

Understanding Student and Faculty Incivility in Higher Education

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Abstract

In recent years, faculty have seen an increase in latecomers, sleepers, cell phone addicts, and downright discourteous students in their courses. Classroom incivility is the disruptive behavior that occurs in higher education learning environments at an alarming rate. Incivility is often a reciprocal process; both students and faculty may contribute to a climate of disrespect for one another or the learning process. University students are increasingly diverse, unprepared for college-level work, juggling multiple life roles, and facing tremendous pressures to perform in large, impersonal classes. Faculty are often trained as researchers and struggle to effectively manage their classrooms. Millennial Generation students (and their parents) present a new set of challenges for faculty, including consumerist attitudes toward higher education and a failure to take responsibility for their own learning. Overall, uncivil behavior violates an unspoken or implied understanding of respect for the learning process and the academy. If not dealt with swiftly and effectively, it can have detrimental effects on teaching and learning. The purpose of this paper is to review academic literature about classroom disruptions, including the causes of incivility and strategies to manage negative student behaviors. In particular, young, female, low-status, and minority instructors face the greatest challenges. Recommendations for faculty include presenting engaging lectures at a moderate pace, respectfully interacting with students, gathering student input in the development of a classroom code of conduct, communicating clear expectations, and familiarizing oneself with classroom incivility research, as well as sharing this research with students.

Keywords: Student incivility, faculty incivility, classroom management.

On Wednesday morning at 10:00, half of the 100 Introductory Psychology students are in their seats. The instructor, an assistant professor in her early 30s, begins class on time. Fifteen students stagger into the lecture hall between 2 and 20 minutes late. One student sitting near the side wall is sleeping. The student next to him is reading the newspaper. Several students in two different groups are discussing their weekend plans, despite the instructor's impatient stares and pauses in the lecture. Ten students are text-messaging on their cell phones. Twenty students have laptops that are open to Facebook or email. Four students leave between 5 and 10 minutes early, while the professor is still speaking. Other students pack their backpacks so that they are ready to leave five minutes before the end of class. Then, noticing that their

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classmates have packed their belongings, the remaining students begin to do the same, creating quite a disruption as they noisily gather books, computers, and papers.

Disruptive, uncivil behavior in higher education takes many forms. In this paper, uncivil behavior will be defined and categorized. The likely causes of and contributors to incivility will also be discussed. Lastly, the paper will describe strategies that can be used to manage and prevent student and faculty incivility.

What is Incivility?

Incivility, as defined broadly by Berger (2000), refers to any “speech or action that is disrespectful or rude” (p. 446). Clark (2008) expands on this definition by noting that incivility indicates “disregard and insolence for others, causing an atmosphere of disrespect, conflict, and stress” (p. E38). In a seminal study conducted by the Center for Survey Research at Indiana University (2000), incivility was described as “contrary to the well-being of the classroom community, including behaviors that distract the instructor or other students, disrupt classroom learning, discourage the instructor from teaching, discourage other students from participating, [and] derail the instructor’s goals for the period...” (as cited in Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010). In the context of higher education, Clark proceeds to note that incivility “may be demonstrated by students or faculty and...violates the norms of mutual respect in the teaching-learning environment” (p. E38). Clark points out that when students and/or faculty fail to recognize and obey these norms of mutual respect, emotions such as fear, anger, hostility, and resentment may develop between the parties involved.

Incivility in higher educational contexts is commonly grouped into categories, although the categorical labels vary. For example, experts have grouped uncivil behaviors into *more serious* and *less serious* behaviors (e.g., Connelly, 2009). *Less serious* behaviors are simply annoyances to most instructors, although it is important to note that labeling the severity of such behaviors is a subjective task (Alberts, Hazen, & Theobald, 2010). In other words, a behavior that one instructor considers rude and disruptive (e.g., a student eating his or her lunch during class) may not bother – or even enter the awareness of – another instructor. Connelly (2009) provides several examples of *less serious* behaviors:

- sleeping in class
- disapproving groans or sighs
- acting bored or disinterested
- not attending class
- challenging the instructor’s knowledge or credibility
- dominating class discussion
- not taking notes during lecture

On the other hand, *more serious* student behaviors may involve expressions of hostility or threat toward the instructor. Alberts and colleagues (2010) claim that such threatening

behaviors have been on the rise in U.S. college settings since the 1990s. *More serious* behaviors include:

- stalking (in person or electronically)
- intimidation
- unjustified complaints to a professor's superiors (e.g., department chair, dean)
- unwarranted negative feedback on an instructor's teaching evaluation
- cheating or other academic integrity violations
- personal comments or verbal attacks against faculty or classmates

The *most* serious form of incivility, however, occurs when students threaten the instructor or classmates with violence. Clark (2008) notes that, while acts of violence on college campuses are rare, they do occur, and such incidents have been given substantial media attention in recent years. Notably, Connelly (2009) labels various classroom disruptions related to technology, such as sending inappropriate emails to the instructor, using one's cell phone during class, and using a computer for purposes unrelated to the class as *more serious* uncivil behaviors.

The specific uncivil behaviors that faculty and students consider disruptive often overlap with one another. In particular, both faculty and students are bothered by individuals who hold side conversations with classmates that are loud and disruptive (Feldmann, 2001; Alberts et al., 2010). Faculty and students are also annoyed by students who make sarcastic remarks or express boredom or displeasure in a noticeable way (e.g., groaning, sighing). Another behavior that faculty and students have cited as uncivil is making loud emotional outbursts during class.

Faculty tend to consider the following student behaviors uncivil:

- failing to participate or express interest in the course
- coming to class unprepared
- making demands and unreasonable requests toward the instructor (e.g., extended deadlines, make-up exams, extra credit opportunities)
- disrupting class by arriving late or leaving early

While classroom incivility is often discussed from a faculty perspective, research (e.g., Center for Survey Research, 2000) has shown that instructors engage in uncivil behavior that is noticed and reported by students. Specifically, students are bothered by faculty who engage in the following behaviors:

- presenting lectures at a fast pace with little to no student involvement or interaction
- acting in an aloof, distant manner toward students, or conveying to students that they are a burden
- surprising students with unannounced assessments or unanticipated exam questions
- arriving late to class or canceling class without prior notice

- permitting students to belittle or ridicule classmates

More recent research has examined student perceptions of incivility committed by other students. A study by Bjorklund and Rehling (2010) revealed that students consider the following uncivil behaviors to be the most serious:

- “continuing to talk after being asked to stop”
- “coming to class under the influence of alcohol or other drugs”
- “allowing a cell phone to ring”
- “conversing loudly with others” (p. 16)

In addition to severity, the study investigated the frequency of uncivil behaviors. Students reported that text-messaging and packing up belongings before the end of class occurred the most frequently, while “continuing to talk after being asked to stop” and “coming to class under the influence of alcohol or drugs” occurred the least frequently (p. 16). The researchers found a significant negative correlation between severity and frequency of uncivil behaviors, suggesting that respondents perceived the most serious classroom behaviors as taking place on a less frequent basis. In contrast, the disruptive behaviors that students reported as occurring most often were typically classified as moderately uncivil in terms of severity.

Clearly, as a result of uncivil behavior on the part of students and faculty, the learning environment may be seriously compromised. However, classroom incivility can lead to further adverse effects, in addition to a disruption or harming of the learning environment. According to Bjorklund and Rehling (2010), when incivility occurs, students’ affiliation with and respect for their institution may decrease. Respect for the instructor often diminishes as well, as students expect the professor to take control of the classroom and curtail disruptive, disrespectful behaviors. Instructors with little or no training in dealing with incivility may lose confidence in their abilities to teach effectively and manage their classrooms, potentially leading to a continuous cycle of uncivil student behaviors. Although colleges and universities recognize the occurrence of incivility on their campuses, administrators who are concerned about the institution’s public image may be reluctant to address the problem (Nordstrom, Bartels, & Bucy, 2009). Consequently, incivility continues on these campuses, as a prevailing attitude of acceptance and approval is conveyed to students.

Why Does Classroom Incivility Occur?

Classroom incivility has been the focus of increased attention in higher education circles, and is commonly labeled as a “growing problem” (Morrissette, 2001, p. 3). Many blame the deterioration of civility in society at large for the problem (e.g., Connelly, 2009). Nonetheless, experts still struggle to answer the following question: Has incivility always been a problem on university campuses, or has it become worse in recent years? According to Nilson (2003) and Nilson and Jackson (2004), many of the widespread uncivil behaviors seen in college classrooms today were virtually nonexistent through the mid-

1980s. Only in the last two decades has classroom incivility been recognized and labeled as a national concern in higher education.

Student-Related Causes and Contributors

According to Alberts et al. (2010), in the U.S., many students are not challenged academically before they enter college, and as a result, they possess inaccurate expectations and ideas about the nature of college-level work. Additionally, Alberts et al. claim that today's generation of college students – the Millennial Generation (i.e., those who graduated from high school in 2000 or later) – present unique challenges to university instructors, in part due to “permissive parents, overly lenient school environments, and a regular diet of instant gratification entertainment” (p. 440). Professors of the Millennial Generation often bemoan this cohort's short attention spans and affinity for multitasking, which makes engaging students throughout a 75-minute lecture a formidable task.

In addition, Nordstrom and colleagues (2009) present several interesting theories for why incivility on college campuses may be on the rise. Anecdotally, some faculty have noted that today's college students seem to possess a sense of entitlement. Specifically, Nordstrom et al. claim that some students believe they should put forth minimal effort in their courses. Rather than wanting to acquire knowledge for its own sake, an increasing number of students simply want to be entertained in class. Students may also feel that the instructor should reward them with high grades simply for class attendance. Faculty now view themselves as largely responsible for students' learning, while students themselves have become comparatively passive. In summary, characteristics of the Millennial Generation may make this particular group of students more prone to classroom incivility than previous generations.

Lastly, Kuhlenschmidt and Layne (1999) mention the following student-related factors as potential causes of classroom incivility:

- medication or other substances students may be taking
- illness (both physical and mental)
- fatigue
- stress (e.g., feeling overextended)
- emotional challenges (e.g., loss of a loved one, break-up of a relationship)
- emotional immaturity and poor problem-solving skills
- attention-seeking
- redirected aggression (i.e., when a student becomes upset with a professor due to an unrelated event that occurred outside the classroom)
- vision and hearing problems, or other disabilities

In regard to stress, college students are often juggling multiple roles. Some students may have full- or part-time jobs, in addition to taking a full courseload. Kuhlenschmidt and Layne claim, “As time pressures [for students] increase, civility is often lost” (p. 51).

Faculty-Related Causes and Contributors

Nilson and Jackson (2004) claim that a byproduct of the increase in university size and specialization is the fact that adjunct instructors and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) often teach courses, labs, and recitation sections, rather than full-time faculty. Certain demographic or personal characteristics of the instructor may foster an environment of incivility. For example, traits such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, and status within the university can affect the frequency of student incivility. Specifically, instructors who are female, young, non-White, and low status (e.g., adjuncts, lecturers, or GTAs) may experience more incivility issues than instructors who do not possess these qualities. Nilson (2003) notes that students tend to view the college professor in the traditional sense: as a mature, White male with a deep voice and commanding presence in the classroom (she refers to this as the “professorial stereotype” – p. 56). When students encounter an instructor who does not fit these characteristics, they may experience resistance, and hence, are more likely to act in an uncivil manner.

Alberts and colleagues (2010) conducted a study with early-career geography faculty based on the belief that younger, less experienced professors are more likely to experience incivility in the classroom than their veteran counterparts. The findings showed that almost all of the early-career instructors surveyed had experienced some form of incivility in their classrooms. However, the researchers also found that incivility was significantly more problematic for certain subgroups of respondents, especially women. Female faculty members reported incivilities at a considerably higher rate than male professors. Some female instructors reported that students were reluctant to accept them as authority figures. Other female faculty respondents noted that students treated them more casually and informally (e.g., calling them by their first names instead of “Dr.” or “Professor”), as compared to their male faculty colleagues.

Relatedly, one troubling finding of Alberts et al.’s work revealed that female faculty were significantly more likely than male faculty to experience the most serious form of classroom incivility. That is, female faculty members were more likely than their male counterparts to be the targets of openly hostile behavior. Instructors of color, as well as international faculty members, were also more likely to be targets of incivility, as compared to their White, American-born colleagues. Interestingly, although non-White and international instructors reported comparatively high rates of incivility, they were less likely than other instructors to confront disruptive behavior in their classrooms.

Irrational or unrealistic faculty beliefs may contribute to incivility. Faculty tend to believe that students should be attentive, respectful, and interested in the course material at all times. Further, some faculty assert that students should blindly accept their authority and expertise. As a result, faculty may behave in an uncivil manner toward students when these unrealistic expectations are violated. The tendency of faculty to behave uncivilly only adds fuel to the fire when it comes to student incivility.

On a related note, Berger (2000) notes that more uncivil behaviors occur in classrooms with faculty members who do not exhibit prosocial behavior (i.e., these faculty members

do not practice *immediacy*). Prosocial behaviors such as asking the class, “Do you understand?” (p. 446), as well as nonverbal indicators of immediacy (e.g., eye contact, leaning forward when a student asks a question) can promote civility in the learning environment. Teachers who do not possess these prosocial skills are often viewed as standoffish, distant, and callous in the eyes of students. When students suspect that the professor does not care about them, they are more likely to engage in incivility. Other uncivil faculty behaviors (e.g., delivering lectures that are too fast-paced or do not involve students, discouraging questions or comments, lacking approachability, showing a disregard for office hours outside of class) suggest to students that the faculty member is a deserving recipient of uncivil acts.

Institution-Related Causes and Contributors

Nilson (2003) takes a slightly different approach in examining the potential causes of incivility. She points not to characteristics of students themselves, but rather, a larger paradigm shift that has taken place within the academy over the past 20 years. First, Nilson argues, college campuses have become increasingly diverse, and that diversity brings a broad array of student attitudes and expectations about learning and the academic environment. Nilson and Jackson (2004) claim, “Many traditional-age students experienced success in high school without practicing the courtesies that college-level faculty expect” (p. 4). Therefore, evidence suggests that today’s college students are arriving at universities unprepared for the culture and environment of the academy. Nilson (2003) also cites the increasing specialization of faculty interests. Faculty who are primarily research-focused may lack the resources and/or interest to invest time and effort in teaching and classroom management techniques.

Nilson notes that universities have exacerbated classroom conduct and incivility problems in their own right. For example, universities only tend to sanction the most serious forms of uncivil behavior. Nilson and Jackson (2004) argue that universities have such a strong desire to retain their students that some uncivil behaviors may be overlooked. Further, universities are continuing to grow in size, and class sizes are becoming larger. The authors assert that incivility is more likely to occur in large enrollment classrooms, where a student may feel like a “number” rather than an individual learner. When students believe they can act anonymously, they are more apt to behave uncivilly. Overall, Nilson and Jackson characterize today’s university environment as “impersonal” and “indifferent” (p. 4).

Alberts et al.’s (2010) study conducted with early-career geography faculty examined whether characteristics of the institution may contribute to incivility. Indeed, the study found that instructors who taught at public institutions reported significantly higher rates of incivility (29.6% of respondents), as compared to faculty at private institutions (8.3% of respondents). The hostility form of classroom incivility was more frequently reported by instructors at research-oriented universities, as compared to other types of institutions. With regard to class size, findings showed – in support of Nilson and Jackson (2004) – that instructors of large lecture courses were more likely to experience classroom incivility than instructors of smaller courses and seminars. The authors reasoned that this find-

ing may have been observed because interaction between the instructor and students is greatly facilitated in classes with fewer learners.

Other Contributors to Incivility

Alternatively, Kuhlenschmidt and Layne (1999) assert that uncivil behavior in the classroom may have nothing to do with the instructor. The authors claim that, when students exhibit disruptive and rude behavior, instructors often personalize it. On the contrary, Kuhlenschmidt and Layne point out that behavior tends to be time-contingent. For example, disruptive talking between students commonly occurs near the end of class. Instructors can plan activities or administer assignments near the end of the period to combat this problem. Also, incivility may sometimes occur after graded exams or papers are handed back; therefore, instructors should reserve this until the final minutes of the class session. In addition, Kuhlenschmidt and Layne indicate that disruptive behavior often occurs because it has been rewarded previously. For instance, in high school, a student may have received attention from his or her teacher for acting in an uncivil way (e.g., talking in class, regardless of whether the student said something relevant to the discussion).

Moreover, students may not realize a behavior is disruptive to the professor or other students; not every uncivil behavior is performed with malicious intent. On the other side of the coin, sometimes students are bothered by uncivil behavior that the instructor does not observe or recognize (e.g., two students talking in the back of the room). If the behavior continues to occur without the instructor's awareness, and as a result, the instructor does not address the behavior, he or she loses some credibility as a manager of the classroom.

Consumerism

Berger (2000) and Nordstrom et al. (2009) discuss the issue of consumerism in higher education today, and how consumerist attitudes contribute to incivility. The underlying assumption behind the consumerism mentality is that students (or their parents) are paying for an education in order to obtain a final product: a degree. Consequently, Berger notes that students believe they "...are in the best position to know what they want and to decide whether the education they are getting is relevant and worthwhile" (p. 447). Students who subscribe to the consumerism mentality believe they are owed something for the tuition dollars they pay. As perceived consumers, students may pressure faculty to satisfy their demands and requests, and may blame the professor for an unsatisfactory grade. In short, Berger claims that consumerism "...promotes an anti-scholarly approach to higher education" (p. 447).

Some professors argue that today's college students in large part view their higher educational experience as a "means to an end" (ProfPost, 2009). College is regarded as a four-year experience that one must endure for the primary purpose of attaining a higher-paying job. In support of this assertion, Nordstrom et al. (2009) cite a 2006 report conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute. The report showed that 69% of students claimed they attended college in order to earn more money; in contrast, just 21% of

students in 1976 endorsed this as their primary reason for attending college. Empirical work by Nordstrom and colleagues showed that students who scored higher on a 16-item consumerism scale were more likely to report engaging in incivility, as compared to students with lower consumerism scores. Some students were more likely to hold consumerism beliefs than others, including males, those attending college part-time, and students who were not planning to attend graduate school.

Modern Technology

Many faculty note the contribution of technology to incivility in the modern-day university classroom. Some faculty believe that, because technology is so widely available to students, incivility in the classroom simply “looks different” than it did 20 years ago (Fowler, personal communication, February 3, 2011). Nworie and Haughton (2008) report that about 99% of undergraduates own their own PC. In addition, nearly all (99.9%) students use email, and 80% of students use some form of instant messaging daily. More than 90% of students use technology to assist with their learning assignments and activities (e.g., writing papers, developing presentations).

Nworie and Haughton claim that recent advances in technology have both greatly helped and harmed the practice of college teaching. In particular, the authors state that learning technologies have brought novelty, originality, and flexibility to higher educational settings – online and face-to-face. At the same time, the progression and development of technology has potentially led to several unanticipated consequences, including new forms of classroom incivility. In particular, students may be more likely to engage in incivility because electronic devices promote inattention and distraction. In particular, student cell phone usage in the classroom is an issue that many instructors have experienced. When a student’s cell phone rings, beeps, or vibrates, instructors may “lose their train of thought in that instant and the attention of other students is diverted” (p. 54). Further, if a student elects to take the call and stands up to leave the classroom, the attention of fellow learners is further disrupted. In larger courses, in which learners remain relatively hidden and anonymous, some students may actually take the cell phone call while remaining in their seats.

However, the use of cell phones goes beyond simply taking calls or sending text messages in class. Increasingly, students are using cell phones to assist with cheating and academic dishonesty. As most cell phones are equipped with camera technology, students are able to take pictures of exams or their neighbors’ answer sheets, as well as record moving images (e.g., class lectures). Podcasting has also gained popularity, and its uses have expanded. For example, podcasting was initially applied to higher educational settings for the purposes of supplementing class lectures. After listening to a lecture in class, students would be able to download a podcast and review the lecture for clarification and reinforcement of key points on their own time. However, more recently, several unintended uses of podcasts have emerged. According to Nworie and Haughton, “students are seeing the technology as a substitute for class attendance” (p. 55), thereby contributing to various forms of incivility. Additionally, the uncivil use of technology in the classroom has the potential to impact the student-teacher relationship and interaction pat-

terns (i.e., by forming a barrier between instructor and student), and raises the cost of classroom technology for colleges and universities.

Nworie and Haughton point out that the use of technology in higher education also raises questions regarding the ownership of intellectual property. That is, instructors may not be “able to predict and/or control where [course] content will end up and how it will be used” (p. 55). Online teaching and learning environments have illuminated various new possibilities with regard to incivility. If students are taking an online course, they may also be taking assessments online, and therefore, cheating is considerably easier than in a face-to-face course. The Internet has made it possible for students in both online and face-to-face courses to download papers and assignments; thus, the potential for plagiarism and other academic integrity violations is greatly enhanced.

How Do Instructors Deal with Classroom Disruptions?

In their study of early-career geography faculty, Alberts et al. (2010) found that 86.2% of respondents used “friendly, verbal reminders” (p. 450) to deal with classroom incivilities once they had occurred. Almost three-fourths of instructors had spoken privately with the offending student outside of class. In general, respondents rated these strategies as quite effective in managing classroom disruptions. On the other hand, about 70% of instructors had attempted to avoid dealing with student incivility by including classroom behavior-related policies in their syllabi. The authors found that, among this particular sample of faculty respondents, the more personal the response from the instructor (e.g., speaking with the offending student in private), the more effective the strategy was in the management of incivility.

One especially effective strategy endorsed by several survey respondents was learning students’ names – even in large enrollment courses. Not only should instructors learn students’ names, but respondents also noted that faculty should call on students frequently during class. This sends the message that participation and active involvement in class are important and expected. Further, as previously noted, students are more likely to behave in an uncivil fashion when they feel like anonymous members of a large, impersonal course, rather than crucial components of a learning community.

Another (potentially less effective) strategy endorsed by some instructors in dealing with student incivility was shaming or embarrassment. Shaming was described as a manner in which discipline and order in the classroom could be maintained. In a few cases, shaming was even described as “confrontational” and instructors actually reported “yelling” at students (p. 452). Interestingly, however, all of the faculty members in the present study who reported using shaming were male. Female instructors seemed more hesitant about using such punitive approaches. Some respondents pointed out the importance of one’s teaching evaluations, particularly for pre-tenure faculty. In this way, using a strong disciplinarian approach to address incivility in the classroom could backfire for some instructors.

How Can We Prevent Incivility in Higher Education?

In Alberts et al.'s study, some respondents suggested that the most effective way to deal with incivility in the classroom was to take a proactive, preventive approach. To that end, incivility experts have suggested multiple ways to prevent uncivil behavior in the classroom. First, Nilson and Jackson (2004), as well as Morrissette (2001), recommend that instructors include classroom conduct policies in their syllabi. Specifically, instructors should outline in a written document "...what kinds of behaviors will be considered inappropriate and deserving of sanctions, as well as why (e.g., that these behaviors annoy other students in the class as well as the instructor)" (Morrissette, 2001, p. 4). Instructors should describe grading policies in regard to tardiness, attendance, participation, missed or late assignments, and make-up exams (Nilson, 2003). Faculty members might consider listing their policies regarding sleeping, inattention, side conversations, cell phone usage, and showing disrespect toward the instructor or other students.

Another approach instructors can take is to focus on desired behaviors, rather than undesired behaviors. For example, instead of writing, "Please refrain from holding side conversations during class with your neighbor; it is very distracting to your classmates, as well as the instructor," faculty members may write, "Please show respect toward the instructor and your fellow students by listening attentively during class discussion." Regardless of whether desired or undesired behaviors are emphasized, Morrissette (2001) advises that instructors clearly delineate their expectations and policies in the syllabus, noting that students can become hostile and resentful when syllabi are ambiguously written.

With regard to technology, Nworie and Haughton (2008) advise instructors to include statements in their syllabi regarding the improper use of electronic devices in the classroom. These policies should include warnings about cheating, as well as the ways in which technology may be used appropriately. Instructors' policies should complement and reference the university's policy. Nworie and Haughton further recommend that orientation sessions for both students and faculty should address acceptable and unacceptable uses and purposes of technology for teaching and learning.

Bjorklund and Rehling (2010), in their study of student perceptions of classroom disruptions, assert that instructors should share with students the research on incivility. In particular, research on student views of classroom incivility should be highlighted. The authors write, "...the knowledge that one's fellow students, as well as the professor, are likely to view particular behaviors negatively can educate students in community expectations and bring considerable pressure to discourage uncivil behavior" (p. 17). In an associated vein, both Alberts and colleagues (2010) and Nordstrom and colleagues (2009) point out the role that other students can play in stopping or preventing incivility. Nordstrom et al. assert that subjective norms can work to an instructor's advantage. If a professor communicates behavioral standards to his or her students, students' *attitudes* about appropriate classroom behavior – and thus, the students' behavior itself – will change.

One way for faculty to enforce behavioral standards, aside from including a civility policy in the syllabus, is to have a discussion with students during the first few class periods about appropriate classroom conduct. Furthermore, faculty can solicit student assistance and input into this issue by developing a classroom code of conduct; such a project would represent a joint effort between learners and the instructor. A behavior contract is effective because of the “peer pressure” effect it exerts on students. According to Nordstrom et al., even if students are unconcerned with whether the instructor is disturbed by their uncivil behavior, chances are they *will* care about their classmates’ opinions and respect the wishes of their fellow learners. If their classmates view particular behaviors as annoying or disruptive, students will be less likely to engage in them.

In order to develop a class code of conduct, the professor holds a discussion with students early in the semester about uncivil behaviors they frequently see other students performing. The instructor takes notes on the discussion, then compiles a document that all students will review and sign at the next class session. By signing the code of conduct, students agree not to engage in the behaviors outlined in the document. Nilson and Jackson (2004) find that students who develop such a code end up patrolling their own behavior to a large extent.

Moreover, instructors should consistently enforce such policies and address them immediately when they are violated. Often times, instructors ignore uncivil behavior, hoping that it will go away. Unfortunately, the uncivil behavior usually does *not* vanish on its own, and in fact, it may even become worse. If a faculty member fails to acknowledge classroom incivility, students may interpret the faculty member’s silence as assent. Furthermore, Morrissette (2001) states that, when faculty fail to respond to incidents of student incivility, “...students can begin to capitalize on their new sense of power within the classroom and attempt to intimidate faculty” (p. 4).

According to Morrissette, faculty can exercise certain communication skills, such as active listening, to deal with disruptive and problematic students. Specifically, Morrissette offers the following recommendations:

- use civil language
- maintain inclusive attitudes
- teach students how to disagree with one another (and the instructor)
- listen to students in a respectful manner
- model respectful and empathetic behaviors

Students can often learn which behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate simply by observing faculty role models. Morrissette advocates that faculty speak *with* students, instead of speaking *at* them. Faculty who exercise good listening and interpersonal skills can decrease the chances of encountering uncivil behavior from students in their classrooms.

Summary and Conclusion

Incivility in higher education undoubtedly takes many forms. What exactly constitutes uncivil behavior depends on both the instructor's perception of the behavior and whether it is disruptive to the learning environment. Incivility experts (e.g., Nilson, 2003) make the case that uncivil behavior in the classroom has been an increasing problem over the last two decades. In recent years, advances in technology and its availability to students (e.g., cell phones, laptops) have arguably fueled the increase in classroom incivility (Braden & Smith, 2006; Nworie & Haughton, 2008). Such devices often serve as distractions to the students operating them, and negatively affect the learning processes of other students. Moreover, the consumerism mentality that many modern college students and their families seem to possess has likely contributed to the rise in incivility. Some students believe they are entitled to a degree because of the tuition they pay; therefore, they reserve the right to challenge and defy the authority of their professors, especially with regard to grades.

Additionally, research (e.g., Clark, 2008) has shown that faculty contribute to a climate of incivility just as much as students do. In fact, students are more likely to display uncivil behavior in courses taught by faculty members who have demonstrated some form of incivility toward students. Further, faculty who possess certain characteristics that do not match the traditional professoriate stereotype may be particularly vulnerable to incivility in their classrooms (e.g., instructors who are young, female, non-White, or of international descent). However, various prevention strategies have been put forth to combat classroom incivility. In particular, a student-generated code of conduct has been employed with success in an effort to target incivility. In sum, the rise in classroom incivility has many potential causes. With careful management and planning, techniques can be employed to reduce disruptive behavior and promote an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect. Colleges and universities should continue to acknowledge incivility within their institutions, and should continue to seek and develop innovative, effective ways to target the ever-growing problem.

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