

How and when perceived job search incivility leads to reduced job search behavior

Perceived job search incivility

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Zia Ul Islam and Qingxiong (Derek) Weng

Department of Business Administration, School of Management, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, P.R. China

Ahmed Ali

IRC for Finance and Digital Economy, KFUPM Business School, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

Usman Ghani

Department of Business Administration, IQRA University, Karachi, Pakistan, and

Rana Muhammad Naeem

Department of Business Administration, School of Management, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, P.R. China and Department of Management Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of job seekers' perceived incivility during job search on their job search intensity via job search-specific self-esteem, and to explore how the job seekers' level of dispositional mindfulness buffers these relationships.

Design/methodology/approach – Using self-report measures, time-lagged data were obtained from 242 graduating students of a Chinese university.

Findings – Results showed that perceived incivility during job search was negatively related to job search-specific self-esteem, and that job search-specific self-esteem was positively related to job search intensity. Further, dispositional mindfulness mitigated the direct link between perceived incivility and job search-specific self-esteem and the indirect link between job seekers' perception of incivility and job search intensity through job search-specific self-esteem.

Originality/value – By integrating the recruitment and job search literature, we investigated how negative experiences (perceived incivility during recruitment) stemming from the context of job search influence the motivation of job seekers to continue their job search via the mediating role of job search-specific self-esteem. Further, for the first time, we explored the moderating role of dispositional mindfulness in the job search literature by utilizing the framework of positive psychology.

Keywords Perceived incivility, Job search behaviors, Job search-specific self-esteem, Dispositional mindfulness, Job search intensity

Paper type Research paper

The experience of engaging in a job search is challenging owing to multiple hurdles, including rejection, setbacks and other negative emotional encounters (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001; Kreemers *et al.*, 2018). Despite it being an arduous process, persistence in job search activities is crucial for job success (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001). Job seekers' perceptual processes and their interpretations of job search experiences affect their levels of persistence throughout the job search process (Wanberg, 2012). Research has affirmed that personal experiences during a job search have a pernicious effect on the job seeker's motivation for continuing to engage in job search activities (Kreemers *et al.*, 2018).

Extant job search scholarship has investigated the specific factors that are central to a job seeker's job search process (for review see, Manroop and Richardson, 2016; Wanberg *et al.*, 2020).



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These factors include demographics (e.g. age, gender, education, race) (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001; Saks, 2005), personal and psychological variables such as the big five personality traits (Wanberg *et al.*, 1996), self-efficacy (Petruzzello *et al.*, 2021; Wanberg *et al.*, 1999), and job search clarity (Côté *et al.*, 2006; Wanberg *et al.*, 2012). Despite the fact that the job search literature (e.g. Wanberg *et al.*, 2012) underscores the influential role of contextual factors in job searches, limited empirical work is available on how negative events stemming from the context of the job search influence job seekers' subsequent motivation and job search activities.

Recently researchers have explored how contextual variables, such as negative feedback and perception of the lack of progress, hinder job seekers from successfully conducting their job search activities (e.g. da Motta Veiga and Turban, 2018a; Kreemers *et al.*, 2018). Building on this line of research, we argue that one such contextual factor is the job seekers' experience of incivility during their job search. An interviewer or recruiter who is rude, abrupt, unresponsive, dismissive of a job seeker's qualifications or appearance, or who makes disapproving remarks displays uncivil behaviors toward the job seeker (Ali *et al.*, 2016). These uncivil behaviors can have detrimental effects on the job seeker's perception of self-worth and their future job search behavior.

In the current study, we advance the job search literature by investigating the impact of job search incivility on job seekers' motivation and search behaviors. Specifically, we examine the influence of job seekers' perceived incivility on their subsequent job search intensity via the mediating process of job search-specific self-esteem (hereinafter referred to as job search self-esteem). Job search self-esteem is referred to as the job seeker's "self-perceived competence in job seeking" (Ellis and Taylor, 1983, p. 634) and is subject to fluctuation across diverse situations (Heatherton and Polivy, 1991; Bai *et al.*, 2016). Situations in which job seekers experience incivility perpetrated by interviewers may cause them to attribute such acts of incivility to their lack of self-worth in the job search domain. Lowered self-esteem, as a self-regulatory mechanism, is likely to play a crucial role in determining subsequent job search intensity (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, we inquire whether or not a change in a job seeker's job search self-esteem in response to incivility results in a corresponding change in the search intensity of job seekers.

Moreover, to investigate whether or not job seeker individual differences cushion the influence of incivility on job search self-esteem and job search intensity relationship, we tested the moderating role of the job seeker's dispositional mindfulness. Drawing from the positive psychology framework (Brown and Ryan, 2003), dispositional mindfulness refers to one's "awareness and observation of the present moment without reactivity or judgment" (Glomb *et al.*, 2011, p. 116). As such, dispositional mindfulness may mitigate the negative association between job seekers' incivility and their job search self-esteem, as well as the indirect relationship between job seekers' incivility and job search intensity. Although, previous studies have underscored the role of mindfulness in mitigating the deleterious effect of negative experience and stressful situations (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Hülsheger *et al.*, 2013; Tarraf *et al.*, 2019), the potential role of mindfulness has yet to be examined within the context of the job search process. In doing so, we respond to recent calls by researchers (da Motta Veiga *et al.*, 2018; van Hooft, 2018) for studies that examine the role of mindfulness in coping with the stressful experiences encountered by job seekers.

Overall, this study broadens our understanding of how and when perceived job search incivility influences job-seeking behaviors. To this end, our study makes three important contributions. First, we integrate the recruitment and job search literature by investigating the influence of recruiters' uncivil behaviors on job search intensity via job search self-esteem. Doing so, we investigate the underlying process through which recruiter's incivility can influence job seekers' subsequent motivation to continue their job search. Second, we utilize the positive psychology framework to test how the individual difference of job seeker dispositional mindfulness cushions the negative influence of incivility on job seekers'

self-esteem. Finally, we theorize and examine a moderated-mediation model in which the interactive effect of recruiter's incivility and job seeker's mindfulness is linked to job search intensity through job search self-esteem.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Incivility is ambiguous in nature. As such, job seekers could attribute the cause of job search incivility to several sources given that job seekers are uncertain of the real reason why recruiters or interviewers mistreated them (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). The attribution process (Weiner, 1986) is an important aspect through which job seekers tend to evaluate themselves with respect to their environment. Job seekers who internally attribute incivility may attach uncivil treatment to their self-worth. Such internally attributed uncivil behaviors would be deleterious to job seekers.

According to the self-regulatory perspective (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001), job search behaviors such as job search intensity and other motivational processes may change as job seekers get either positive or negative treatment from the environment. An interviewer's rude or discourteous behavior may lead job seekers attributing this uncivil treatment to their lack of competence and worth, i.e. self-esteem (Chen *et al.*, 2013). Past research has documented that the self-esteem of people diminishes when they are rejected, devalued, demeaned, or ignored by significant others (Mead, 1934). Thus, we argue that when job seekers perceive uncivil treatment from recruiters (i.e. key figures in the hiring process), their job search self-esteem will be negatively affected.

Self-esteem is a necessary personal resource for driving job search behaviors such as job search intensity (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001). Job search intensity denotes the frequency of job search-related activities undertaken by job seekers. It has been established in previous studies that job search intensity is essential for both job search outcomes and success (see, da Motta Veiga *et al.*, 2018; Kanfer *et al.*, 2001). Job search intensity is not static and may change due to various factors as the job seekers proceed on their job search journey. We argue that one such factor is the degree to which individuals perceive incivility during the job search. Individuals who ascribe the experience of incivility to their lack of self-esteem would become less motivated to carry out relevant job search actions leading to future employment.

Moreover, combining the self-regulatory framework with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, we investigate how individual differences may attenuate or exacerbate the theorized incivility-self-esteem-job search intensity relationship. Dispositional mindfulness is a stable individual difference trait. As people with mindfulness view situations in a non-evaluative fashion, they are unlikely to judge the experience of incivility in a way that reflects on their personal incompetence in the job seeking. As a result, their self-esteem is unaffected and they are less likely to reduce their job search intensity even after experiencing incivility.

Perceived incivility, job search self-esteem, and job search intensity

Consistent with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals' confidence in their personal capacities is an important variable in the self-regulatory process that has been previously associated with multiple performance spheres (e.g. Judge and Bono, 2001). This research suggests its relevance for studying its potential impact on the motivation of job seekers. Embedded in self-regulation mechanisms, self-esteem refers to the degree to which individuals see themselves as significant, capable and worthy. As a consequence, self-esteem motivates people not only to establish difficult career goals and carry out activities to attain those goals (Crook *et al.*, 1984) but also encourages them to persist in challenging situations (Bandura, 1977).

Self-esteem is an individual's general evaluation of his or her overall worthiness (Rosenberg, 1965). A closely related but distinct from the self-esteem is the notion of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his/her abilities to accomplish a particular task (Bandura, 1986). Job search self-efficacy implies a job seeker's belief in his/her abilities to execute job search activities (Kanfer and Hulin, 1985). Job search specific self-esteem is a contextual construct like self-efficacy that represents "self-perceived competence in job seeking" (Ellis and Taylor, 1983). Research has shown job seekers' self-esteem to be an important predictor of job search intensity and job search outcomes (Ellis and Taylor, 1983; Kanfer *et al.*, 2001). When individuals have confidence in their own worth and competence to perform job search-related activities effectively, they are more probable to involve in job search behaviors. Thus, high job search self-esteem should be positively related to job search intensity.

However, instances of incivility experienced during an interview might signal a negative evaluation of a job seeker's worth and capabilities. This makes examining the potential impact of a recruiter's uncivil behaviors on a job seeker's job search self-esteem relevant. In the job search process, job seekers set a goal of attaining employment and continuously evaluate their progress toward that goal. As the direct feedback from potential employers is uncommon in the job search context (Wanberg *et al.*, 2012), uncivil treatment from recruiters could be construed as negative feedback, which can negatively affect how job seekers see their self-worth and competence in the job market.

Empirical studies have shown that an individual's level of self-esteem is influenced by negative workplace experiences such as abusive supervision (Vogel and Mitchell, 2017) and ostracism (Ferris *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, recent research in the family context has shown that family incivility as a contextual demand depletes family members' resources in the form of self-esteem (Bai *et al.*, 2016). Both work and family contexts involve interpersonal interactions similar to the recruitment context where job seekers interact with recruiters. As there are also commonalities between the workplace and job search contexts (Amundson and Borgen, 1982; Hulshof *et al.*, 2020), it is expected that job search incivility would adversely affect the job seeker's level of job search self-esteem. Taken together, we hypothesize that:

- H1. Perceived job search incivility negatively influences job search self-esteem.
- H2. Job search self-esteem positively influences job search intensity.

According to Zimmerman (2000), individuals make self-judgments of their performance. As we theorized earlier, in the job search context experiencing incivility can be considered as negative feedback and job seekers may attribute this feedback as a reflection of their personal incompetence and/or lack of self-worth (e.g. Baumgardner *et al.*, 1989; Brown *et al.*, 1988). Since job search self-esteem is what motivates people to carry out job search activities, it is logical to assume that job search self-esteem is the potential underlying mechanism through which the experience of incivility during a job search affects job search intensity. As such, interpersonal encounters with rude interviewers can be expected to negatively affect job seekers' confidence in their self-worth and competence. This reduced self-esteem lowers job seekers' expectations that their future job search efforts will be successful, which results in little motivation for them to engage in intense job search behaviors. Based on above-mentioned reasoning, we put forward:

- H3. Job search self-esteem mediates the relationship between perceived job search incivility and job search intensity.

The moderating role of dispositional mindfulness

In this study, we argue that job seekers' dispositional mindfulness can play a buffering role against the effects of interviewers' uncivil behaviors. Job seekers require effective self-regulation in the face of difficulties, setbacks, and rejections, including incivility. Instead

of attributing the experience of incivility to oneself, job seekers with dispositional mindfulness take an impartial view of the experience. Highly mindful job seekers can minimize self-doubt and regulate their cognitive reactions to the experience of incivility.

Glomb *et al.* (2011) offered a framework explicating two main psychological processes fundamental to mindfulness. First, highly mindful individuals can detach themselves from thoughts, events, emotions, and experiences. This decoupling process enables individuals to detach themselves from experiences and events and minimize self-relevant inferential tendencies. Second, highly mindful individuals feel “a decrease in automaticity of mental processes in which past experiences, schemas, and cognitive habits constrain thinking” (p. 124). The “decreased use of automatic processes” defuses reactivity to unfavorable events. Both of these psychological processes improve self-regulation.

Aligned with the self-regulatory framework, we expect that mindfulness can mitigate the adverse consequences of incivility experiences on job seekers’ job search self-esteem. A host of studies have demonstrated the significance of mindfulness in successful self-regulation (for example, Grossman *et al.*, 2004; Ostafin *et al.*, 2015), including research affirming that individuals with high levels of mindfulness respond non-reactively when they are exposed to incivility (Peters *et al.*, 2016). Put differently, when job seekers experience incivility instigated by recruiters, they do not react in a way that influences their self-perceptions; rather they respond in a non-judgmental and non-reactive fashion by accepting the experience of incivility without changing their self-relevant perceptions (Tarraf *et al.*, 2019). As such, individuals with high levels of mindfulness decouple their self-esteem from the experience of incivility. Previous studies support the idea that high mindfulness enables individuals to detach their self-esteem from the experience of interpersonal rejection (Heppner and Kernis, 2007). As mindfulness makes individuals less judgmental in responding to adverse experiences, we expect that mindfulness will ease the negative effect of a job seeker’s experience of incivility on self-esteem. On the contrary, job seekers with low levels of dispositional mindfulness are less likely to regulate their thoughts when experiencing incivility (Tarraf *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, low mindfulness causes job seekers to internally attribute the recruiters’ uncivil behaviors, which threatens their self-worth. As such, it is hypothesized:

- H4. The interaction of mindfulness and perceived job search incivility predicts job search self-esteem, such that the negative relationship between perceived job search incivility and job search self-esteem is weaker for those job seekers who have higher levels of dispositional mindfulness.

Finally, because we anticipate that dispositional mindfulness will moderate the relationship between job search incivility and self-esteem, we also predict that dispositional mindfulness will moderate the strength of the indirect association between incivility and self-esteem. Dispositional mindfulness equips individuals to “disidentify” themselves from self-critical cognitions (Pepping *et al.*, 2013) and detaches their self-esteem from the negative thoughts that arise from experiencing incivility. In addition, mindfulness increases individuals’ task engagement (Roche *et al.*, 2014). In other words, highly mindful job seekers (relative to low mindful job seekers) are anticipated to be less likely to attribute incivility to their personal competence and self-worth. Hence, their self-esteem and subsequent job search intensity will be less affected. Based on this, we expect that:

- H5. Job search self-esteem mediates the interactive effect of dispositional mindfulness and perceived job search incivility on job search intensity, in such a way that the relationship of perceived job search incivility and job search intensity through job search self-esteem will be weaker only when dispositional mindfulness is higher.

Method

Sample and procedure

Data were obtained from Chinese students studying in a large Chinese university ($N = 242$) using two-time lags, covering a job search duration of 2.5 months. The criteria set for sample selection were: (1) the students should be in senior year of their respective program (2) they must be active job seekers, (3) they should be engaged in job search for minimum two weeks, and (4) they are expected to graduate by end of the current year. Participants were ensured that (1) participation in the survey is voluntary and (2) the information they provide is strictly confidential.

Data were collected in three different phases. In the first phase (Time 0), participants completed a baseline paper-pencil survey. This survey was administered in the second week of October because most students in Chinese institutes begin their job search at this time (Islam *et al.*, 2021; Liu *et al.*, 2014). The baseline survey consisted of control variables such as age, gender, education, work experience, and measures of negative affectivity (included to control for negative response bias) and dispositional mindfulness. Three hundred fifty-four participants completed the baseline survey. Two months after the initial survey, 251 participants filled the Time 1 survey that included measures of incivility and job search self-esteem. The two-month interval was selected to allow respondents adequate time to interact with at least one recruiter (Van Hove *et al.*, 2015, 2019). Two weeks later, 242 students completed a Time 2 questionnaire that measured job search intensity. Participant attrition throughout the data collection was due to (1) non-willingness to continue participating further, (2) no experience of an interview so far, and (3) having secured a job during the survey period. Overall, the participant retention rate was 68.40%. On the basis of response-non-response analysis, we found no significant differences with respect to incivility, self-esteem, mindfulness, job search intensity, and controls between the base-line survey respondents (Time 0) and non-respondents (Time 1-Time 2).

Of the participants who completed all three surveys, 58% were male, the mean age was 22.72 ($SD = 1.78$), with an average work experience of 0.89 ($SD = 2.48$) months.

Measures

All measures were translated from English to Chinese according to the translation-back-translation method recommended by Brislin (1980).

incivility. We adapted a 10-item scale developed by Hebl *et al.* (2002) to assess perceived incivility. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced discourteous or rude behavior from the recruiter in their last interview. For example, recruiter/interviewer was hostile, cold or rude. Students responded on a 5-point Likert (1 = *Not at all*, 5 = *Very Much*). The reliability coefficient (α) for this measure was 0.87.

Job search self-esteem. Job search self-esteem was measured by using a 10-item scale developed by Ellis and Taylor (1983). The respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed/disagreed to the items. One sample item is "I know exactly how to find the kind of job I'm looking for". Respondents marked their answers on a 5-points Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The reliability coefficient (α) for the measure was 0.90.

Dispositional mindfulness. Dispositional mindfulness was assessed with the 15-item Chinese version of the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) by Deng *et al.* (2012). The respondents marked their answers on a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = almost always, 5 = almost never). A sample item included "I find myself doing things without paying attention" the reliability coefficient (α) for the scale was 0.91.

Job search intensity. We assessed job search intensity using the 12-item measure developed by Blau (1994) and slightly modified by Wanberg *et al.* (1999). Students were asked to show

how frequently they carried out different activities (e.g. Prepared/revised your resume, sent out a resume to a potential employer, filled out a job application, etc.) over the last two weeks. The students responded on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = Never/0, 5 = Very frequently/at least 10 times). The reliability coefficient (α) for the scale was 0.89.

Control variables. We controlled for age, gender, and total work experience (in months) of the participants. In order to minimize the chance of negative response bias, we followed the study of [Ali et al. \(2016\)](#) by choosing 6 out of 10 items from PANAS originally developed by [Watson et al. \(1988\)](#) for measuring negative affectivity (NA). Respondents indicated the level of their general feelings such as being “distressed”, “upset”, “guilty”, “scared”, “afraid”, and “nervous”, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was 0.71.

Results

Analytical approach

We tested the measurement model to ensure the discriminant validity of the measured variables by conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Then, we tested the hypotheses utilizing *PROCESS* macro ([Hayes, 2013](#)). This is an extension of the SPSS macro developed by [Preacher et al. \(2007\)](#). As our study hypothesized a moderated-mediation relationship, we followed the research of [Cole et al. \(2008\)](#) and [Eissa and Lester \(2017\)](#) to analyze our hypothesized model. We performed the analyses in two steps. In step 1, we ran a simple mediation model using Model 4 of the *PROCESS* macro to test **H1-H3**. In step 2, we integrated the moderating variable into the model (**H4**) and tested an overall moderated-mediation model (**H5**) using Model 7 of the *PROCESS* macro. The continuous measures were mean-centred before testing the hypothesized model ([Aiken and West, 1991](#)).

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, Cronbach’s alphas, and bivariate correlations for the study variables.

Construct validity

The results of CFA indicated that the four factor model including perceived incivility, dispositional mindfulness, job search self-esteem, and job search intensity (Time 2) fit the data well (χ^2 (1606.174/1,028) = 1.562, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.92, RMR = 0.051, RMSEA = 0.048). We ran an alternate CFA in which all indicators loaded onto a single factor. Results indicated a poor fit to the data (χ^2 (4412.528/1,034) = 4.267, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.35, TLI = 0.33, RMR = 0.39, RMSEA = 0.12). Thus, the four factors model demonstrated the best model fit.

Test of hypotheses

The results concerning **H1** to **H3** are presented in **Table 2**. As shown, perceived incivility was negatively related to job search self-esteem ($B = -0.42$, $t = -5.99$, $p < 0.01$) and job search self-esteem was positively associated with job search intensity ($B = 0.19$, $t = 3.47$, $p < 0.01$). These results provided support for **H1** and **H2**. To investigate the mediating effect (**H3**), we calculated the indirect effect of perceived incivility on job search intensity. The results in **Table 2** show that perceived incivility had a significant indirect effect on job search intensity through job search self-esteem ($B = -0.08$, LLCI = -0.14 , ULCI = -0.03). We also conducted Sobel test (bootstrapped = 5,000, CI_{95%}), which showed the indirect effect of perceived incivility on job search intensity as significant (Sobel $z = -2.97$, $p < 0.01$), and confirmed that the bootstrapped CI did not contain zero (-0.14 , -0.03). These findings provided further support to our mediation hypothesis.

Table 1.
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among studied variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	22.71	1.78	—							
2. Gender	0.58	0.49	0.04	—						
3. Work experience	0.89	2.48	-0.04	0.09	—					
4. Negative affectivity	2.74	0.85	-0.01	-0.02	0.12	—				
5. Perceived incivility	3.54	0.98	-0.21**	0.03	0.20**	0.15*	(0.87)			
6. Job search self-esteem	3.39	1.10	0.13*	-0.07	-0.15*	0.018	-0.39**	(0.90)		
7. Job search intensity	3.03	0.95	0.02	-0.063	-0.11	0.11	-0.36**	0.34**	(0.89)	
8. Dispositional mindfulness	3.02	0.88	-0.10	-0.02	-0.11	0.024	0.28**	-0.04	0.11	(0.91)

Note(s): *N* = 242; gender (1 = male, 0 = female); The alpha reliabilities are given in the parentheses
***p* < 0.01. **p* < 0.05

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
<i>Outcome: job search self-esteem</i>				
				0.17
Constant	3.96	0.95	4.16**	
Perceived incivility	-0.42	0.70	-5.99**	
Age	0.03	0.04	0.84	
Gender	-0.12	0.13	-0.90	
Work experience	-0.04	0.03	-1.30	
Negative affectivity	0.11	0.08	1.37	
<i>Outcome: job search intensity</i>				
				0.21
Constant	3.79	0.83	4.57**	
Job search self-esteem	0.19	0.05	3.47**	
Perceived incivility	-0.29	0.06	-4.59**	
Age	-0.04	0.03	-1.12	
Gender	-0.06	0.11	-0.52	
Work experience	-0.01	0.02	-0.58	
Negative affectivity	0.18	0.07	2.66**	
Indirect effect of perceived incivility on job search intensity	Effect	<i>SE</i>	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
	-0.08	0.03	-0.14	-0.03
Normal theory test for indirect effect	Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>z</i>	
	-0.08	0.03	-2.97**	

Note(s): *N* = 242; Bootstrap sample size = 5,000; CI = confident interval; LU = lower limit; UL = upper limit
***p* < 0.01

Table 2.
Mediation analysis

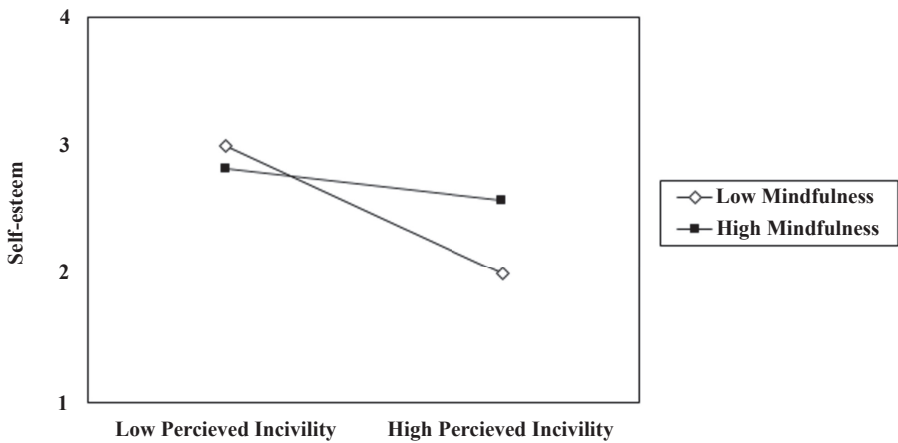
The results of the moderating role of dispositional mindfulness on the relationship between perceived incivility and job search self-esteem (H4) are presented in Table 3. The significant perceived incivility × mindfulness interaction ($B = 0.19, t = 3.49, p < 0.01$) provided support for our moderation hypothesis. The graphical illustrations of the moderating effect of dispositional mindfulness are shown in Figure 1. The negative association between perceived incivility and job search self-esteem is weaker ($B = -0.14, t = -1.11, CI = -0.39$ to 0.11) at high levels of dispositional mindfulness, but is negative and stronger ($B = -0.48, t = -7.04, CI = -0.61$ to -0.34) at low levels of dispositional mindfulness. Moreover, the difference between the slopes was significant ($t = 5.50, p < 0.01$). Thus, these findings provided further support for the moderation hypothesis (H4).

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
<i>Outcome: job search self-esteem</i>				
				0.22
Constant	2.66	0.86	3.10**	
Perceived incivility	-0.31	0.09	-3.47**	
Dispositional mindfulness	0.02	0.10	0.16	
Perceived incivility × Dispositional mindfulness	0.19	0.06	3.49**	
Age	0.03	0.04	0.68	
Gender	-0.09	0.13	-0.65	
Work experience	-0.03	0.03	-0.97	
Negative affectivity	0.07	0.10	0.70	

Note(s): *N* = 242; Bootstrap sample = 5,000
***p* < 0.01

Table 3.
Moderation analysis

Figure 1. Interactive effect of perceived incivility and dispositional mindfulness on job search-specific self-esteem



For moderated-mediation, the expected indirect effect of perceived incivility on job search intensity via self-esteem was conditional upon the level of dispositional mindfulness (H5). We set high and low levels of dispositional mindfulness (± 1 SD) to assess the conditional indirect effect of perceived incivility on job search intensity (via job search self-esteem). The results in Table 4 show that the indirect effect was stronger ($B = -0.09$, $CI_{95\%} = -0.16$ to -0.04) at a low level of dispositional mindfulness, but was weaker ($B = -0.03$, $CI_{95\%} = -0.08$ to 0.01) at a high level of dispositional mindfulness. To assess the difference between the two lines/slopes, the index of moderated-mediation was calculated. The results revealed a significant negative coefficient ($B = -0.06$, $CI_{95\%} = -0.09$, -0.03). This significant negative coefficient reveals two patterns. First, the two lines/slopes are significantly different from each other. Second, perceived incivility led to decreased job search intensity through lowered self-esteem, but only among those job seekers with low dispositional mindfulness. As such, H5 received full support.

Discussion

The objective of this research was to investigate the underlying psychological process through which perceived incivility during a job search influences job seekers’ motivation in conducting job search activities. In addition, we examined the contingent effect of dispositional mindfulness on the stated relationships. The results offered consistent support for our arguments. Based on social cognitive theory, our findings revealed that perceived incivility was negatively associated with job search intensity via the mechanism of job search self-esteem. Moreover, as was expected, the moderated analysis revealed that dispositional mindfulness

Table 4. Moderated-mediation analysis

	Indirect effect	LL CI, UL CI
<i>Conditional indirect effect of perceived incivility on job search intensity at:</i>		
Low dispositional mindfulness (-1 SD)	-0.09	[-0.16 -0.04]
High dispositional mindfulness ($+1$ SD)	-0.03	[-0.08 0.01]
Difference	-0.06	[-0.09 -0.03]

Note(s): $N = 242$; The 95% confidence intervals for the conditional indirect effects; Bootstrap sample size = 5,000; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; CI = confidence interval

weakened the relationship between perceived incivility and job search self-esteem. The moderated-mediation results further showed that the indirect link of perceived incivility with job search intensity through job search self-esteem was weaker when dispositional mindfulness was high. In addition to identifying a negative link between job search incivility and job search behavior, we examined a mechanism underlying this relationship as well as a boundary condition. Specifically, the mediation (job search self-esteem) and moderation (dispositional mindfulness) effects established in this study present fresh insights into the harmful effects of incivility experiences in the job search context.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to theory and research in several ways. First, we integrate the recruitment and job search literature. Previous research has focused on the association between the mistreatment experienced by applicants in a hiring setting with organizational outcomes (Chapman *et al.*, 2005). Despite the fact that several researchers (da Motta Veiga and Turban, 2018b; Acikgoz, 2019) have highlighted the need to align recruitment processes (e.g. recruiter behaviors) to job seekers' motivation and behaviors, there has been limited research available in this direction. To date, only Ali *et al.* (2016) have examined the influence of rude and discourteous treatment by recruiters on job searchers' confidence and their subsequent job-seeking behaviors. Our findings add to this line of research by examining an underlying psychological process through which mistreatment by an interviewer affects a job searcher's behaviors. Specifically, our findings demonstrate that perceptions of incivility during a job search tend to reduce an individual's job-seeking intensity due to reduced job search self-esteem. The use of job search self-esteem highlighted the potential effects of the perpetrator of uncivil behavior on the victim's self-worth and self-competence. For example, Ali *et al.* (2016), in their preliminary study on job search incivility, provided a detailed account of the specific instances of uncivil behaviors such as unresponsiveness, belittling remarks, criticism on appearance, and making the job seekers feel inferior. These uncivil behaviors during recruitment not only question the competency of the applicant (self-efficacy) but also generate perceptions in the mind of the applicant about his/her self-worth (self-esteem). Therefore, incorporating job search self-esteem in our study as an underlying mechanism sheds light on the effect of recruiter incivility on both the self-worth and self-competence aspects of the applicant.

Further, our connection of domain-specific incivility with domain-specific self-esteem is in line with the current trend in the incivility literature. For example, recent research in the work-family domain has examined how family incivility influences employees' self-esteem and subsequent behavior (Bai *et al.*, 2016). By linking context-specific incivility to state self-esteem, we provide evidence of the link between perceived incivility during the job search and job search self-esteem. Our study is also in accordance with the current trend in job search research where contextual factors such as feedback and perceived progress have been related to job seekers' evaluations of self-competence and subsequent job search outcomes (Liu *et al.*, 2014; Wanberg *et al.*, 2010).

Second, our analysis shows that diminished job seeker self-esteem caused by incivility results in lower performance (job search intensity) in the job search process. In the workplace domain, Chen *et al.* (2013) reported that employees behaviorally disengage from the task when their sense of self is jeopardized. Our results are congruent with these findings, given that job search intensity is akin to the notion of task performance (van Hooft and Noordzij, 2009), which we found to be negatively influenced by job seekers' diminished self-esteem. In the job search discourse, our findings supplement Kanfer's *et al.* (2001) meta-analytical findings that self-esteem is positively related to the intensity of job search behaviors.

Third, our study is the first to investigate the moderating role of dispositional mindfulness in mitigating the negative consequences of perceived incivility in the job search process. Doing so, we add to previous job search literature indicating that a positive job seeker mindset can buffer the negative events experienced during one's job search. For example, [Kreemers et al. \(2018\)](#) uncovered the buffering role of self-compassion, a positive and adaptive mindset, in mitigating the influence of unfavorable job search experiences on a job hunters' negative emotions. Our findings show that dispositional mindfulness buffers the negative relationship between job seekers' perceptions of incivility and their job search self-esteem. Our conclusions regarding the moderation effects also validate studies that investigated the buffering effect of mindfulness in the face of negative contextual experiences in the context of workplace incivility (e.g. [Tarraf et al., 2019](#)).

Finally, our findings confirmed the moderated effects of dispositional mindfulness on the indirect link between incivility and job search intensity through job search self-esteem. Specifically, the results suggest that perceived incivility reduces the job search self-esteem and motivation, but only for those job seekers who are low in dispositional mindfulness. Stated differently, dispositional mindfulness is a conditional positive psychological construct that can attenuate the influence of perceived incivility on self-esteem and, subsequently, on job search intensity. The integration of both mediating processes (self-esteem) and boundary conditions (dispositional mindfulness) in our study present a more holistic and clearer view of "how" and "when" incivility experienced during the job search is more deleterious.

Practical implications

There are several practical implications of this study for job-seeking individuals, organizations, and interventionists. First, job hunters can gain from assessing what affects their self-esteem and how negative encounters influence it. Awareness of this as well as resisting the urge to "take it personally" provides a starting point for overcoming the negative effects of recruiters' incivility on job search intensity.

Second, it is essential for organizations to understand how significant the impact of interviewers' behaviors is on both job seekers' motivation and their attraction toward the target organization. Because a recruiter's behavior may have both financial and non-financial consequences, organizations need to train the recruiters in order to minimize the occurrences of incivility during the employment process.

Third, interventionists working on reducing the stress of job seekers during unemployment may benefit by understanding how mindfulness affects job seekers' ability to cope with damaging experiences. This knowledge will enable interventionists to devise effective strategies to enhance job seekers' mindfulness. Moreover, to reinstate the self-esteem of incivility victims and motivate them to persist in their job search, the interventionist can utilize the JOBS program model [1], which can assist job seekers faced with stressful encounters and boost their self-esteem ([Price and Vinokur, 2018](#)). Finally, job seekers themselves can exercise mindfulness on a daily basis to develop enduring mindfulness skill. Self-initiated or informal mindfulness meditation may be more fruitful than formal mindfulness training ([Birtwell et al., 2019](#)). Engaging in daily mindfulness practice can help job seekers remain focused on their job attainment goal in the face of negative experiences such as incivility during the job search process.

Limitations and directions for future research

We acknowledge several limitations of our study. First, common method variance (CMV) is possible due to the self-reported nature of the data in our study. To minimize the possibility

of CMV, we took several steps. First, we separately measured the variables of our study (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) over three different periods. Second, we adapted previously validated reliable measures for use in our study (Conway and Lance, 2010). Third, the respondents were assured that the responses they provided would be confidential (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Lastly, we used a common latent factor (CLF) in order to discover the common variance among the delineated associations, contrasting the standardized regression weights with and without CLF. The resulting difference values across all standardized regression weights were less than 0.20, indicating that CMV was not a major problem. Moreover, the interaction effect identified in our study is not likely to be explained by CMV (Evans, 1985).

Second, our study could not examine either the dynamism inherent in job searches (Kanfer *et al.*, 2001) or within-person incivility experiences (Zhou *et al.*, 2015). However, the experience of incivility in the job search process is different from that in the workplace. In the workplace context, environmental characteristics are more stable and as such incivility may occur more frequently. In contrast, the job search setting is unstable in that it involves job seekers' interactions with different recruiters and interviewers. This interactional diversity during the job search process makes the frequency of incivility less likely, which strengthens our case for studying incivility at the between-person level.

We offer several recommendations for future research. First, as our study validated the buffering role of mindfulness in job search, future studies should consider other positive psychological constructs such as psychological capital (Luthans *et al.*, 2007) to see its effect in cushioning the detrimental influence of incivility in the job search setting. Second, future studies should replicate the findings of this study by sampling employed as well as unemployed job seekers. Differences in the study population may result in different outcomes for the experience and effects of incivility. Different types of job seekers may process and decode incivility information differently. Third, keeping in view the current trend in job search research (Wanberg *et al.*, 2010; Liu *et al.*, 2014; da Motta Veiga and Turban, 2018a; Song *et al.*, 2020), future studies should use the repeated measures designs to capture the dynamic nature of job seekers' experiences of incivility across multiple interactions with recruiters [2]. Lastly, research in the workplace domain shows that the detrimental effects of incivility are not just limited to the victims' work related outcomes but also spillover to other important areas of their lives (e.g. He *et al.*, 2020; Ferguson, 2012; Lim and Lee, 2011). Building on similar studies, future researchers are encouraged to probe into the pernicious effect of incivility experienced during job search on the job seekers' life outside of the job search domain (e.g. confidence in one's life, life satisfaction, and wellbeing).

Conclusion

The current study builds on incivility research in the context of the job search and underscores the significance of context-specific factors that influence job seekers' self-perceptions and job search efforts. To best of our knowledge, this research is among the first that investigated the role of dispositional mindfulness in the job search domain. The findings conclude that job seekers' perceived incivility is disadvantageous, preventing involvement in job search behaviors. Additionally, findings illustrated the buffering role of dispositional mindfulness, highlighting that the detrimental effect of perceived incivility during the job search is less intense for high mindful job seekers. Taken together, the results of this research suggest that recruiters should pay attention to their behaviors during the recruitment and that the mindfulness level of job seekers should be improved for tackling negative experiences during the job search.

Notes

1. The interventionists can refer to <http://www.isr.umich.edu/src/seh/mprc/PDFs/Jobs%20Manual.pdf> for detail guidelines and practical steps for the implementation of this program.
2. We are thankful to the anonymous reviewer for suggesting us to discuss the possibility of this research avenue.

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Corresponding author

Qingxiang (Derek) Weng can be contacted at: wqx886@ustc.edu.cn

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