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978-0-521-89551-4 - Incivility: The Rude Stranger in Everyday Life

Philip Smith, Timothy L. Phillips and Ryan D. King

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Incivility

Has anyone ever pushed in front of you in a queue? Stolen your parking space? Talked on their mobile phone during a film at the cinema? In our everyday lives we all encounter rude and inconsiderate people. This unique book provides the first ever systematic investigation of typical encounters with rudeness. Through a meticulous analysis of over 500 events, it maps out what people experience as rude, where and when this happens and what takes place in the exchange between the participants. The inquiry further charts the emotional and social consequences of rudeness and victimization, with the results challenging the widespread assumption that bad behaviour is toxic to community life. In conclusion the study draws upon its findings and surveys a range of strategies for reducing the level of incivility in everyday life, identifying some simple and innovative solutions. *Incivility* will appeal to criminologists, sociologists and scholars of urban studies.

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*This book is dedicated to the memory of Raymond Smith
and Donald Phillips. Always happy to talk to strangers,
both were believers in the virtue of civility.*

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Preface and acknowledgements

This book is the product of several years of collaborative activity by the three authors in various combinations. Describing this division of labour is somewhat complex, but might be helpful to readers should they wish to direct questions to the team. The original grant proposals, focus group pilot work, survey instrument design and administration, conceptual thinking about the new area and the book proposal were the work of Timothy Phillips and Philip Smith. The former was particularly responsible for figuring out how to capture something commonplace yet elusive using survey methods. Smith is the chief author of Chapters 1, 8 and 9, although contributions from the other two team members were also made. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 were initially written by Smith and Phillips, then revised by Ryan King as the book developed. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 were equally authored by King and Smith. Some material from Phillips appears at the start of the last of these.

Along the way this book has had the benefit of support from the many institutions that sheltered its authors at one point or another in the research or writing process. In Australia we thank the University of Tasmania, the University of Queensland and the Australian National University. In the United States we express gratitude to Yale University and the University at Albany. In Europe we were hosted by Trinity College Dublin and the Kulturwissenschaftliches Kolleg, Universität Konstanz. We thank the professional research teams who took the project to the field. In Albany, Lauren Porter provided research assistance as the book neared completion. This book would never have happened without the substantial financial support of the Australian Research Council – their generous Discovery Grant enabled us to field the survey. In an era when research funding is increasingly tied to demonstrating some visible and concrete social or economic benefit, it has been gratifying to know that basic research with no immediate financial or policy payoff still has its supporters.

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Along the way various colleagues have provided clues and insights into how to think about our findings and which questions to ask, often just in casual conversation or e-mail exchange. Some paragraphs were more directly inspired by the lateral thinking of our peers. In alphabetical order we thank: Jeffrey Alexander, Scott Boorman, Mike Emmison, David Garland, Bernhard Giesen, Bob Holton, Jim McKay, Joachim Savelsberg, Barry Schwartz, Jonathan Simon. Randall Collins is especially acknowledged for providing detailed written feedback on some of our findings. Carlo Tognato brought to our attention the interesting policies of Antanas Mockus. Although this book contains completely new written material, we worked our way towards it with four basic journal publications, the first three of which were based on the somewhat provisional focus group data only. These appeared in the *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, the *Journal of Sociology*, the *Sociological Review* and in *Urban Studies* (Phillips 2006; Phillips and Smith 2003, 2006a; Smith and Phillips 2004). For good ideas we thank the anonymous reviewers for these journals as well as the referees of our Cambridge proposal and manuscript. Our thanks also go to the Glasgow University Urban Studies group for diffuse intellectual support and for looking to build upon our research in the UK context. Finally, we must mention the team at Cambridge. Notably John Haslam was an early supporter of this project and Carrie Parkinson kept an eye on progress. Both were infinitely patient and understanding as various personal and professional complications delayed the arrival of the typescript.