Mean Girls in the Legal Workplace

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Abstract
This quantitative study examined relationships between perceptions of aggression, workplace incivility, and job satisfaction among legal professional women. Microaggressions Theory and Relational Aggression Theory provided the theoretical frame work for this study. Perceptions of higher levels of direct and indirect aggression from others were significantly associated with greater workplace incivility towards others and with lower job satisfaction.

Study results provide empirical evidence of direct and indirect Mean Girl behavior in the legal workplace and highlight the negative consequences of Mean Girl behavior. Demonstrating microaggressions and relational aggression in the legal workplace support the theoretical framework. Present findings imply that reducing Mean Girl behavior may be necessary to foster a healthy and ethical legal workplace for all, based on decency and positive exchange. While this study was correlational in nature, so cause and effect cannot be determined, present findings suggest that Mean Girl behavior may lead to increasing levels of workplace incivility and lower levels of job satisfaction in the legal workplace.

Keywords: workplace incivility, relational aggression, microaggressions, Mean Girls, legal workplace, bullying

Introduction

Workplace incivility is a growing problem, but little is known regarding Mean Girl behavior in the legal workplace. Further, little is known regarding the detrimental effects of Mean Girl behavior on job satisfaction in the legal workplace.

The subject of Mean Girls (Dolan & Oliver, 2009), or woman-to-woman workplace incivility, has only recently appeared in the literature because these behaviors can be subtle and often go unnoticed. For the purposes of the study, "Mean Girls" refers to adult women whose acts of "gender microaggressions" (Sue, 2010, p. 15) against other women that "result in harmful psychological consequences and create disparities" (Sue, 2010, p. 15).

Sue (2010) posited that Mean Girl microaggressions include insulting, slighting, or discrediting an individual, and perpetrators of microaggressions are largely unconscious of their offense. Perpetrators of microaggressions act on their victims both purposefully and invisibly. Anyone can commit microaggressions acts: a coworker, supervisor, neighbor, or friend. Microaggressions are a transformation from the Mean Girl on the school playground to the Mean Girl in the workplace. The actions produce psychological injury to the targets and bystanders. Not realizing the injury, microaggressions foster workplace incivility that can be just as injurious to bystanders who witness these behaviors as it is to the victim who is the target of the microaggressions. In this way, Mean Girl behavior can lead to an increase in workplace incivility and a lowering of job satisfaction.

In the legal workplace, Mean Girl behavior can be used to demonstrate the power a senior female attorney has over a first year female attorney. When treatment is flagrant, brazen, and unashamed, it can be expressed in sexual harassment, physical abuse, biased hiring practices, or exposing women to a hostile, male-dominated workplace. Dellasega (2005) asserted that women who commit aggressions against their coworkers are struggling for power, and ultimately the Queen Bee among them is unwavering in her pursuit to acquire and maintain power. In the legal workplace, power is the means by which a woman can leverage her ability to become the Queen Bee by using subtle tactics such as not including team members in conference calls or meetings to destroy the confidence of another woman on the same team in an effort to become visible to leadership while she moves toward partnership, and Mean Girl behavior is one means of obtaining power. For these reasons, Mean Girls can be "constantly on the offense in her interactions with peers, launching preemptive strikes that she believes will protect or further her interests" (Dellasega, 2005, p. 31).

Gender workplace incivility in organizations produces unwanted occupational consequences. With costs mounting, workplace incivility can drain an organization's profits (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2010). Because workplace incivility produces negative behaviors and a toxic environment, it results in occupational annoyances that can lower morale and job satisfaction (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2010). Disability claims and occupational stress are examples of how gender workplace incivility can affect organizations' earnings. Eighty-four percent of human resource professionals surveyed stated their firms' experienced increased hostility as a result of frustration and anger (Flynn, 1998). With increased workloads and a shortage of employees, organizational leaders must service clients in more cost-effective ways, which

increases competition among women in many industries, including law. It is therefore reasonable to conjecture that this competition can potentially lead to Mean Girl behaviors, increased workplace incivility, and declining job satisfaction among females in the legal workplace.

Problem Statement
It is important to examine Mean Girl behavior in the legal workplace and how higher levels of Mean Girl behavior might be associated with greater levels of workplace incivility and lower job satisfaction. However, no published studies to date have used quantitative survey methodology to examine Mean Girl behavior in the legal workplace or whether Mean Girl behavior may be associated with the level of job satisfaction in female legal workers.

Background
Andersson and Pearson (1999) began a discourse on the workplace incivility paradigm, explaining that incivility includes brazen, impolite, and uncivil acts that encroach upon civil principles. Andersson and Pearson (1999) hypothesized that perpetrators, victims, and eyewitnesses of incivility are not able to discern uncivil behavior as being distinctly and purposefully harmful. Victims and observers might believe that incivility is a part of the process of coping with daily hassles (Pearlin & Lieberman, 1979, p. 220). Incivility, then, is a process rather than a single event (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) that is not readily detectable by perpetrators or victims.

Relational aggression is a new research phenomenon that has materialized in the past 10 years. Gossiping, starting rumors, and talking behind another's back with the intent to harm are behaviors that, while not new, have particular relevance to "female aggression" (Glynn, 2009, p. 2). Achieving status among peers in adolescence is the motivation for these acts. Nevertheless, among adult women, the tendency to be insensitive or ambivalent to all types of women has intensified, resulting in unresolved anxiety, frustration, annoyance, and residual hurt. Conversely, female aggression is not a new phenomenon. Little girls first meet the Mean Girl when they learn about Cinderella and her stepsisters. Women of all ages are familiar with the Mean Girl archetype on the page, on the screen, and in real life (Glynn, 2009).

Literature Review
Because Mean Girls are skilled at relational aggressive behavior, their actions become more difficult to interpret. Mean Girls employing covert or "relational indirect aggression" (Dolan & Oliver, 2009, p. 2) against other women is increasing. Women are perpetrating workplace incivility toward each other more than men are perpetrating workplace incivility toward women. Björkqvist et al. (1994) observed that women are capable of acting aggressively, but they choose a variety of methods of aggression (or, but they choose methods of aggression that are different as compared to men). Mean Girl incivility is one way that legal professional women can and do assert their power over other women.

Mean Girl incivility encourages women to engage in unkind exchanges while remaining affable and approachable. The more socially adept a woman is, the better she is at engaging in Mean Girl incivility in a discrete way. Two central theories posited to explain Mean Girl behavior are Microaggression Theory and Relational Aggression Theory.

Microaggressions Theory

Sue et al. (2007) defined microaggressions as daily acts of verbal abuse, gossiping, and spreading rumors verbally and behaviorally demean individuals. Sue et al. (2007) theorized that, in most incidents of microaggressions, perpetrators are not cognizant of the fact that they have participated in an exchange that humiliates the recipient of the

Women are often believed to be the more nurturing sex because women are taught to express compassion more easily than men (Seppala, 2013), However, when women compete with each other in the workplace, they may not be nurturing toward each other. Cortina et al (2002), studied employees in the court system and concluded that women's coping is more widespread than men and may be a reflection of their more serious incidents of misconduct. Chief Justice Warren Burger (1991) stated that manners, good behavior, decency, and civility stop lawsuits from becoming battles and help to keep an organized society from falling apart. Mean Girl microaggressions are the opposite of manners, good behavior, decency, and civility, and can thereby bring incivility to the workplace.

Relational Aggression Theory

According to Crick et al., relational aggression is "a manipulation of social relationships . . . [that] can include gossip and rumors" (as cited in Hoover et al., 2008, p. 2329). Relational aggression is behavior intended to hurt someone by harming his or her relationships with others (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Relational aggression is not typical bullying, either physical or verbal, but a more subtle form of aggression that uses relationships to damage or manipulate others.

Relational aggression is a specific type of bullying primarily used by women (Crothers et al., 2009). Crothers et al. (2009) put forth that relational aggression—also known as social aggression and indirect aggression (Björkqvist et al., 1992)—is reflective of both overt and covert behaviors designed to harm another through the exploitation of a relationship (Remillard & Lamb, 2005). Relational aggression includes behaviors intended to threaten friendships or relationships, or, more specifically, behaviors that contribute to the loss of friendship or social connection through social isolation or alienation (Crothers, Schreiber, Field, & Kolbert, 2009), which is how Mean Girls mistreat other women in the workplace.

According to Relational Aggression Theory, Mean Girl microaggression behavior perpetrated by adult women is the same behavior exhibited by young girls (Crothers et al., 2009). However, some literature indicates that, while relational aggression is common to girls in middle and high school, they are not born this way; rather, they learn to behave this way when exposed to relational aggressive behaviors of other women (Dellasega, 2005). Relational aggression can therefore be the mimicking of behaviors witnessed in female power struggles, expressed as a variety of emotionally hurtful behaviors, including socially aggressive behaviors, gossiping, social exclusion, social isolation and social alienation, talking about someone, and stealing friends or romantic partners (Crothers, et al. 2009). As women age, engaging in relational aggression can become routine (Valen, 2011). Older women can be and are just as competitive and mean as young women and a woman's responses to situations and fundamental personality don't always improve with age (Valen, 2011). Sutton et al.

(1999) found that using direct methods declines with age in women, while using relational aggression as an indirect method of bullying increases with age.

Some scholars maintain that women who commit relational aggression are not purposefully undermining their victims (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999; Valen, 2011). Rather, these researchers suggest that some women unintentionally demonstrate preferences for other women or behaviors. However, women who use relational aggression in the workplace instead of using their talent's to compliment the strengths (or diminish the deficiencies) of work teams would rather find ways to form obscure turf wars among other women (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). These forms of bullying and manipulation can be subtle, as Rayner, (2007) found that social intelligence is correlated with indirect forms of bullying, such as not including someone in an e-mail list, but not with physical or overt verbal bullying. Given that workplace incivility between Mean Girls is relational indirect bullying (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Rayner, 2007), researchers cannot overlook that the context of the skills used is "largely based on an ability to understand or manipulate the minds of others—a 'theory of mind', or social cognition. Consequently, there are reasons for assuming that a successful bully "will in fact have superior theory of mind" (Sutton et al., 1999, p. 120). The application of these social cognitive skills validate the theory that indirect relational aggression is a key method for one female to acquiring power over another female in the workplace.

While Microaggression Theory and Relational Aggression Theory can potentially explain the reasons for Mean Girl behavior in the professional organizations, no studies to date have used quantitative survey methodology to examine the relationship between Mean Girl behavior, workplace incivility, and job satisfaction in the legal workplace. The present study was specifically designed to fill this important gap in the published literature.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study was to use quantitative survey methodology to explore whether Mean Girl treatment of women by other women in the legal workplace is associated with greater workplace incivility and lower levels of job satisfaction.

Hypotheses
Based on a review of the published literature, the following hypotheses were tested, each stated in null hypothesis form:

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between Mean Girl behavior and job satisfaction.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no relationship between workplace incivility and job satisfaction.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no relationship between Mean Girl behavior and workplace incivility.

Methods

Participants

One hundred sixty legal professional women logged on to the survey website, and 129 sufficiently complete the survey to be included for testing the study hypotheses (N = 129). Women in this study were from across the United States, averaged 45 years of age (SD = 11; range: 25 to 70), and included female associates, partners, paralegals and administrative staff from law firms, legal corporations, governmental agencies, and legal nonprofit organizations in metropolitan cities within the USA. Workplace demographics are displayed in Table 1 and personal demographic are provided in Table 2 (note that some frequencies add to <100% due to missing data).

Workplace Demographics	n	%
Employment Status		
Employed, 1-19 hours per week	5	3.9
Employed, 20-30 hours per week	5	3.9
Employed, 31-39 hours per week	28	21.9
Employed, 40 or more hours per week	82	64.1
Not employed, looking for work	5	3.9
Not employed, not looking for work	1	0.8
Retired	2	1.6
Job title		
Attorney	33	25.8
Legal secretary	33	25.8
Paralegal	26	20.3
Office services	1	0.8
Other	35	27.3
Industry role		
Upper management	1	0.8
Middle management	15	11.7
Junior management	8	6.3
Administrative staff	25	19.5
Support staff	37	28.9
Trained professional	21	16.4
Skilled laborer	1	0.8
Consultant	1	0.8
Self-employed	6	4.7
Other	13	10.2
Organization type		
Public sector	33	25.8
Private sector	80	62.5
Not-for-profit	10	7.8
Unknown	2	1.6
Other	3	2.3
Organization annual budget (in U.S. dollars)		
Less than $1 million	14	11
$1 Million to $10 million	12	9.4
$10 Million to $100 million	11	8.7
$100 Million to $500 million	8	6.3
Over $1 billion	6	4.7
Unknown	71	55.9
Would rather not say	5	3.9
Occupation		
Management	3	2.3
Business and financial operations	5	3.9
Architecture and engineering	2	1.6
Life, physical, and social sciences	1	0.8
Community and social services	1	0.8
Legal	96	74.4
Education, training, and library	4	3.1
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	1	0.8
Health care and technical	1	0.8
Personal care and services	1	0.8
Office and administrative support	7	5.4
Other	7	5.4

Table 1: Workplace Demographics

Personal Demographics	n	%
Primary language		
English	127	99.2
Spanish	1	0.8
Education level		
High school or equivalent	7	5.5
Vocational/technical school (2-year degree)	11	8.6
Some college	23	18
Bachelor's degree	31	24.2
Master's degree	17	13.3
Doctoral degree	2	1.6
Professional degree (MD, JD)	37	28.9
Race		
American Indian or Native Alaskan	2	1.6
Asian	3	2.3
Black	35	27.3
Hispanic	6	4.7
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0.8
White	78	60.9
Other	3	2.3

Table 2: Personal Demographics

Measures

Workplace Incivility Scales
The Workplace Incivility Scales (WIS) of Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001) is a seven-item measure of the effects of incivility descriptions of psychological well-being and job satisfaction, using a response scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*very often*). Higher scores suggest more severe experiences of workplace incivility. The WIS has strong internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .85) (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001).

Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992)
The Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) of Buss and Perry (1992) is a 29 item aggression measure that uses a response scale that ranges from 1 (Extremely uncharacteristic of me) to 5 (Extremely characteristic of me). The AQ includes subscales for Physical Hostility (AQ-P), Verbal Aggression (AQ-VA), and Hostility (AQ-H). The AQ has acceptable internal reliability, including Cronbach's alphas of .83 for the total AQ, as well as .85 for AQ-P, .72 for AQ-VA, and .77 for AQ-H.

Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale
The Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale (DIAS) of Björkqvist et al. (1992) includes a seven-item subscale for verbal aggression (DIAS-VA) and a 12-item subscale for indirect aggression (DIAS-IA), using a response interface that ranges from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very often). The DIAS has acceptable internal reliability, including Cronbach's alphas of .75 for the DIAS-VA and .83 for the DIAS-IA (Björkqvist et al., 1992).

Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire Job Satisfaction Subscale
The Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire Job Satisfaction Subscale
(MOAQ-JSS) of Cammann et al. (1979) is a three-item measure of global job
satisfaction using a response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly
agree*) expressing extent to which each of three statements characterized their work:
"All in all, I am satisfied with my job," "In general I like working here," and "In
general, I don't like my job" (reverse coded; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007, p. 1254).
Cammann et al. (1979) used meta-analysis to determine that the MOAQ-JSS has
strong face validity and construct validity, while Bowling and Hammond (2008)
determined that the MOAQ-JSS is a reliable and construct-valid measure of job
satisfaction.

Overt-Covert Aggression Scale
The Overt-Covert Aggression Scale (OCAS) of Kaukiainen et al. (1997) includes 21
items rated on a 4-point scale (0 = *never* to 3 = *very often*), expressing the extent to
which participants had (a) observed aggression among others in their workplace and
(b) experienced exposure to aggression as targets (Kaukiainen et al. 1997). The OCAS
Cronbach's alpha internal reliability range from .86 to .90 for observed aggression
and from .76 to .89 for self-experienced aggression (Kaukiainen et al., 1997;
Kaukiainen et al., 2001).

Procedures

Permissions and recruitment
Permission and approval were obtained Walden University IRB (Approval No. 08-12-13-0128905) prior to data collection. Participants were recruited by contacting law firm administrators, human resource managers, and office managers requesting permission to distribute surveys via e-mail to the women in the firm. The electronic invitation was also posted to professional networking groups on LinkedIn and Yahoo such as Legal Secretaries Group, Law and Legal Jobs, DC Legal Secretaries, NALS (National Association of Legal Secretaries), and eLegal Support. Survey links were also sent to attorneys in nonprofit, government, and private sectors. Potential participants received a pre-notice e-mail introducing the survey, followed by and e-mail with the survey link (via http://www.Psychdata.com). A follow-up reminder e-mail sent two weeks later.

Data collection
Participants completed the online survey using their preferred computer with internet access. By clicking the link in the recruitment email, participants were taken directly to the survey webpage. The first page of the survey was the informed consent page, which provided an overview of the study and informed participants of their rights. If participants clicked the 'agree' button, providing informed consent to participate, formal data collection began. Participants who declined to the informed consent provision were taken to the "thank you' page at the end of the survey. Data collection typically took less than 30 minutes.

Data Management
Data were downloaded from the psychdata.com website using a password. Data were checked for errors and scored in Microsoft Excel software prior to analysis in SPSS statistical software (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY).

Design and Analysis
The survey employed a cross-sectional design. Data descriptives included the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores for each measured variable. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson's correlation ("r") at the $p < .05$ threshold for statistical significance.

Results

Measured Variable Descriptives

Measured Variable Descriptives are displayed in Table 3. Workplace incivility averaged 0.89 on the WIS, corresponding to experiencing incivility "once or twice" in the last year. DIAS averaged .60, indicating that participants seldom experience workplace aggression. Aggression Questionnaire averaged 1.78, roughly corresponding to the indication that self-reported aggression was "somewhat uncharacteristic of me." MOAQ scores averaged 5.18 on the 1-to-7 scale, indicating moderate job satisfaction.

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Workplace incivility (WIS)	127	.89	.76	0.00	2.75
Direct & indirect aggression (DIAS)	127	.60	.58	0.00	2.39
Self-reported aggression (OACS)	117	1.78	.41	1.10	3.17
Job satisfaction (MOAQ)	128	5.18	1.79	1.00	7.00

Table 3: Workplace Incivility, Job Satisfaction, Direct and Indirect Aggression in Workplace, and Self-reported Aggression Descriptives

Hypothesis testing

Table 4 shows that workplace incivility, direct and indirect aggression in the workplace, and self-reported aggression were each significantly ($p < .01$) correlated with job satisfaction in the negative direction, such that the greater the Mean Girl behavior, the lower the job satisfaction. Age was significantly correlated with job satisfaction such that older legal workers had higher job satisfaction. Length of time with current employer and in current position were not significantly related to job satisfaction.

Null Hypothesis 1 was rejected because there was a significant relationship between Mean Girl behavior and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction (MOAQ) was significantly correlated with the DIAS measure of direct and indirect aggression ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$) and the OCAS measure of of self-reported aggression ($r = -.30$, $p < .001$) (Table 4). These correlations were negative in direction, indicating that the greater the Mean Girl behavior, the lower the job satisfaction. Note that the significant negative correlation between self-reported aggression (OACS) and job satisfaction (MOAQ) indicates that Mean Girl behavior is correlated with lower job satisfaction, whether the Mean Girl behavior is given or received.

Measured Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Workplace incivility (WIS)						
2. Job satisfaction (MOAQ)	-.42*					
3. Direct & indirect aggression (DIAS)	.54*	-.26*				
4. Self-reported aggression (OCAS)	.43*	-.30*	.33*			
5. Age	.06	.24*	.24*	-.004		
6. Length of time with current employer	.15	.11	-.002	.05	.43*	
7. Length of time in current position	.13	.02	-.10	-.02	.38*	.76*

Table 4: Correlation Matrix for Hypothesis Testing
* = statistically significant, p <.05.

Null Hypothesis 2 was rejected because there was a significant relationship between workplace incivility and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction (MOAQ) was significantly correlated with the WIS measure of workplace incivility ($r = -.42$, $p < .001$) (Table AA). This correlation was negative in direction, indicating that the greater the workplace incivility, the lower the job satisfaction.

Null Hypothesis 3 was rejected because there was a significant relationship Mean Girl behavior and workplace incivility. The WIS measure of workplace incivility was significantly correlated with the DIAS measure of direct and indirect aggression ($r = +.54$, $p < .001$) and the OCAS measure of self-reported aggression ($r = +.43$, $p < .001$) (Table AA). These correlations were positive in direction, indicating that the greater the Mean Girl behavior (direct and indirect aggression and the self-reported aggression), the greater the workplace incivility.

Discussion
The aim of this study was to fill the gap in existing literature regarding the effects of Mean Girl behavior and workplace incivility on job satisfaction in the legal workplace.

Whether real or perceived, women are likely to report mistreatment by other legal professional women with relational aggression and are experiencing incidents of this conduct with regularity, making legal environments inhospitable for some women (Chen, 2009). The growing frequency of tensions among women in the legal profession is a cause for concern (Chen, 2009). Some scholars may assert that the outward anger expressed by women cannot affect society. However, I found that relationships are consistent with the expectations that originated from the hypothetical descriptions proposed and the existing work on relational aggression and focused on two assertions: (a) workplace incivility, self-reported Mean Girl behavior, and Mean Girl behavior from others at work are positively related and (b) these constructs related to lower levels of job satisfaction.
In this study, a negative relationship between Mean Girl behavior incidents and lower levels of job satisfaction among female legal professionals was measured. This study represents the first known quantitative study examining of Mean Girl behavior and workplace incivility concurrently with job satisfaction in female legal professionals. Further, this study described the rates of aggression in the legal workplace

Implications
To provide women with a support system, organizational leaders must treat workplace incivility and Mean Girl behavior like a business problem. Education, workshops, and interventions are necessary, and organizational leaders must address the loss of productivity and absenteeism. Loss of revenue and talent because of workplace incivility and Mean Girl behavior must become an ongoing discussion in organization boardrooms.

Women in the workplace need training to "depersonalize conflict" (Rikleen, 2009, p. 1) an idea that is gaining popularity. Women tend to be more compassionate than men and more in tune with their own and others' feelings (Beutel & Marini, 1995), which may be an advantage when dealing with the human intricacies of the workplace. The alternate side is that when women take things too personally when challenged or

criticized, they are prone to reacting with excessive aggression. That is when Mean Girl behavior can affect organizational accord. Relational aggression is devious, misleading, and covert. When boys fight on the playground, the aggressor acknowledges punching the other boy. The boy receiving the punch will either retaliate and punch back or do nothing, but initiation of the conflict is clear. Conversely, a Mean Girl will tell another girl she can borrow her blouse, admire her while wearing it, and tell other girls she cannot imagine someone wearing such an ugly blouse. Relational aggression is indirect; it is a cycle of gossiping, spreading rumors, and talking behind someone's back. Offenders know how to escape exposure, so they can walk away from being responsible and avoid owning their behavior, and the victim cannot take revenge. Women who are targets of this behavior are powerless to do anything about it.

Threatening another woman's career because she has power in the situation is another way that female-to-female workplace incivility and relational aggression diminish a women's self-esteem and job satisfaction. Intervention becomes an obligatory component in the prevention of relational aggression. Workshops on gender differences and communication are critical to the intervention process. The study findings indicated the participation of human resource managers, senior management, and employees, for example, is essential to ensure the safety of all women in organizational settings in which they can learn acceptance for one another and develop healthy relationships in the process.

Women must learn to define themselves and their interactions with other women, not in terms of treating another female civilly but in terms of treating another human being civilly. McClure (2003) noted, "Women must learn how to speak with conviction and decency" (p. 1) and called this civilized assertiveness. McClure contended civilized assertiveness "purports the importance of equality, which entails defining oneself not in female terms but in human terms" (p. 1). To define oneself in human terms versus female terms makes way for civility at the most basic level. The Golden Rule of doing unto others must prevail to achieve organizational harmony.

The indication that considerable numbers of professional legal women responded to this study is an example that the topic of microaggressions by Mean Girls is significant and necessitates a reexamination of the essential concepts of relational aggression. Women do not have to like one another, but being decent to other people is not a female experience but a human experience. Organizational leaders must be sensitive to Mean Girl behavior because social media can serve as a means to transmit the impact of communication and bad behavior on an organization's image to the world and exemplifies how quickly people can place an organization's reputation at risk.

With a pervasive sociocultural enigma such as relational aggression, it can be challenging to determine where to initiate change in terms of looking for solutions. Industrial and organizational psychologists play an important role in educating organizational leaders about relational aggression. Relational aggression serves as an assault against a women's reputation and both diminishes and demeans simultaneously. Relational aggression affects women's health, well-being, and self-esteem. Self-confidence-building exercises and a focus on communication skills are

necessary for victims of relational aggression. Workshops can educate women on how to confront, manage, and release their feelings of envy and jealousy.

Limitations

The present study sample was limited to female workers in law firms, legal corporations, and legal nonprofit organizations in metropolitan cities within the USA, including included female associates, partners, and nonlegal female staff such as paralegals and administrative staff. It is therefore unclear whether present results generalize beyond American legal workers to other industries or legal workers in other countries.

All study data came from self-report, with no objective measures of third-party reports. While self-report was appropriate for the present investigation, self-report provides the opportunity to deceive, and people could have exercised deception (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997).

Areas for Future Research

The present study should be replicated with larger, more diverse samples, including other industries and organizations beyond the legal workplace. Contrasting male and female behavior may prove fruitful in providing a better understanding of Mean Girl behavior. Third-party reports and objective measures, such as complaints filed with Human Resource departments, could be used to validate self-report measures. Further, future research should include assessments to examine stress, microaggressions, and relational aggression, as well as the relationship between Mean Girl behavior, worker productivity, and worker retention. Lastly, future research should explore the effects of training on reducing Mean Girl behavior in the legal workplace.

Conclusion

This study of 129 female legal professionals demonstrated how Mean Girl behavior is associated with workplace incivility and lower levels of job satisfaction in the legal workplace. Combined, findings of the present study highlight the detrimental effect of Mean Girl behavior in the legal workplace.

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