e-Rudeness at Work: 
The Impact of Rude Email on Employee Performance

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements 
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Management

by

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2014
DEDICATION

TO

My boys

“Do what makes you happy, be with who makes you smile, laugh as much as you breathe, and love as long as you live.”

— Rachel Ann Nunes

For my sons, James and Drew, who make me laugh as much as I breathe, and for my husband Tom, who I will love as long as I live.
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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Existing research on rudeness has primarily focused on explaining it in face-to-face encounters, and has largely neglected examining its impact through other mediums. This dissertation addresses this gap in the literature by introducing the new construct of e-Rudeness, defined here as workplace email behavior perceived by an email recipient as insensitive, disrespectful, and a violation of norms for mutual respect within an organization. First, a new measure of e-Rudeness was derived from interview data and validated on an independent sample of employees. Next, the results of two experimental studies showed that exposure to e-Rudeness reduces individual task performance beyond that of face-to-face rudeness, and that exposure to e-Rudeness resulted in lower performance evaluations for third-parties through a mechanism introduced here as e-Rudeness contagion. Taken together, these three studies comprise an empirically grounded understanding of rudeness in the context of email at work, highlight important distinctions between it and face-to-face rudeness, and reveal the substantial risk that rude email poses to organizations and their employees.
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e-Rudeness at Work:
The Impact of Rude Email on Employee Performance

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Management

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Existing research on rudeness has primarily focused on explaining it in face-to-face encounters, and has neglected examining its impact through other mediums. This dissertation addresses this gap in the literature by introducing the new construct of e-Rudeness, defined here as workplace email behavior perceived by an email recipient as insensitive, disrespectful, and a violation of norms for mutual respect within an organization. First, a new measure of e-Rudeness was derived from interview data and validated on an independent sample of employees. Next, the results of two experimental studies showed that exposure to e-Rudeness reduced individual task performance beyond that of face-to-face rudeness, and that exposure to e-Rudeness resulted in lower performance evaluations for third-parties through a mechanism introduced here as e-Rudeness contagion. Taken together, these three studies comprise an empirically grounded understanding of rudeness in the context of email at work, highlight some preliminary distinctions between it and face-to-face rudeness, and reveal the potential risk that rude email poses for employees.
Chapter 1

THE ROLE OF e-RUDENESS IN ORGANIZATIONS

In everyday conversation, the term “rude” is used to refer to people or situations that are impolite, disrespectful, or fail to meet a person’s expectations for a myriad of reasons. An aggressive motorist, a less than collegial colleague, an irritating in-law, or a menacing neighbor can all be described as rude. If asked, most people can offer up multiple recent personal examples of rude behavior, but they may also have trouble coming up with a sound definition. This, most likely, is on account of the many different types of behavior that can be considered rude, and the fact that the classification of a behavior as rude varies enormously by situation. For example, it is rude to shout loudly in a library, but perfectly acceptable to yell in a park. Rudeness can encompass an almost infinite array of actions and mannerisms, yet is so highly context specific that in a slightly different situation that same behavior would not be considered rude at all. Thus, pointing to rudeness in popular culture is easy, but isolating exactly what makes something rude and studying it empirically can be quite difficult.

In organizational research, rudeness has been defined as insensitive or disrespectful workplace behavior enacted by a person that displays a lack of regard for others (Porath & Erez, 2007: 1181). It is considered a low intensity anti-social behavior which lacks a clear intent to harm (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), but nevertheless violates social norms and injures employees (Cortina, 2008). Rudeness threatens the well-being of organizations as well as its members, and carries with it a plethora of adverse consequences (Giacalone, Riordan, & Rosenfeld, 1997; Griffin, O’Leary-Kelly, & Collins, 1998; O’Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, 1996). Despite the seriousness of its impact, however, and the variety of behaviors that can be
considered rude, research up to this point has focused on explaining rudeness in face-to-face encounters at work, which I argue provides an important but incomplete baseline for our understanding of its complexity.

More specifically, the study of rudeness in the management literature currently does not distinguish between rude acts encountered in forms other than face-to-face communication, including rudeness encountered via email. Despite evidence in the scholarly literature on communication that suggests there are important differences between face-to-face and ‘computer-mediated’ interactions (Burgoon, et al., 2002), the management literature has thus far neglected to meaningfully differentiate rudeness experienced in-person and rudeness experienced through email. Therefore, one goal of this dissertation is to provide some preliminary theoretical and empirical rational for a distinction between face-to-face and e-Rudeness. The next sections will discuss the theoretical and empirical motivation for this dissertation as well as the proposed contributions of this research.

**Theoretical Motivation**

This dissertation aims to fill three current gaps in our knowledge of the way rude behavior functions in organizations. First, the specific contextual factors that affect an individual’s perceptions of rudeness remain underspecified. That is, an understanding of how situational elements influence the intensity of perceived rudeness is necessary to help explain variation in individual’s reactions to the phenomenon. Second, emotion and the role it plays in a target’s response to rudeness is also not well understood. This knowledge is important because negative affect represents a likely factor in how perceptions of rudeness impact attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Third, research has not yet considered whether rude incidents have
consequences for individuals who were not involved in the rude encounter. Understanding if and how rudeness can spread between employees at work will help determine whether rudeness poses an additional risk to organizations.

First, it is well accepted that an individual’s experience of rudeness is highly context specific, meaning that the degree of rudeness felt by a target varies greatly depending on multiple factors. However, the specific factors that influence whether a behavior is likely to be interpreted as rude have not been systematically examined. In other words, key drivers of variation in perceptions of rudeness that make it more or less likely for a behavior to be perceived as rude are posited to exist, yet our knowledge of what those elements are and how their fluctuation influences perceptions of rudeness is limited. Therefore, through the study of e-Rudeness, information will be gained about the impact of variations in factors such as psychological closeness, paralinguistic (head nods, facial expressions) and back-channeling (um, ok, uh-huh sounds) cues, as well as whether differences in the amount of contextual information make perceptions of rudeness more or less likely. Finally, examining e-Rudeness will also likely reveal a more comprehensive understanding of the specific factors that influence the identification of face-to-face rudeness across situations and contexts.

Another aspect of rudeness that is well documented in the literature is its association with the experience of emotion. Multiple studies have reported that negative affect and emotional responses are common subsequent to an act of face-to-face rudeness (Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001; Vartia, 2004; Pearson, et al., 2001). However, a more nuanced understanding of emotion and the precise role it plays in the target’s identification, experience, and response to rudeness is not yet well understood. A primary way that e-Rudeness may differ from face-to-face rudeness is through the inability of emotion to be effectively communicated, conveyed, and
interpreted through email. Specifically, the inherent characteristics of electronic mail (i.e. its asynchronous and text-based format) limit its ability to transmit emotional content accurately (Byron, et al., 2010), meaning that messages intended to communicate emotion to a receiver are hindered and deficient in their ability to be accurately interpreted. Therefore, by studying rudeness through a medium that is inherently less emotion-rich, we will gain a better understanding of how specific variations in emotion affect the receiver’s perceptions of rudeness.

Finally, research has widely determined that rude behavior has consequences for targets of rudeness (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Lim & Cortina, 2005) and can result in on-going hostility and aggression. More recent studies (i.e. Porath & Erez, 2007; 2009), have even suggested that indirect rudeness (rude behavior that is witnessed but not directly experienced) can also have psychological and behavioral ramifications. However, research has not yet considered whether a rude incident can impact the behavior of a target (original recipient of rude behavior) such that it has consequences for individuals who later come into contact with the target. This research proposes that rude behavior will negatively influence a target’s behavior toward third parties who were not involved or even present during a rude encounter. Thus, the question of whether rude behavior has measurable consequences for individuals removed from the incident itself, is considered in this research as the notion of e-Rudeness contagion. This proposed aspect of e-Rudeness could have implications for organizations as well as theoretical application to other forms of workplace mistreatment.

**Empirical Motivation**

In addition to theoretical contributions, this dissertation also aims to fill several empirical gaps in the literature. Namely, understanding and examining the distinct impact that e-Rudeness can have on individual outcomes, including its particular psychological, behavioral, and
relational consequences for employees at work. Existing research on rudeness provides the foundation and grounding for the probable ways that e-Rudeness influences employees, but justification for how e-Rudeness is likely to affect these outcomes will come from existing knowledge in domains outside of management, such as psychology and communication.

The Psychological Impact of Email Rudeness

The first category of outcomes that are likely to differ as a result of the medium through which rudeness is experienced is its psychological impact on employees. It is well known that face-to-face rudeness is detrimental to the psychological well-being of employees who encounter it (Ferguson & Barry, 2011; Lim & Cortina, 2005). For instance, evidence from recent studies suggests that when employees witness, or are the target of, rude behavior at work they report negative feelings such as brooding and worry (Porath & Pearson, 2010), increased levels of psychological distress (Cortina, et al., 2001), withdrawal, and isolation (Pearson et al., 2001). Other studies have found a link between the experience of face-to-face rudeness and anxiety (Chen & Spector, 1992; Fox & Spector, 1999; Fox et al., 2001), in addition to stress and nervousness (Pearson & Porath, 2005).

However, there are currently no studies to my knowledge that objectively explore the psychological influence of rude behavior on employees when it is experienced via email, which is a notable gap in the literature given that there are several reasons to expect that e-Rudeness may have negative psychological effects that are more detrimental than those associated with face-to-face rudeness. Specifically, the text-based characteristics of email, including its a-synchronous nature and lack of paralinguistic and back-channeling cues, could make miscommunication, negative interpretation, and an over-confident perception of email tone more
likely. Each of these reasons has implications for the amount of stress, anxiety, worry and negative psychological consequences experienced by email communicators.

Email differs from face-to-face communication on the receiving side of interactions in that it possesses more contextual ambiguity and a lack of nonverbal and paralinguistic cues, which could make the interpretation of electronic mail more challenging and stressful. In contrast, when a message is communicated in-person there is a wealth of information available to help the receiver anchor and make sense of it (Clark, 1996). For instance, paralinguistic cues such as tone of voice, hand gestures, facial expression, rate of speech, and context all communicate information about the intent and emotion of the sender as well as the message itself (Allbritton, McKoon, & Ratcliff, 1996; Price, Ostendorf, Shattuck-Hufnagel, & Fong, 1991). However, when the receiver is forced to interpret a message without the help of these paralinguistic signals and nonverbal cues, the challenge is significantly heightened (Abrahams, 1962; Drew, 1987; Goffman, 1959) and misinterpretation becomes more likely (Kruger, et al., 2005).

The challenge of email communication is also compounded by the systematically more negative interpretation that communicators attribute to the tone of an email message. For example, evidence from a series of recent studies suggests that receivers of email communication are likely to misinterpret messages as having a more negative emotional tone than what was actually intended by the sender (Byron, 2008; 2010). More specifically, this study indicates that email receivers more often perceive positive email as neutral, and neutral email as negative, when compared to the intended tone of the email sender. Taken together, these findings point to communication via email as not only more likely to be misconstrued, but misconstrued in a
negative way, which has implications for the stress and anxiety associated with its interpretation, perception, and psychological consequences when experienced through an electronic medium.

One potential explanation for this systematically negative interpretation may come from the hyper-personal model of communication (Walther, 1996). This theory proposes that people compensate for the inherent lack of communicative information in email by making assumptions and giving meaning to features of an email message that may not actually be relevant to the sender’s intent. For instance, as suggested by Walther (1996), “due to an individual’s desire to reduce uncertainty in computer-mediated communication, they are susceptible to making exaggerated attributions based on limited information” (Ramirez, et al., 2002:216). Specifically, when faced with limited information, people tend to overthink and over interpret the significance of features of an email message including its length, word choice, and tone, which may or may not be relevant indications of the sender’s emotion and intent. Thus, the increased likelihood that email receivers will make exaggerated negative attributions about an email could help explain why e-Rudeness is likely to provoke worry, stress, and anxiety from the receiver and potentially may lead to more detrimental psychological consequences than face-to-face rudeness.

A final key reason that more anxiety, stress and worry may result from the experience of e-Rudeness relative to face-to-face rudeness is on account of a propensity for email senders to be over-confident in their ability to effectively communicate. This overconfidence bias, which adds to the burden of email interpretation for receivers, indicates that people possess a tendency to believe they can communicate through e-mail more effectively than they actually can (Kruger, et al., 2005). Specifically, research indicates that this overconfidence bias likely exists due to the inherent difficulty that most people have with detaching themselves from their own perspective when evaluating the potential perspective of someone else. For instance, e-mail communicators
may “hear” a statement differently than their email receiver does, especially in situations where a message is intended to be perceived as sarcastic or funny.

*The Behavioral Impact of Email Rudeness*

The second category of outcomes that are likely to differ as a result of the impact of e-Rudeness compared with face-to-face rudeness is through its behavioral impact on employees. It is well known that face-to-face rudeness is associated with many forms of negative employee behavior (Beis, Tripp & Kramer, 1997; Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002), such as retaliation (Bies & Tripp, 2005; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), counterproductive workplace behaviors (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2005), aggression (Tyler & Blader, 2000), reduced task performance (Porath & Erez, 2007), and anti-social behavior (Lim & Cortina, 2005). However, no prior research has tested the influence of rude email in an experimental setting or made a comparison between it and face-to-face rudeness.

This is a notable gap in our understanding of rudeness given that there are multiple reasons to expect that the difference between experiencing rude behavior via email versus in-person may be pronounced, and particularly that e-Rudeness may affect employee behavior more negatively than that of face-to-face rudeness. Specifically, the reasons for this include the heightened ambiguity of the norms that govern email communication at work, a common yet erroneous perception that electronic interactants have more privacy when communicating through email, and finally, the prevalence and unremitting nature of the constant stream of incoming email that employees face on a daily basis. All of these explanations provide justification for the proposed increased level of severity of the behavioral consequences provoked by e-Rudeness.
Primarily, communicating through a medium such as email, which possesses more ambiguity in terms of the norms that govern it, is likely to incite deceitful behavior over and above what is normal for in-person relations. For instance, the nature of email as a relatively recent form of interaction compared with face-to-face communication, means that the social norms, or commonly accepted yet unwritten rules (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985), which govern the acceptability of email behavior are less established (Beer, Knight, & D’Esposito, 2006; Goleman, 2007; Suler, 2004). Recent research from the communication domain, suggests that people are not only more willing to lie more when communicating through email, but they also feel less guilty about deceiving (Naquin, et al., 2010). This psychological difference may be at least partially explained by moral disengagement theory.

Specifically, moral disengagement theory (Bandura, 1991; 1999) is the process of convincing oneself that ethical standards do not apply in a particular context. This is thought to occur by separating moral reactions from inhumane conduct through disabling the mechanism of self-condemnation (Fiske, 2004). In the context of email interaction, greater ambiguity about what constitutes acceptable behavior (i.e. sending email to a family member or friend from work, forwarding a sensitive message from a co-worker to someone else, etc.), combined with a false sense of privacy, and increased psychological distance between the sender and receiver may allow people to justify potentially unethical behaviors more easily over email or online (Caspi & Gorsky, 2006). Thus, individuals not only engage in deceptive behaviors such as lying, manipulating, cheating, and stealing more frequently when they are interacting through a computer-mediated channel, but they are also more likely to believe they are justified in doing so (Naquin, et al., 2010), which has likely implications for the interpretation of e-Rudeness.
Another theory that could help explain this phenomenon is the social identity model of deindividuation effects, referred to as SIDE theory (Lea & Spears, 1991; 1992; 1995). This theory helps explain why people may feel less restrained by typical social norms and constraints in online environments. Consistent with early conceptualizations of deindividuation theory (Festinger, 1952), this model predicts that contextual factors such as anonymity, invisibility, and minimal authority increase the likelihood of restraint reduction (inhibition) and the subsequent display of anti-normative behavior, defined as behavior that goes against typical norms of conduct for a given social group or situation (Postmes & Spears, 1998). For example, people are more likely to express aggression, feel less restrained, and uninhibited when they communicate through computer-mediated mediums (Holland, 1996). Taken together, these two theories have implications for the difference in potential behavioral consequences of rudeness encountered through email versus face-to-face. Namely, the greater likelihood of moral disengagement and disinhibition associated with email interaction is likely to compound the severity of employee deviant behavior experienced as a result of e-Rudeness.

Finally e-Rudeness may have more serious behavioral consequences than face-to-face rudeness due to its frequency and low-intensity. Although this seems counterintuitive, continuous minor stressors may actually have more serious consequences on organizational behaviors than more major but punctuated events. For instance, daily hassles are actually more predictive of negative employee behavior such as absenteeism, turnover, and a decline in job attitudes and performance compared to less frequent but more serious life stressors (Ivancevich, 1986). In fact, daily interpersonal stressors at work can accumulate to have a greater impact on attitudinal outcomes than major time-limited disturbances (Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2004; Cortina et al., 2001; Deitch, et al., 2004; Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As such, the
constant, insidious, and unrelenting nature of responding to email may mean that e-Rudeness could potentially have more serious consequences on employee behavior than instances of face-to-face rudeness.

*The Relational Impact of Email Rudeness*

A final category of difference between e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness lies in the potential dissimilarity of their relational consequences. Although ample evidence for the detrimental effects of face-to-face rudeness on relational outcomes exists, the consequences of e-Rudeness on employee relationships have never been explicitly considered. For instance, rude behavior has a well-documented detrimental impact on intra-organizational relationships, which is arguably one of its most harmful effects. Uncivil acts at work are a major source of disruption to the development of healthy employee relationships and interfere with the formation of trust and mutual respect, which ultimately derails cooperation (Cortina, 2008). Therefore, it is clear that face-to-face rudeness is destructive to workplace interpersonal relationships, yet there are at least two reasons to expect that e-Rudeness may have consequences that could be even more detrimental to employee relations than face-to-face rudeness. These include the limited capability of email to create the requisite psychological closeness between interactants necessary to form a relational foundation built on trust and dependence, as well as the characteristic of asynchronicity which makes email a much less ‘rich’ mode of communication than face-to-face. Both of these reasons suggest that e-Rudeness may inhibit or at least impede the formation of close trusting interpersonal relationships at work and increase the likelihood of destructive relational consequences after an instance of e-Rudeness.

First, e-Rudeness may have more severe relational consequences than face-to-face rudeness due to the limited capacity of email to transmit non-verbal cues, which likely hinder the
psychological closeness felt between interactants. For instance, evidence suggests that individuals who communicate primarily through email have difficulty establishing trust and building close mutually dependent relationships with their interaction partners, compared with those who interact mostly in person (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). In support of these findings, Mehrabian (1981) has shown that nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact and body language help create psychological closeness by conveying aspects such as interpersonal interest and warmth. Further, psychological closeness is associated with the formation and development of trust and friendship (Rice & Love, 1987), which helps foster the likelihood of future collaboration (Collins & Miller, 1994) and the maintenance of enduring interpersonal connections. This means that the inherent lack of nonverbal cues in email poses a relational disadvantage (Friedman & Currall, 2003) that could hinder the establishment of close collaborative relationships at work and exacerbate the negative relational consequences of e-Rudeness.

Another key reason that more severe relational consequences may result from e-Rudeness, is on account of the asynchronicity of email. Specifically, asynchronicity means there is an inherent delay between sending and receiving messages, thus the interaction between individuals is discontinuous and occurs in short intermittent bursts. This is particularly disadvantageous when a miscommunication occurs because the discontinuity makes identifying and recovering from these instances more difficult. For example, if a miscommunication arises via email, there is no way to quickly detect whether it was intentional or erroneous by clarifying the meaning of the message, asking a follow-up question, looking confused, or redirecting the conversation. Thus, by the time either the sender or receiver identifies that a miscommunication has occurred, it is often too late to improve the trajectory of the conversation and fix the mistake.
The asynchronicity of email means that e-Rudeness could pose even more detrimental consequences for employee relationships on account of the extended timeframe that it takes to resolve misunderstandings.

Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984) may help explain why different modes of communication inherently vary in terms of their ability to transmit ambiguous social information, such as the expression of emotion or affection. Specifically, media richness is conceptualized as a function of the interactivity of a medium, the number of social cues available, and the degree of personal focus perceived by interactants. Therefore in the context of media richness, email is considered much less preferable for building and fostering relationships as well as transmitting potentially ambiguous content than face-to-face communication. Media richness theory is predicated on the belief that rich mediums promote closer relationships and more personal interactions (Daft & Langel, 1984) as well as more effectively and accurately convey social information. In the context of this study of e-Rudeness, media richness theory provides evidence that messages conveyed through email may be more easily misinterpreted (Dennis & Valacich, 1999; Burke & Chidambaram, 1999; El-Shinnawy & Markus, 1997) and thus the risk of relational detriment aggravated by e-Rudeness could be heightened.

In sum, this section has outlined several gaps in our existing understanding of the empirical consequences of rude behavior and how they could impact employee outcomes. For instance, information, knowledge, and evidence from disciplines such as communication and psychology indicate that clear differences between the consequences of communication experienced through different modalities likely exists, yet thus far, the influence of this difference has not been empirically considered as it pertains to rudeness. However, I argue that
this constitutes a sizable gap in the rudeness literature, and one that this dissertation research aims to fill.

Research Questions and Contribution

This dissertation is positioned to make several potential contributions which address the gaps in the literature previously discussed. By comparing and studying the unique consequences that e-Rudeness is likely to have on psychological and behavioral employee outcomes, we will likely gain a better understanding of the ways in which rude behavior influences individuals at work. Specifically, the contribution of this research consists of three distinct research questions to be answered respectively by three different studies employing a mixed-method approach. Although these studies are separate in their intended empirical contribution, they are interrelated and connected by a common purpose, which is to expand the study of e-Rudeness.

Specifically, the first question that this research aims to answer is, *what is e-Rudeness and how does it differ from face-to-face rudeness at work?* Study 1 of this dissertation provides the foundation for a new measure of e-Rudeness, derived from interviews with organizational professionals. In conjunction with the experimental hypothesis-testing conducted in Studies 2 and 3, Study 1 develops a conceptual understanding of the dimensions of e-Rudeness. Then, through a process of qualitative data analysis, a scale for its measure was created and validated. Thus, the first contribution of this dissertation is the introduction of an e-Rudeness scale that is grounded in theory and empirically validated.

A second contribution of this research is an examination of the effect of e-Rudeness on employee attitudes and behavior. Specifically, the question Study 2 addresses is *what is the impact of e-Rudeness on individuals' attitudes and actions?* The primary purpose of this study is
two-fold. First Study 2 examines how e-Rudeness affects individual task performance, as well as psychological outcomes such as negative affect, discrete emotions, rumination, and a desire to retaliate. Second, this laboratory experiment makes a comparison between the effects of e-Rudeness versus that of face-to-face rudeness, which may enable a more informed understanding of their systematic differences.

A third question addressed by this dissertation is whether e-Rudeness is contagious. Specifically, the research question answered in Study 3 is *does e-Rudeness influence a target’s evaluation of a third party at work?* Although never tested empirically, prior theoretical work suggests that one act of rudeness should lead to another more intense act of rudeness (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), and that this cycle should perpetuate itself. However, I argue that e-Rudeness will not only beget more e-Rudeness directly between the original parties, but it is also likely to diffuse indirectly and detrimentally affect a target’s evaluation of a third-party who is unrelated to the initial incident. Thus, if contagion is found to be a property of e-Rudeness, the threat that it poses to organizations would be further heightened.

Taken together, this research may enable an informed evaluation to be made of the overall threat that e-Rudeness poses to employees from the perspective of its impact on psychological, and individual behavioral outcomes. The research questions addressed here build upon a well-established foundation of existing knowledge, yet explore novel and original questions within a burgeoning domain. Finally, the three studies proposed here will expand our understanding of rudeness in the context of email interaction at work, highlight some preliminary distinctions between face-to-face and e-Rudeness, and enable an assessment of the overall threat that rude email behavior poses to employees. However, in order to develop a full understanding of e-Rudeness, it is crucial to first look at how it is linked with other related constructs and
positioned within the wider nomological network of workplace mistreatment. Therefore, the next chapter will discuss where e-Rudeness is situated within the field, how it is both related and different from competing constructs, and finally offer a definition of the proposed e-Rudeness construct.
Chapter 2

THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF e-RUDENESS

Although this dissertation focuses primarily on e-Rudeness, it is necessary to start with an explanation of face-to-face rudeness and outline prior work that pertains to the study of more general types of workplace mistreatment within organizations. The background provided here contributes to the foundation, explanation, and definition of e-Rudeness as well as the theoretical background relevant to the proposed hypotheses in subsequent sections. Therefore, this chapter will first review the constructs related to rudeness explaining how each differs from the phenomenon of interest and help clarify its position within a larger domain, then it will discuss rudeness and incivility more specifically, and conclude with a definition of e-Rudeness.

The Nomological Network of Workplace Mistreatment

At its most broad, rudeness is encompassed within the nomological network of workplace mistreatment. Workplace mistreatment is defined as acts perpetrated by one or more members of an organization that cause psychological, emotional, or physical harm to a target (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Workplace mistreatment includes dozens of constructs that pertain to aggression at work, and consists of concepts such as abusive supervision, bullying, negative mentoring, petty tyranny, supervisor undermining, generalized hierarchical abuse, in addition to others. Thus, workplace mistreatment can be thought of as a constellation of topics within which a number of smaller domains, related by their connection to mistreatment, are encompassed.

By distinguishing e-Rudeness from other constructs within workplace mistreatment, as well as examining its inter-relationships with them, it will be possible to provide a more
comprehensive depiction of what rude email behavior is at a conceptual level. Therefore, the objective of this section is two-fold, primarily it will differentiate e-Rudeness and justify how it is unique by contrasting its definition and features with multiple other competing constructs. At the same time, it is also intended to clarify the approximate position of e-Rudeness within the nomological network, which will be done by simultaneously comparing it with those constructs to examine their similarities and also identifying areas of overlap. In sum, the following descriptions are meant to both contrast and also compare e-Rudeness with competing constructs, to elucidate how it is different from, similar to, and positioned within the domain of workplace mistreatment.

Figure 1 (adapted from Andersson & Pearson, 1999) shows the approximate position of constructs within the workplace mistreatment domain. Specifically, it depicts workplace mistreatment within the broader fields of counterproductive workplace behavior (CWB) and deviant behavior, both of which examine employee behavior that has negative consequences for organizations. The figure also illustrates the complex nature of the interrelationships between constructs within the field of workplace mistreatment, and the subtle differences that make each one unique.
FIGURE 1

Rudeness within the Nomological Network of Workplace Mistreatment

To accomplish the two aforementioned objectives, this section will draw on several recent papers that have clarified and organized the domain (i.e. Fox & Spektor, 2005; Raver & Barling, 2008; Aquino & Thau, 2009; Hershcovis, 2011). Specifically, the constructs most closely related to rudeness and e-Rudeness include abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), interactional injustice (Beis & Moag, 1986), aggression (Aquino, et al., 1999; 2000), and bullying (Einarsen, 2000). These constructs differ from rude behavior in three important ways: intent, intensity, and target. Intent refers to the
victim’s perception about the perpetrator’s aim to cause harm (Hershcovis, 2007). Intensity pertains to the severity or degree of harmfulness the victim attributes to the aggressive behavior (Barling, 1996). Finally, target has to do with the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (i.e. supervisor, co-worker, customer, subordinate, etc.). Therefore, the following section will discuss the similarities and differences that rude behavior has with the five aforementioned workplace mistreatment constructs.
# TABLE 1

Comparison of e-Rudeness and Related Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abusive Supervision</td>
<td>The sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000)</td>
<td>Lower Status</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Undermining</td>
<td>Behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation (Duffy, Ganster &amp; Pagon, 2002)</td>
<td>Any</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional Justice</td>
<td>The quality of interpersonal treatment one receives while procedural justice takes place (Beis &amp; Moag, 1986)</td>
<td>Lower Status</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Aggression</td>
<td>A socially deviant response that violates organizational norms and threatens the well-being of the organization (Robinson &amp; Bennett, 1995)</td>
<td>Any</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Situations where a person repeatedly and over a period of time is exposed to negative acts (i.e. constant abuse, offensive remarks or teasing, ridicule or social exclusion) on the part of coworkers, supervisors or subordinates (Einarsen, 2000)</td>
<td>Lower Status</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incivility</td>
<td>Low intensity deviant acts, such as rude and discourteous verbal and nonverbal behaviors enacted towards another organizational member with ambiguous intent to harm (Andersson &amp; Pearson, 1999)</td>
<td>Any</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber Incivility</td>
<td>Communicative behavior exhibited in computer-mediated interactions that violate norms of mutual respect (Lim &amp; Teo, 2009)</td>
<td>Any</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudeness</td>
<td>Insensitive or disrespectful behavior enacted by a person that displays a lack of regard for others (Porath &amp; Erez, 2007)</td>
<td>Any</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Rudeness</td>
<td>Workplace email behavior that is perceived by an email recipient as insensitive, disrespectful, and a violation of norms for mutual respect within an organization</td>
<td>Any</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First, abuse by supervisors is defined as “subordinates’ perception of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000: 178). The main point of overlap with rude behavior is that abusive supervision includes “hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors,” of which rude acts could be included. Also, much like rudeness, abusive supervision is a subjective assessment made by the target about another’s behavior, which is influenced by individual differences and the context of the situation. The points of departure, however, are that abusive supervision is higher intensity and specifically directed downward, whereas rude behavior could be directed upward, downward, or laterally. Also, abusive supervision is sustained nonphysical hostility, but rudeness may just be a single incident of disrespect, therefore abusive supervision is not a 'low intensity' behavior, but rather one that involves more hostility. Finally, in the case of abusive supervision, the intent of the supervisor is to cause harm, whereas rude behavior may or may not be intended to cause harm, and by definition, the intent of the instigator is unclear.

A second construct that could be compared with rude behavior is social undermining, or “behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work related success, and a favorable reputation” (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002:332). Most notably, social undermining includes the same types of behavior as rudeness, such as: insults, harassment, silent treatment, belittling, and criticizing (Hershcovis, 2011). Thus, some social undermining behavior could be considered rude. However, there is an important difference between the constructs of social undermining and rudeness. Notably, social undermining is intentional, meaning that the behaviors are performed explicitly to impede the victim’s accomplishment of certain goals. In contrast, because the definition of rude behavior
does not specify intent, it could encompass behavior from all three categories (intentional, unintentional, or ambiguous intent). Therefore, social undermining is a more specific category of workplace mistreatment than rudeness, and rudeness includes unintentional and ambiguous rude behavior that would not be considered social undermining.

Third, interactional injustice describes the quality of interpersonal treatment one receives in organizational decision making (Beis & Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1990). Therefore it reflects the degree to which employees are treated with politeness, dignity, and respect by the authorities involved in executing procedures or determining outcomes (Greenberg, 1990; 1993). Interactional injustice then encompasses instances where employees are treated impolitely or with a lack of dignity and respect, and thus overlaps with rudeness. However, despite this commonality, there are important differences as well. For example, interactional justice exists only in the supervisor-subordinate dyad, whereas rudeness can occur at any level and between any two people or groups in an organization (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). Further, interactional justice is specific to being treated with “politeness and respect… during the execution of procedures… or outcomes,” meaning that it is bounded by circumstance and refers to the way employees are treated while procedures are enacted. In contrast, rudeness could occur at any time that employees are at work. Although interactional injustice could include instances of rudeness, not all rude behavior conforms to the definition of interactional injustice.

Fourth, workplace aggression is a broad category that encompasses a wide range of behavior and has been defined in several ways. One definition, for instance, describes it as any behavior intended to harm an organization or its members (Neuman & Baron, 2005). Another, on the other hand, refers to it as a retaliatory behavior enacted in response to an unfair situation (Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999). Yet a third, specifies workplace aggression as a socially
deviant response that violates organizational norms and threatens the well-being of the organization (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Thus, aggression encompasses a wide range of harmful behavior from vandalism and sabotage to harassment, physical abuse, and even homicide (Neuman & Baron, 1997). In terms of its relation to rudeness, the two main distinctions lie in intent to harm and the intensity of the behaviors described. Workplace aggression specifies behavior that is very severe and clearly intended to harm, whereas rudeness includes behavior that is unintentional, ambiguous, and low-intensity. Therefore, although a portion of rudeness could be encompassed within the domain of workplace aggression, not all of it fits under that category.

Finally, bullying is defined as an employee’s repeated exposure to negative acts from coworkers, supervisors, or subordinates (Einarsen, 2000). It includes behaviors such as verbal abuse, offensive remarks, teasing, ridicule, social exclusion, and neglect (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). Again, although there is a potential overlap between bullying and rudeness in terms of the types of behavior they describe (i.e. offensive remarks, social exclusion, etc.), they differ in terms of their intensity and target. Bullying, by definition, includes a longitudinal component that differentiates it from rudeness, which by contrast may or may not describe a single act. A second point of departure between them is that bullying tends to be done by people with more power or status toward those who have less power (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009), whereas rudeness can occur both up or down the status hierarchy (i.e. toward coworkers, subordinates, or supervisors). Thus, although bullying could include rude behavior, it is usually experienced with greater intensity on account of its recurrence, and its focus is on targets with less status.
Taken together, it is clear that rude behavior has distinct features that differentiate it from other competing concepts within the broad domain of workplace mistreatment. Yet, it is firmly situated within this domain because rude acts cause harm to the organization and its members (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Blau & Andersson, 2005; Lim & Cortina, 2005). Further, rudeness violates organizational norms for mutual respect and encompasses intentional, unintentional, and ambiguous acts, which further differentiate it from other types of workplace mistreatment. Taken together, the specific features of rudeness on the dimensions of intensity, intent, and target explicate how it is unique from abusive supervision, social undermining, interactional injustice, workplace aggression, and bullying. However, in addition to the ways that rudeness differs from these competing constructs, the comparisons made here are also draw attention to the ways in which rudeness overlaps with competing constructs.

Particularly, rudeness shares conceptual space and nomological overlap with specific instances of abusive supervision, bullying, and social undermining. Namely, these types of workplace mistreatment can be classified as rude, when they occur at a low intensity. In addition, workplace aggression also has some overlap with rudeness when it refers to non-physical low-intensity behavior. Although similarities and differences between rudeness and the aforementioned competing constructs exist, it is also necessary to realize that the conceptual and practical distinctions between constructs in this domain are not always precise and mutually exclusive. In other words, often times the boundaries between constructs can be quite indistinct and blurry (Hershcovis, et al., 2011). With this in mind, it is also crucial to explain the relationship between rudeness and incivility.
Rudeness and Incivility

Incivility was first introduced to the field of management by Andersson and Pearson (1999: 457) who defined it as “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect.” These scholars specified that uncivil behaviors were “characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others.” Drawing on work from a wide variety of fields, their conceptualization of workplace incivility distinguished it from more serious forms of workplace mistreatment, such as violence. Further, they argued that research in this area was understudied, yet pivotal conceptual territory within a burgeoning stream of research on mistreatment and aggression.

Subsequently, Lim and Cortina (2005) clarified the concept of workplace incivility by explicating the main feature that differentiates it from other workplace mistreatment constructs: ambiguous intentionality. For instance, Lim and Cortina (2005: 483) explained that, “incivility lacks clear, conscious intentionality… that is, although incivility may occasionally have visibly injurious objectives, it can often be attributed to other factors, such as the instigator’s ignorance, oversight, or personality. Therefore, intent is ambiguous to one or more of the parties involved.” In other words, according to Andersson and Pearson (1999: 456), “One may behave uncivilly as a reflection of intent to harm the target, or one may behave uncivilly without intent (e.g., ignorance or oversight)… or the instigator may intend to harm the target, yet he or she may not even be conscious of such intent.” In all three cases, whether intent is present or not, it is ambiguous to the target of the behavior. Thus, incivility, by definition, would exclude acts where intent is not ambiguous.

Based on the concept of incivility, Lim and Teo (2009) introduced cyber incivility within the domain of information technology, which integrated the concept of uncivil behavior with that
of electronic media. Cyber incivility is defined as communicative behavior that is exhibited in computer-mediated interactions that violate norms of mutual respect. Although this definition represents a step toward e-Rudeness, it also possesses several distinctions. First, it includes all electronic media, and therefore is much broader than e-Rudeness. Essentially, it comprises a conceptual conglomerate including text message, Google Chat, Skype, FaceTime, Instant Messenger, Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, email, and others. Second, the definition of cyber incivility is limited in its ability to capture all instances of disrespectful behavior because much like incivility, it specifies ambiguous intentionality. Finally, cyber incivility is not limited to organizations, which means it includes many other forms of incivility that exist online such as flaming and trolling. For these three reasons cyber incivility shares conceptual space with e-Rudeness, but also leaves room for the unique contribution of a construct consisting exclusively of rude workplace email.

In contrast, Porath and Erez (2007: 1182) define rudeness as “insensitive or disrespectful behavior enacted by a person that displays a lack of regard for others.” Porath and Erez (2007) differentiate rudeness from incivility by eliminating the qualification of ambiguous intent altogether. Therefore, uncivil behavior includes acts where the presence of or lack of intent to harm is not obvious (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001; Cortina, 2008), whereas rudeness is more encompassing in that it disregards intentionality altogether.

In other words, as explained by Porath and Erez (2007: 1181), “Andersson and Pearson (1999) reserved the term incivility for rudeness that occurs with ambiguous intentionality, but the perceived intentionality of various types of aggression is often unclear or unknown, and people often use (the term) “rudeness” to describe uncivil behavior without consideration for intent at
all.” Therefore, as long as an act is perceived as disrespectful or insensitive by the target, it is rude according to the definition provided by Porath and Erez (2007). Arguably, this gives the concept of rudeness more flexibility than that of incivility because intent to harm is often subjective, non-transparent, and therefore a matter of varying interpretation. Thus, with that technical distinction made clear, it is important to note that rudeness and incivility are often used interchangeably in the literature. Although I will adopt and use the term “rudeness” here because the behavior I explore, predict and test fits the definition of rudeness more precisely, the two terms can be considered approximate synonyms in most cases.

Now that e-Rudeness has been distinguished from competing constructs within the domain of workplace mistreatment, a definition of e-Rudeness can be proposed. I build on the existing framework outlined above, and use the definition of rudeness as the foundation for my definition of e-Rudeness, which is defined below, but examined and discussed in more detail during subsequent chapters.

A Definition of e-Rudeness

Consistent with the conceptual framework of rudeness outlined by Porath and Erez (2007), e-Rudeness is defined here as *workplace email behavior that is perceived by an email recipient as insensitive, disrespectful, and a violation of norms for mutual respect within an organization*. Specifically, this definition conceives of rude email behavior that consists of insensitive or disrespectful acts perceived to be offensive by the target. It is also consistent with prior conceptualizations of incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999: 457; Lim & Cortina, 2005: 483; Lim & Teo, 2009) in that e-Rudeness involves a violation of social norms, which is subjective and determined by the target. The characteristic of ambiguous intent is deliberately
excluded from the definition of e-Rudeness because the intent of the actor may be irrelevant to the determination of rudeness as made by the target.

In contrast to prior definitions of rudeness and cyber incivility, e-Rudeness further refines rude behavior into a sub-group that is specific to email communication at work. The justification for this distinction will be explained in more detail in the subsequent chapter. However, based on the definition provided here, e-Rudeness can be conceptualized as existing under the umbrella of rudeness, but distinctly different in that it refers only to certain types of rude behavior that pertain exclusively to email interaction at work.

Moving forward, the first study of this dissertation produces a psychometrically sound and empirically validated measure of the e-Rudeness construct, which is developed through a process of qualitative data analysis that guides scale development from its theoretical dimensions. Toward this objective, the following chapter will first expand upon the theoretical rationale provided in Chapter 1 for why e-Rudeness is expected to be a distinct construct in the minds of employees. Next, Chapter 3 will introduce Study 1 which is described in detail and provides an empirical test of the new measure of e-Rudeness, including a discussion of how the preliminary conceptual dimensions of the construct were derived and tested. Thus, Chapter 3 forms the basis of the experimental studies of the effect of e-Rudeness on individual task performance which will be carried out in Chapters 4 and 5.
Chapter 3

A NEW MEASURE OF e-RUDENESS

To more fully develop the e-Rudeness construct and its implications for organizational behavior, the focus of this chapter will be on developing, refining, and validating a new scale for measuring rude email encountered at work. Specifically, the purpose of Chapter 3 is to first explain how the existing scale intended to measure uncivil email is deficient, why a new scale is needed, and then to develop a measure that is more psychometrically sound. In addition, the resulting newly developed measure of e-Rudeness introduced here provides insight into the specific features and dimensions that distinguish it from face-to-face rudeness, as well as other related workplace mistreatment constructs, and represents an improved measure for use in future academic and practical research.

Although no theoretical construct specific to rude email at work has been proposed in the literature, a scale that measures uncivil workplace email does currently exist (Lim & Teo, 2009). However, its underutilization in the context of management research could be based on its multiple deficiencies, which render it of limited use and even could represent a barrier for the continued growth and study of rudeness and incivility. The existing scale falls short in that: (1) its discriminant validity was not established upon creation, and testing in this study revealed that six of its items cross-loaded with established measures (i.e. job satisfaction), (2) its convergent validity was not supported because it does not load onto one factor, (3) it contains items that are double-barreled and confusing (4) it is limited in scope in that it only captures rude email sent from a supervisor, and most importantly, (5) its content validity is highly questionable because several items are so strongly worded that they likely measure a different construct (of higher
intensity) than rudeness or incivility. Each of these limitations will be discussed in more depth below; saving the issues pertaining to factor analytics for the results section.

First, the cyber incivility scale contains both lengthy and double-barreled items that are unclear and ask multiple things at once, which can be confusing and frustrating to respondents. For instance, as recommended by DeVillis (2003; 670-671), scale items that are excessively lengthy increase complexity and diminish clarity for respondents, and therefore should be avoided. Also, double-barreled items are problematic for survey respondents because they involve two parts which may or may not involve the same response (DeVillis, 2003). As an example, one item on the scale is, "My immediate supervisor paid little attention to a statement made by you through email or showed little interest in your opinion." According to the recommendation by DeVillis, this item contains too much verbiage for respondents to consider, and two separate questions. Other items on the scale are equally as confusing and unclear, such as "My immediate supervisor was not acknowledging that he/she received your email even when you sent a ‘request receipt’ function," or "My immediate supervisor inserted sarcastic comments between paragraphs in emails." The first item is confusing because it does not use proper verb tense, and the latter seems to be an improper English translation of the saying to "read between the lines." Therefore, these items do not meet basic standards of adequacy for the type of scale development and use in rigorous academic research.

Second, the existing measure is severely limited in scope in that it only captures email that comes from the immediate supervisor. Every statement begins with the prefix, "My immediate supervisor…" and refers only to instances that have originated from that single source. Although this is certainly one important avenue through which employees encounter workplace incivility, restricting the scale to a scope this narrow, excludes several other
meaningful sources. For instance, insulting email is known to come from co-workers, clients, subordinates, and managers from other areas within the company, all of which are not captured by the current scale. Further, from a theoretical perspective, the constructs of rudeness and incivility do not specify the source of their disrespectful behavior, instead they are intentionally inclusive of all sources. This aspect of the existing scale represents a serious deviation from theoretical grounding in that it does not do an adequate job covering the domain it purports to measure, which calls its content validity into question.

Adding to this deficiency, several items on the existing scale violate another key aspect of incivility, in that they are, by definition, low intensity acts. Instead, items on the existing scale arguably go beyond the more subtle nature of incivility (as being grounded in discourtesy and impoliteness) and progress toward higher-intensity types of deviance such as abusive supervision, workplace aggression, and even bullying. For instance, items on the existing scale include, "My immediate supervisor made derogatory and demeaning remarks about me…," "My immediate supervisor put me down and was condescending…" and" My immediate supervisor said something mean… and hurtful to me." The type of actions described by these items, especially coming from a supervisor, are likely more extreme than rudeness, and instead conform better to the theoretical definition of abusive supervision as constituting behavior of a higher-intensity (Tepper, 2000). Therefore, the existing scale does not stay within the theoretical boundaries of the content of the construct it intends to measure, and instead is likely to measure a different construct entirely (i.e. bullying or abusive supervision).

Taken together, these deficiencies indicate a lack of content validity in the only existing measure of uncivil email and represent a crucial flaw limiting its usefulness. Specifically, it restricts the existing measure's ability to reflect important tenets that differentiate rudeness and
incivility from other concepts within the workplace mistreatment domain. Also, the issue is of paramount importance in this field in particular, because of the nuanced differences between constructs. If researchers do not strictly adhere to the construct boundaries, conducting meaningful research will become more of a challenge as concepts and definitions become muddled and over-lapping. For instance, frustration has already been expressed by some that this area is already, "…fragmented and poorly integrated…" because studies have used imprecise terminology and measures. Further Tepper (2007; 262) points out how this problem, "has the potential to undermine the development of knowledge in this very important area of research."

Thus, instead of the existing scale facilitating future research, I argue that it actually represents an obstacle to the study of rude email. For this reason, the creation of a new theoretically grounded and psychometrically sound scale of e-Rudeness is vital and a primary objective of this dissertation research.

Toward the development of a construct with improved psychometric soundness, Study 1 consists of two phases. Phase 1 is an exploratory investigation of the e-Rudeness construct, the goal of which is the development of theoretical dimensions of e-Rudeness systematically derived from interviews and then combined to form an e-Rudeness scale. Phase 2 is a quantitative test of the quality of the scale items, as well as the overall validation of the e-Rudeness measure that was derived in Phase 1 by establishing convergent and discriminant validity through factor analytic techniques. Together, these two phases comprise the scale development and testing of a new e-Rudeness measure that is empirically informed and validated and will likely be more useful than the existing scale. To accomplish these objectives, the chapter begins with a discussion aimed at justifying why e-Rudeness should be identified as a distinct construct, drawing from and building on the theoretical and empirical rationale provided by existing
knowledge. Then, it argues for an empirical distinction to be made between face-to-face and e-Rudeness, explains Study 1, and discussed its results, findings, and limitations.

**e-Rudeness as a Distinct Construct**

Moving toward providing a rationale for e-Rudeness to be considered as a distinct construct and variable, it is first necessary to provide an explanation for why an empirical distinction is needed. Therefore, this section will discuss indirect evidence suggesting e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness may be different, including their unique features and potential consequences. Specifically, I propose four reasons why e-Rudeness may be distinctive in the minds of employees. I will draw from and integrate rationale primarily from the communications domain, which explains why communicating through an email medium specifically, has systematic differences that are likely to influence perceptions of rudeness.

Finally, I will argue that making an empirical distinction may be warranted to develop a more accurate understanding of rude behavior as it actually exists in organizations, in both its face-to-face and email forms.

There are four primary reasons that e-Rudeness could be empirically distinct from face-to-face rudeness. These include that e-Rudeness has: (1) distinct contextual features from face-to-face rudeness which are likely to affect rudeness perceptions, (2) potentially more severe behavioral consequences for employees, (3) a unique possibility to influence other employees, as well as (4) different physical features that set it apart from face-to-face rudeness. Although rude behavior in the context of email interaction is situated under the same category as general rudeness, I argue here that it possesses several differences from its face-to-face counterpart. Therefore, it is worth considering whether e-Rudeness warrants its own identity as a construct.
Distinct Contextual Features

The first reason to consider making an empirical distinction between e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness stems from its distinct contextual features. For instance, email communication possesses several unique characteristics that distinguish it from face-to-face interaction. Specifically, these elements include a text-based format, asynchronicity (discontinuity in communication), lack of paralinguistic signals (facial expressions, hand gestures, etc.), and back-channeling cues (head-nodding, sounds of understanding, etc.). The unique contextual features are likely to affect employees’ perceptions of rudeness when it is experienced via email. Specifically, paralinguistic cues such as tone of voice, hand gestures, facial expression, and rate of speech, complement face-to-face communication by providing a wealth of additional information to aid in the interpretation of messages (Clark, 1996; Price, et al., 1991). However, in the case of e-Rudeness, an email receiver is left to interpret messages without the help of these contextual features, making it more likely that an email will be miscommunicated and interpreted as rude. Therefore, its distinct contextual features comprise an important distinction between face-to-face and e-Rudeness.

More Severe Consequences

A second reason that e-Rudeness may need to be conceptualized as a separate construct than face-to-face rudeness is on account of its distinct and potentially more severe consequences. Specifically, e-Rudeness may have a more negative influence on employee behavior compared to face-to-face rudeness. For instance, email interaction possesses greater normative ambiguity (meaning that less consensus exists about what constitutes acceptable behavior). Email is also associated with a false sense of privacy, invisibility, and minimal authority. This unique combination of factors increases the likelihood that employees will behave in unethical and
deviant ways when interacting via email (Caspi & Gorsky, 2006). Specifically, the email medium increases the propensity that employees will engage in lying, manipulating, cheating, stealing and deception, as well as believe they are justified in doing so (Naquin, et al., 2010). Therefore, the behavioral consequences that follow from face-to-face rudeness, such as counterproductive workplace behavior, aggression, and retaliation (Tripp, & Kramer, 1997; Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002) could be more serious and more negative as a consequence of e-Rudeness.

A Greater Influence on Others

A third reason to propose an empirical distinction from face-to-face rudeness is due to a unique potential that e-Rudeness may have to influence other employees. For instance, it is known that emotions can spread to others through the mechanism of emotional contagion (Schoenewolf, 1990; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993; Barsade, 2002). However, recent evidence suggests that this phenomenon is also possible through electronic media (Hancock, Gee, Ciaccio, & Lin, 2008). Specifically, the facial feedback hypothesis (McCanne & Anderson, 1987), which proposes that the experience of affect may be activated by a physiological mechanism in which exposure to words with emotional content leads people to mimic the related expression (i.e. reading the word ‘smile’), and subsequently feeling the emotion associated with that facial movement (i.e. happiness) illustrates this phenomenon.

The facial feedback hypothesis provides a key explanation for how emotions and affective states may be transferred to others through email and other electronic communication, which has important implications for e-Rudeness. This could mean that email is a dangerous vehicle for rude behavior to spread and impact others at a much higher frequency than that of face-to-face rudeness, given the high volume of email that is sent and received daily. Thus, I
argue that this propensity further distinguishes e-Rudeness from face-to-face rudeness and provides additional justification for empirical distinction.

Unique Physical Features

The final difference that may support making a distinction between e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness is its physical features, which may set email rudeness apart in the minds of employees. These include characteristics that influence the content of the sender’s message and make it unique to an email medium. For instance, individuals seek to reduce uncertainty in computer-mediated communication by making exaggerated attributions based on limited information (Walther, 1996), just as they do in face-to-face communication. The difference is that in email people tend to overthink and over interpret the significance of features of the physical message (Ramirez, et al., 2002). Specifically, small differences in physical features such as email length, word choice, font color and style, punctuation, etc., tend to be scrutinized and given meaning, which may or may not be actual indications of the sender’s intentions. Therefore, the physical features of email constitute a potential perceptual distinction that may set e-Rudeness apart from face-to-face rudeness.

Making the empirical distinction between e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness could be important for the study of rude behavior because it may enable the existing theoretical framework of rudeness to stay grounded in its ability to predict how employees are actually affected by exposure to rude behavior. By overlooking the ways email influences the identification, perception, and experience of rudeness, we may not be able to fully understand how either type of rudeness actually affects employees. However, by studying e-Rudeness separately, research may be better able to develop more nuanced and accurate theory pertaining to both constructs.
Research Design and Methods: Study 1

Study 1 consists of two phases. Phase 1 is an exploratory investigation of the e-Rudeness construct, the goal being the development of theoretical dimensions of e-Rudeness that are systematically derived from interview data and combined to form an a-priori e-Rudeness scale. The qualitative data analysis procedure is adapted from a technique used by Gibson and colleagues (2003), which specifies an eight-stage process for deriving construct dimensions from interview data and is designed to ensure the content validity of the resulting measure. Specifically, semi-structured interviews are transcribed to form a qualitative dataset that is content analyzed for key words informed by the literature. The construct items are then derived from the text surrounding the keyword search, consolidated and grouped into dimensions, which are then coded, compiled, and finally revised. Thus, Phase 1 parallels this procedure and uses it to develop an a-priori measure of e-Rudeness.

Phase 2 represents a quantitative test of the quality of the scale items, as well as the overall validation of the e-Rudeness measure derived in Phase 1 and its comparison with other competing scales. Specifically, these two phases in conjunction constitute the establishment of a new e-Rudeness scale that possesses both content and construct validity and can be used to measure email rudeness in organizations.

Participants: Phase 1

Phase 1 of the study was comprised of a snowball sample of 15 organizational professionals. Employees who perform white-collar jobs, across a wide-range of industries and occupations, and spend time using email as a means of communication at work on a daily basis were included in the interview sample set. The goal was to select individuals who were representative of a broad range of professional occupations and managerial-level careers in a
number of different settings. Some of the individuals approached for interviews were solicited to voluntarily participate in the study during the capstone course of their executive MBA program, and others were part of the professional network of the researcher.

Participants: Phase 2

The sample for Phase 2 of the study consisted of 112 (over 100, as recommended by Hinkin, 1995 for sufficient power in scale validation) professional employees who use email at work on a daily basis. These individuals also worked as Mechanical Turks in the United States and therefore were voluntarily enrolled in Amazon’s Mechanical Turk crowd-sourcing internet marketplace to receive a nominal wage for completing online questionnaires. The respondents received $.50 cents for completing this survey. Overall, the US Mechanical Turk population is predominantly female and white, and is somewhat younger and more educated than the US population overall.

Procedure: Phase 1

The procedure for Phase 1 of Study 1 consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews, which lasted approximately one hour each. Specifically, participants were recruited until the usefulness of the data reached a point of diminishing returns. The specific interview protocol, provided in Appendix A, was informed by the work of Cortina (2008) as well as Porath and colleagues (Pearson, Anderson, & Porath, 2005; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Porath, Overbeck, & Pearson, 2008) in that the construct of interest was asked about in multiple ways during the interview which allowed for the participant’s conceptualization of the construct to be ascertained based on the triangulation of their responses to both direct and indirect questions. In addition, it allowed for the development of a rapport with the interviewer, which made interviewees feel more comfortable discussing the topic.
Each interview started with a series of basic questions about their email use at work. This included questions about the amount of time the participant spends using email, the approximate number of emails they typically receive in a day, and with whom they are usually communicating. Second, the next line of questioning focused on understanding the norms that govern email usage in their organization. For instance, I asked questions such as, “Is there a standard timeframe that is considered normal to respond to an email?” Also, “Is most email that you read typically formal including a greeting, salutation and auto-address? Or is it usually more casual?”

The next portion of the interview focused primarily on uncovering how employees identified, classified, thought and felt about, as well as responded to rude workplace email. Thus, the questions included were, “How often do you receive email at work that you consider to be rude,” “What does a rude email look like to you?” “How do you know when an email is rude?” and “Specifically, what is different about a rude email?” and ”How is it defined?” Finally, to explore the affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences of receiving a rude email, I asked interviewees to “tell me about a time when you remember receiving a particularly rude email….“ “How did it make you feel?” “What did you think?” “About how much time did you spend thinking about it?” “Did you worry about it?” and “How did you decide to respond?”

To determine if people perceived a difference between rude email and rude face-to-face encounters, I asked “Do you think receiving a rude email is different from someone acting rudely to you in person at work?” “Which scenario do you think happens more often?” “Is one usually worse than the other?” “Why?” “Is one more likely to end better?” “Why?” “Can you give me an example?” Although the interview followed a script containing the questions specified in
Appendix A, the interviewees were also asked other probing questions relevant to examples and stories they shared.

In general, the interview questions were intended to probe at specific aspects, features, and instances of e-Rudeness. They were designed to produce interview data that consisted of both the participant’s answers to direct questions about e-Rudeness in which case participants were conscious of the interests of the researcher, as well as capture answers in response to indirect questions about e-Rudeness. The latter set of responses was designed to capture additional features of the construct that the participant did not include when asked about the phenomenon directly. Further, by using this procedure, I was able to circumvent people’s potentially limited capacity to introspect about the phenomenon. Following the completion of data collection, the participants’ responses were transcribed to form a comprehensive qualitative database.

Procedure: Phase 2

The data from approximately 15 hours of interviews was transcribed and analyzed using a qualitative approach based on that recommended and described by Gibson and colleagues (2003) for the derivation of construct dimensions using interview data. Specifically, the procedure entailed using computer-facilitated qualitative data analysis to content analyze a database of interview transcriptions for key words and then subsequently derive items, dimensions, and compilations of dimensions based on a systematic procedure of sorting, categorization, and revision.

For this study, the e-Rudeness dimensions that formed the basis of the scale of e-Rudeness were derived using the following eight-stage process. Specifically, the data analysis procedure involved: (1) creating a keyword list, (2) excerpting text containing those keywords,
(3) deriving items, (4) deriving dimensions, (5) coding items and assessing inter-rater reliability, (6) compiling dimensions, (7) revising items, and (8) modifying items. Although this overview covers all the general steps, a more detailed explanation of the stages of the process is described below.

The first step in the process was to identify a keyword list informed by the literature that pertained to the construct of e-Rudeness. The list contained 10 words that had been used in prior definitions of the construct or were related to its features. The word list for e-Rudeness consisted of the words: rude, insensitive, disrespectful, impolite, offend, insult, unkind, lack of regard, uncivil, and violate (as well as all derivatives of these words; i.e. offend, offensive, offended, etc.) Step two, was then to search for these keywords and visually scan the portion of the transcript that surrounded the highlighted word to determine where the discussion relating to that term started and stopped. It was also important to ensure that the topic of that portion of the conversation was email. The relevant portion of the text was then copied and pasted into a new document, which contained all segments of text in which any mention of the term was made. This process was repeated for all keywords. A new document containing interview excerpts for each of the individual interviewees was then created.

Stage three was to carefully examine the excerpt files to determine how each interviewee defined the construct of interest. For the present study of e-Rudeness, each excerpt file was considered individually and consolidated into two expressions, encompassing the way the interviewee defined the construct. Each expression of the construct was then considered a unique item and compiled into a separate file. Table 2 summarizes the thirty unique items, two from each interview, for e-Rudeness obtained from this procedure.
### TABLE 2

**Items Derived From Interviews**

1. It is rude when people send me an email requesting something from me and copy my boss on it
2. Copying a lot of people on an email is rude because it can make people look bad
3. Rude email makes demands without saying please and thank you
4. Rude email catches me off guard and is disrespectful
5. It is rude to send email without thinking about how it will be received
6. Rude email is accusatory
7. It is rude when I send someone a detailed email and it is obvious that they did not read it carefully
8. Rude email is passive-aggressive
9. It is rude not use pleasantries in email
10. It is rude when someone doesn’t respond to my email
11. Email with a harsh tone can be interpreted as rude
12. Email that is excessively short or too formal is rude
13. Rude email tends to have a negative tone
14. It is rude to send frequent condescending emails to me requesting that I do something
15. Rude email uses inflammatory language
16. It is rude when someone cc’s my boss because they don’t like the answer I gave them
17. A demanding tone makes an email rude
18. A rude email feels like a personal attack
19. A rude email is written by someone who is frustrated
20. It is rude when someone replies to my email without carefully reading the original message first
21. Rude email tends to be often passive-aggressive
22. Rude email is brisk in tone
23. Rude email is written by someone when they are mad or upset
24. Rude email demands something from me instead of using pleasantries
25. It is rude when someone demands something instead of requests it
26. Rude email is brisk and to the point
27. Rude email demands my immediate action
28. It is rude when I send someone a detailed email and it is obvious that they did not read it carefully
29. Rude email is insensitive
30. Rude email blames me for something
Next, stage four involved an informed coder grouping the items together into dimensions. The goal was to obtain parsimony, or the least number of dimensions possible, without losing any uniqueness of the items. Subsequently, stage five required that two independent coders categorize each item derived from the interviews into one of the dimensions. The inter-rater reliability was then computed, based on the similarity between the coders’ classification of each item and determined to be adequate ($\kappa = .79, p < .05$). Following the coding of the items, stage six involved assessing the frequency that each dimension was mentioned across the interviewees, and collapsing the dimensions that did not occur frequently into others that could be generalized. The resulting eight dimensions included: negative tone, impolite, insensitive, careless, accusatory, passive aggressive, demanding, and structure and function. Table 3 shows the e-Rudeness dimensions and items.
### TABLE 3

e-Rudeness Dimensions Derived From Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Corresponding Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Tone</td>
<td>11. Email with a harsh tone can be interpreted as rude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Rude email tends to have a negative tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. Rude email is brisk in tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26. Rude email is brisk and to the point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impolite</td>
<td>9. It is rude not use pleasantries in email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24. Rude email demands something from me instead of using pleasantries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. It is rude when someone doesn't respond to my email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. It is rude to send frequent condescending emails to me requesting that I do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inensitive</td>
<td>5. It is rude to send email without thinking about how it will be received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29. Rude email is insensitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Rude email catches me off guard and is disrespectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Rude email uses inflammatory language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careless</td>
<td>20. It is rude when someone replies to my email without carefully reading the original message first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. It is rude when I send someone a detailed email and it is obvious that they did not read it carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28. It is rude when I send someone a detailed email and it is obvious that they did not read it carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusatory</td>
<td>30. Rude email blames me for something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Rude email is accusatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. A rude email feels like a personal attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. A rude email is written by someone who is frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23. Rude email is written by someone when they are mad or upset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function &amp; Structure</td>
<td>1. It is rude when people send me an email requesting something from me and copy my boss on it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Copying a lot of people on an email is rude because it makes people look bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Email that is excessively short or too formal is rude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive-Aggressive</td>
<td>8. Rude email is passive-aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. It is rude when someone cc's my boss because they don't like the answer I gave them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. Rude email tends to be often passive-aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demanding</td>
<td>17. A demanding tone makes an email rude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Rude email makes demands without saying please and thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25. It is rude when someone demands something instead of requests it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stages seven and eight were the final steps in the process, and involved the revision and modification of the initial list of items drawn from the interview excerpts to ready them for inclusion on a survey instrument. Thus, taken together, these eight stages in combination were used to derive the theoretical dimensions of e-Rudeness behavior as well as create an ex ante measure of experienced e-Rudeness.

The purpose of deriving the e-Rudeness scale through use of this qualitative approach was to develop an empirical construct that was both practically relevant and possessed content validity. In other words, by grounding the new e-Rudeness scale in actual statements from employees about their own experiences and perceptions of rude email, this procedure helped ensure that the resulting e-Rudeness scale closely matched its intended theoretical counterpart.

Finally, the Mechanical Turk online survey software tool was used to administer a questionnaire containing the new measure of e-Rudeness as well as two other competing measures and two scales of attitudinal outcomes. The questionnaire consisted of approximately 50 items, including the newly developed e-Rudeness scale, along with the competing scales of cyber incivility (Lim & Teo, 2009), and workplace incivility (Blau & Andersson, 2005), as well as the attitudinal outcomes of job satisfaction (Luthans, Avolio, Avey & Norman, 2007), and intent to leave (Meyer et. al., 1993). Appendix B contains the complete questionnaire.

The results from this questionnaire were used to assess the quality of the preliminary scale items derived from Phase 1, as well as how e-Rudeness correlated with other independent measures (Hinkin, 1995), its reliability, as well as the convergent and discriminant validity of the e-Rudeness scale itself.
Results: Study 1-Phase 1

The interview data (presented in Table 4 below), suggests initial evidence that employees seem to encounter e-Rudeness regularly in organizations, have opinions about which type of communication they prefer, and believe it may have adverse consequences for themselves, their workplace relationships, and their productivity.

TABLE 4
Interview Excerpts by Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>e-Rudeness Finding</th>
<th>Semi-Structured Interview Excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likely to Exist in Organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Although I don't get as much now in my current job, when I was working for (name of company) a few years ago, it was a very high stress environment, and I would say I got a rude email probably on a monthly basis...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Consultant, Public Relations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;In our industry it's probably a little different, because it just depends on the job, and sometimes you can end up working with a contractor that's not very nice... I would say I get a rude email about once a month.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Structural Engineer, Construction Engineering)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;It happens so many times in my line of work where someone will send an email and it's like they need something, you know, 'right now'. .. and that can really make people mad.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Title Analyst, Oil and Gas)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| May Be A Sensitive Topic to Discuss |
| "Uuuuuum. I'd say it's not that common. We tend to have really good relationships with our clients, so there is an understanding... and we know they're busy. (after question was rephrased) |
| "The rudeness tends to come from clients not responding to us at all... or one of the things that especially bothers me and a lot of my co-workers, is when someone... will write an email with multiple parts or multiple questions, and they obviously haven't read it and they'll just reply back with some sort of a questions that was answered at a point later in the email ..." |
| (Senior Account Manager, e-Marketing Firm) |
| "In terms of rude emails... I'm trying to think... I don't think I've really had one. Sometimes, I am copied on the email, so I wasn't necessarily the person they were responding to directly. (after question was rephrased, later in the interview) |
| I remember there were a couple of the guys who worked in sales and for whatever reason they didn't like the way that I operated, or whatever and I remember I just got this, like, barrage of rude responses and I remember reading the email and I was showing it around the office going I can't believe this man is so rude to me! Like how dare he talk to me in that kind of tone... I was just amazed, it was just so completely blatantly rude!" |
| (Consultant, Public Relations) |
"I'm trying to even think of... some people might define the emails that I get as rude but I don't think they are because one, I have a relationship with them and I understand how they work and how they communicate. Two, I don't take it personally because I understand the culture I'm in."

(after question was rephrased, referring to a specific incident far in the past)

"...we just kept going back and forth and it was so heated that I even turned to my colleagues to help me respond to this email and just step away and be done with it. Plus I know the nature of this person, I know how he is, I know how he communicates and I know what he's trying to get so I was feeding into a fire. That was my mistake. I had to stop and get reinforcement to help me level my emotions before responding. I've had incidents with him before and he is just a rude person."

(Program Director, Graduate Education)

"A face to face interaction doesn't live forever and you don't get to read it and re-read it, but when somebody sends you that email you can read it over and over and over. And you can analyze it and try to figure it out if you want... you can answer it. You can answer it and try to calm them down. You can answer it and match them. You can ignore it, you can delete, you can do all kinds of things but a verbal exchange isn't there. You can't relive it... it's gone."

(Administrative Assistant, Education)

"If I were to compare the two communication mediums or avenues, I would say that it probably takes a ruder person to be rude in person than it does on email. You know because, like if I ask you a question face to face you're going to answer me, but if I send you an email, you might not get back to me for quite some time or ever at all."

(Assistant Program Director, Graduate Education)

"One thing which makes a big difference is that if I say something rude to you (in-person), you will likely respond in some way indicating that you are ticked off even more or tempered down, but in the email you're just going to get it all out and the other person has no chance of responding until they read the whole thing."

(Software Engineer, Information Technology)

"The difference is that I get to tell my manager... and everyone is fully aware of the situation and you can handle it. But, you get blindsided by an email from somebody that's mad that you, and you had no idea they were mad. And it's way easier to do because people don't even have to ask to talk to your supervisor... they just hit that cc button like crazy!"

(Administrative Assistant, Education)

"I prefer handling a sensitive issue by email... over email I can filter and edit, whereas phone conversations can escalate much more quickly... and there isn't that time and distance to filter and measure and be diplomatic."

(Senior Account Manager, e-Marketing Firm)

"Email can very easily be miscommunicated. What I could be saying can be rude to the reader when I'm really just enforcing a rule. The outcome is what it is, but over email it may be taken as rude, like 'How dare you give me the wrong answer? How dare you give me a no when I demand a yes?' And that will keep going... whereas if it's in person, I can kill them with kindness and they can see the kindness in my voice and my gestures, which will calm their emotions down. In email they can just keep going."

(Program Director, Graduate Education)

"I've learned that there's times where I just don't email and it's either going to be a phone conversation with my client or face to face with somebody in my office if it can be because there's just the chance that it may not go, or not be understood or perceived the way that..."
| May Have Unique Consequences | “It's much worse to have a difference of opinion over email. It's like... do you want to get your point out? Or do you want to just unload? Email is much more passive aggressive. If you want the issue resolved, you have to go face to face.” (Program Coordinator, Graduate Education)  
I think more times than not I would say email may have worse consequences than face to face and I think that it's easier to understand what a person is trying to get across when you can see their facial expressions, when you can hear their tone of voice, their inflections in their voice and a lot of times they may even explain things more, go into more detail than maybe what they would in an email.” (Marketing Director, Non-Profit) |
|---|---|
| Affective Reactions | “You look down and you see the cc line... and you realize they cc'd your boss... and you're like 'oh god.' Because now I can't even make this right. Now I'm going to get a phone call from my boss, and she's going to be like 'what's up with so and so? Why are they cc'ing me on this? What's going on?' So, that's when it becomes rude, when you're being thrown under the bus for something that you have no knowledge of.” (Administrative Assistant, Higher Education)  
"I've had emails that made me cry. I had one from a parent who had two daughters in my class, this was a little while ago, several years, and she would take her daughters out of school all the time. And her kids were struggling to keep up, you know, and when I saw her once I asked her. I'm like, 'they need to be in class' and she was so mad that she read me the riot act... sent me a really, really rude email saying that I had no business telling her how to raise her kids, and that kind of thing. It was rude.... I never talked to her again after that.” (Teacher, Elementary Education)  
"Mostly frustrated... annoyed... just kind of like ugh. Especially with this client, this is just so typical. This is exactly what I've been dealing with for a while now... and as much as we try to be extremely clear and be detailed and say what we expect, there is this ongoing lack of communication and rudeness in terms of not listening.” (e-Commerce Service Specialist, Sporting Goods)  
"The worst ever, is the person who does not fully read what you have sent to them, replies... is furious, very upset at what they have perceived the email to say, immediately without thought, jots off a ‘who do you think you are taking this kind of responsibility? This has nothing to do with you and I don't understand why we're even having this conversation when this is way above your pay grade’- type of email... cc's your boss, all the supervisors, and basically the whole company... that was very humiliating.” (Program Coordinator, Graduate Education) |
As suggested by the following comments, the interview data represents initial support for my assumption that e-Rudeness is likely to exist in organizations:

"Although I don't get as much now in my current job, when I was working for (name of company) a few years ago, it was a very high stress environment, and I would say I got a rude email probably on a monthly basis..."
(Consultant, Public Relations)

"In our industry it's probably a little different, because it just depends on the job, and sometimes you can end up working with a contractor that's not very nice... I would say I get a rude email about once a month."
(Structural Engineer, Construction Engineering)

"It happens so many times in my line of work where someone will send an email and it's like they need something, you know, 'right now'... and that can really make people mad."
(Title Analyst, Oil and Gas)

One observation I noticed early-on in the process of conducting the interviews, was that people seemed to be more comfortable recalling instances of rudeness that occurred in the past or when rudeness was directed toward another co-worker instead of themselves. Commonly, interviewees would tell me that 'they have the type of personality where things that others think are rude don't bother them' or they 'let most things roll of their back' but then as the interview progressed, and I approached the same topic in a different way, the interviewees seemed more forthcoming with examples of e-Rudeness. This may have also been because they simply could not recall any instances of rudeness when I asked them about it initially, and it took some thinking before they could remember examples. Instances of rudeness are characteristically 'low intensity' acts; therefore examples would most likely be less memorable than other more intense acts of workplace aggression. However, this may also be evidence that admitting to being offended or hurt by a rude email is a sensitive topic and one that people feel more comfortable
discussing at a psychological distance, (i.e. far in the past, something experienced only by co-workers) or only with close trusted friends. As the following excerpts suggest, when faced with recalling examples of rude email, some interviewees gave an initial response that was very non-committal, but then disclosed more to me later in the interview:

"Uuuuum. I'd say it's not that common. We tend to have really good relationships with our clients, so there is an understanding... and we know they're busy.

(after question was rephrased)

"The rudeness tends to come from clients not responding to us at all... or one of the things that especially bothers me and a lot of my co-workers, is when someone... will write an email with multiple parts or multiple questions, and they obviously haven't read it and they'll just reply back with some sort of a question that was answered at a point later in the email ..."
(Senior Account Manager, e-Marketing Firm)

The next quote is another example from an interviewee who seemed fairly certain initially that she had not received a rude email at work, yet once she got more comfortable in the interview, and I rephrased the question focusing on her prior jobs, she easily recalled a rude email incident:

"In terms of rude emails... I'm trying to think... I don't think I've really had one. Sometimes, I am copied on the email, so I wasn't necessarily the person they were responding to directly."

(after question was rephrased, later in the interview)

"I remember there were a couple of the guys who worked in sales and for whatever reason they didn't like the way that I operated, or whatever and I remember I just got this, like, barrage of rude responses and I remember reading the email and I was showing it around the office going I can't believe this man is so rude to me! Like how dare he talk to me in that kind of tone... I was just amazed, it was just so completely blatantly rude!"
(Consultant, Public Relations)
Similarly, the next interviewee initially said she was not bothered by rude email encountered during the course of her job, but once I approached the question from a different perspective, and asked her to tell me about specific instances of email rudeness she had encountered in the past, it was clear that sometimes rude email does bother her:

"I'm trying to even think of... some people might define the emails that I get as rude but I don't think they are because one, I have a relationship with them (referring to her clients) and I understand how they work and how they communicate. Two, I don't take it personally because I understand the culture I'm in."

(after question was rephrased, referring to a specific incident far in the past)

"...we just kept going back and forth and it was so heated that I even turned to my colleagues to help me respond to this email and just step away and be done with it. Plus I know the nature of this person, I know how he is, I know how he communicates and I know what he's trying to get so I was feeding into a fire. That was my mistake. I had to stop and get reinforcement to help me level my emotions before responding. I've had incidents with him before and he is just a rude person."

(Program Director, Graduate Education)

Next, there was some initial evidence to suggest that employees may conceptualize and discuss rude email in terms that are different than face-to-face rudeness. Most interviewees reported that rude email may have unique features, causes, and effects on their own behavior and on the behavior of their co-workers. For example, the following examples indicate how rudeness experienced over email may be different than rudeness in a face-to-face encounter:

"A face to face interaction doesn't live forever and you don't get to read it and re-read it, but when somebody sends you that email you can read it over and over and over. And you can analyze it and try to figure it out if you want... you can answer it. You can answer it and try to calm them down. You can answer it and match them. You can ignore it, you can delete, you can do all kinds of things but a verbal exchange isn't there. You can't relive it... it's gone."

(Administrative Assistant, Education)
"If I were to compare the two communication mediums or avenues, I would say that it probably takes a ruder person to be rude in person than it does on email. You know because, like if I ask you a question face to face you're going to answer me, but if I send you an email, you might not get back to me for quite some time or ever at all."
(Assistant Program Director, Graduate Education)

"One thing which makes a big difference is that if I say something rude to you (in-person), you will likely respond in some way indicating that you are ticked off even more or tempered down, but in the email you're just going to get it all out and the other person has no chance of responding until they read the whole thing."
(Software Engineer, Information Technology)

"The difference is that I get to tell my manager... and everyone is fully aware of the situation and you can handle it. But, you get blindsided by an email from somebody that's mad that you, and you had no idea they were mad. And it's way easier to do because people don't even have to ask to talk to your supervisor... they just hit that cc button like crazy!"
(Administrative Assistant, Education)

In addition, interviewees also indicated a preference for one medium over the other. For instance, some interviewees felt they could be more calculated and rational when handling a contentious situation over email, whereas others felt their ability to express their emotions in-person could soften a message that might be taken the wrong way. Here are several perspectives:

"I prefer handling a sensitive issue by email... over email I can filter and edit, whereas phone conversations can escalate much more quickly... and there isn't that time and distance to filter and measure and be diplomatic."
(Senior Account Manager, e-Marketing Firm)

"Email can very easily be miscommunicated. What I could be saying can be rude to the reader when I'm really just enforcing a rule. The outcome is what it is, but over email it may be taken as rude, like 'How dare you give me the wrong answer? How dare you give me a no when I demand a yes?' And that will keep going... whereas if it's in person, I can kill them with kindness and they can see the kindness in my voice and my gestures, which will calm their emotions down. In email they can just keep going."
(Program Director, Graduate Education)
"I've learned that there's times where I just don't email and it's either going to be a phone conversation with my client or face to face with somebody in my office if it can be because there's just the chance that it may not go, or not be understood or perceived the way that you're anticipating."

(Title Analyst, Oil and Gas)

Finally, several stories and examples suggested that e-Rudeness may have negative consequences for employees at work. Interviewees discussed instances where receiving a rude email was an emotional shock, annoying, embarrassing, or even humiliating:

"You look down and you see the cc line... and you realize they cc'd your boss... and you're like 'oh god.' Because now I can't even make this right. Now I'm going to get a phone call from my boss, and she's going to be like 'what's up with so and so? Why are they cc'ing me on this? What's going on?' So, that's when it becomes rude, when you're being thrown under the bus for something that you have no knowledge of."

(Administrative Assistant, Higher Education)

"I've had emails that made me cry. I had one from a parent who had two daughters in my class, this was a little while ago, several years, and she would take her daughters out of school all the time. And her kids were struggling to keep up, you know, and when I saw her once I asked her. I'm like, 'they need to be in class' and she was so mad that she read me the riot act... sent me a really, really rude email saying that I had no business telling her how to raise her kids, and that kind of thing. It was rude.... I never talked to her again after that."

(Teacher, Elementary Education)

"Mostly frustrated... annoyed... just kind of like ugh. Especially with this client, this is just so typical. This is exactly what I've been dealing with for a while now... and as much as we try to be extremely clear and be detailed and say what we expect, there is this ongoing lack of communication and rudeness in terms of not listening."

(e-Commerce Service Specialist, Sporting Goods)

"The worst ever, is the person who does not fully read what you have sent to them, replies... is furious, very upset at what they have perceived the email to say, immediately without thought, jots off a 'who do you think you are
taking this kind of responsibility? This has nothing to do with you and I
don’t understand why we’re even having this conversation when this is way
above your pay grade- type of email… cc’s your boss, all the supervisors,
and basically the whole company… that is very humiliating.”
(Program Coordinator, Graduate Education)

Some interviewees also discussed the difference between the two communication
media in terms of their consequences, and provided examples indicating that e-Rudeness may
have consequences that are more severe than rude behavior that happens face-to-face at work.
For instance:

"It's much worse to have a difference of opinion over email. It's like... do
you want to get your point out? Or do you want to just unload? Email is
much more passive aggressive. If you want the issue resolved, you have to
go face to face."
(Program Coordinator, Graduate Education)

"I think more times than not I would say email may have worse
consequences than face to face and I think that it's easier to understand
what a person is trying to get across when you can see their facial
expressions, when you can hear their tone of voice, their inflections in their
voice and a lot of times they may even explain things more, go into more
detail than maybe what they would in an email."
(Marketing Director, Non-Profit)

Although a wide-range of examples of rude behavior were cited, all were instances that
the interviewees themselves referred to as rude. Some of the examples of rudeness provided by
interviewees may also overlap with related constructs (i.e. bullying, aggression, incivility, etc.),
however, this is expected because there is theoretical overlap between rudeness and other related
constructs within the nomological network of workplace mistreatment. In response to rude email
behavior, interviewees gave examples of destructive consequences such as negative emotions,
strained relationships, and even the termination of employment. Some interviewees suggested
that the consequences of email rudeness may be different and potentially more damaging to individuals and organizational outcomes than that of face-to-face rudeness. Finally, initial evidence from the interviews also suggested that admitting to being offended by an email might be a sensitive topic or one that employees seemed either to be hesitant to recall intentionally or may not even be aware of. As many of these illustrations and quotations suggest, I found support for my assumption that e-Rudeness is a real phenomenon that employees face on a regular basis during the course of a variety of jobs.

Results: Study 1-Phase 2

First, to demonstrate that the new e-Rudeness construct was distinct from competing scales, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with oblique rotation was performed on the original group of 24 e-Rudeness items, and the items from cyber incivility (Lim & Teo, 2009), job satisfaction (Luthans, et al., 2007), and intent to leave (Meyer et al., 1993). Nineteen of the e-Rudeness items initially loaded cleanly onto one factor, using the parameter that each item should load at more than .4 on the desired factor and more than .10 greater on that component than any others (Hinkin, 1995).

Of the nineteen items, three were dropped due to redundancy and overlap (i.e. "Someone sends me an email that is brisk and to the point" and "Someone sends me an email that is brisk" or "Someone catches me off guard with an email that is disrespectful" and "I am caught off guard by a disrespectful email"). In these examples, one item from each redundant pair was dropped and one was kept, leaving sixteen e-Rudeness items remaining. The original scale also included three items that pertained to rude email replies (i.e. "Someone replies to my email without carefully reading the original message first," and "I send someone a detailed email and it is obvious that they did not read it carefully"), which reduced the reliability of the scale, so those
items were also dropped. Therefore, the e-Rudeness scale was reduced to thirteen items with a satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .94$).

In comparison, the cyber incivility scale did not remain intact during Principal Component Analysis, and instead of displaying convergent validity, six of the cyber incivility items cross-loaded with both job satisfaction and e-Rudeness (see Table 5 below). This indicated that the cyber incivility scale most likely does not reliably measure one latent variable and seriously limits its validity and usefulness. As shown in Table 5, all items from the e-Rudeness scale loaded cleanly, meaning they were positively correlated with each other and did not cross-load onto the factor of another competing construct.

**TABLE 5**

**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study 1 Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Experienced e-Rudeness</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>(.94)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Cyber Incivility</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Workplace Incivility</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Intent to Leave</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>(.95)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n= 112. Reliabilities are on the diagonal in parentheses. Correlations greater than .24 are significant at $p < .01$. Correlations above .17 are significant at $p < .05$.

To assess the convergent validity of the newly created e-Rudeness scale, consistent with the recommendation of Campbell and Fiske (1959) for scale validation, its association with two competing constructs, as well as two organizational outcomes was assessed. As shown in Table 5, construct validity was demonstrated in that the e-Rudeness scale possessed the expected
significant positive association with intent to leave ($r = .20, p < .05$) as well as the expected significant negative association with job satisfaction ($r = -.25, p < .01$). e-Rudeness was also correlated with scales used to measure similar outcomes. For instance, e-Rudeness had a significant positive association with both cyber incivility ($r = .69, p < .01$) and workplace incivility ($r = .48, p < .01$), which provided further evidence of construct validity. Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Factor Loadings Among Study 1 Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Experienced e-Rudeness</th>
<th>Cyber Incivility</th>
<th>Intent to Leave</th>
<th>Job Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced e-Rudeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone sends me an email that uses inflammatory language</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone sends me an email that does not use pleasantries</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone cc's my boss because they don't like the answer I gave them</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone sends me an email that is brisk in tone</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am caught off guard by a rude email</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone sends me a passive-aggressive email</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone sends me an email with a harsh tone</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone sends me an email when they are mad or upset</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone sends me an email that is condescending</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone makes a demand of me by email without saying please or thank you</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Someone sends me an email that has an accusatory tone  
\[ 0.71 \quad 0.35 \quad 0.02 \quad -0.08 \]

Someone sends me an email that demands something instead of requests it  
\[ 0.63 \quad 0.14 \quad 0.26 \quad 0.03 \]

Someone sends me an email without thinking about how it will be received  
\[ 0.80 \quad 0.01 \quad 0.24 \quad 0.06 \]

**Cyber Incivility**

Said something hurtful to you through email  
\[ 0.39 \quad 0.78 \quad 0.19 \quad -0.07 \]

Used emails to say negative things about you that he/she would not say to you face-to-face  
\[ 0.37 \quad 0.78 \quad 0.12 \quad -0.09 \]

Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you through email  
\[ 0.13 \quad 0.85 \quad -0.05 \quad -0.13 \]

Inserted sarcastic or mean comments between paragraphs in emails  
\[ 0.12 \quad 0.76 \quad 0.01 \quad -0.02 \]

Put you down or was condescending to you in some way through email  
\[ 0.21 \quad 0.84 \quad 0.03 \quad -0.20 \]

Sent you emails using a rude and discourteous tone  
\[ 0.24 \quad 0.80 \quad 0.18 \quad -0.21 \]

Used CAPS to shout at you through email  
\[ 0.23 \quad 0.76 \quad -0.09 \quad -0.08 \]

Not replying to your email at all  
\[ 0.37 \quad 0.47 \quad 0.40 \quad 0.06 \]

Ignored a request (e.g., schedule a meeting) that you made through email  
\[ 0.45 \quad 0.48 \quad 0.29 \quad 0.01 \]

Replied to your emails but did not answer your queries  
\[ 0.43 \quad 0.42 \quad 0.41 \quad -0.03 \]

Used emails for time-sensitive messages (e.g., canceling or scheduling a meeting on short notice)  
\[ 0.47 \quad 0.44 \quad 0.49 \quad 0.02 \]

Paid little attention to a statement made by you through email or showed little interest in your opinion  
\[ 0.49 \quad 0.28 \quad 0.38 \quad -0.11 \]

Not acknowledging that he/she has received your email even when you sent a “request receipt” function  
\[ 0.41 \quad 0.55 \quad 0.40 \quad 0.01 \]

**Job Satisfaction**

I am generally very satisfied with my job  
\[ -0.18 \quad -0.19 \quad -0.37 \quad 0.70 \]
I am generally satisfied with the kind of work I do in this job
I seldom think of quitting my job
Very few people who do this job feel the work is useless or trivial
Most people who do this job are very satisfied

**Intent to Leave**
I will probably leave this organization within the next 2 years
I will probably look for a new job in the next year
I will actively look for a new job in the next year

*Extraction Method: Principal Component; Varimax-Kaiser Normalization; converged in 6 iterations.
**Boxed items indicate cross-loadings of Cyber Incivility scale.

In terms of construct validity, the newly created e-Rudeness scale possessed strong positive correlations with workplace incivility (an existing incivility measure) and intent to leave, as well as a strong negative correlation with job satisfaction, all of which indicated that e-Rudeness behaved as was expected within the nomological network, and is evidence of construct validity. In comparison, the construct validity of the cyber incivility scale could not even be evaluated because of its severe cross-loading during the prior analysis. If convergent and discriminant validity cannot be established, then the interpretation of correlations between that scale and other variables is erroneous because the scale itself is not distinct and separate. Taken together, the results of Study 1 suggested that the new e-Rudeness scale represents a measure with improved validity and psychometric soundness.

The content validity of the newly derived e-Rudeness scale was established using a combination of procedures. Specifically, by employing an approach recommended by Hinkin and Tracey (1999), the initial key word list used to analyze the data was derived from the
literature, and based on terms, phrases, and words using the definition of face-to-face rudeness as a foundation for the framework of the new construct of e-Rudeness. This step ensured that the theoretical dimensions (i.e. impolite, negative tone, demanding, etc.) accurately represented components of rude behavior. Next, by using an informed coder to group the items into dimensions, the content validity of the scale was protected. Carefully following the steps proposed by Gibson et al. (2003) increased confidence that the new e-Rudeness scale does in fact measure the intended construct.

The inter-rater reliability of the preliminary e-Rudeness scale was also assessed at stage five of the analysis process, wherein two independent coders classified each item into one of the dimensions. Specifically, the inter-rater reliability was found to be adequate ($\kappa = .79, p < .05$) and thus the similarity between raters was regarded as having 'substantial agreement' (Landis & Koch, 1977). Also, as evidenced by the reliability of the newly developed scale ($\alpha = .94$), these thirteen items consistently measure one latent variable. Also, the items that comprise the scale all pertain to aspects of the theoretically derived definition of rudeness, namely insults, disrespect, and impolite behavior. This likely supports the assumption that the construct measured by the scale is in fact e-Rudeness.

Taken together, Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this study indicated strong support for the construct, convergent, and discriminant validity of newly created e-Rudeness scale. In comparison, the cyber incivility scale did hold up during scale testing. For instance, the e-Rudeness scale demonstrated strong convergent and discriminant validity in that all 13 items loaded cleanly onto one factor with no loadings above .4 on any other components. In comparison, 6 of the 13 cyber incivility items cross-loaded onto two other measures, so much so
that the scale was un-factorable. Therefore, neither convergent nor discriminant validity of the cyber incivility scale could be established.

**Discussion: Study 1**

The findings of Study 1, including both Phase 1 and Phase 2, suggest initial support for the following four aspects of e-Rudeness: (1) it is likely to exist in organizations; (2) employees are most likely encounter it on a regular basis in a wide-variety of professions; (3) they believe it has adverse consequences for themselves, their workplace relationships, and their productivity; and (4) the new e-Rudeness scale developed here represents an improved measure of rude workplace email above that of cyber incivility.

The Existence of e-Rudeness

Although the frequency of its incidence was varied, all employees interviewed did report receiving some rude email at work. It also was apparent from the stories and examples, that when interviewees did get a rude email, they felt it had a negative impact on them. Also, discussing their experiences with rudeness seemed to be a topic that some were hesitant to talk about, unable to readily remember, or potentially one that they had not considered prior to our conversation. One reason for this could be that admitting to being offended or hurt by someone may take introspection and a willingness to be vulnerable, two things that may be not be entirely acceptable in our masculine corporate culture, especially in the workplace.

Interestingly, some interviewees were more forthcoming about their experience than others. In multiple instances, interviewees initially told me "I just don't get upset about email that others might think of as rude" or "I am not the type of person to take things like that personally." In fact, most interviewees told me some variant of this initially. Then, as we discussed the issue
further and they seemed to become more comfortable and became more willing to share their experiences. Most interviewees did open up and provide multiple specific instances about times they received email that they felt was particularly offensive and explained why. Some even shared instances when they had unintentionally sent a rude email themselves and discussed the ramifications. A few interviewees were even willing to share with me physical examples of rude emails they had kept. Despite some initial hesitation to discuss it, evidence from the interviews seemed to support my initial assumption that e-Rudeness does exist in a wide variety of organizations and jobs.

Future studies should explore whether employees actually are reluctant to discuss being offended by rudeness, even when they are not the instigator. Is there something about being the target of rudeness on the receiving end that makes people uncomfortable? Why do people seem to gravitate toward discussing it in the third-person, in the past, or in hypothetical scenarios rather than recalling recent first-person experiences? Does this inclination vary by a person's culture, organization, or position within the company? Is there a time when employees feel more comfortable discussing workplace rudeness? What happens when rude incidents are brought up to other coworkers or a supervisor? An investigation of questions such as these could lead to a fruitful exploration of the interplay between organizational and national culture and perceptions of rudeness. A valuable contribution for future studies would be to look at how norms, values, and beliefs affect the interpretation of workplace communication and the acceptability of feeling offended.

A Distinction between Face-to-Face and e-Rudeness

A second potential finding from the interview data was some indication that e-Rudeness may be distinct from face-to-face rudeness. When asked about both types of rudeness,
interviewees tended to discuss them separately. For instance, some interviewees brought up distinct features, such as using the carbon-copy function or not responding to an email as a particularly common way of angering or offending someone. On the contrary, when asked about face-to-face rudeness some referenced raised voices or certain expressions as examples of face-to-face rudeness that they had seen at work. The different vocabulary and separate examples people used to describe each type of rudeness, indicated some preliminary evidence that they may be conceptualized as two distinct entities with different causes and potentially different consequences.

Similarly, when asked about both types of rudeness directly in comparison, interviewees seemed to explain nuanced differences. For instance, some interviewees discussed how e-Rudeness can be much more easily ignored, whereas others referenced how the blind-carbon-copy function can be used to gossip and spread rumors. Interviewees also explained how emoticons could be used to both help clarify or diffuse a sensitive message, but they could also be used as a way to get away with making passive-aggressive comments. Another difference brought up was the use of subject lines, which one interviewee explained was the source of a frustrating situation for him because he had a client who used the same one (his name) for every email he would send, which made organizing their conversations and finding something they had discussed in the past virtually impossible. There were multiple examples of situations where a rude incident that occurred through one medium could not have been replicated in the other. Taken together, evidence from the interviews suggested that rudeness may be perceived differently by employees when it is experienced through an electronic medium.

Further, some interviewees also expressed a preference for dealing with or encountering rudeness through one medium over the other. For example, some employees reported that they
would rather handle contentious matters over email because they have more time to think, filter, edit, and respond in a diplomatic and professional manner. In comparison, several others discussed how they believed their outcomes were much better when sensitive subjects were talked about in-person. The reasoning behind their preference had to do with the ability to soften a message with smiles, body language, and tone of voice. In addition, some people felt that by using face-to-face communication they could provide more explanation to whomever they were communicating with, and have more certainty that the message was being interpreted as intended.

The scale development and validation performed in Phase 2 of Study 1 also provides some evidence that e-Rudeness may be a separate construct from face-to-face rudeness, at least in the minds of employees. For instance, the e-Rudeness scale, which was grounded in the qualitative interview data and informed by the definition of rude behavior taken from prior literature, displayed adequate reliability as well as convergent and discriminant validity. In an independent sample of 112 Mechanical Turks, all items loaded cleanly onto one factor and had a coefficient alpha of $\alpha = .94$. Therefore, the new scale developed here represents a way for email rudeness to be measured in organizations, both for future academic research as well as practical utility.

Future research should consider whether making an empirical distinction between face-to-face and e-Rudeness is justified, and whether studying them separately will lead to more accurate theory and predictions. The differences between other modes of workplace communication should also be examined to determine whether their empirical and theoretical distinction is warranted. Exploring the ways that various other media (i.e. Google Chat, text messaging, Twitter, phone, Skype, etc.) differ from email specifically could lead to interesting
comparisons that help answer questions about the effect of message medium on employees at work.

The Adverse Consequences of e-Rudeness

Along with the existence of e-Rudeness, the results from both phases of Study 1 provide initial support for my assumption that e-Rudeness may be associated with negative consequences for employees. There are several examples within the interview data that led me to this view, including that targets of e-Rudeness reported experiencing negative emotions, strained relationships, and a loss of work time and productivity. For example, the most common was that e-Rudeness produced negative psychological and emotional consequences for themselves. The specific types cited in the interviews comprised a wide-range of affective states from dread and anxiety to sadness and shame. For example, several people reported experiencing increased levels of stress and worry, dread, regret, surprise, aggravation, and embarrassment. However, a few employees recalled feeling deeper or more intense emotions such as sadness, humiliation, shame, and anger. Although the degree of the specific emotional response likely varied depending on the circumstance, it became clear that exposure to e-Rudeness in an organizational setting was commonly followed by a negative emotional reaction.

Second, interviewees described how e-Rudeness negatively influenced their workplace relationships, including their connection with co-workers, clients, and supervisors. Multiple people described tension between the sender and receiver as a result of a rude email encounter. Beyond this, there was also indication that the interpersonal ramifications of e-Rudeness may run even deeper. For instance, interviewees reported carbon-copying as one of the most derisive and yet common forms of e-Rudeness. This practice represented a clear source of embarrassment and humiliation for targets, especially if an employee's supervisor was cc'd on the email. The
implication of this was that the employee needed to be watched carefully on the task because they may not do a satisfactory job. Therefore, when used in combination with e-Rudeness, the carbon-copy function of email represented an indirect way that workplace interpersonal relationships could be strained.

Third, most interviewees discussed dealing with e-Rudeness as a very time-intensive process, that involved significant attention and took their focus away from being productive at work. Specifically, some interviewees recalled spending several hours or more on the construction of a simple email reply to a rude email that would ordinarily have taken them only a few minutes. In more extreme circumstances, when emotions were very heated, targets of e-Rudeness recalled asking co-workers to assist them in the process of deciding how to reply to a rude email. In these scenarios, the anxiety, stress, and the lost time spent dealing with the situation was compounded because other co-workers were also spending their time trying to help the target cope with the situation. In addition, several people interviewed reported their tendency to dwell on and ruminate about rude email which represented an additional threat to employees' productivity and work quality.

Finally, from an empirical perspective, Phase 2 indicated that e-Rudeness is likely negatively associated with job satisfaction and positively associated with intent to leave, both of which represent adverse consequences. The scale validation done in Study 1 (Phase 2) indicated that the extent to which people reported experiencing e-Rudeness at work was negatively associated with their level of satisfaction with their job and positively correlated with their intention of looking for another job within the next year. Therefore, e-Rudeness is likely associated with negative employee attitudes. Taken together, the evidence from Study 1
represents preliminary support for the existence of e-Rudeness and its potentially adverse consequences for employees.

Additionally, these findings have implications for future research and bring attention to a new area of workplace mistreatment. As electronic communication is used more readily at work, management researchers should consider if and how their area of expertise is affected by this shift. Are there other fields and domains within management that could benefit by considering how electronic communication influences employee behavior? For instance, how are our theories of leadership, decision-making, or power and influence affected by electronic communication? Do existing management theories still accurately predict employee behavior when the interaction occurs through computer-mediated channels? Some fields have already incorporated this into their conceptual frameworks, as evidenced by concepts such as 'virtual teams,' but are there other fields that would benefit from a reassessment of theory?

An Improved e-Rudeness Measure

After a thorough analysis and close comparison between the cyber incivility and e-Rudeness scales, it appears that the existing cyber incivility scale possesses many limitations. First, it cross-loaded onto other scales, which means it failed to demonstrate discriminant validity. Second, it did not load onto one factor, indicating that it likely measures at least two latent variables. Third, several items are double-barreled, confusing, and unclear, which can frustrate respondents, force them to guess, or cause them to stop taking the survey altogether (DeVillis, 2003). Fourth, it is limited in scope in that it only captures rude email from one source, the immediate supervisor, which unnecessarily limits its scope. Finally, its strong correlations with intent to leave and job satisfaction suggest that cyber incivility may measure a higher-intensity type of workplace mistreatment altogether.
Thus, the new e-Rudeness scale developed here represents an improvement over the existing cyber incivility scale in that it is psychometrically sound and properly validated. By deriving the scale using a qualitative approach, conducting the interviews on organizational professionals from a wide-range of organizations, and aligning every aspect of scale development with theory, the content validity of the resulting scale is improved. The newly developed measure of e-Rudeness also provides insight into the specific features and dimensions that distinguish rude email from face-to-face rudeness and represents an improved measure for use in future research.

**Limitations: Study 1**

Despite an attempt to employ rigorous research practices in the collection and analysis of Study 1 data, it is not without limitations. For instance, one limitation of Study 1 is the snowball sampling approach used to select interviewees. Snowball sampling involves getting recommendations for future subjects using the existing subject pool. It is a non-probability sampling technique, meaning that snowball sampling does not mitigate individual differences among subjects in a sample, which means the findings from the sample cannot be generalized to a population. In this case, the use of snowball sampling means that the results about the likely existence and potential negative consequences of rude email should not necessarily be applied to all employees. Instead, the findings should be considered preliminary information about the potential characteristics of email rudeness in some work settings. Additional research, preferably research that uses probability sampling, is needed before generalizations can be made about how employees perceive and conceptualize rude email across different work settings.

A second methodological concern of Study 1 is that all interviews were conducted by the researcher, and some interviewees had prior knowledge of the research topic. Although
unavoidable in this case, the involvement of the researcher during data collection represents a serious limitation and reason for cautious interpretation of the findings from Study 1. For instance, interviewees can easily be influenced by subtle and even unintentional cues given by the interviewer about responses that an interviewee may perceive the interviewer would consider more desirable. Therefore, the researcher's involvement in the interviews, relationship with interviewees, and some interviewees' prior knowledge of the study, all represent limitations of the validity of the results of Study 1 and reasons that the findings of Study 1 should be interpreted cautiously.

A third limitation of Study 1 is the use of a single self-report measure containing both the new e-Rudeness scale (independent variable) as well as the measures of job satisfaction and intent to leave (dependent variables) on the same survey. This limits the degree of confidence that can be placed in the resulting association between the independent and dependent variables because when variables are measured at the same time, on the same questionnaire, they are much more likely to be correlated. Another drawback of using self-report measures is the possibility that respondents can exaggerate or lie, which weakens confidence in the results. Future research should consider conducting a larger scale qualitative research study that interviews more participants, uses a probability sampling technique, and employs multiple trained interviewers to further explore how employees perceive and respond to rude email at work.
Chapter 4

STUDY 2: THE EFFECTS OF e-RUDENESS

Chapter 2 discussed the existing stream of rudeness literature and proposed a definition of e-Rudeness. Then, Chapter 3 added to this definition by developing a valid measure. This chapter builds on the foundation provided by Chapters 2 and 3, and expands the study of e-Rudeness toward a test of a preliminary theory of its outcomes. Specifically, to gain a definitive understanding of how e-Rudeness influences employees and organizations, there is a need for a thorough, in-depth analysis of e-Rudeness in a controlled context. Thus, in this chapter, I develop and test a theory about e-Rudeness and the way I expect it to be associated with individual task performance and face-to-face rudeness. Finally, the chapter concludes with a detailed description of Study 2, as well as a discussion of results and limitations.

While the existing literature in this domain provides an important foundation for the anticipated influence of e-Rudeness on organizations and their members, no known research up to this point has investigated the impact of workplace rude behavior encountered via email on individual task performance. The hypotheses proposed in this chapter are designed to determine whether e-Rudeness poses a compelling threat to organizations and employees, and the extent to which it warrants future investigation by organizational scholars. To accomplish this, Chapter 4 focuses on explaining why e-Rudeness is expected to not only influence individual task performance, but also why this effect is anticipated to be stronger than face-to-face rudeness that is substantially similar.
e-Rudeness and Task Performance

There are several reasons to believe that e-Rudeness is likely to have a negative effect on an email recipient’s task performance. Although no direct evidence to date has shown that rude workplace email affects individual task performance, substantial indirect evidence indicates that rudeness experienced through email should negatively influence organizational outcomes (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Bies & Tripp, 2001; 2002; 2005; Cortina et al., 2001; Porath & Erez, 2007; 2009). Specifically, the threats to individual performance include the negative emotions and attitudes produced as a reaction to mistreatment, the rumination that is likely to follow an e-Rudeness incident, as well as a desire for retaliation.

These explanations, which will be described in detail during subsequent sections of this chapter, represent both reasons to expect that e-Rudeness will be negatively associated with individual task performance in general, and they also embody mechanisms through which receiving a rude email at work could produce detrimental consequences for an individual’s task performance. However, before mediators are discussed, I initially expect to find a general negative association between e-Rudeness and individual task performance. Hence:

**Hypothesis 2.1:** Targets of e-Rudeness will perform worse on a task than people who do not experience e-Rudeness.

Specifically, the choice of mediators proposed here was made based on a combination of considering what mediators had been theorized and tested in prior work on face-to-face rudeness (Blau & Anderson, 2005; DeBono, et al., 2011; Porath & Erez, 2007; 2009), as well as from a logical deduction of the potential processes that could account for the influence of e-Rudeness on
task performance. Thus, the processes that most likely explain how e-Rudeness acts upon task performance are negative affect, retaliation, and rumination.

In the following three sections, I will elaborate on and discuss each of the three potential mediators which I anticipate will explain the relationship between e-Rudeness and individual task performance.

**Negative Affect**

Negative affect represents the first explanation for how e-Rudeness could potentially lead to lower individual task performance for employees. Specifically, negative affect is an umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of negative feelings, moods, and emotions that individuals experience (Watson & Clark, 1984). In particular, some of the most common negative affective states include anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness (Tellegen, 1985). Recent research on the consequences of face-to-face rudeness at work suggests that negative affect is a common byproduct of experiencing or even observing mistreatment. For instance, when employees are exposed to verbal abuse at work they are more likely to experience a negative mood, fear, and distress following the incident (Barling, 1996; Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001). Building on these findings, in their study of workplace hostility, Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2004) showed that experiencing incivility in the workplace also produced increased levels of anger and stress. In fact, scholars in this domain report negative affect as one of the most common outcomes of experiencing face-to-face rudeness (Vartia, 2004; Pearson et al., 2001; Chen & Spector; 1992; Fox & Spector, 1999; Fox et al., 2001; Martinko, Gundlach, & Douglas, 2002). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that negative affect will also be a consequence of e-Rudeness.
The first reason to suspect that negative affect will mediate the negative relationship between e-Rudeness and task performance is because of the high levels of arousal produced by the negative emotions known to accompany face-to-face rudeness (Cortina et al., 2001). High levels of emotional arousal are known to interfere with cognitive processing. For instance, according to Kahneman’s early work on attention (Kahneman, 1973), individuals have limited attentional resources that can be allocated to mental tasks. The extent to which these resources are devoted to a task directly affects an individual’s performance. Further, during task completion, people actively make decisions about whether to devote their limited attentional capacity to the task or to withdraw their attention and instead focus on off-task activities (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Therefore, devoting resources to thinking about and processing an emotional event could take attentional resources directly away from the task, and negatively affect task performance (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Thus, I suspect that the high emotional arousal following an e-Rudeness incident is one reason to propose negative affect as a mediator.

A second reason that the negative affect resulting from an experience of e-Rudeness could interfere with task performance involves selective processing (Varner & Ellis, 1998), or an individual’s limited capacity to process and learn multiple things at one time. For instance, a series of experiments conducted by Ellis and colleagues show that participants who experience negative emotions were impaired in their ability to use prior knowledge to solve present problems (Ellis et al., 1995). Specifically, individuals who experienced negative affect did not remember new information as well as those who did not experience negative emotions (Ellis et al., 1997). These studies point to the interference of emotional experiences with the subject’s ability to process and learn new information. In other words, when individuals are trying to process their negative emotional experience, they are not able to simultaneously learn the
requisite information for a task. Therefore, it is likely that a restricted ability to process new information contributes to the detriment of experiencing negative emotions on individual task performance.

Finally, a third explanation that implicates negative affect and emotion as an impediment to individual task performance has to do with emotions as a signal of trouble. According to Weiss and Cropanzano’s (1996) affective events theory, developed to explain how moods and emotions experienced at work influence job satisfaction and performance, experiencing negative affect indicates that something in the environment is wrong. Affective events theory explains that the experience of negative affect, which individuals typically find distressing, motivates them to conduct a search for new information. Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) argue that the purpose of environmental scanning is to develop an explanation about the cause of the problem to alleviate distress. This scanning then takes time away from work and results in negative consequences for task completion and performance. Taken together, the negative emotions and distress following an e-Rudeness incident could become an impediment to task performance. Therefore, I expect that:

**Hypothesis 2.2a:** Negative affect mediates the negative relationship between targets of e-Rudeness and task performance.

**Rumination**

Rumination poses a second explanation for how e-Rudeness could potentially lead to lower individual task performance. For example, rumination occurs when an individual compulsively focuses on the symptoms of their distress as well as possible causes and consequences (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). In other words, it is a similar
cognitive activity to worrying, but instead of dwelling on the future, rumination focuses on the past. In the case of face-to-face rudeness, a common response to mistreatment at work is rumination (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Porath, Overbeck, & Pearson, 2008), or continuously replaying a series of events in one’s mind in an attempt to try to understand what happened and why (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008).

Rumination is comprised of both reflection, which is neutral in tone, and brooding, which is negative in tone (Feldner, Leen-Feldner, Zvolensky, & Lejuez, 2004). For instance, in the case of brooding, the repetitive thoughts in one’s mind would tend to be more negative, such as, “If only I had said or done this” or “If I could redo the incident, this is what I should have said.” On the other hand, reflecting thoughts would be more neutral in tone and may attribute the cause of the rude behavior to the situation or justify the actor’s behavior with other excuses. For example, “He or she has been very busy and stressed lately” or “That is just his or her personality.” However, whether the thoughts that follow a rude incident are characterized as reflective or brooding, they likely still pose a serious threat to performance. For instance, even when the subject is devoting cognitive attention toward reflecting neutrally on an emotional incident, they are still taking cognitive attention away from task completion, which poses a distraction and most likely impairs performance. Therefore, the rumination that follows from an experience of e-Rudeness, whether neutral or negative is a likely impediment to individual task performance. Therefore, I expect that:

**Hypothesis 2.2b:** Rumination mediates the negative relationship between targets of e-Rudeness and task performance.
Retaliation

Finally, retaliation, or the desire to get revenge, represents a third explanation for the expected negative link between e-Rudeness and individual task performance, and the final suggested mediator. Retaliation consists of the desire to perform harmful actions intended to punish a person or group in response to a grievance (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). For example, if a victim believes someone intentionally wronged them, the incident may prompt a reaction that is aimed at restoring fairness or justice (Folger, 2001). Thus, the incident may then trigger an attempt to “get even” with the instigator or even “make them pay” for their transgression.

Early research on fairness and justice indicates that when people perceive that they have been treated unfairly, a common response is retaliatory behavior. This may even include severe forms of retaliation such as theft (Greenberg, 1990; 1993), vandalism, and violence (Fisher & Baron, 1982). Therefore, it is plausible that some victims of workplace mistreatment may intentionally decide to retaliate by choosing not to devote their time, attention, or energy toward workplace tasks. For instance, in their qualitative study of face-to-face rudeness, Pearson & Porath (2005) found that after experiencing a rude act, some employees reported deliberately withholding effort and reducing their commitment to workplace tasks. Therefore, in the case of e-Rudeness, it is possible that employees may intentionally retaliate by reducing their effort and subsequently decreasing their performance. Thus, retaliation represents a third explanation for the expected negative link between e-Rudeness and individual task performance. Therefore, I predict that:

**Hypothesis 2.2c:** A desire to retaliate mediates the negative relationship between targets of e-Rudeness and task performance.
In sum, the three mediators discussed here indicate why e-Rudeness is expected to have a negative effect on individual task performance. These explanations represent the potential ways that receiving a rude email at work could have detrimental consequences for individual task performance. Taken together, I expect negative affect, rumination, and retaliation to mediate the negative association between e-Rudeness and individual task performance. The figure below depicts the general process model of e-Rudeness, including the anticipated negative association between e-Rudeness and individual task performance through negative affect, rumination, and retaliation.

**FIGURE 2**

![Process Model of e-Rudeness](image)

Moving toward an exploration of the effect of e-Rudeness and the potential justification of its distinction between face-to-face rudeness, the next section compares the anticipated
influence of e-Rudeness with that of face-to-face rudeness, and proposes a test of this suggested stronger negative effect.

**Comparing the Effects of e-Rudeness with Face-to-Face Rudeness on Task Performance**

In comparing the anticipated effects of e-Rudeness on task performance with those of face-to-face rudeness, there are a number of reasons to suspect that e-Rudeness may have a more negative impact on individuals than face-to-face rudeness. Past research has demonstrated that the negative effects of face-to-face rudeness on individual task performance are strong and pervasive (Porath & Erez, 2007; 2009). For instance, even when participants were exposed to indirect and imagined rudeness their performance decreased. In this research, I aim to demonstrate that e-Rudeness will not only have a negative influence on individual outcomes, but also that e-Rudeness will have an even stronger negative effect than face-to-face rudeness, as depicted in Figure 3 below. The reasons for the anticipated stronger effect are three-fold, and the following discussion will elucidate these three arguments in more detail.

**FIGURE 3**

Comparative Effect of e-Rudeness versus Face-to-Face Rudeness
First, I suspect that the contextual ambiguity and asynchronicity of email will lead to more rumination from the receiver about the rude incident, presenting an even greater distraction from the task. For example, in the communication domain, the concept of uncertainty is conceptualized as a cognitive state that fluctuates based on the discrepancy between the information desired and that which is acquired (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). Communication via email carries with it fewer interaction cues and less contextual information than face-to-face interaction (Cramton & Webber, 2005). This means that email inherently possess a higher degree of uncertainty than face-to-face interaction. In face-to-face communication there are more avenues for gaining additional information and clarification (i.e. observing tone of voice, facial expressions, and back-channeling cues, etc.) if doubt about the meaning of the message arises. However, the cue restriction that is characteristic of email, impedes the communicator’s ability to regulate interaction, express information, and monitor feedback (Kraut et al., 1982; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Straus & McGrath, 1994), all of which should lead to greater uncertainty and more ambiguity after e-Rudeness than would otherwise be expected following a rude face-to-face interaction.

Further, rumination, or focusing repetitively on the meaning, causes, and consequences of an incident (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993; 1995), is a possible response to uncertainty. For instance, under instances of high uncertainty, ruminators are more likely to continue the cycle of rumination and become increasingly distressed (Ward, 2003). Thus, in terms of e-Rudeness, it is plausible that the greater the uncertainty and contextual ambiguity inherent in email may increase the amount of off-task attention and rumination spent by the receiver trying to process and make sense of the interaction. Therefore, the characteristics of
email which make interaction vaguer and less certain, will likely impact the extent to which a
target of e-Rudeness ruminates about an incident, and subsequently is distracted from a task.

A second reason to suspect that e-Rudeness may to lead to lower individual task
performance than face-to-face rudeness is because of the increased psychological distance
between the message sender and receiver. Specifically, the greater psychological distance
between email interactants compared to that of in person interactants, could make retaliation by
withholding effort on a task more likely. For instance, one of the primary differences between
face-to-face interaction and email interaction is a lack of social presence, or the feeling that other
actors are jointly involved (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Social presence theory suggests
that a communication medium is low in social presence if the degree of awareness of the others
in a communication interaction is low (Sallnas, Rasmus-Grohn, & Sjostrom, 2000). Email is
characteristically low in social presence on account of its lack of nonverbal and back-channeling
cues, and absence of social context (spatial features and physical artifacts) which help to
generate a shared orientation and mutual understanding of meaning (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire,
1984). Further, this lack of social presence corresponds to an increase in psychological distance,
or the salience of the other interactants in a conversation (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976).
Consistent with this perspective, I propose that e-Rudeness will inspire the same type of vengeful
and retaliatory behavior that would typically be expected in response to face-to-face rudeness. As
discussed above, one way that employees can retaliate or restore a sense of equity following a
perceived injustice is by withholding effort on a task or intentionally performing poorly
(Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003; Pearson & Porath, 2005; 2004). Therefore, I would
expect that the increased psychological distance between the sender and receiver in email
interaction could make retaliation by withholding effort on a task more likely.
Also, e-Rudeness is likely to lead to worse individual task performance beyond that of face-to-face rudeness, because of its systematically negative interpretation (Byron, 2008). For instance, the tendency for people to perceive email messages as overwhelmingly more negative than intended, may lead email receivers to experience negative affect at higher levels. For instance, in her study of the interpretation of emotional email in the workplace, Byron (2008) showed that email messages which were intended to be perceived positively in tone were actually consistently perceived as more neutral in tone than they were intended. Similarly, email that was intended to be perceived as neutral in tone, was actually perceived to be more negative in tone than intended. Thus, email receivers tend to assume a less optimistic interpretation of message content, which has implications for e-Rudeness. Namely, this systematic miscommunication is a likely contributor to the reasons that e-Rudeness is likely lead to worse individual task performance than face-to-face rudeness.

Another issue, which further complicates the systematically negative interpretation of email communication, is a potentially equally problematic overconfidence bias on the end of the sender. This means that when people communicate electronically, they tend to overestimate their ability to effectively convey their message in the tone that they intended. For instance, in a series of laboratory experiments conducted by Kruger and colleagues (2005), participants were much worse at conveying their intended emotional tone and also interpreting other’s intended emotional tones through email interaction than they believed. Therefore, according to this finding, when an email receiver perceives an email to be rude, it is likely that they are also very confident in their interpretation. Taken together, the overconfidence bias of the sender, combined with the systematically more negative interpretation of email by the receiver, should lead a target of e-Rudeness to experience more anger, frustration, and stress than a target of face-to-face
rudeness. Subsequently, higher levels of negative affect experienced by targets of e-Rudeness should lead to worse individual task performance.

Taken together, the ambiguity, asynchronicity, and negative interpretation of email, combined with the increased psychological distance and over-confidence bias of email communicators makes it likely that e-Rudeness will have a stronger negative association with individual task performance than face-to-face rudeness. Thus, I anticipate that:

**Hypothesis 2.3**: Targets of e-Rudeness will perform worse on their task than will those who are targets of substantially similar face-to-face rudeness.

**Research Design and Methods: Study 2**

To test the hypotheses proposed in Chapter 4, the following section describes Study 2, which is designed to answer the empirical questions proposed thus far regarding the effect of e-Rudeness on individual task performance and face-to-face rudeness. Specifically, Study 2 assesses the general effect of e-Rudeness on individual task performance, tests whether negative affect, rumination, and retaliation mediate the model, and measures the comparative relationship of e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness.

**Participants**

The sample consisted of 209 undergraduate students, who were voluntarily enlisted as human subject pool participants at a large university in the western United States. Specifically, the human subject pool elicited student participation in research studies in return for extra credit in one of their social science courses. The participants who signed up for this particular study
were randomly assigned to one of four conditions based on a 2 (message content: rude vs. neutral) x 2 (message medium: face-to-face vs. email) between subjects design.

Procedure

The experimental design and manipulation used here closely paralleled prior studies of in-person rudeness (Porath & Erez, 2007, Study 1). Upon showing up to the laboratory, participants were told that they were participating in a voluntary activity, which was part of an on-going research study about the connection between communication style and a person’s approach to problem solving. The experimenter explained that they would first be sent an email with a link to a brief assessment on communication style (shown in more detail below), which for Study 2 was just filler to provide the confederate with enough time to ask a question. Completing the assessment took the participants about five minutes. Next, the experimenter explained that they would receive a second email (shown below) with a link to a timed problem-solving activity. This activity (the measure for task performance) took participants about another ten minutes. After an overview of the general process was given, the experimenter said, “Because the questionnaires are all online, and I will be emailing you the links to both studies at the times they need to be completed, so please have your email open and read all email that comes from me immediately when you receive it. Finally, to minimize distractions to your peers and enable everyone to do their best work, please email me (at an email address written on the board) with any questions that arise during the study instead of raising your hand for help.” The experimenter also emphasized several times in the explanation how important it was to read and follow the directions.

At this point, the experimenter then returned to a table at the back of the room and emailed Part 1 of the study, the "communication style questionnaire" (Appendix C) to the group.
The email to the participants read:

Participants,

Below is the link to your first questionnaire. When you are done, please sit quietly and wait for others to finish. Also, be sure to read the directions carefully before you begin.

Thanks,

-name of the experimenter

http://xxxxxx.qualtrics.com/xxxxx

Completing the questionnaire typically took the participants between three and six minutes. About 3 minutes after this email was sent to participants, a confederate turned to the experimenter (who was seated at a desk in the back of the room) and loudly asked a clarifying question about the directions. Specifically, the confederate asked (at a volume that could be heard by all), “On questions 21-25, does a ‘1’ mean not at all agree or completely agree?” The experimenter then stood up and replied to the confederate and the class, “May I have your attention, I was just asked a question about the directions… a ‘1’ means not at all agree on questions 21-25.” The experimenter’s response to the question served as the rudeness manipulation.

After the manipulation, the experimenter sent a second email containing the link to the problem solving activity, which was actually the measure of task performance. The email body read:
Participants,

The next step is to complete a timed problem-solving activity followed by more survey questions. Once you click the link, you will have 10 minutes to work on the word scramble. At the end of 10 minutes the survey will automatically advance. When you have answered all of the questions, please sit quietly and wait for everyone to finish. When you are ready to begin, please click the link below.

Thanks,

-name of the experimenter
http://xxxxxx.qualtrics.com/xxxxx

The participants then completed the problem solving activity, which consisted of a challenging word scramble used in past research (Erez & Isen, 2002). After ten minutes, the survey automatically advanced to a final set of questions, which took participants about twenty-thirty more minutes and contained a measure of helpfulness, measures of the proposed mediators- negative affect, rumination, and desire to retaliate- as well as additional measures of performance, and finally the manipulation check, in that order. All instruments for this study are provided in Appendix C. The manipulation check consisted of four items to determine the perceived rudeness of study participants, these items included, “The experimenter was not respectful toward all participants,” “The experimenter was polite,” “The experimenter acted rudely toward participants,” and “Participants were treated respectfully at all times during this study.”

The participants were then be debriefed, thanked, and excused. The debrief script built upon the one used by Porath & Erez (2007), but devoted even more time to the explanation of the study, a discussion of the need for incomplete disclosure, and took additional measures to ensure that none of the participants took the manipulation to heart (see Appendix G).
Specifically, the experimenter apologized to the participants, the confederate was introduced, and the participants were offered a bag of candy as a token of the experimenter’s apology. They were also told how their participation in this study would help employees at work in the future. After the debrief, most study participants (especially those in the rude conditions) were very interested in the study, asked several questions, and seemed genuinely amused with the whole process.

Manipulations

Message Content. The message content manipulation was adapted from a rudeness manipulation used in prior studies (Porath & Erez, 2007, Study 1). Specifically, in the rude condition, the experimenter answered the confederate’s question with, “May I have your attention; I was just asked a question about the directions. Is this really that tough? Yes, a ‘1’ means not at all agree on every question. I would think XXX (name of university) students could follow these simple directions. I run this study on high school students and they have never had a problem… what is with this group?” In the control condition, the experimenter answered the confederate’s question with, "May I have your attention; I was just asked a question about the directions. Yes, a ‘1’ means not at all agree on questions 21-25."

Message medium. The message medium manipulation varied by the channel used for the confederate to ask the manipulation provoking question to the experimenter, as well as the channel used for the experimenter's response to the class. This communication was either made vocally or through email. For example, in the rude email condition, the experimenter sent the following message to the class:
Is this really that tough? A 1 means not at all agree on EVERY question!! I would think XXX students could follow these simple directions. I run this study on high school students and they have never had a problem. What is with this group?

Name of Experimenter
Title of Experimenter
Department of Experimenter
School of the Experimenter
College and City
Email

From: Confederate Name [name.confederate@xxx.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, February 24, 2014 11:45 AM
To: Experimenter Name
Subject: Part 1

Name of Experimenter,
On questions 21-25, does a 1 mean not at all agree or completely agree?

Thanks,
Confederate

Measures

Perceived Rudeness. Perceived rudeness, or the extent to which the participants perceived the experimenter as rude, was measured using four items. This served as the manipulation check, and represented ‘how rude’ the participants perceived the actions of the experimenter. Specifically, participants were asked to respond to the following items: (1) The experimenter was not respectful toward all participants, (2) The experimenter was polite, (3) The experimenter acted rudely toward participants, and (4) Participants were treated respectfully at all times during this study. Participants responded on 7-point bipolar scales with point labels that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability estimate of the scale was $\alpha = .93$.

Task performance. Task performance was measured using a word scramble activity (Erez & Isen, 2002; see also Porath & Erez, 2007). Specifically, task performance was assessed
by counting the number of anagrams that the participant was able to correctly solve in ten minutes. The average number of words unscrambled in this sample of participants was about 5 words, or ($\bar{x} = 5.22$, s. d. = 2.23).

**Negative Affect.** The negative affect of participants was measured using the negative affect subscale of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Specifically, an eighteen-item measure of experienced negative affective state was used. Participants responded on 7-point bipolar scales with point labels that ranged from *not at all feel this way* to *completely feel this way*. The reliability estimate of the scale was $\alpha = .90$.

**Rumination.** Rumination was measured using a five-item scale adapted from the Impact of Event Scale (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979, see also McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2007). Participants responded to the following statements: (1) During the task, I couldn’t stop from thinking about other things, (2) Thoughts and feelings about something else kept running through my mind, (3), I found it difficult not to think about other things during this experiment, (4) I found myself playing another situation over and over in my mind, and (5) Even when I was trying to focus on the task, I kept thinking about something else. Participants responded on 7-point bipolar scales with point labels that ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The reliability estimate of the scale was $\alpha = .91$.

**Desire for Retaliation.** Desire for retaliation was measured using an adaptation of a scale employed by Porath & Erez (2007). Specifically, participants were asked to respond to the following items: (1) I did not perform up to my capacity because I didn’t want to help, (2) I was not motivated to do the tasks because of the way I was treated, and (3) I would like the experiment to fail because of the way I was treated. Participants responded on 7-point bipolar
scales with point labels that ranged from \textit{strongly agree} to \textit{strongly disagree}. The reliability estimate of the scale was $\alpha = .83$.

\textbf{Results: Study 2}

First, to determine whether the experimental manipulation created the intended effect on the study participants, perceived rudeness was analyzed in a two-way ANOVA with message medium and message content as between-subject variables. The results indicated a significant main effect of message content ($F[1, 225] = 625.40, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .74$), a significant main effect of message medium ($F[1, 225] = 16.90, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .07$), and a significant interaction ($F[1, 225] = 23.60, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .10$). Thus, although perceived rudeness was effected by message content and medium, a test of the simple main effect of message medium on perceptions of rudeness revealed no significant difference ($F[1, 225] = .27, p = .30, \eta_p^2 = .01$) across the email neutral ($\bar{x} = 1.34, \text{ s. d.} = .54$) and face-to-face neutral conditions ($\bar{x} = 1.24, \text{ s. d.} = .45$), meaning perceptions of rudeness across neutral conditions were virtually the same. Message medium only influenced perceptions of rudeness when participants were exposed to a rude email, in which case ($\bar{x} = 4.05, \text{ s. d.} = 1.33$) the manipulation was perceived to be significantly less rude than those who encountered face-to-face rudeness ($\bar{x} = 5.26, \text{ s. d.} = 1.23$); ($F[1, 225] = 40.50, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .17$). This indicated that even when the email and face-to-face conditions were evaluated individually, participants exposed to either type of rudeness (e-Rudeness or face-to-face rudeness) perceived significantly more rude treatment than their neutral condition counterparts. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among Study 2 variables are reported in Table 7.
TABLE 7
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study 2 Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. e-Rude Condition</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. F2F Rude Condition</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perceived Rudeness</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Task Performance (Anagram)</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negative Affect</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>(.90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rumination</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>-.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Retaliation</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>(.83)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n= 229. Reliabilities are on the diagonal in parentheses. Correlations above .13 are significant at p < .05. Correlations greater than .17 are significant at p < .01.

To explore the relationship between message medium and message content on task performance, a two-way ANOVA showed a significant main effect of message content ($F[1, 225] = 9.85$, $p = .00, \eta^2_p = .04$) that was qualified by a significant interaction between message content and message medium ($F[1, 225] = 10.40$, $p = .00, \eta^2_p = .04$), such that the effect of rudeness on performance depended on whether the rudeness was delivered in-person or through email. When participants were exposed to e-Rudeness, their average performance was significantly lower ($\bar{x} = 4.07$, s. d. = 2.17) compared to participants who were not exposed to e-Rudeness ($\bar{x} = 5.96$, s. d. = 2.14); ($F[1, 225] = 16.43$, $p = .00, \eta^2_p = .16$). However, there was no significant difference ($F[1, 225] = .01$, $p = .94, \eta^2_p = .00$) between the performance of participants exposed to face-to-face rudeness ($\bar{x} = 5.32$, s. d. = 2.04) compared with the average performance of participants not exposed to face-to-face rudeness ($\bar{x} = 5.30$, s. d. = 2.32). Also, the main effect of message medium was not significant ($F[1, 225] = .32$, $p = .32, \eta^2_p = .00$).
Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 2.1 predicted that targets of e-Rudeness would perform worse on a word scramble task than individuals who were not exposed to e-Rudeness. To test Hypothesis 2.1, the simple main effect of email rudeness on task performance revealed a significant difference ($F[1, 225] = 16.43$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2_p = .16$) between number of words participants were able to unscramble (i.e. the measure of task performance) in the email neutral condition ($\bar{x} = 5.96$, s. d. $= 2.14$) and the number of words unscrambled in the e-Rude conditions ($\bar{x} = 4.07$, s. d. $= 2.17$). This indicated that being exposed to rude behavior via email had a significant negative effect on participant's task performance, as measured by words unscrambled. The results indicated support for Hypothesis 2.1.

Hypothesis 2.2a, posited that negative affect would mediate the relationship between e-Rudeness and task performance. However, the results of a two-way ANOVA showed no significant main effect of message content on negative affect ($F[1, 225] = .70$, $p = .40$, $\eta^2_p = .00$), or message medium on negative affect ($F[1, 225] = .83$, $p = .36$, $\eta^2_p = .00$), and no significant interaction ($F[1, 225] = .03$, $p = .95$, $\eta^2_p = .01$). There was also no significant difference between negative affect across the e-Rude ($\bar{x} = 4.07$, s. d. $= 2.17$) and neutral email conditions ($\bar{x} = 4.07$, s. d. $= 2.17$); ($F[1, 225] = .25$, $p = .57$, $\eta^2_p = .01$). Therefore, because the manipulation of e-Rudeness behavior did not have a significant effect on negative affect, it could not be tested as a mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Hypothesis 2.2b stated that rumination would mediate the relationship between e-Rudeness and task performance. A two-way ANOVA revealed that there was no significant main effect of message content on rumination ($F[1, 225] = .45$, $p = .50$, $\eta^2_p = .00$), but there was a
significant main effect of message medium on rumination \((F / \{1, 225\} = 4.67, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .02)\), such that participants ruminated more in the face-to-face conditions \((\bar{x} = 2.87, \text{ s. e.} = .12)\) compared to the email conditions \((\bar{x} = 2.47, \text{ s. e.} = .15)\). Further, there was no significant interaction between message content and message medium on rumination \((F / \{1, 225\} = .09, p = .76, \eta_p^2 = .00)\). In terms of testing Hypothesis 2.2b, similar to Hypothesis 2.2a, because e-Rudeness did not significantly affect levels of rumination across conditions, as can be seen in Table 7, it could not be tested as a mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Hypothesis 2.2c, predicted that a desire to retaliate would mediate the relationship between e-Rudeness and task performance. A two-way ANOVA showed no significant main effect of message medium on retaliation \((F / \{1, 225\} = .88, p = .34, \eta_p^2 = .00)\), but it did reveal a significant main effect of message content \((F / \{1, 225\} = 43.55, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .16)\), such that participants had a stronger desire to retaliate after exposure to rudeness \((\bar{x} = 2.10, \text{ s. d.} = .10)\) compared to no rudeness \((\bar{x} = 1.17, \text{ s. d.} = .10)\). Also, the interaction between message content and message medium was approaching significance \((F / \{1, 225\} = 3.57, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .02)\), meaning that the effect of message content on participants' desire to retaliate depended on the medium through which it was encountered. A test of the simple main effect of exposure to rudeness on desire to retaliate showed that participants who experienced face-to-face rudeness reported wanting to retaliate more \((\bar{x} = 2.29, \text{ s. d.} = 1.35)\) than those exposed to e-Rudeness \((\bar{x} = 1.89, \text{ s. d.} = 1.34)\); \((F / \{1, 225\} = 4.07, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .02)\). However, exposure to e-Rudeness \((\bar{x} = 1.89, \text{ s. d.} = 1.34)\) compared to no email rudeness \((\bar{x} = 1.23, \text{ s. d.} = .55)\); \((F / \{1, 225\} = 8.97, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .10)\) did significantly increase participants' desire to retaliate. Therefore it warranted being tested as a mediator.
To test whether desire to retaliate mediated the relationship between e-Rudeness and task performance, I performed a Sobel (1982) test for mediation. However, because a key assumption of the Sobel test is a normally distributed sample, and that assumption is not satisfied for small samples, I employed a bootstrapping approach recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2004). This technique for bootstrapping uses repeated random sampling from a smaller data set to simulate the power enabled by a larger dataset. After specifying the number of bootstrap resamples at 5000, the bootstrapping technique measured both the direct and indirect effect of e-Rudeness through retaliation on task performance. Results of the Sobel test indicated that desire to retaliate was not a statistically significant mediator ($Z = -.31$, $p = .24$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2.2c was not supported. e-Rudeness did foster an increased desire to retaliate, but did not explain the negative association of e-Rudeness on task performance.

Hypothesis 2.3, posited that targets of e-Rudeness would perform worse on a task than participants subjected to similar face-to-face rudeness. In other words, this hypothesis makes a comparison between the performance of participants exposed to face-to-face rudeness versus the performance of participants exposed to e-Rudeness, and predicted that exposure to the latter form of rudeness would have a greater negative effect on task performance. A test of the simple main effect of email rudeness on task performance revealed that the number of words unscrambled by participants was significantly lower in the e-Rudeness condition ($\bar{x} = 4.07$, s. d. = 2.17) than in the face-to-face rude condition ($\bar{x} = 5.32$, s. d. = 2.04); ($F[1, 225] = 9.06$, $p = .00$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$), providing support for Hypothesis 2.3. However, the simple main effect of face-to-face rudeness on individual task performance was non-significant across conditions ($\bar{x} = 4.30$, s. d. = 2.04); ($\bar{x} = 4.32$, s. d. = 2.33); ($F[1, 225] = .00$, $p = .94$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$), therefore a direct comparison could not be made.
Exploratory Research Questions

As a follow-up to Hypotheses 2.2a (unsupported), which predicted that negative affect would mediate the relationship between e-Rudeness and task performance, I conducted additional analyses to explore whether differences existed between the discrete emotions experienced by participants across the face-to-face and e-Rudeness conditions. The reason for this shift from negative affect to emotion had to do with a question I had about whether the PANAS scale, which was developed to assess "the two primary dimensions of mood" (Watson, et al., 1988; p. 1069) namely, positive affect and negative affect, may not have effectively captured participants' reactions to rudeness. For instance, in these studies, assessing discrete emotions seemed to be a potentially more relevant and likely byproduct of exposure to rudeness (rather than positive or negative affect) because emotions are known to have a clear stimulus and be a direct reaction to an incident whereas moods are more diffused with no clear cause (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). Therefore, I broke apart the PANAS scale into individual emotions and by conducting seven 2 x 2 ANOVAs, I assessed the effect of message medium and message content on anger, fear, hostility, and shame.

First, the results of the first two way ANOVA of message medium and content on anger revealed no significant main effect of message content ($F[1, 225] = 1.51, p = .22, \eta^2_p = .01$), and no significant main effect of message medium ($F[1, 225] = .75, p = .39, \eta^2_p = .00$), but it did yield an interaction effect that approached significance ($F[1, 225] = 3.14, p = .07, \eta^2_p = .01$). A test of the simple main effect of message content and medium indicated that among participants exposed to rudeness, those exposed to face-to-face rudeness reported significantly
more anger ($\bar{x} = 1.85$, s. d. = 1.28) compared to those exposed to e-Rudeness ($\bar{x} = 1.46$, s. d. = 1.29); ($F[1, 225] = 3.54$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2_p = .03$).

Second, a two way ANOVA of message medium and content on fear showed a significant main effect of message medium ($F[1, 225] = 4.26$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2_p = .02$), such that participants reported feeling more afraid when the message medium was face-to-face, and the message content was collapsed across conditions. The ANOVA showed no significant main effect of message content ($F[1, 225] = .31$, $p = .58$, $\eta^2_p = .00$), and no significant interaction effect ($F[1, 225] = .79$, $p = .38$, $\eta^2_p = .00$).

Third, a two way ANOVA of message medium and content on hostility showed no significant main effect of message medium ($F[1, 225] = .43$, $p = .51$, $\eta^2_p = .00$) and no significant interaction effect ($F[1, 225] = .42$, $p = .52$, $\eta^2_p = .00$), but there was a significant main effect of message content ($F[1, 225] = 7.37$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .03$) on hostility, such that participants exposed to rudeness reported feeling more hostile, when message medium was collapsed across email and face-to-face conditions.

Finally, a two-way ANOVA of message medium and message content on shame revealed no significant main effect of message medium ($F[1, 225] = .72$, $p = .40$, $\eta^2_p = .00$) and no significant main effect of message content ($F[1, 225] = .22$, $p = .64$, $\eta^2_p = .00$), but it did show a significant interaction effect ($F[1, 225] = 3.73$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2_p = .02$), such that the influence of message content and medium on participants feelings of shame depended upon whether the rude behavior was encountered via email or face-to-face. For example, as shown by Figure 4, a test of the simple main effect of message medium and content showed that participants in the e-
Rudeness condition reported feeling more ashamed ($\bar{x} = 2.29, \text{ s. d.} = 1.66$) compared to those in the face-to-face rude condition ($\bar{x} = 1.78, \text{ s. d.} = 1.22$); ($F [1, 225] = 7.44, p = .00$). Results of a linear regression also established that level of shame reported by respondents was significantly correlated with task performance ($\beta = -.27, p = .00, R^2 = .70$), such that shame was negatively associated with number of words unscrambled. However, when tested as a mediator, shame did not explain the relationship between e-Rudeness and task performance ($Z = -.19, p = .22$).

**FIGURE 4**

Effect of Rudeness on Shame by Message Medium
Taken together, the evidence from the exploratory analysis indicated that message medium may account for some of the differences in the discrete emotions felt by participants, particularly e-Rudeness elicited more shame whereas face-to-face rudeness provoked more fear. Therefore, even though discrete emotions may not help explain the relationship between e-Rudeness (or face-to-face rudeness) and task performance, it does point to one potential difference in outcomes between them. Table 8 reports the emotional outcomes of message medium and content as described in this section.
### TABLE 8
Discrete Emotional Outcomes of Message Content and Medium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discrete Emotion</th>
<th>Effect of Message Content</th>
<th>Effect of Message Medium</th>
<th>Interaction Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>F2F rudeness generates more anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>A F2F medium generates more fear</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>Rude content generates more hostility</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervousness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>e-Rudeness generates more shame</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion: Study 2**

The results of Study 2 suggest evidence for four findings: (1) exposure to e-Rudeness seems to have a negative effect on task performance; (2) the negative effect of e-Rudeness may be stronger than that of face-to-face rudeness on task performance; (3) the relationship was not
mediated by negative affect, rumination, or retaliation (although e-Rudeness did foster more retaliation); and finally (4) exposure to face-to-face rudeness seemed to elicit more anger, whereas e-Rudeness provoked more shame. These results provide preliminary support for the existence of e-Rudeness, and indicate that it may also have negative consequences for individual task performance.

Study 2 suggested that indirect exposure to a one-time instance of e-Rudeness impaired individual task performance. This finding builds on prior research about rude behavior, which has demonstrated that exposure to rudeness is harmful to employees (Porath & Erez, 2007), and extends those findings to rude behavior experienced through email. It also extends the findings of prior research which has established the harmful effects of rude email on self-reported attitudinal outcomes such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Lim & Teo, 2009). This study, however, is the first to present evidence that email rudeness has a detrimental effect on an objective measure of individual performance, and represents the initial experimental test of the effects of rude email.

Study 2 also lends some initial evidence indicating that upon making a direct comparison of the two types of rudeness, individuals exposed to e-Rudeness may perform worse on the same task than those exposed to face-to-face rudeness. In other words, in this study, participants subjected to rudeness that was engineered to be substantially similar aside from its medium of delivery (i.e. in person versus email), performed worse after exposure to e-Rudeness compared to individuals exposed to face-to-face rudeness. This means that when the performance of participants was compared across mediums in this study, those exposed to rude email were more negatively impacted and performed worse on the task.
However, it is important to note that this finding is qualified by the non-significant effect of face-to-face rudeness on task performance, which is somewhat puzzling given that the effect of face-to-face rudeness on task performance has been documented in prior research (Porath & Erez, 2007), and counterintuitive given that participants in the face-to-face rude condition reported significantly higher perceptions of rudeness than those in the email rude condition. However, one potential explanation for this non-significant result could have been due in part to a different manipulation of rudeness used here compared to that used by Porath and Erez (2007). Using the exact manipulation from Porath and Erez (2007) was not possible in this study because the rude behavior needed to be replicable across message mediums. Therefore, a difference between the manipulations of rudeness could be a reason for the disparity among outcomes. It also suggests that the relationship between exposure to rudeness and task performance may be more complicated than previously believed. For instance, maybe rudeness only affects task performance if it is experienced at low levels, and participants perceived the face-to-face manipulation in this study as too rude. A more direct examination of the nature of the relationship between perceptions of rudeness and performance could be a worthwhile topic for future research to explore.

Another aspect of Study 2 that raises more questions than it answers is the unsupported tests of mediation. For instance, Hypothesis 2.2a, b, and c were not supported, yet the effect of e-Rudeness on task performance was evident. Prior research has looked at the effect of face-to-face rudeness on performance through rumination, negative affect, and a desire to retaliate with mixed results, and found some evidence for memory recall as a more likely mediator (Porath & Erez, 2007). Memory recall was not tested in this study; therefore future research should
explicitly test memory recall as a mediator of e-Rudeness, with the goal of learning more about why rude email produces negative effects on individual performance.

The exploratory analyses indicated initial evidence suggesting that participants may experience different emotions after exposure to rudeness through different mediums. For instance, targets of face-to-face rudeness displayed higher levels of anger, whereas targets of e-Rudeness reported feeling more ashamed. This suggests a potential difference between mediums that may help us understand more about each type of rudeness. For instance, a face-to-face threat is less ambiguous and targets may more quickly determine, based on what they see and hear, that they are being insulted. This perception would likely generate emotions more consistent with the primal response to run or fight, such as anger. On the other hand, the rude email may have been less of a physical threat, but instead generated scrutiny and introspection (as observed by the experimenter) which may have implicated it as a threat to participants’ self-image, fostering higher levels of the more inwardly directed emotion of shame. This finding is interesting given that it could represent a clue about why people are influenced by threats of each type differently. Future research should more directly explore the differences between discrete emotions caused by each type of rudeness. For example, are there other differences? Embarrassment and humiliation represent similar emotions to shame, but were not directly assessed in this study. Would those emotions be elicited by e-Rudeness as well? Future studies should also examine why these differences exist.

Additionally, the findings of Study 2 suggest initial evidence that it may be beneficial to consider making a theoretical and empirical distinction between e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness. If future research reveals additional differences between them, separating these two types of rude behavior may be warranted. Although direct evidence of a difference was
inconclusive in this study due to the non-significant effect of face-to-face rudeness on performance, several indirect differences in affective outcomes did emerge. Future studies should continue to examine whether other differences between them exist, and aim to make a successful direct comparison. If there are significant empirical differences between e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness, it may be necessary to make a theoretical distinction so our knowledge of both types of rudeness accurately reflects how they affect employees.

Taken together, the findings from Study 2 indicated additional evidence that e-Rudeness is a real phenomenon, which likely has a negative effect on task performance, and may also have outcomes that are distinct from face-to-face rudeness. However, Study 2 also revealed potential limitations in our current understanding of the underlying processes of rude behavior and brought up several questions that remain unanswered, such as what explains the effect of exposure to e-Rudeness on performance. Why does e-Rudeness interfere with an individual's ability to perform a task? Exactly what is driving this relationship? What else does exposure to e-Rudeness cause? These questions represent important areas for future research to explore because their answers may provide substantial insight about other unknown differences between rudeness through other mediums, and further our understanding of rude behavior in general.

**Limitations: Study 2**

Study 2 was not without limitations. One limiting aspect of Study 2 was that the role of the experimenter was not played by a professional actor who was blind to the study conditions and purpose. This represents a potentially serious limitation because the experimenter's behavior during the study represented the rudeness manipulation, and thus was crucial to the effectiveness of the experiment and validity of the experimental conditions. This not only may have limited the
believability and potency of the rudeness manipulation, but it also could potentially compromise the integrity of the study if differences in the behavior of the experimenter between conditions introduced confounds, or alternate reasons for the observed effect. For instance, experimenter expectancies in some cases can become self-fulfilling prophecies whereby the experimenter unknowingly influences the behavior of participants through subtle cues (Rosenthal, 1973).

A second limitation of Study 2 is a potential diffusion effect, where crucial information about the study purpose may have been leaked from past participants to future participants. For instance, this study (as well as Study 3) involved nine separate experimental sessions, including two sessions of each of the four conditions and a pretest. Study 2 took place over a span of about six weeks, and included over two hundred participants. Although all participants were asked not to share any study information with others, it is possible given the large timespan and number of participants involved, that some did discuss the study with their classmates or friends. If participants did enter the study with prior information about the study purpose, they would know that the rude treatment initiated by the experimenter was a scripted part of the study and it would most likely not have the intended influence that it would have had if the participant believed it was genuine. Therefore, this limitation represents a significant threat to the internal validity of the study.

Another limitation lies in the design of this laboratory study, and constitutes the disruption of the normal order for collecting causal data, where the mediator is measured after the manipulation, yet before the outcome. The normal causal order makes it possible to derive a cause and effect relationship between the stimulus and the outcome. In the case of Study 2 (and Study 3), however, this ordering would have compromised the validity of the experimental manipulation. For instance, measuring the mediators (negative affect, rumination, and retaliation)
required that the participants answer questions about their feelings (angry, sad, frustrated, etc.) and consider their answer to statements such as whether they were preoccupied about an incident. If participants were prompted by questions such as these immediately after the rudeness manipulation, it would have tipped them off that the experimenter’s rudeness was part of the experiment. In other words, the accurate measurement of the outcome (task performance) depended on participants not knowing that the rude behavior was part of the experiment. Therefore, it was necessary to wait until after the outcome was measured to collect data on the mediators. That is, measuring the mediator out of order may have limited the ability to firmly establish causality, but it was most likely a necessary tradeoff in this instance to ensure the dependent measure was uncontaminated.

Another concern in this study is that participants' exposure to rudeness was indirect, meaning that the rude behavior was not directed toward participants, and instead was directed toward a confederate. It was, however, likely to involve most participants indirectly through the nature of the insult. In other words, instead of being the direct target of rudeness, participants only received indirect exposure or were observers, depending on the degree of their identification with the group insulted (students of the particular university where the studies took place). For instance, if participants did not feel personally insulted by the comment made by the experimenter, than they were only observers of the rude behavior. This represents a serious threat to the internal validity of the tests of rudeness performed here because theorizing about the phenomenon depends on participants being the subject of the rudeness. Taken together, these limitations represent potential concerns and threats to the internal validity of Study 2.
Chapter 5

STUDY 3: e-RUDENESS CONTAGION

A central purpose of this dissertation research is to determine whether e-Rudeness has measurable consequences for third-parties, and thus can be considered contagious. To my knowledge, no prior published studies have offered empirical evidence regarding the transfer, spread, or contagion of rude behavior in organizations. Therefore, this chapter focuses on developing the definition, concept, and theoretical framework for what I call e-Rudeness contagion. I not only argue that e-Rudeness is contagious; I also test the concept of e-Rudeness contagion in this research. Specifically, I contend that when individuals experience e-Rudeness, it is likely to have consequences for third-parties, which involves some form of contagion. To explain this, I draw from and build on an existing social psychological framework that describes general social contagion to outline three outcomes that could result from this phenomenon. Therefore, the purpose of Study 3 is to test for the general effect of e-Rudeness contagion by looking for evidence of three consequences.

As discussed below, I propose that e-Rudeness can have at least three different types of negative effects for third-parties. The first type of e-Rudeness contagion is spontaneous mimicry, wherein an individual exposed to e-Rudeness unconsciously imitates characteristics of a rude email resulting in an impulsive rude reply. Second, I propose that e-Rudeness might also be spread through the transfer of its physical symptoms, such as negative affect to targets of e-Rudeness making them more likely to exhibit subsequent e-Rudeness. The third potential outcome of e-Rudeness contagion is restraint reduction, or a reduction in employees' inhibitions about displaying normative (or appropriate) behavior and instead behaving negatively. The
following chapter explains these three potential manifestations of e-Rudeness contagion in more detail.

Specifically, this chapter includes a discussion of the relevant literature pertaining to the social psychological concept of contagion in order to provide the conceptual framework for the idea of e-Rudeness contagion as it is proposed here. Then, each of the three proposed consequences of e-Rudeness contagion will be explained in detail in their own section below. Next, I will build upon this framework by offering a definition of e-Rudeness contagion, proposing a model of the general process, and then presenting a hypothesis geared toward testing for these effects. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a description of the test for Study 3, as well as a discussion of results and limitations.

**Background and Conceptual Framework**

Before a definition of e-Rudeness contagion can be developed, it is necessary to first discuss the theory and literature pertinent to the social psychological concept of contagion in order to provide the conceptual foundation and framework for e-Rudeness contagion. Therefore, this section first discusses what is meant by contagion and then how the existing framework can be useful for identifying and explaining rude behavior as it exists in the workplace.

Beginning with its inception over a century ago, the term contagion has been surrounded by ambiguity and imprecision regarding its meaning and definition. Past research indicates that scholars from different fields, including sociology and social psychology have used it inconsistently and imprecisely to refer to a wide range of behavior until around the mid-1990s (Le Bon, 1895; Blumer, 1939; Levy & Nail, 1993). Specifically, contagion is a type of social influence that has been muddled with other types of social influence including social facilitation,
vicarious learning, suggestion, imitation, Asch-type conformity, and mass hysteria. According to Levy & Nail (1993), the confusion has largely been due to the fact that contagion itself encompasses three different sub-types of phenomena that were once contained under the same umbrella term.

In its most general sense, contagion is defined as “the spread of affect, attitude, or behavior from one person to another, where the recipient does not perceive an intentional influence attempt on the part of the initiator” (Levy, 1992: 469). In contrast to intentional influence tactics such as obedience and compliance, contagion is a specific category of social influence that includes three subtypes: echo contagion (mimicry), hysterical contagion (symptoms), and disinhibitory contagion (restraint reduction). These three subtypes differ based on whether the recipient of the behavior experiences internal conflict about its adoption and the degree of spontaneity with which the behavior is ultimately adopted. Therefore, each subtype can be thought of as its own distinct manifestation of contagious behavior.

The first type of contagion, called echo contagion, was initially discussed by Polansky (1950). However, in a more recent organization and review of the literature, Levy and Nail (1993) describe echo contagion as occurring when the affect or behavior of another person is spontaneously imitated by an individual who does not experience psychological conflict about adopting the behavior (Levy, 1992). With this type of contagion, the imitated behavior is exactly the same as the behavior initiated, so it is often thought of as spontaneous mimicry. An example of echo contagion is the phenomenon of yawning; where the target spontaneously adopts the contagious behavior without thinking or hesitating. The dynamics that underlie echo contagion are thought to occur at a lower level of cognitive processing where psychological conflict is not present within the focal individual about whether to adopt the behavior or not (English &
English, 1958). The recipient's response to the behavior is involuntary, meaning that cognitive processing likely occurs at a level below conscious awareness (Levy & Nail, 1993). Therefore, echo contagion can be thought of as a distinct type of unconscious, involuntary, and spontaneous mimicry that exists in social settings.

Hysterical contagion represents the second type of social contagion. It involves “the spread of physical symptoms to a (psychologically) conflicted recipient without the presence of an identifiable pathogen (Levy, 1992: 470).” The recipient is said to be “conflicted” because they exhibit internal psychological conflict about whether or not to adopt the behavior. In other words, hysterical contagion occurs when multiple people experience similar physical symptoms without a physical explanation. Examples of physical manifestations that can be passed along by way of hysterical contagion include difficulty breathing, fainting, crying, nervousness, and panic (Levy & Nail, 1993).

Like echo contagion, hysterical contagion also occurs at a low level of cognitive processing and the contagious behavior that is passed on to others is relatively exact, meaning it does not involve much improvisation or deviation on the part of the recipient. However, hysterical contagion is theorized as being precipitated by the presence of internal psychological conflict and involves the spread of pathological symptoms, neither of which is present in echo contagion (Levy, 1992). Particularly, the presence of internal psychological conflict is an important characteristic of hysterical contagion. This means that the contagious behavior is neither attractive nor desirable to the recipient and they experience internal psychological conflict about whether to adopt it, but ultimately do anyway. Therefore, taken together, hysterical contagion comprises the second subtype of social contagion and is conceptualized as a group conversion
reaction in which abnormal emotional behavior, beliefs, or physical symptoms are spread from one individual to another.

Disinhibitory contagion, the third and final subtype of social contagion, is characterized by a reduction in the restraint experienced on the part of the recipient as a consequence of observing or experiencing an individual perform a behavior, despite the presence of psychological conflict (Levy & Nail, 1993). Specifically, the term “disinhibition” in this case, refers to the weakening or removal of a restraint due to an external or internal stimulus (Kaplan, 1966), meaning that an individual who at one time was “conflicted,” will experience less psychological conflict about adopting the behavior due to repeated exposure. Thus, the key features of disinhibitory contagion include a higher level of cognitive processing and the state of disinhibition, or a resolution of the internal psychological conflict with the adoption of the behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Specifically, it is this state of internal conflict that differentiates disinhibitory contagion from several other forms of social influence, including social facilitation, vicarious learning, suggestion, and imitation (Levy & Nail, 1993). For instance, in comparing disinhibitory contagion to vicarious learning, which involves the adoption of a behavior through observation or social modeling (Bandura, 1971); a marked difference is the absence of internal psychological conflict about adopting the behavior in the case of vicarious learning. Therefore, in sum, the characteristic of restraint reduction is an important feature of disinhibitory contagion.

Also unlike both echo and hysterical contagion, with disinhibitory contagion the recipient's behavior is not necessarily an exact replication of the initiator's behavior. For instance, an initiator may display empathetic behavior that is subsequently passed along to another individual who then exhibits empathy, but the exact behavioral display will likely be different. In other words, because disinhibitory contagion involves a higher level of cognitive processing and
behavior that is more complex, the behavior that is actually passed along to a third-party will belong to the same behavioral class (anger, encouragement, empathy, etc.), but is not likely to be an exact imitation. An example of disinhibitory contagion could be when students in a new class are fearful to ask a question until someone else has gone before them. Specifically, in this situation students may decide not speak up until someone else asks a question first, signaling that it is ok to do so, and reducing their inhibition about following suit. In sum, disinhibitory contagion describes the transfer of more complex types of behavior.

Taken together, echo contagion, hysterical contagion, and disinhibitory contagion, describe a useful theoretical framework that I argue can be applied to the current concept of e-Rudeness contagion. Specifically, each contagion subtype relates to a unique expression of e-Rudeness contagion. In other words, I propose that e-Rudeness contagion may exist in at least three distinct forms that parallel the contagion subtypes discussed above. The following three sections will discuss e-Rudeness contagion as spontaneous mimicry, e-Rudeness contagion as the spread of negative symptoms, and finally e-Rudeness contagion as restraint reduction respectively, before culminating the chapter with a definition and conceptual model of the e-Rudeness contagion construct, and a discussion of Study 3.

**e-Rudeness Contagion as Spontaneous Mimicry**

Based on the framework described above, the first potential manifestation of e-Rudeness contagion is through a process similar to that of echo contagion. In other words, e-Rudeness as echo contagion describes the idea that the phenomenon of e-Rudeness can spread by way of spontaneous mimicry. Building on the definition of echo contagion provided by Levy and Nail
(1993), e-Rudeness contagion as spontaneous mimicry would occur when an unconflicted recipient imitates the e-Rudeness behavior of another person (Levy, 1992: 470).

An example of e-Rudeness as echo contagion might be people’s tendency to reply to email by constructing it in a way that is similar to the one they just received. For instance, if an individual receives a message that is short, their reply tends to be shorter; if an individual receives a message that is casual, their reply tends to be more casual (Hancock, Gee, Ciaccio & Mae-Hwah Lin, 2008). Specifically, in an experimental study of the interaction patterns of dyads in computer-mediated communication, Hancock and colleagues found that reply messages differed systematically based on the characteristics of the email that the subject was sent (Hancock et al. 2008). Thus, they concluded that email users anchor their decisions about the construction of a reply message based on characteristics of the original email message.

This provides indirect evidence that certain characteristics of email rudeness (i.e. lack of a salutation, omission of a greeting, or absence of an electronic signature, etc.) could conceivably be spontaneously imitated and passed on to others. Taken together, e-Rudeness contagion as spontaneous mimicry could represent email that is perceived as rude and is (1) virtually identical to the behavior initiated, (2) spontaneously adopted by the recipient without conscious thought, and (3) unlikely to produce psychological conflict within the individual about its adoption. Therefore, e-Rudeness as echo contagion as it is conceived of and explained here, represents the first way that e-Rudeness contagion could be passed on in an email interaction.

**e-Rudeness Contagion as the Spread of Symptoms**

The second outcome of e-Rudeness contagion is the spread of its negative symptoms. This proposed way for e-Rudeness to be passed to others, involves the idea that rude email
behavior could be transferred between employees in an organization by way of catching a physical symptom of the rude behavior itself. In other words, building on the definition provided by Levy & Nail (1993), e-Rudeness as hysterical contagion would involve the spread of physical symptoms such as negative affect, frustration, or annoyance to conflicted recipients. Therefore, just as hysterical contagion describes a group conversion reaction in which abnormal emotional behavior (i.e. vomiting) is spread from one individual to another, e-Rudeness as hysterical contagion, could be conceived of as the transfer of negative affect and emotions to others following an e-Rudeness incident. Thus, in order to fully understand how negative affect can be caught and transferred via email, it is necessary to first explain the process of emotional contagion and the related facial feedback hypothesis in more detail.

Emotional contagion, “a process in which a person or group influences the emotions of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes” (Schoenewolf, 1990: 50), represents a potential way that e-Rudeness could manifest as hysterical contagion. Specifically, Barsade (2002: 646) describes it as “the contagion of everyday moods in workgroups… that occurs at both conscious and subconscious levels.” However, in organizational research, emotional contagion is a phenomenon that scholars have often studied in face-to-face interaction. This is potentially because the mechanism through which affective transfer has been theorized to occur, has been thought to rely heavily on non-verbal communication, which may explain why most studies have employed face-to-face interaction. For instance, Barsade (2002) looked at the influence of one person’s emotional display on the behavior of a group in the laboratory, Totterdell et al. (1998) examined mood convergence among nurses and accountants, and Hochschild (1979; 1983) looked at the affective display of flight attendants.
As Barsade (2002) explains, the first step in the contagion process is believed to occur through an unconscious and automatic mechanism called primitive contagion, where affect is “caught” through a very fast and innate process of automatic, continuous, synchronous nonverbal mimicry (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992; 1993). However, in the past few years, scholars have begun to investigate whether emotional contagion can operate through electronic mediums, creating the need for a new theory that explains how emotional contagion could operate without the presence of nonverbal cues. The facial feedback hypothesis fills this gap and helps explain how emotional contagion may occur via email.

Specifically, the facial feedback hypothesis (McCanne & Anderson, 1987) proposes that the experience of affect may be activated by a physiological mechanism in which exposure to words with emotional content leads people to activate facial muscles that are related to the display of a particular emotion, and then subsequently feel the emotion associated with that physiological movement (Ekman, 2009; Foroni & Semin, 2009). For example, in their laboratory study of facial positioning, Strack, et.al (1988) showed that emotions such as happiness and sadness could actually be triggered by the activation of facial muscles during the process of smiling or frowning (Strack, Martin, & Stepper, 1988). Therefore, applying the facial feedback hypothesis to the study of e-Rudeness could be useful to help explain how the negative affect experienced after a rude encounter (Vartia, 2004; Pearson et al., 2001; Chen & Spector; 1992; Fox & Spector, 1999; Fox et al., 2001; Martinko, Gundlach, & Douglas, 2002) might be “caught” and transferred to others who interact with the target via email.

In addition to the facial feedback hypothesis, recent empirical evidence also suggests that emotional contagion may be able to transcend face-to-face communication and exist in electronic contexts. For example, Hancock et al. (2008) found that text messages differed depending on the
mood of the sender, such that senders induced with negative affect produced messages that were systematically different than those produced by senders in a control condition. Further, Cheshin, Rafaeli, and Bos (2011) tested whether emotional contagion via email could occur during their laboratory study of virtual negotiations. Specifically, they reported that negotiators who exchanged negative messages were more likely to experience negative affect by the end of the simulation. Taken together, this evidence lends support to the facial feedback hypothesis and indicates that it may be possible for emotional contagion to occur through electronic mediums such as email. In sum, if negative affect and emotions can both be caught and passed along to others, as well as increase the likelihood that an individual will display subsequent rude behavior, e-Rudeness contagion as the spread of symptoms may be a viable explanation for the transfer of e-Rudeness between employees in an organization.

**e-Rudeness Contagion as Restraint Reduction**

Finally, a third outcome of the transfer of rude email behavior between employees is e-Rudeness contagion as restraint reduction. As discussed above, disinhibitory contagion is characterized by a reduction in restraint experienced on the part of the recipient as a consequence of observing an individual enact a behavior. Consistent with this conceptualization, e-Rudeness as disinhibitory contagion would involve a reduction in an individual’s inhibitions following the experience, or even mere witness of, e-Rudeness. In other words, e-Rudeness contagion as restraint reduction is conceived of here as occurring when a target of e-Rudeness experiences less inhibition about retaliating, behaving inappropriately, or acting negatively on account of exposure to e-Rudeness, especially in a situation where social norms call for some type of restraint. Therefore, in this section, I will discuss the spiral theory of incivility, conceived of by Andersson & Pearson (1999), as one potential example of e-Rudeness contagion as restraint
reduction. However, in order to further clarify the idea, a brief background explanation of the spiral theory of incivility is first required.

Specifically, Andersson and Pearson (1999) propose that organizational incivility exhibits the characteristics of a deviation amplifying spiral, wherein the negative action of one party leads to the subsequent negative action of a second party, resulting in increasingly counter-productive behavior. They suggest that a rude act is often a precursor to the exchange of coercive actions and ultimately provides the impetus for the formation of conflict spirals. These spirals, “begin with one party’s perception of an incivility… followed by the reciprocation of a counter act of incivility, which can potentially escalate to an exchange of coercive actions until one party reaches a tipping point” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). This process explains how sustained workplace incivility may gain in momentum and increase in intensity overtime, ultimately leading to more severe acts of workplace aggression.

The spiral theory of incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) also suggests that experiencing or even observing rude behavior may result in a reduction of self-control and an increased desire to act in a negative way. This reduction in restraint then sets in motion a cascade of events that leads to the proliferation of rude acts and the perpetuation of the incivility spiral. For example, Andersson & Pearson (1999) decided to call this phenomenon the “incivility spiral,” because they observed that incivility often followed a pattern of consecutive increases in rudeness created by the unwillingness or inability of human actors to alter their conduct and end the cascade. Most notably, they found that the infractions typically got more severe with each revolution of the spiral. For instance, they state that “…the incivility often escalated into coercive action… and resulted in increasingly counterproductive behaviors” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999: 458). Thus, Andersson and Pearson (1999) determined that the phenomenon was
a “deviation amplifying” spiral because the negative actions of one party quite often led to the increasingly negative actions of the second party (Masuch, 1985).

Thus, the spiral theory of incivility can be thought of as an example of contagion as restraint reduction (i.e. disinhibitory contagion) in that it describes how exposure to rude behavior can result in an individual’s reduction in restraint and lowered inhibitions toward displaying negative behavior. In other words, if a similar phenomenon can be applied to rude email behavior, then exposure to e-Rudeness may result in an increased likelihood of displaying negative behavior toward others. This is important because if e-Rudeness is encountered by employees at work, it may pose a risk to organizations if the stimulus results in restraint reduction and increases the likelihood that other types of inappropriate or negative behavior could result from exposure to a rude email.

Although no empirical evidence that I know of has offered support for the incivility spiral in organizational research, multiple studies have provided indirect evidence for rudeness begetting negative behavior. Specifically, Porath and Erez (2007) argue that targets of workplace mistreatment can and often do inadvertently displace their aggression, and act with hostility toward individuals who are unrelated to the initial abuse. Also, studies rooted in psychology show that experiencing disrespectful behavior can lead to displaced aggression (Denson, Pederson, & Miller, 2006; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Marcus-Newhall, Pedersen, & Miller, 2006), where an individual’s behavioral response to a provoking situations can be delayed or transferred to other people (Zillmann, 1979). In addition, similar patterns of behavior have also been observed in other domains such as interpersonal conflict. For instance, a robust link has been established between a perceived wrongdoing and subsequent aggressive actions (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 1995; 1996; 2001; 2002; Felson & Steadman, 1983; Luckenbill, 1977; Pruitt & Rubin,
Therefore, taken together, the spiral theory of incivility in conjunction with indirect empirical evidence of rude behavior leading to negative behavioral consequences, suggests that targets of e-Rudeness may experience less inhibition about treating coworkers negatively after exposure.

In sum, e-Rudeness contagion as restraint reduction describes the third way that e-Rudeness is conceptualized here as being transferred to employees in an organization. This form of e-Rudeness contagion conforms to the definition of disinhibitory contagion because it involves (1) a higher level of cognitive processing, and (2) the presence and subsequent resolution of internal psychological conflict after the adoption of the behavior (Levy, 1992; Levy & Nail, 1993; Bandura, 1991; 1999; Bandura & Walters, 1963). In other words, it involves decisions about more complex behavior and the presence of some type of internal tension. Further, the spiral theory of incivility represents a theoretical example of rude behavior transferred by way of restraint reduction. Thus, if experiencing or observing e-Rudeness reduces one’s inhibitions about acting inappropriately or more negatively toward a third-party, then e-Rudeness contagion as restraint reduction may exist.

Taken together, the three subtypes of contagion discussed here represent distinct manifestations of e-Rudeness contagion, and represent the idea that e-Rudeness may be able to be transferred between employees in an organization and have consequences for individuals once removed from a rude incident. Specifically, the proposed conceptual framework for e-Rudeness contagion proposed here draws from and builds upon the three forms of social contagion, spontaneous mimicry (echo contagion), the spread of symptoms (hysterical contagion), and restraint reduction (disinhibitory contagion), which make up the model of e-Rudeness contagion.
depicted below. Moving toward a test of e-Rudeness contagion, the next section discusses a definition and offers a model based on these three manifestations of the phenomenon.

**A Definition of e-Rudeness Contagion**

e-Rudeness contagion is defined here as a *process through which the negative influence of e-Rudeness is passed along to third-parties in an organization*. It describes the ability for rude email behavior to affect employees who are uninvolved in the initial e-Rudeness incident. The transmission of rudeness as defined by e-Rudeness contagion may pose a serious threat to organizations because it involves the spread of the negative influence of e-Rudeness to third-parties, who then could be detrimentally affected by it indirectly.

The theoretical model illustrated below, describes the culmination of the three types of e-Rudeness contagion. Specifically, it describes e-Rudeness contagion as (1) spontaneous mimicry, or the imitation of rude email characteristics; (2) e-Rudeness contagion as the spread of symptoms, or the transfer of negative affect to others by way of emotional contagion following an e-Rudeness incident thereby increasing the likelihood that third-parties will display subsequent instances of e-Rudeness; and finally (3) e-Rudeness contagion as restraint reduction, or the reduction of inhibition about displaying negative or inappropriate behavior on account of exposure to e-Rudeness.
FIGURE 5

Model of e-Rudeness Contagion

Taken together, these outcomes represent the proposed model of e-Rudeness contagion, and denote potential manifestations of its existence in organizations. Therefore, I expect that:

**Hypothesis 3.0:** Targets of e-Rudeness will be ruder toward a third-party than people who do not experience e-Rudeness.

Research Design and Methods: Study 3

To test hypothesis 3.1, the final section of Chapter 5 describes Study 3, which tests for evidence of the general effect of e-Rudeness contagion by looking for evidence of spontaneous mimicry, the spread of symptoms, and restraint reduction. Specifically, Study 3 tests whether individuals who experience e-Rudeness are more likely to display subsequent rude behavior or its negative consequences toward a third-party.

Participants
The sample consisted of 232 undergraduate students, who voluntarily enlisted as human subject pool participants at a large university in the western United States. Specifically, the human subject pool elicits student participation in research studies in return for extra credit in one of their social science courses. The participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions based on a 2 (message content: rude vs. neutral) x 2 (message medium: face-to-face vs. email) between subjects design.

Procedure

The procedure used in Study 3 closely parallels that of Study 2, with one notable difference. Instead of administering a problem solving task after the manipulation, Study 3 involved the completion of a performance evaluation activity and collected measures relevant to the hypothesis proposed in Chapter 5. Participants were told that they were participating in a voluntary activity, which was part of an on-going research study about the connection between communication style and performance evaluation. The experimenter explained that they would first be sent an email with a link to a brief assessment on communication style (the same assessment as in Study 2), which was just filler to provide the confederate with enough time to ask a question.

Completing the assessment took the participants about 5 minutes. The experimenter then told participants that they would be watching a video of an MBA student giving a speech, and that they should pay attention to her delivery (i.e. gestures, volume, comfort level, etc.) because they would be rating her performance and giving her feedback. Finally, the experimenter explained that the final step was to take a second survey about the speech (which contained the
measures of e-Rudeness as spontaneous mimicry, e-Rudeness contagion as the spread of symptoms, and e-Rudeness contagion as restraint reduction, as well as the manipulation check).

After the overview of the general process, the experimenter said, “Because the questionnaires are all online, and I will be emailing you the links to both studies when you need to complete them, please have your email open and read all email that comes from me immediately when you receive it. Finally, to minimize distractions and enable everyone to do their best work, please email me (at an email address written on the board) with any questions that arise during the study instead of raising your hand for help." The experimenter also emphasized how important it was to read and follow the directions.

At this point, the experimenter then returned to a table at the back of the room and emailed Part 1 of the study, the "communication style questionnaire" (Appendix D) to the group. The email prompt to the participants read:

Participants,

Below is the link to your first questionnaire. When you are done, please sit quietly and wait for others to finish. Also, be sure to read the directions carefully before you begin.

Thanks,

-experimenter's name
http://xxxxxxx.qualtrics.com/xxxxxxx

The administration of the communication style assessment and the manipulation are the same as in Study 2.

After participants completed the first assessment, they were then shown short video (5 minutes, 43 seconds) of a student giving a speech, and asked to begin the feedback exercise. Their written responses to this portion were later coded by independent raters as the measures of
e-Rudeness contagion (see Appendix E and F). Participants were sent the following email, and asked to follow the link:

```
Participants,

The next step is to complete a series of questions about the speaker's performance. When you have answered all of the questions, please sit quietly and wait for everyone to finish. When you are ready to begin, please click the link below.

Thanks,
-name of the experimenter
http://xxxxx.qualtrics.com/xxxxx
```

The participants were then be debriefed, thanked, and released. The full debrief script is provided in Appendix G.

**Manipulations**

The manipulations used in Study 3 are the same as the manipulations used in Study 2.

**Measures**

In this study, three measures were coded by two research assistants blind to the conditions and purpose of the study. The coders were first given a written copy of the three items, and given instruction on how to assess the participants' feedback email for each measure of e-Rudeness contagion. Next, the coders were guided through three examples, and then asked to do 2 more on their own. Finally, the coders completed a practice round consisting of 10 feedback emails. Points of disagreement were discussed, but at this point the inter-rater reliability of the coders was sufficient enough to have them rate the actual participant feedback.

**Perceived Rudeness.** Perceived rudeness, or the extent to which the participants perceived the experimenter as rude, was measured using four items. This served as the
manipulation check, and represented ‘how rude’ the participants perceived the actions of the experimenter. Specifically, participants were asked to respond to the following items: (1) The experimenter was not respectful toward all participants; (2) The experimenter was polite; (3) The experimenter acted rudely toward participants; and (4) Participants were treated respectfully at all times during this study. Participants responded on a 7-point bipolar scale with point labels that ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The reliability estimate of the scale was $\alpha = .93$.

*e-Rudeness Contagion as Spontaneous Mimicry.* e-Rudeness contagion as spontaneous mimicry is an original measure developed in this study to mirror the theoretical construct of echo contagion. It was measured here by assessing the physical structure of the participant’s written feedback. Two independent coders rated the physical characteristics of the feedback email written by participants. Coders assigned one point for each of the following rude email characteristics: email body was excessively short or long (1 point if too short, 1 point if too long), rude tone (1 point), greeting (1 point if absent), salutation (1 point if absent) and grade (1 if no grade was given- i.e. an unmet expectation). To stay true to the subjective aspect e-Rudeness, the meaning of 'too short' and 'too long' was intentionally not specified to the coders; instead it was left to their interpretation of what they would consider inappropriately short or long given the scenario. A score of 0-5 was assigned to each response based on its physical characteristics of rudeness, with a (0) indicating that the email was *very rude* and a (5) indicating that the email was *very polite*. The inter-rater reliability was found to be adequate ($\kappa = .65, p < .05$) and thus the similarity between raters was regarded as having 'substantial agreement' (Landis & Koch, 1977).
e-Rudeness Contagion as the Spread of Symptoms. e-Rudeness contagion as the spread of symptoms is an original measure developed in this study to mirror the theoretical construct of hysterical contagion. It was measured here by assessing the affective tone of the participant’s written feedback to the speaker. Two independent coders were asked to rate participants’ feedback email based on 'how disappointed you would feel if this feedback was about a speech you had given.' Coders rated each feedback email on a 5-point bipolar scale with point labels that ranged from (1) very disappointed to (5) very proud. The inter-rater reliability was found to be adequate (κ = .43, p < .05) and thus the similarity between raters was regarded as having 'moderate agreement' (Landis & Koch, 1977).

e-Rudeness Contagion as Restraint Reduction. e-Rudeness contagion as restraint reduction is an original measure developed in this study to mirror the theoretical construct of disinhibitory contagion. It was measured by participants’ assessment of the quality of the speech based on their response to two items: (1) Overall, I thought the speaker did well, and (2) The speaker was better than most I've seen. Participants responded on a 7-point bipolar scale with point labels that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability estimate of the scale was α = .86.

Results: Study 3

To determine whether the experimental manipulation created the intended effect on study participants, perceived rudeness was analyzed using a two-way ANOVA with message medium and message content as between-subject variables. The results indicated a significant main effect of message content (F [1, 228] = 514.96, p = .00, η² = .69), a non-significant main effect of message medium (F [1, 228] = 1.03, p = .31, η² = .00), and a marginally significant interaction effect (F [1, 228] = 3.56, p = .06, η² = .02). This suggested that message content was the main
driver of participants' perceptions of rudeness, whereas message medium itself did not influence rudeness perceptions. A test of the simple main effect of message content and message medium on perceived rudeness indicated that rudeness encountered in-person ($\bar{x} = 4.47$, s. d. = 1.36) was perceived to be ruder ($F[1, 228] = 4.50, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .02$) than rudeness encountered through email ($\bar{x} = 4.07$, s. d. = 1.29), which was expected. However, there was no significance difference ($F[1, 228] = .35, p = .23 \eta^2_p = .01$) between perceptions of rudeness across the face-to-face ($\bar{x} = 1.13$, s. d. = .40) and email ($\bar{x} = 1.24$, s. d. = .56) neutral conditions. Further, participants exposed to face-to-face rudeness ($\bar{x} = 4.47$, s. d. = 1.36) also perceived more rude treatment ($F[1, 228] = 282.75, p = .00, \eta^2_p = .70$) than participants in the neutral face-to-face condition ($\bar{x} = 1.13$, s. d. = .40) and, participants exposed to e-Rudeness ($\bar{x} = 4.07$, s. d. = 1.29) perceived more rude treatment ($F[1, 228] = 231.38, p = .00, \eta^2_p = .68$) than participants in the neutral email condition ($\bar{x} = 1.25$, s. d. = .56). This indicated that both the face-to-face and email rude manipulations produced their intended effects. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among Study 3 variables are reported in Table 9.

### Table 9

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study 3 Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. e-Rude Condition</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. F2F Rude Condition</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perceived Rudeness</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Restraint Reduction</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Spontaneous Mimicry</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Spread of Symptoms</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n= 232. Reliabilities are on the diagonal in parentheses. Correlations greater than .23 are significant at p < .01. Correlations greater than .17 are significant at p < .05.
Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 3.1 predicted that targets of e-Rudeness would act ruder toward a third-party than people who did not experience e-Rudeness. The contagion of e-Rudeness behavior was tested using three indicators: spontaneous mimicry, the spread of symptoms, and restraint reduction. Each of these measures of contagion was intended to capture a different avenue through which rude behavior could be transferred to a third-party. First, to test whether message content and message medium had an overall influence on the measures of contagion taken together, a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. The results showed a significant main effect of message content \((F[3, 226] = 5.24, p = .00, \eta^2_p = .07)\), but no significant main effect of message medium \((F[3, 226] = .99, p = .74, \eta^2_p = .01)\), and no significant interaction \((F[3, 226] = .59, p = .63, \eta^2_p = .01)\). These results indicated that when message content was collapsed across levels of message medium, exposure to rudeness did predict contagion as measured by spontaneous mimicry, the spread of symptoms, and restraint reduction.

Then, a two-way ANOVA was conducted on each of the three measures of contagion to assess the effect of message content and message medium individually. First, the 2 x 2 ANOVA of message content and message medium on contagion as restraint reduction (i.e. performance ratings) showed no significant main effect for message medium \((F[1, 229] = .30, p = .59, \eta^2_p = .00)\), a significant main effect for message content \((F[1, 229] = 6.80, p = .01, \eta^2_p = .03)\), and no significant interaction effect \((F[1, 229] = .06, p = .81, \eta^2_p = .00)\). The main effect of message content suggested that when exposure to rudeness was collapsed across levels of message medium, the performance ratings of participants were significantly lower in the rude
conditions ($\bar{x} = 4.39$, s. d. = .12) than in the neutral conditions ($\bar{x} = 4.83$, s. d. = .11). This indicated that exposure to rudeness was contagious, such that it reduced the restraint of participants and lowered their evaluation of a third-party's performance.

Next, the 2 x 2 ANOVA of message medium and message content on contagion as spontaneous mimicry (i.e. structural characteristics of rude email) showed a significant main effect of message content ($F[1, 228] = 6.92$, $p = .01, \eta^2_p = .03$), no main effect of message medium ($F[1, 228] = 2.52$, $p = .11, \eta^2_p = .01$), and no significant interaction effect ($F[1, 228] = 1.09$, $p = .30, \eta^2_p = .01$). The main effect of message content suggested that when exposure to rudeness was collapsed across levels of message medium, the average feedback email was significantly more polite in the rude conditions ($\bar{x} = 1.33$, s. d. = .90) compared to the neutral conditions ($\bar{x} = 1.70$, s. d. = 1.00). This indicates that exposure to either type of rudeness affected the structural characteristics of raters feedback email making them more polite, which was opposite than what was expected.

Finally, the 2 x 2 ANOVA of message content and message medium on contagion as the spread of symptoms (i.e. negative affect in a third-party), yielded no significant main effect of message content ($F[1, 228] = .01$, $p = .91, \eta^2_p = .00$), no significant main effect for message medium ($F[1, 228] = .05$, $p = .82, \eta^2_p = .00$), and no significant interaction effect ($F[1, 228] = .50$, $p = .48, \eta^2_p = .00$). Therefore, e-Rudeness as the spread of symptoms was determined not to be a significant source of contagion, as it was conceptualized and measured in this study.

In sum, the results of Study 3 indicated partial support for Hypothesis 3.1, in that two of the three indicators of contagion (restraint reduction and spontaneous mimicry) showed a significant effect of rudeness on the performance evaluation and feedback intended for a third-
party. Specifically, participants who were exposed to either e-Rudeness or face-to-face rudeness rated the performance of a third-party as lower, yet constructed feedback email intended for them that was more polite. Table 10 presents the means, standard deviations, and mean differences for all three indicators of contagion.

**TABLE 10**

**Performance Evaluation as a Function of Exposure to e-Rudeness v Control**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Email Control Condition</th>
<th>e-Rude Condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>s.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Perceived Rudeness</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Restraint Reduction</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spontaneous Mimicry</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Spread of Symptoms</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n= 122 (65 in the neutral condition; 57 in the rude condition)
*p < .05
**p<.01

**Discussion: Study 3**

Study 3 tested whether e-Rudeness was contagious, meaning that exposure to a rude email produced consequences for a third-party who was not involved in the rude incident. The results of Study 3 suggested initial support the phenomenon of e-Rudeness contagion as well as the contagion of face-to-face rudeness, as measured by a reduction in the inhibitions of individuals exposed to either type of rude behavior. Specifically, those exposed to rude email or face-to-face rudeness were both more likely to pass along negative consequences, as evidenced by the lower performance ratings of a third-party. This represents initial evidence of a reduction in the normative restraint displayed by individuals to provide favorable feedback to others as a
result of exposure to rudeness. For instance, existing research in the area of performance appraisal indicates that people are highly socialized to provide positive feedback when required to appraise the performance of others (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). This tendency represents a strong norm and mutual expectation for giving and receiving affirmative feedback as well as avoiding giving others unfavorable or critical feedback. Evidence from Study 3, however, indicates initial evidence that participants in both the e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness conditions may have been less inhibited by this norm, and instead gave more negative evaluations of a third-party anyway.

Interestingly, results from Study 3 also indicated initial evidence suggesting that participants reduced inhibitions' and increased negative ratings may have been coupled with a tendency to construct feedback email that was more polite, as measured by physical features and structural characteristics (i.e. excessive length or brevity, absence of a greeting, salutation, or signature, a brisk tone, etc.). In other words, after receiving a rude email or being exposed to face-to-face rudeness, participants demonstrated an increased propensity to rate the performance of a third-party as worse, but write them an email that was more polite. This is interesting given that it is opposite of what was predicted, and yet may indicate a systematic accompaniment to a harsh evaluation. Future research should address this phenomenon more directly and explore whether these behaviors are commonly correlated. For instance, are lower performance ratings typically associated with a more polite delivery? A study that addresses this question could be a useful complement to the findings presented here.

Taken together, the combination of these two findings build on the results of Study 2, and suggest further evidence that exposure to rudeness likely has negative consequences. In Study 3, the results indicate that the negative consequences of exposure to rudeness could be made even
more damaging however, from the tendency of evaluators to compensate for giving lower ratings by constructing feedback that is more polite. This potential inclination may be prompted by an increased awareness of the features and characteristics of rude email made more salient to participants through their exposure to e-Rudeness. It is possible that this heightened awareness (because of just receiving a rude email themselves) may have prompted participants to use more pleasantries in their own email to a third-party than they otherwise would have. However, this justification does not explain why participants exposed to face-to-face rudeness also constructed email that was more polite. Therefore, future research should explore the factors that motivate this tendency? Is it out of a sense of guilt or some other type of compensatory response that people are driven to deliver negative feedback more politely? This represents an area with multiple intriguing questions for future research.

If the findings from Study 3 can be generalized to actual organizations, this could indicate that exposure to rudeness may not only negatively affect the performance evaluation of third-parties, but also that the true opinions and attitudes of raters about the performance of subordinates may be concealed under the façade of politeness. In a practical setting, this could magnify the consequences of lower performance reviews and create misunderstandings, confusion, and mixed messages about expectations for future performance and areas of improvement. For instance, if supervisors exposed to e-Rudeness or face-to-face rudeness give subordinates lower ratings on performance reviews, but deliver the news in a way that seems more polite and positive, employees may get the wrong idea and mistakenly believe their supervisor is more satisfied with their performance than they actually are. Further, if supervisors are leery about providing critical constructive feedback because of recent exposure to rudeness,
and instead provides them with positive feedback despite holding a more negative opinion, then the benefits of performance appraisal as a method of improvement could be stymied.

This finding may also have notable potential implications for employees as well as organizations in a practical work setting given that employee raises, career advancement, and bonus allotment is often based on supervisors' ratings of employee performance. Again, if the findings of this study can be generalized, supervisors' exposure to rudeness prior to conducting annual reviews, job entrance interviews, or making critical evaluative judgments could in some instances have a negative influence on the outcome of these types of appraisals for employees and their careers. For organizations, this phenomenon also represents a potential problem in the form of a systematic bias embedded in the system used for awarding promotions, advancement, or making employee placement decisions. Either way, the results presented here indicate preliminary evidence that rudeness contagion could represent a threat to both the well-being of employees at work and the effective functioning of internal organizational review processes and procedures.

Although, the results of Study 3 did not support e-Rudeness contagion entirely as was expected, exposure to rudeness did result in more negative appraisals of a third-party. Therefore, Hypothesis 3.1 was partially supported in that the main effect of both e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness contagion was established, but not in all expected ways. Even at only partial support, the findings of Study 3 contribute to those from Studies 1 and 2 to add some confidence to the notion that exposure to e-Rudeness may carry with it harmful consequences for employees. In particular, Study 2 showed that e-Rudeness is likely to have negative consequences for employees directly through its effect on task performance, whereas Study 3 established initial evidence that e-Rudeness may also generate negative consequences indirectly.
through its effect on third-parties. This demonstrates that rudeness may have detrimental consequence for individuals not involved or even exposed to the initial rude behavior, but instead, who come into contact with the target after the incident. Therefore, this test of rudeness contagion represents initial empirical support for the idea that rude behavior may possess a 'spillover' effect, which is an assumption that has been widely presumed up to this point, but never to my knowledge empirically tested.

In sum, the results of Study 3 represent some initial evidence of a possible contagion effect from exposure to rude behavior, and contribute to a more complete understanding of the influence of rude behavior on employees. Further, the results also help clarify that rudeness contagion may not occur in precisely the ways expected, in that it does not proliferate rude behavior directly. Instead, Study 3 indicated that rudeness is likely only contagious through its transfer of negative consequences for third-parties, suggesting that the phenomenon may be more complicated than previously believed. The results of Study 3 also indicate that more investigation is needed to explore the mechanism through which rudeness contagion operates.

**Limitations: Study 3**

Despite multiple operationalizations of contagion, Study 3 is not without limitations. A main concern with this study is a limitation in the generalizability of the findings. For instance, the sample consisted of undergraduate college students, a subset of the population that differs in meaningful ways from employees of actual organizations. Specifically, students are not paid a wage for their work, supervised by an employer, and do not have the same level of expertise as employees. These differences represent a threat to external validity (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002) in that the effects of e-Rudeness contagion found in this study may not be replicated if the phenomenon had been tested on actual employees. Similarly, another related limitation of the
design of this study is that the effects were found in a laboratory setting, which differs in substantial ways from the context of organizations. Again, the effect found in this study may interact with a laboratory setting such that it would not hold if a different setting were to be used (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

Another limitation of Study 3 is that the participants were asked to evaluate the performance of a video of a presenter giving a speech. It is possible that systematic differences may exist between the ways people evaluate someone on video compared to what their evaluation would have been if the speech had been given in-person. For instance, participants may be more inclined to rate an in-person speaker as better given that they are perceived as more 'real' than a video presenter would be, and therefore the contagion effect found here may diminish as participants become more sympathetic to the speakers weaknesses. Similarly, another limitation is the participants' unfamiliarity with the speaker. In this study the individual in the video was a complete stranger, which may have elicited lower performance rating than if participants had known the speaker. This represents an important limitation because the measure of contagion depended on the assumption that participants felt restraint in evaluating the speaker negatively. However, because the speaker was not someone the participants had a relationship with they may have experienced less restraint in providing a negative evaluation. These limitations represent serious threats to the internal and external validity of Study 3, and limit confidence in the findings of e-Rudeness contagion reported here.

A third limitation of Study 3 is the manipulation of rudeness that was used to elicit the observed effect, which represents a threat to the construct validity of rude behavior as it was enacted here (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). In this case, the experience of rudeness was provoked by an insult made to participants that may have exceeded the level of disrespect
warranted for classification as 'rudeness,' and instead may have been a higher intensity type of aggression such as abusive supervision. Based on participants' self-reported perceptions of rudeness, this threat is especially pertinent in the face-to-face condition where participants reported being treated much more rudely than in the email condition. The validity of findings derived from this study could be jeopardized if the independent variable was not rude behavior, but a different construct entirely. Taken together, although Study 3 was carried out using measures to maximize internal and external validity, the limitations discussed here represent reasons that confidence in the results of e-Rudeness contagion should be viewed as tentative and limited.
Chapter 6

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The three studies of this dissertation provide initial support for the existence and detrimental effects of e-Rudeness. Taken together, this research delivers an analysis of what e-Rudeness is, how it can be measured, the negative ways it can influence individual task performance, and harm third-parties. The research design utilized a multi-trait multi-method approach, measuring e-Rudeness in several ways through exploratory, field, survey, and experimental data collection and analysis techniques, which lends some confidence to the preliminary findings presented here.

Specifically, the exploratory investigation introduced a new measure of e-Rudeness derived from data gathered during 15 hours of interviews with professional employees. The new measure was then tested and validated on an independent sample of Amazon Mechanical Turks, and found to possess improved reliability, construct, convergent, and discriminant validity over an existing scale of email incivility. Two laboratory experiments then showed initial evidence for the detrimental effect e-Rudeness may have on individual task performance and its likely negative effect on third-party performance evaluations through rudeness contagion. In conjunction, these three studies comprise an empirically grounded understanding of rudeness in the context of email at work, highlight some distinctions between it and face-to-face rudeness, and possess theoretical implications for the fields of workplace mistreatment, communication studies, and information technology. These findings help explain why e-Rudeness has
potentially harmful consequences for individuals, both directly through its negative effect on individual task performance and indirectly through initial evidence of its contagion.

**Theoretical Contributions**

In addition to the contribution made by each of the three studies to the field of rudeness and incivility (which has been discussed in each chapter), the collective findings of this dissertation also may have theoretical application more broadly to the domains of communication studies, workplace mistreatment, and information technology. Specifically, this research may (1) help to fill some gaps in our understanding of the influence of contextual factors in the interpretation of interpersonal communication; (2) elucidate more clearly the role of emotion in understanding the impact of counterproductive workplace behaviors on employees; and (3) explain a mechanism through which electronic interaction can transmit affective influence. Each of these theoretical contributions will be discussed individually and explained in more detail in the following sections.

*Communication Studies: The Influence of Context & Message Medium*

First, the findings of this research underscore the dynamic influence that contextual factors are likely to have in the perception and interpretation of interpersonal communication, which is a current gap the communication studies literature. The results presented here build upon current active research in this area, which has begun to uncover the influence that contextual and situational factors have on the interpretation of interpersonal interaction. The contribution made by these three studies represents an important first step toward building a more comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding how message medium, a key contextual factor, may influence the way people make sense of messages.
Prior research in communication studies has established that the interpretation of a message undoubtedly varies depending on contextual information (Price, et al., 1991), but exactly how the interpretation of a message is different from one situation to another is not well known. Some of the key contextual factors that are known to influence the interpretation of a message include; the source of communication (i.e. is it coming from an authority, a peer, or subordinate, a male, or a female, etc.), the target of communication (i.e. is it direct, or indirect, toward students, employees, executives, etc.), the paralinguistic cues displayed by the source (i.e. head nods, facial expressions, gestures), the psychological closeness with the source (i.e. how connected the target feels with the source), the relationship between the target and source (i.e. are they friends, acquaintances, colleagues, strangers), as well as the situation itself (Clark, 1996). All of these factors are known to play an important role in how a message is interpreted, and yet most of them have not been systematically examined.

This research contributes to a better understanding of the specific influence of one such contextual factor, that of message medium. Message medium has to do with the channel through which a message is transmitted, and includes face-to-face interactions, phone communication, and computer-mediated exchanges. Evidence from this research indicates that individual differences between the characteristics of email compared to those of face-to-face communication may produce distinctive affective outcomes of interactants. For instance, the results of Study 2 suggested that that when a rude message is compared across mediums, the meaning and intensity of the message is interpreted differently by receivers. Specifically, the rude face-to-face message was perceived as significantly more offensive, whereas the rude message delivered by email was viewed as a milder threat. The direct comparison between email and face-to-face communication media made by this research supports current theorizing by
communication studies scholars about the influence of message medium as well as the importance of non-verbal cues in conveying message meaning.

This contribution not only underscores the importance of understanding the influence of situational factors such as message medium, but it also suggests that some contextual factors may have a greater influence on our interpretation of communication than others. For example, the results of Study 2 also suggest that the paralinguistic (non-verbal) cues associated with face-to-face rudeness, such as hearing the tone of voice and seeing the facial features of the source of the message (i.e. the instigator), may contribute to stronger perceptions of rudeness by a target than the lack of psychological closeness, ambiguity, and a-synchronicity associated with an email message. In other words, this research preliminarily indicates support for the assumption that certain contextual factors, namely those that can be experienced through sensory input (i.e. hearing, seeing, etc.) may be weighted more heavily in terms of their influence on the way a message is perceived and interpreted. Therefore, the findings of Study 2 could have implications for the theoretical framework that describes how context is believed to influence the way individuals interpret and make sense of communication, and particularly suggests that an accurate model probably should not assume that all contextual factors are weighted equally.

This finding also invites a wealth of follow-up questions for future research to investigate. For instance, if context represents an important factor in the way communication is perceived, and paralinguistic cues contribute considerably to its interpretation, then are all types of messages perceived more intensely when they are delivered face-to-face? For instance, does the pattern hold true for positive messages? In other words, are some messages interpreted as more offensive when they are communicated by email? This contribution also brings up multiple questions about how and why contextual factors contribute to the interpretation of
communication. For instance, do contextual factors interact and combine to systematically influence perceptions? What contextual factors are missing from a complete theoretical model of the interpretation of communication? By explicating the importance of the role of message medium in understanding how communication is perceived, this dissertation research may fill a notable theoretical gap by highlighting the importance of situational and contextual features of communication.

*Workplace Mistreatment: The Role of Emotion*

Second, emotion and the role it plays in the broader study of workplace mistreatment and deviance, which encompasses a range of deviant workplace behaviors such as bullying, abusive supervision, social undermining, and aggression, is currently not well understood. For instance, little is known about which discrete emotions are experienced after exposure to workplace mistreatment, or whether there are differences between the specific emotions elicited by exposure to other forms of deviance (i.e. bullying, stealing, abusive supervision, etc.). Therefore, the findings of this dissertation may contribute to a better understanding of the more complex and nuanced role that emotion is likely to play in the negative effect that workplace mistreatment has on employees, as will be discussed in more depth below.

Recent research has found that negative affect and emotional responses are a common precursor to committing deviant acts, as well as a common consequence of them (Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001; Vartia, 2004; Pearson, et al., 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2004), but the role of discrete emotions in association with exposure to mistreatment has not been studied directly. However, exploring the discrete emotions elicited from exposure to mistreatment of all forms could be an important step in gaining a more accurate picture of the influence it has on employees. For instance, it is less likely that an employee will commit a deviant act or be the
target of an act directly, versus the likelihood of being exposed to a deviant act indirectly through observation or witnessing its occurrence between others at work. Therefore, understanding the emotional impact that indirect exposure has on witnesses could broaden the scope of workplace mistreatment research by revealing a wider range of impact than previously believed.

The findings of this dissertation also represent initial evidence of a shift from the current thinking about the role of affect in existing models of workplace mistreatment as a simple binary variable anchored by either the experience of negative affect or its absence. Instead, the results supported by this research suggest that the presence or absence of negative affect may not fully capture the broad range of discrete emotional distinctions that exist in participants' range of emotional experiences, and that the experience of emotion may actually be a more dynamic and nuanced affective response than previously believed. This may be important because a careful examination of the differences between the 'emotional profile' of each type of deviant behavior within the workplace mistreatment domain, could reveal distinctions between the types of mistreatment that research has not yet discovered.

For instance, the exploratory analysis conducted in Study 2 of this dissertation indicates evidence that not only are discrete emotions such as anger, hostility, fear, and annoyance experienced by participants after exposure to rude behavior, but that differences may also exist in terms of the specific discrete emotions experienced depending on the channel through which the rudeness is encountered. For instance, participants seemed to feel angrier after they were exposed to a face-to-face incident, whereas, shame was the predominate emotion reported by participants after exposure to e-Rudeness. A natural question that follows from this finding then is, 'Why would different emotions be elicited by the same message?'
One explanation for this may hinge upon the important distinction between the emotional effects of an insult made through each respective medium. For instance, a face-to-face threat is less ambiguous and targets may be able to more quickly determine, based on what is seen and heard, that they are definitively being insulted. This then, could result in the experience of emotions that are more consistent with a primal response to run or fight, hence the higher levels of anger reported in Study 2. On the other hand, rude email is most likely perceived as less of a physical threat, but instead may foster more inwardly-directed feelings such as shame. Knowing that message medium may elicit distinctive affective outcomes could advance our thinking about the potential effect of communication medium on discrete emotions, as well as offer an impetus to explore employees’ emotional reactions to other forms of workplace mistreatment.

For instance, characteristics of electronic mail such as asynchronicity and a text-based format may make interpretation of email more difficult (Byron, et al., 2010). Interestingly, however, instead of experiencing more or less intensity of the same emotion (i.e. stronger anger), Study 2 indicated that participants experienced a different emotional profile entirely. Specifically, they reported elevated levels of shame, a more inwardly directed emotion than anger. This finding may be notable given that it could represent a clue about the mechanism through which individuals handle threats of each type, and how the effect of those differences may lead to distinctive negative psychological consequences. Current theory pertaining to workplace mistreatment and emotions tends to assume that the same emotions (i.e. frustration, anger, fear, hostility, etc.) are produced by most types of deviant behavior (i.e. bullying, abusive supervision, etc.). Conversely, the findings of this research suggest, that exposure to different acts of deviance may each result in a different profile of discrete emotions. If this is true, it
would be an important contribution to the field of workplace mistreatment because it would highlight an important difference among constructs that are currently viewed as quite similar.

Taken together, the findings from this dissertation suggest that there are still many important questions to be answered about the emotions elicited by acts of workplace deviance. Although, the findings presented here offer initial indirect evidence that forms of workplace mistreatment could be associated with unique emotions, a nuanced understanding of the underlying processes and reasons for this suggested difference remain unclear. Yet, answers to these questions are fruitful avenues for future research, and may provide substantial insight about other unknown differences between forms of workplace mistreatment and the role of discrete emotions.

*Information Technology: Contagion through Computer-Mediated Interaction*

A third theoretical contribution of this dissertation is initial evidence for the concept of e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness contagion. Existing research presents strong evidence that rude behavior has consequences for direct targets of rudeness (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Lim & Cortina, 2005), and produces on-going hostility between individuals and groups. More recent research has even established that rudeness is likely to have negative psychological and behavioral consequences for those exposed to rudeness indirectly (Porath & Erez, 2007; 2009). Anecdotal reports of rudeness also frequently include mention of a 'spillover effect' or speculation that rudeness will 'trickle down' or 'spiral' to others, but thus far, those assertions have been little more than conjecture. Research, up to this point, has not yet tested whether rude behavior actually can and does spread to individuals once-removed from a rude incident.
Therefore a major theoretical contribution of this work is that it tests the 'spill-over' assumption and develops new theory proposing an explanation for why this effect likely exists. This dissertation provides theoretical support for both e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness as contagious behaviors, in so far as they negatively influence an indirect target’s subsequent behavior toward third-parties. Specifically, rudeness contagion of both types simultaneously supports the notion that contagion can occur through an electronic medium and represents a breakthrough for the advancement of research in the domain of workplace mistreatment because it explains why rude behavior seems to 'spread,' 'trickle down' and 'spill over’. However, future research should explore whether positive organizational constructs are also transmissible through contagion. For instance, could a positive email provoke organizational citizenship behavior? Are there other organizational variables that could be transmitted through contagion-like mechanisms?

The introduction of e-Rudeness contagion also contributes to an ongoing debate in the broader research community of information technology and represents a new mechanism through which electronic interaction may transmit affective influence. This contributes to an on-going debate about the extent that electronic media can convey emotional information. For instance, it complements Hancock et al.'s (2008) findings that emotional contagion can occur through text messages. As well as the work of, Cheshin, Rafaeli, and Bos (2011) that showed that individuals who exchanged negative messages in virtual negotiations were more likely to experience negative affect by the end of the simulation. The evidence for rudeness contagion found in this research builds on prior studies of computer-mediated communication, and contributes to our understanding of how electronic interaction can transmit affective influence as well as helps explain the ways electronic messages influence behavior.
Along these same lines, face-to-face rudeness contagion may have important theoretical application to other fields outside of rudeness and incivility. Rudeness contagion represents a process through which additional types of workplace mistreatment, such as bullying, aggression, abusive supervision, and others could potentially be transferred and passed along from person to person within an organization. Similarly, e-Rudeness contagion may also help explain other related constructs within the information technology domain, such as flaming or trolling, which are specific to computer-mediated communication. Taken together, the new theory and construct of rudeness contagion developed here could spawn several avenues of future research that transcend the field of rude behavior and inform a wide-range of prospective inquiries. For instance, what other types of communication could produce third-party effects? What are the long-term outcomes of this phenomenon? Is negative communication more likely to have third-party consequences than positive? What other explanations help inform our understanding of contagion?

Pertaining to organizational research, rudeness contagion could help explain why rude and uncivil behavior has a negative association with organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and citizenship behavior. It represents initial evidence of the authentication of a mechanism through which disrespect, aggression, and offensiveness behavior could potentially proliferate within groups and organizations. It also offers an explanation for why and how the harmful consequences of rudeness can be transferred between individuals, and why the effects of rudeness have been known to compound over time. Taken together, this contribution fills a theoretical gap in our understanding of rude behavior because it presents initial evidence of a process that has previously been assumed but never empirically supported.
Conclusion

In sum, this dissertation addresses several existing empirical and theoretical gaps in the literature. It introduces the new construct of e-Rudeness, provides initial evidence that it may have a negative association with task performance, and suggests that rude behavior may be contagious. By examining the effects and consequences that e-Rudeness and rudeness contagion have on psychological and behavioral outcomes, this dissertation has developed new theory designed to better understand the dynamic ways that rude behavior influences employees at work.

More specifically, Study 1 developed and tested a new and improved theoretically grounded scale for measuring e-Rudeness. The results from Study 1 indicate evidence of three potential findings; (1) e-Rudeness is likely to exist and occur regularly in organizations; (2) employees seem to encounter it regularly in a wide-variety of professions; (3) employees believe that e-Rudeness has adverse consequences for themselves, their workplace relationships, and their productivity. These three findings laid the foundation for Studies 2 and 3 and served as the primary contributions of Study 1 of this research.

Study 2 built on the findings of Study 1 and tested for the influence of e-Rudeness on individuals in multiple ways in a laboratory setting. Specifically, Study 2 suggested evidence for three empirical findings; (1) e-Rudeness is likely negatively associated with task performance; (2) the relationship between e-Rudeness and task performance does not seem to be mediated by negative affect, rumination, or a desire to retaliate; and (3) upon comparison, e-Rudeness may produce distinct emotional reactions (i.e. shame) compared to face-to-face rudeness (i.e. anger). These findings represent the primary contributions of Study 2, and builds on the findings from
Study 1 which indicates that e-Rudeness most likely has harmful consequences for employees at work.

Study 3 presented initial evidence suggesting that both e-Rudeness and face-to-face rudeness may be contagious, in so far as exposure to rude behavior may result in negative consequences for third-parties not exposed to the initial rude encounter. Although, the results of Study 3 did not support the existence of rudeness contagion in all ways measured (i.e. through e-Rudeness contagion as spontaneous mimicry, the spread of symptoms, or restraint reduction), it did support initial evidence of a main effect of contagion due to its link with lower average performance ratings after exposure to either e-Rudeness or face-to-face rudeness.

Taken together, this research enables a more informed evaluation to be made of the overall threat that e-Rudeness poses to employees from the perspective of its impact on individual task performance. The questions it addresses build upon a well-established foundation of existing knowledge, yet explore new areas that may make an impactful contribution to the study of rudeness and incivility as well as more broadly to the domains of workplace mistreatment, information technology, and communication studies. The three studies conducted here expand our understanding of rudeness in the context of email at work, highlight some initial distinctions between face-to-face and e-Rudeness, and enable a more realistic assessment of the overall threat that rude email poses to employees.

Like other research, this dissertation raises more questions than it answers. One question that arises from this dissertation is whether there are other ways that e-Rudeness can manifest and negatively influence employees. For instance, does it affect the way people assess risk or their ability to concentrate? This topic may even bridge the boundary between micro and macro
organizational research and have implications for innovation, entrepreneurship, and strategic management. For instance, it would be interesting to study whether investors are influenced by exposure to e-Rudeness or e-Rudeness contagion? How does it affect people's decision-making?

Is e-Rudeness contagion likely to make individuals more risk-seeking or more risk-averse? Could it affect how teams interact and cooperate? There are many questions that could follow from the contributions made by this dissertation. In combination, these findings generate several unique avenues for future research and support the continued study of rude behavior by future scholars.
REFERENCES


Shandwick, W. & Tate, P. 2011. KRC Research: Civility in America.


APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Purpose of interviews: To better understand e-Rudeness
Research question: What role does e-Rudeness play at work?
Sample: Approximately 15 managers and organizational professional

Interview Script for __________________________ (name of person and organization)
Date ____________________________
Location ____________________________

I. General introduction
What is your job (job title)? How long have you been a (job title)?
How long have you worked at (current company)?
What do you like about working here? Anything that you’re less than thrilled about here?
How would you describe the culture in your organization? What is it like to work there?
Do you typically take on a lot of extra assignments at work? In other words, do you go “above and beyond” what you are paid to do at work?

II. General Email Use
Approximately what percentage of your workday is spent reading, sorting, or responding to email? About how many hours would you say that is?
About how much email would you say you get on a daily basis? Who is this email from?
Internal? External?
Is most of the email urgent? How quickly do you have to respond to it?
What timeframe that is considered normal to respond to an email in your organization? Does it depend on whether the email is internal or external? If so, what are the timeframes?
What percentage of the time do people in your organization use email to communicate (versus face-to-face or phone)?
What percentage of the time do you use email? F2F? Phone? Other?
Do you think these percentages have changed over the last 10 years?
What factors do you think about when you are deciding whether to communicate via email versus the other options?
Is most email that you get formal or more casual?
In your opinion, what makes an email seem formal? Casual?

III. e-Rudeness
How often do you receive email at work that you consider to be rude?
What do you think the reason is? (i.e. miscommunication, stress, org culture, etc.?)
Have you ever sent an email that you later realized was interpreted as rude? How often?
What makes an email rude?
What does a rude email look like? How is it different?
Which way (email or face-to-face) do you prefer to communicate at work? Why?
Which way do you think your co-workers prefer? Why?
Think back to a time when you remember getting an email at work that was particularly rude. Can you describe what happened? What did the email look like? What specifically was it about the email that was so upsetting? What is your relationship to the person who sent the email (i.e. co-worker, boss, client?)

IV. Responses to e-Rudeness
Going back to the incident you described earlier, what was your immediate reaction? Emotion? Did you respond via email? How? What did you say? Did you spend time thinking about how to respond? About how long did you contemplate what to do? After you responded, did you continue to think about the situation? What ended up happening? Was there a resolution? How is your relationship with that person now? Did other people end up getting involved? Did you talk to anyone else about it? How did the incident affect the rest of your day? Week? Did it have an impact on how much work you could do or wanted to do that day? Does dealing with this kind of thing affect any measurable performance outcomes for you or others that you work with? What about how much extra work (above and beyond) you or others are willing to take on?

V. e-Rudeness versus Face-to-face Rudeness
Now, I’m going to ask a few questions about the difference between rude interactions when they happen over email versus in person at work. Do you think one happens more frequently than the other? Why? What are the differences between when rudeness happens in person versus electronically? Do you think the consequences could be different imagining the same incident played out over email versus in person? Why? Can you think of an example? Do you think one is more harmful or damaging? Why? If you were the CEO of your organization, would you prefer employees to communicate more in person or over email? Why? What about when your employees need to work out their differences. Would you prefer your employees (imagining you are CEO) communicate in person or face-to-face? Why?

VI. Conclusion
Anything else that I haven’t asked that you’ve been thinking about, or any more stories to share that come to mind? Thank you so much for your time!
### APPENDIX B

#### Study 1: e-Rudeness Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Experienced e-Rudeness | 1. Someone sends me an email requesting something from me and copies my boss  
2. Someone makes a demand of me by email without saying please and thank you  
3. Someone catches me off guard with an email that is disrespectful  
4. Someone sends email without thinking about how it will be received  
5. I send someone a detailed email and it is obvious that they did not read it carefully  
6. Someone sends me a passive-aggressive email  
7. Someone sends me an email that does not use pleasantries  
8. Someone doesn't respond to my email  
9. Someone sends me an email with a harsh tone  
10. Someone sends me an email with an accusatory tone  
11. Someone sends me an email that demands something instead of requests it  
12. Someone sends me an email that uses inflammatory language  
13. Someone cc's my boss because they don't like the answer I gave them  
14. Someone sends me an email with a demanding tone  
15. Someone sends me an email that is condescending  
16. Someone replies to my email without carefully reading the original message first  
17. Someone sends me an email that is brisk in tone  
18. Someone sends me an email when they are mad or upset  
19. Someone sends me an email that is brisk and to the point  
20. Someone sends me an email that demands my immediate action  
21. I send someone a detailed email and it is obvious that they did not read it carefully  
22. Someone sends me an email that is insensitive  
23. Someone sends me an email blaming me for something  
24. I am caught off-guard by a rude email  |
| Cyber Incivility   | 25. Your immediate supervisor said something hurtful to you through email.  
26. Your immediate supervisor used emails to say negative things about you that he/she would not say to you face-to-face  
27. Your immediate supervisor made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you through email  
28. Your immediate supervisor inserted sarcastic or mean comments between paragraphs in emails  
29. Your immediate supervisor put you down or was condescending to you in some way through email  
30. Your immediate supervisor used caps to shout at you through email  
31. Your immediate supervisor sent you emails using a rude and discourteous tone  
32. Your immediate supervisor was not replying to your email at all  
33. Your immediate supervisor ignored a request (e.g., schedule a meeting) that you made through email  
34. Your immediate supervisor replied to your emails but did not answer your queries |

Continued on next page…
| Workplace Incivility | 39. Put you down or was condescending to you in some way  
36. Paid little attention to a statement you made  
41. Made demeaning, rude, or derogatory remarks about you  
42. Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either privately or publicly  
43. Ignored or excluded you from professional camaraderie  
44. Doubted your judgment in a matter over which you have responsibility  
45. Made unwanted attempts to draw you into a discussion of personal matters |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Job Satisfaction     | 46. I am generally very satisfied with my job  
47. I am generally satisfied with the kind of work I do in this job  
48. I seldom think of quitting my job  
49. Very few people who do this job feel the work is useless or trivial  
50. Most people who do this job are very satisfied |
| Intent to Leave      | 51. I will probably leave this organization within the next two years  
52. I will probably look for a new job in the next year  
53. I will actively look for a new job in the next year |
**APPENDIX C**

**Study 2: Participant Questionnaire**

**Communication & Problem Solving: Part I**  
*Preferred Communication Style*

**Instructions:**
This study investigates how communication style influences the way people solve problems. It consists of three separate parts; the following questionnaire is Part 1. You will have 10 minutes to complete this section.

**Please read all directions carefully and complete this section as accurately as possible.**
The following 15 questions ask you about the way you prefer to communicate. Rate each item below on a scale from 1 to 7, indicating the extent to which you agree with the statement- for all questions, a 1 indicates ‘not at all agree’ and a 7 indicates ‘completely/totally agree.’

**How do you like to communicate?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Completely/Totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoy being social</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. When I am with my friends, I usually do most of the talking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. When I first meet someone new, I am usually a bit quiet until I get comfortable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Most people who know me would describe me as outgoing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I consider myself an extrovert</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I enjoy going to social events where there are lots of different people to talk to</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am very comfortable giving speeches and presentations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I like being the center of attention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### What do you get from communicating?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>After I spend time being social, I feel exhausted</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Meeting new people is invigorating</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I would rather spend time with close friends than make small talk with acquaintances</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Being up in front of people is exciting and fun</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>After spending time at a social event, I usually like time to myself to recover</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I find communicating with others to be enjoyable</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Once you are finished, please wait quietly at your seat.**
Instructions:
Below are a series of anagrams, or scrambled words. You have 10 minutes to unscramble as many words of the following words as you can. No foreign words, plurals or proper nouns can serve as solutions.

Problem Solving Activity

kalfe ____________
blentao ____________
snilaoi ____________
remude ____________
ciimtv ____________
loroc ____________
sodpiee ____________
eeepsa ____________
elbmut ____________
gegirrt ____________

Once you are finished, please wait quietly at your seat.
The final questionnaire consists of questions about the word scramble and your experience as a participant in this study. Please read each section heading carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about that topic. You will have 20 minutes.

**How do you think you did on the word scramble?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Completely/ Totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I think I performed very well on the word scramble activity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I think my performance was above average compared to my peers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The word scramble activity was easy for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I would be surprised if I didn’t do well on the word scramble</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I tried very hard to do well on the task</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I was highly motivated to do my best work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I gave unscrambling the words my best effort</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I enjoyed the word scramble task</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I did not enjoy trying to unscramble those words</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The word scramble task was not enjoyable for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**How do you feel?**

Please indicate what extent you feel this way right now:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Completely / Totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Irritable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Distressed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ashamed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Upset</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Nervous</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Guilty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Scared</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Hostile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Jittery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Afraid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Angry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Joyful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Sad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Annoyed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Happy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Down</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Content</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Unhappy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How is your mood?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Completely/ Totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am in the mood to be helpful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel like helping people now more than ever</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If someone needed help right now, I would offer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. At this point in time, helping someone else sounds appealing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**How was your focus during the word scramble?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Completely / Totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. During the task, I couldn’t stop from thinking about other things</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thoughts and feelings about another incident kept running through my mind as I was trying to concentrate on the task</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I found it difficult to keep myself from thinking about other things during this task</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I found myself re-playing another situation over and over in my mind</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Even when I was trying to focus on the task, I kept thinking about something else</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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</table>

**How was your experience as a participant?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Completely/ Totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The study purpose had to do with my communication style preferences and performance evaluation</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I enjoyed participating in this study</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The experimenter was polite to participants</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The experimenter was rude</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Participants were treated respectfully at all times during this study</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The experimenter acted rudely toward study participants</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I did not perform up to my capacity because I did not want to help</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I was not motivated to do the tasks because of the way I was treated</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. I would like the experiment to fail because of the way I was treated</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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APPENDIX D

Study 3: Participant Questionnaire

Communication & Performance Evaluation:
Part I Preferred Communication Style

**Instructions:**
This study investigates how communication style influences the way people evaluate the performance of others. It consists of three separate parts; the following questionnaire is Part 1. You will have 10 minutes to complete this section.

Please read all directions carefully and complete this section as accurately as possible. The following 15 questions ask you about the way you prefer to communicate. Rate each item below on a scale from 1 to 7, indicating the extent to which you agree with the statement- for all questions, a 1 indicates ‘not at all agree’ and a 7 indicates ‘completely/totally agree.’

**How do you like to communicate?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Completely/Totally</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoy being social</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<td>2. When I am with my friends, I usually do most of the talking</td>
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<td>3. When I first meet someone new, I am usually a bit quiet until I get comfortable</td>
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<td>4. Most people who know me would describe me as outgoing</td>
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<td>5. I consider myself an extrovert</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I enjoy going to social events where there are lots of different people to talk to</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<td>7. I am very comfortable giving speeches and presentations</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<td>8. I like being the center of attention</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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### What do you get from communicating?

10. After I spend time being social, I feel exhausted

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11. Meeting new people is invigorating

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12. I would rather spend time with close friends than make small talk with acquaintances

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13. Being up in front of people is exciting and fun

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14. After spending time at a social event, I usually like time to myself to recover

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15. I find communicating with others to be enjoyable

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### Once you are finished, please wait quietly at your seat.
Instructions:
This section consists of two steps. First, you will watch a short video of a persuasive speech and answer three questions about the video. Then, you will be asked to compose a written evaluation of the speaker’s performance. Your evaluation should include your general impressions of quality, as well as a more detailed criticism of the delivery and content of the talk.

Specifically, your evaluation should include:
- how well the speaker captured and held your attention
- the level of comfort of the speaker in front of the audience
- their use of gestures, movement, and tone of voice (too slow, fast, high, low)
- your general impression of quality and ways the speaker could improve

Please provide as much detail about your evaluation as possible.

**Quality of the speech?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Completely / Totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overall, I thought the speaker was very good</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. This speaker was better than most I’ve seen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If I was giving this speaker a grade, it would be an ‘A’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

**Written evaluation of the speech**

Overall, I thought the speaker...

To improve, I think the speaker needs to...

Compose a brief email to the speaker with a few of your suggestions…
The final section consists of four questions about your experience as a participant in this study. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

**How was your experience as a participant?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Complety / Totally</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The study purpose had to do with my communication style preferences and performance evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I enjoyed participating in this study</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The experimenter was polite to participants</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Participants were treated respectfully at all times during this study</td>
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Thank you! Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated. Once you are finished, please wait quietly at your seat.
APPENDIX E

Instructions for Coders

I assigned a number to each participant’s feedback and two independent coders reviewed the feedback email and rate each on two dimensions. The coders’ were given the scoring sheet (Appendix F) to record their scores. The coder’s ratings were aggregated into one value for each category and used as a proxy for e-Rudeness contagion as spontaneous mimicry and e-Rudeness contagion as the spread of symptoms. The coders were also given the following instructions:

Instructions:

These emails were written by the participants who watched a video of a person giving a speech. They were instructed to assess the quality of the speech and evaluate how it was delivered. Please read each participant’s feedback email carefully, and assign it a rating in each category explained below.

Category 1: Assign one point for each of the following physical features of the written assessment. Give 1 point if the email is too long or short, 1 point for a rude tone, 1 point if a greeting is absent, 1 point if a salutation (i.e. thanks) is absent, and 1 point if no grade was given (i.e. they did not respond in accordance with typical norms).

Category 2: How disappointed would feel if this feedback was about a speech you had given? A rating of ‘1’ indicates you would be very disappointed, and a ‘5’ indicates you would be not at all disappointed.
APPENDIX F

Scoring Sheet for Coders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Category 1 (Spontaneous Mimicry)</th>
<th>Category 2 (The Spread of Symptoms)</th>
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<tbody>
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Debrief Script for Studies 2 & 3

[XXX counseling hotline number written on board behind me]: I initially told you that we were studying the connection between communication style and performance evaluation/problem solving, which is true, however, there is an important detail that I could not tell you about the study beforehand, but we want to tell you now.

In this study we are interested in not only the connection between your preferred communication style and your evaluation and rating of the speech, but also whether your evaluation and rating of the speech was influenced by the behavior of the experimenter.

We had two conditions in this study: one where the experimenter was rude and the other where the experimenter was neutral. You were in the X condition. We hypothesized that being rude would decrease your performance.

[To those who were in the rude condition]: I apologize for my rude behavior. It was only part of the experiment, and of course I do not think badly of XXX students, in fact I am a XXX student myself. Please have this candy as a token of my appreciation for you participating in this study and as an apology.

The reason we couldn’t tell you this initially was because that might have changed whether you were influenced by my rude behavior. Particularly, if you knew the study was about rudeness, you may have known that the way I acted was part of it. Does that make sense?

Also, it is important to mention that we were not interested in your specific individual performance only in the groups’ performance by condition. Therefore the study was designed in such a way that your name is not linked to your specific word scramble/evaluation data. Thus, I have no means of identifying whose scores are whose, so there is no reason to worry if you think you may have performed worse on the task than you could have. Does anyone have any questions about that?

Finally, I would now like to introduce you to the individual who asked the question during the study. He is also part of the experimental team. In fact, her name is XXX, and she is actually a fellow PhD student and friend of mine.

The results of this study might have important implications for how managers treat employees, so your participation could help managers understand the serious consequences of rude behavior, and encourage them to take measures to prevent this type of treatment from occurring in the workplace.

Before I let you go, I want to ask that you please do not discuss this study with other people because it may affect our results. Thank you again so much for participating.