expected a response rate of approximately 30%, and, based on this figure, calculated the number of players we would need to survey to arrive at a sample of 357 (i.e. the number needed to generalize to the population), with the total approximating 1150.

We then randomly selected 99 teams from the listing of universities supporting NCAA Division I basketball teams. We visited each team website to collect the names of the players on the rosters and then visited the university websites to find the publicly available email addresses for the players. Thus, we sought to gather information from each player on the roster. This process resulted in us gathering names and email addresses for 1139 NCAA Division I women’s basketball players from 99 colleges and universities across the U.S.

We contacted each athlete by email, inviting her to participate in the study. We incentivized participation by offering players the chance to win one of ten $100 prizes through a random lottery. Participants who responded within the first four weeks were asked to help recruit teammates to complete the survey. In exchange for their assistance, players who recruited a teammate were offered an additional lottery entry. Winner emails were randomly selected and the prizes awarded following the completion of the study. Email addresses supplied for the purposes of the lottery were stored separately to ensure confidentiality.

Overall, 229 athletes responded to the survey (20% response rate). However, the final sample included 204 players from 52 teams as teams with only one player responding were not included in the analyses. An average of 3.49 players (SD = 1.66),
or 25% of team members, responded for each team; this proportion parallels DeChurch and Mesmer-Magnus (2010) meta-analytic findings assessing team mental models, team processes, and team performance which showed an average representation of 26% of team members per team. The respondents’ mean age was 20.5 years (SD = 1.34). Players had been with their teams for an average of 3.5 years. Eight percent of the sample was in their first year, 24% were sophomores, 20% were juniors, and the largest percentage were seniors (40%). Nine percent did not specify their year.

The majority of the sample was White (55%); 39% were Black/African American; 2% Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander; 1% were Hispanic; and 2% identified as other. To examine the representativeness of the sample, we compared our sample racial breakdown with the known characteristics of the population. According to the NCAA Sports Sponsorship, Participation, and Demographics Search database (http://web1.ncaa.org/rgdSearch/exec/saSearch, 2010), White women constituted 40%; Black/African American women constituted 51%; Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander constituted 2%; and Hispanic women constituted 2% of Division I basketball players for the 2009–2010 season. Collectively, these figures suggest that our sample is fairly representative of the overall population from which it was drawn but that White women may have been somewhat over-presented and Black/African American women under-represented in our sample.

3.2. Measures

The survey included a number of multi-item scales; most relevant to the present study were measures of leader (i.e., coach) incivility, team cohesion, and team psychological safety. Construction of the larger survey focused on minimizing response bias and utilizing valid and reliable measures. For example, the team cohesion and team psychological safety measures appeared before questions assessing uncivil coach behavior to allow for an unbiased assessment of team emergent states. In addition, all measures are used extensively in the organizational psychology literature and show strong psychometric properties. All items were scored such that higher values reflect higher levels of the underlying construct.

3.2.1. Team leader incivility

Participants completed a measure assessing their experiences of coach incivility via an adapted version of the Workplace Incivility Scale tailored to the team context (WIS; Cortina et al., 2001). Participants were given the stem, “During the past year, has your coach engaged in any of the following behaviors?” They were then asked to rate six behaviors on a response scale from 0 (never) to 4 (always). Example behaviors include “Put you down or was condescending to you,” “Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately,” and “Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you.”

3.2.2. Team cohesion

Team cohesion was measured with Seashore (1954) four-item scale. Participants were asked to describe on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) response scale the extent to which they agreed with statements addressing their perceptions of team members including “Team members help each other on and off the court,” “Team members are ready to defend each other from criticism from outsiders,” “Team members get along with each other,” and “Team members stick together.” Note that these items most closely represent the social cohesion aspect of team cohesion (Beal et al., 2003). Further, though the measure is old, researchers continue to show its utility in examining social forms of cohesion, its predictors, and outcomes (Stoverink, Umphress, Gardner, & Miner, 2014; Tekleab, Karaca, Quigley, & Tsang, 2016)

3.2.3. Team psychological safety

Team psychological safety was assessed with Edmondson (1996) seven-item scale. Participants reported the extent to which they agreed with statements representing how safe they felt voicing issues and ideas within the team context such as “It is safe to take a risk on this team,” “Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues,” and “Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized” using a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) response scale.

3.2.4. Team performance

Team performance data were gathered from each university’s athletic website for the both the 2008–2009 (past) and 2009–2010 (current) seasons. Team performance was operationalized by calculating the team’s win percentage (total wins/total number of games). Note that this strategy provides an objective measure of team performance that is unaffected by individual team member’s perceptions. Past team performance (2008–2009) was collected to be included as a covariate in the analyses to isolate the effects of coach incivility on outcomes for the 2009–2010 year above and beyond past team performance.

3.2.5. Coach gender

Coach gender data were also gleaned from each university’s athletic website for the 2009–2010 season. Two raters coded coach gender by referencing pictures posted in each coach’s biography on the university websites. The raters had 100% agreement. The majority of teams in our sample were coached by women (65%) which is identical to the overall population of women’s Division I basketball teams (66%; Zgnoc, 2010).
4. Results

4.1. Data aggregation

The data analysis for this study was conducted at the team level because the key predictors in the model (team-leader incivility, team cohesion, team psychological safety) and the dependent variable (team performance) are all team-level variables. Before study variables were aggregated, $r_{wg}$ and intraclass correlations (ICC) were computed to check the appropriateness of aggregation (Biemann, Cole, & Voelpel, 2012; Dixon & Cunningham, 2006). The $r_{wg}$ value measures within-group agreement and determines whether group members are similar enough to support aggregation (James, 1982; James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984). ICCs measure the consistency/reliability of raters within a group (Dixon & Cunningham, 2006). In short, the $r_{wg}$ values determine whether group members are similar enough to each other and the ICCs values confirm this aggregation to the team-level. In the present study, the average $r_{wg}$ for each variable was above the recommended 0.70 (coach incivility = 0.78, team cohesion = 0.78, psychological safety = 0.92) and three-quarters of the groups had $r_{wg}$ over 0.70 for each of the variables. Additionally, the F test between groups was significant for team-level incivility and cohesion: ICC(1) and ICC(2): coach incivility = 0.13, 0.91, team cohesion = 0.10, 0.70. In contrast, the ANOVA for psychological safety was not significant and the ICC values (0.04, 0.28) did not meet the typical standards for aggregation. However, because of the high degree of within-group agreement for psychological safety, we decided to move forward with aggregation of all the variables included in the study.

4.2. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and correlations among the aggregated study variables are presented in Table 1. Leader incivility was negatively correlated with team cohesion, team psychological safety, and current team performance. Team cohesion and team psychological safety were positively related. Team cohesion was not significantly related to team performance; however, team psychological safety was positively related to team performance. Current team performance was positively correlated with past team performance. However, past team performance was unrelated to current coach incivility, team cohesion, and team psychological safety. Leader gender was not significantly related with any of the other study variables. Additionally, independent sample t-tests revealed that teams coached by men and women were not significantly different on any of the study variables.

4.3. Hypothesis testing

Hypotheses 1–3 were tested via OLS regression. The mediation hypotheses (Hypotheses 4–7) and research questions (1–3) were examined using Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS to obtain bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals (using 5000 bootstrap samples) for the conditional indirect effects. The results of these tests appear in Tables 2–5. First, we tested the direct effects of leader incivility on team cohesion, team psychological safety, and team performance. We then tested the indirect effect of leader incivility on team performance via team cohesion and team psychological safety separately (PROCESS Model 4). Lastly, we examined the effects of coach gender on the incivility to team performance, team cohesion, and team psychological safety relationships (PROCESS Model 8) to assess the research questions. All analyses included past team performance as a control variable.²

Hypothesis 1 predicted that team leader (i.e., coach) incivility would be negatively related to objective team performance. In support of Hypothesis 1, coach incivility was significantly negatively related to team performance ($β = −0.30, p < .05, ΔR^2 = 0.09$). Hypothesis 2 predicted that team leader incivility would be negatively related to team cohesion. Leader incivility was a significant and negative predictor of team cohesion ($β = −0.31, p < .05, ΔR^2 = 0.10$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 predicted that leader incivility would be negatively related to team psychological safety. Supporting this hypothesis, leader incivility was a significant and negative predictor of team psychological safety ($β = −0.46, p < .05, ΔR^2 = 0.21$). Thus, the more leaders (i.e., coaches) treated team members (i.e., players) uncivilly, the less cohesive and psychologically safe the team felt. Coach incivility also directly related to lowered team performance.

### Table 1

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<td>−.46</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>(0.66)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leader Gender²</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−.22</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>−.08</td>
<td>−.10</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Past Team Performance</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>.60²</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>−.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² Leader gender coded 0 = man, 1 = woman.

² $p < .05$.

² $p < .01$. 
Hypothesis 4 predicted that team cohesion would be positively related to objective team performance, and Hypothesis 5 predicted that cohesion would partially mediate the team leader incivility-performance relationship. As shown in Table 3, Hypothesis 4 was not supported, as team cohesion was not related to team performance. Nonetheless, because the p-value assumes a normal distribution and this assumption is typically violated in smaller samples such as ours (Williams & MacKinnon, 2008), bootstrapping intervals were also used to test the mediation effects in addition to a typical significance test. These bootstrapping results confirmed the significance test: the confidence intervals for the mediated model included zero (cohesion 95% bootstrap CI = −0.04 to 0.01). Therefore, cohesion was not found to mediate the incivility-team performance relationship as predicted in Hypothesis 5.

Hypotheses 6 and 7 predicted that team psychological safety would be positively related to team performance and partially mediate the incivility-performance relationship. Table 4 displays the results for these analyses. Supporting Hypothesis 6, psychological safety was positively related to team performance. In addition, the confidence intervals computed from asymmetric bootstraps indicated that the indirect effect of leader incivility on team performance via team psychological safety was negative and statistically different from zero. Moreover, the effect of leader incivility on team performance was no longer significant when team psychological safety was included in the model. Thus, team psychological safety fully mediated the leader incivility-team performance relationship, partially supporting Hypothesis 7.

Finally, we examined coach gender as moderator of the relationships between leader incivility and each of the team outcome variables (team cohesion, team psychological safety, and team performance; research questions 1–3); these results appear in Tables 4 and 5. As shown in Table 4, leader gender did not moderate the leader incivility-team performance nor the leader incivility-team cohesion relationship. However, the leader incivility × coach gender interaction on team psychological

### Table 2
Team Cohesion Simple Mediation Results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Team Cohesion</th>
<th></th>
<th>Team Performance</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Performance (control)</td>
<td>0.410</td>
<td>0.432</td>
<td>.557*</td>
<td>0.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Incivility</td>
<td>−.267*</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>−.069*</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Cohesion</td>
<td>−</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.112*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.460*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bootstrap Indirect Effects to Team Performance (through Team Cohesion)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>(SE)</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−0.008</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>−0.039</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CI = confidence interval.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

### Table 3
Team Psychological Safety Simple Mediation Results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Team Psychological Safety</th>
<th></th>
<th>Team Performance</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Performance (control)</td>
<td>0.282</td>
<td>0.287</td>
<td>.544*</td>
<td>0.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Incivility</td>
<td>−.280*</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>−.051</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Psychological Safety</td>
<td>−</td>
<td></td>
<td>.089*</td>
<td>0.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.224**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.488*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bootstrap Indirect Effects to Team Performance (through Psychological Safety)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>(SE)</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>−0.025</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>−0.063</td>
<td>−0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CI = confidence interval.

* p < .05.

† p < .10.

** p < .01.
Table 4
Moderated Mediation Analysis for Leader Incivility and Leader Gender with Team Cohesion and Team Performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mediator–Team Cohesion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control: Past Team Performance</td>
<td>0.418</td>
<td>0.439</td>
<td>0.954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor: Leader Incivility</td>
<td>−0.544</td>
<td>0.235</td>
<td>−2.320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator: Leader Gender</td>
<td>−0.803</td>
<td>0.563</td>
<td>−1.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction: Leader Incivility × Leader Gender</td>
<td>0.368</td>
<td>0.563</td>
<td>1.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcome–Team Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control: Past Team Performance</td>
<td>0.547</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>5.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator: Team Cohesion</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor: Leader Incivility</td>
<td>−0.310</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>−1.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator: Leader Gender</td>
<td>−0.146</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>−1.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction: Leader Incivility × Leader Gender</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.481</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Direct and Indirect Effects

Conditional Direct Effects on Team Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>−0.110</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>−0.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>−0.058</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>−0.122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conditional Indirect Effects on Team Performance (through Team Cohesion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>−0.012</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>−0.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>−0.004</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>−0.038</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Index of Moderated Mediation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CI = confidence interval.

*p < .001.

*p < .01.

*p < .05.

*p < .10.

Table 5

5. Discussion

Sport is a setting where incivility is observed among fans, parents, athletes, and administrators. Despite its prevalence, few sport management researchers have examined the influence of incivility (see Cunningham et al., 2013, for an exception). Furthermore, organizational psychologists have routinely focused on individual outcomes of incivility, failing to consider how the rude, discourteous behaviors from leaders might negatively influence a team’s emergent states or its performance. In the current study, we remedied these gaps in the research by focusing on how leader incivility was associated with team cohesion, team psychological safety, and team performance. We also considered the potential moderating effects of leader gender. Consideration of moderators not only helps extend theory (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007), but they offer researchers and sport managers important understanding of when and under what conditions various phenomena might occur (Cunningham & Ahn, 2018; Cunningham, Fink, & Doherty, 2016).

Consistent with our hypotheses, results indicated that incivility from the coach was directly, negatively related to lowered team cohesion, team psychological safety, and team objective performance. That is, the more team leaders engaged in rude, discourteous behavior toward team members, the less cohesive team members were, the less psychologically safe team members felt, and the worse the team performed. Contrary to our expectations, cohesion was not a mediator through which leader incivility affected team performance. However, findings did suggest that team psychological safety fully mediated the relationship between leader incivility and team performance. Additionally, although leader gender had no effect on the incivility-cohesion or incivility-performance relationships, findings revealed an effect for leader gender on the relationship

safety approached significance (see Table 5); this interaction is plotted in Fig. 2. As show in Fig. 2, the negative effect of leader incivility on team psychological safety was stronger for teams with male leaders as compared to teams with female leaders.
between incivility and team psychological safety; teams with men as leaders reported feeling less psychologically safe with higher levels of leader incivility.

Although ample evidence suggests that cohesion is a strong predictor of performance in sport teams (Al-Yaaribi & Kavussanu, 2017; Carron et al., 2002; Eys et al., 2015), it was not related to performance and not a mediator of the relationship between team leader incivility and team performance in the present study. A recent meta-analysis from

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control: Past Team Performance</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.286</td>
<td>1.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor: Leader Incivility</td>
<td>-0.530</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>-3.461**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator: Leader Gender</td>
<td>-0.725</td>
<td>0.367</td>
<td>-0.1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction: Leader Incivility × Leader Gender</td>
<td>0.331</td>
<td>0.176</td>
<td>1.876*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome—Team Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control: Past Team Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator: Team Psychological Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor: Leader Incivility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator: Leader Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction: Leader Incivility × Leader Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct and Indirect Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conditional Direct Effects on Team Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional Indirect Effects on Team Performance (through Team Psychological Safety)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Moderated Mediation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CI = confidence interval.

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

Fig. 2. Interaction of Leader Incivility and Leader Gender on Team Psychological Safety.
Dobersek, Gershoren, Becker, and Tenenbaum (2014) offers possible explanations. They analyzed the effects of cohesion on sport team performance and found that the link was significantly stronger (a) when considering task instead of social cohesion, (b) on men’s teams instead of women’s teams, and (c) on recreational and college sport instead of professional sport. We focused on social cohesion among women’s teams competing at the highest level of college sports—a level that is closer to professional basketball than it is to recreational basketball. Thus, it is possible that, within this sport context, it is possible that social cohesion is less relevant to performance than are other mediators.

In contrast, team psychological safety fully mediated the relationship between leader incivility and team performance. Thus, when coaches engage in rude, discourteous behaviors that violate norms of conduct (i.e., incivility; Pearson & Porath, 2009), their actions are likely to erode the sense of psychological safety. As a result, team members may be less likely question strategies and assumptions, engage in innovative decision making, or express their differences (Edmondson, 1996, 2003), and the end result is decreased performance. These findings are consistent with Cunningham et al.’s (2014) conceptual arguments, as well as other scholarship suggesting team psychological safety mediates the relationship between team leader behavior and team performance (Hirak et al., 2012; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Schaubroeck et al., 2011). Our results also align with recent work on what constitutes quality athletic experiences, as Bean and colleagues observed that athletes on high quality clubs has opportunities for autonomy, relatedness, and choice (Bean et al., in press). In short, our study demonstrates the importance of both incivility and psychological safety in team performance.

Interestingly, our findings also suggest that leader gender may affect how uncivil behavior from team leaders affects team psychological safety. Previous researchers have found that effective leadership helps facilitate performance, irrespective of leader gender (Welty Peache & Burton, 2011, 2012). We extended this line of inquiry by considering the effects of a match between the leader and team member. There was efficacy in doing so, as incivility’s influence on psychological safety was pronounced when the leader’s gender differed from team members (e.g., when the leader is a man and the team members are women). Similarity/attraction theory (Byrne, 1971) proposes that people feel most comfortable with those who are similar to them, and that similarity on demographic attributes like gender increases liking, social interaction, and attraction. Our findings suggest that similarity, and gender similarity in particular, may affect feelings of psychological safety such that team members feel especially safe in teams where the leader shares their same gender, even when treated uncivilly by the team leader (see also Kerwin et al., 2017, for a similar discussion). Moreover, initial research suggests that demographic similarly plays a role in teams members’ perceptions of psychological safety within the team (Schulte et al., 2012) buttressing the idea that leader-follower gender similarity may offset the negative effects of leader incivility on some team outcomes.

Given that leader gender moderated the relationship between leader incivility and team psychological safety but not leader incivility and team cohesion suggests our findings should be viewed as preliminary until replicated in other investigations. We also encourage researchers to examine other leader characteristics such as those that are highly job-related (e.g., leader tenure, past leader performance) and less job-related (e.g., race, age) that may moderate the relationship between team leader incivility and team outcomes to better understand the factors that influence team outcomes when the team leader engages in incivility. Indeed, related scholarship among athletes and sport organization employees suggests dissimilarity from others can have a negative influence on subsequent connection to the group (Cunningham, Choi, & Sagas, 2008; Cunningham, 2010).

Together, our findings advance the literature on organizational incivility in numerous ways. First, to our knowledge, this is the first investigation of the relationship between team leader incivility and team outcomes. By focusing on highly interdependent basketball teams, we were able to extend incivility theory into the team domain, especially where interdependence plays a crucial role. This study also linked team leader incivility to team-level attitudes (i.e., team cohesion and team psychological safety) as well as objective team performance, demonstrating that incivility is not simply an individual-level phenomenon and that even subtle negative leader behaviors, such as incivility, can have profound consequences for team outcomes. Our findings also extend past research by investigating top-down incivility in a team setting, documenting the broad impact of uncivil leaders. Finally, our results suggest that one aspect of team leaders—leader gender—may play a role in how leader incivility affects some team attitudes as our all-women teams reported less team psychological safety with higher levels of incivility when the team leader was a man.

5.1. Limitations and future directions

There are a number of limitations of the present study, which suggest avenues for future research. First, while data collection resulted in over fifty teams, the response rate for players was somewhat low, which could raise concerns of non-response bias. These fears are somewhat allayed by the fact that the characteristics of the sample were fairly similar to the population. For example, the number of women coaches in the current sample (65%) was nearly identical to the overall population in Division I women’s basketball teams (66%; Zgonc, 2010). However, the sample was only 39% African American which is smaller than the 51% in Division I basketball players. Future researchers should seek to include samples that incorporate teams with all members responding to investigate the relationships in complete teams and not just a subset of members.
In addition, the aggregation statistics for psychological safety did not reach the traditional cutoff values. We analyzed data at the team level because (a) the other statistics did support aggregation, and (b) we theorized at the team level. Nevertheless, the low aggregation statistic for one of the variables is a limitation.

One additional concern may be the issue of causality; that is, whether leader incivility causes lower team performance, team cohesion, and team psychological safety or if team performance is the impetus for increases in leader incivility, lower team cohesion, and detriments in team psychological safety. Although we conducted additional analyses to help address this issue\footnote{Top-down incivility shares some characteristics with another construct in the literature: abusive supervision. Abusive supervision refers to subordinates' perceptions of persistent non-physical verbal and nonverbal hostile behavior from their direct supervisor (Tepper, 2000, 2007). Similar to top-down incivility, abusive supervision is subjectively perceptual; that is, it is based on the perceptions of the target of the behavior. Both constructs also refer to behavior that comes from someone with a higher occupational position than the target. However, abusive supervision differs from top-down incivility in that it is behavior that is sustained over time, is used purposefully by supervisors for an objective goal, and denotes behavior from a direct supervisor (Tepper, 2000, 2007). Top-down incivility, in contrast, need not be sustained over time, is not necessarily utilitarian in nature, and can be perpetrated from anyone with higher status, not only a direct supervisor (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Caza & Cortina, 2007).} and the results suggested that the proposed conceptual model (with team leader incivility as the exogenous variable) was a better fit to the data than alternative models (e.g., with team performance as the exogenous variable), future researchers should investigate these relationships in real time by assessing experiences of incivility throughout the season or a team’s life-cycle to examine the immediate impact of bad performance (e.g., loss) on incivility and vice versa. It may also be the case that there is a spiraling effect such that poor performance and a lack of team cohesion and team psychological safety spur greater leader incivility, which further erodes performance, cohesion, and psychological safety. Investigations assessing team leader incivility, team emergent states, and team performance longitudinally and for both proximal and distal time frames provide fruitful areas for future research.

5.2. Practical implications

Based on our findings, we offer a number of possible strategies to reduce incivility in teams and its negative effects. First, leaders of sport organizations and teams are critical component of organizational success (Chelladurai, 2007; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011, 2012) and in the present study, we reiterate that point by providing empirical evidence of the negative impact of rude and condescending leader behavior on objective performance. Cunningham et al. (2013) noted that uncivil behaviors could be considered part of coaching, and as we discussed in the Introduction, incivility is present throughout much of sport. Despite its prevalence, though, incivility hurts athletes and team performance. Therefore, athletic directors and hiring committees should place a strong emphasis on selecting leaders who manage their teams in a civil and respectful manner as a first step toward negating some of the deleterious consequences of incivility (Porath et al., 2015). Second, sport organizations can institute zero-tolerance policies denouncing incivility, making clear to members that everyone in the organization, regardless of status or position, is to be respected. Such policies might include clear consequences for uncivil behavior and rewards for engaging in and promoting civility (Porath et al., 2015). Third, sport organizations should have clear channels for reporting uncivil behavior without retribution, especially when the incivility comes from leaders in the organization (see also Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). Finally, some researchers have investigated the efficacy of organizational civility interventions that specifically target reducing workplace incivility within workgroups (Leiter, Day, Oore, & Spence, 2012; Leiter, Laschinger, Day, & Oore, 2011), and their findings hold promise for sport organizations. Sport managers could hold regular meetings to identify working and relationship goals and strategies to meet the goals, conflict management training, and team-building exercises. Together, these steps may begin to erode the occurrence of incivility and its negative effects.

5.3. Conclusion

Despite the growth of teams in organizations, researchers have rarely studied incivility in team contexts, limiting the understanding of how incivility affects units made up of interdependent individuals. We addressed this issue by examining team leader (i.e., coach) incivility in highly interdependent athletic teams and documented the detrimental effects (lowered team cohesion and psychological safety, worse objective team performance) of incivility from the team leader. Findings also provided evidence that team psychological safety may be an important emergent state within teams that links leader incivility to poor team performance. Together, the current study provides additional evidence of the negative consequences associated with incivility by demonstrating its consequences in the team context and highlighting the criticality of leader behavior for team functioning.

References


