

'I feel your pain ...' Same sex coworkers sympathize when they observe lack of respect aimed at their colleagues

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Imagine the following scenarios: a co-worker is spoken to condescendingly, excluded from a meeting, or ignored by a supervisor. How does it make you feel? Do you feel differently depending on whether your co-worker is a man or a woman? According to a new study, workers who witness incivility towards colleagues feel negative emotions – especially when the incivility is aimed at workers of the same sex. The work, by Kathi Miner from Texas A&M University and Angela Eischeid from Buena Vista University, Iowa, is the first to look at the relationship between employees' observations of incivility towards same gender co-workers and negative emotions. It is published online in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*.

Workplace incivility is commonplace and violates conventional workplace norms for mutual respect. It also displays a lack of regard for others. Although our first thoughts are likely to be for the victim of this 'abuse', it can also affect our own feelings as observers.

Miner and Eischeid examined how observed workplace incivility towards female and male co-workers relates to four negative emotions - anger, demoralization, fear and anxiety - for both female and male observers. A total of 453 restaurant employees responded to an online survey examining the 'quality of life in the restaurant industry'.

Analyses showed that female observers reported significantly higher

levels of anger, demoralization, fear and anxiety the more they observed other female employees being treated rudely and discourteously at work, in comparison to male employees. Demoralization was the strongest negative emotion experienced by observing women.

Similarly, male observers were significantly more angry, fearful and anxious the more they observed other men being treated uncivilly at work, compared to females. Interestingly, demoralization was not a negative emotion experienced by male observers in these situations.

The authors conclude: "Our results paint a complex picture about the experience of specific [negative emotions](#) in response to observed incivility toward same gender co-workers. In some cases, women are more affected (demoralized) and in others, men are more affected (angry, fearful and anxious). In both cases, witnessing incivility towards same gender co-workers can have significant affective consequences for observers."

More information: Miner K & Eischeid A (2011). Observing incivility towards co-workers and negative emotions: do gender of targets and observer matter? *Sex Roles*. [DOI 10.1007/s11199-011-0108-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-0108-0)

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