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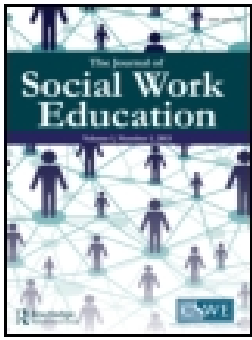
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## Faculty-to-Faculty Incivility in Social Work Education

Jennifer McClendon, Shannon R. Lane, and Theresa D. Flowers

### ABSTRACT

This study explores faculty-to-faculty incivility in schools of social work, which has implications for the implicit curriculum and modeling professional values. A total of 243 social work faculty participated in the study, and faculty-to-faculty incivility was perceived as a moderate to serious problem. Physical threats were considered the most uncivil behavior, and failing to perform one's share of the workload was the most frequently experienced uncivil behavior. Contributing factors to faculty-to-faculty incivility included a sense of entitlement and superiority and unclear roles and expectations. Fear of retaliation and a lack of administrative support were cited as the top reasons for choosing not to address incivility. Structural causes of incivility and the dynamics affecting women and minority faculty are discussed.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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Conversations about bullying and uncivil behavior in academia have been common in higher education news in recent years, from the United States to Australia. These reports point to a continuum of concerning behavior in higher education, from mild incivility to behaviors that include bullying and assault. Some argue the academic workplace may be particularly at risk because of the unwritten rules of gaining tenure and promotion, unmanageable workloads, and unclear roles and responsibilities (Cleary, Walter, Horsfall, & Jackson, 2013).

Nationally, growing concerns over the lack of civility in politics and leadership are discussed in the media and in communities. A national poll from November 2018 found that nearly 80% of Americans fear that political incivility in the United States will lead to violence (Marist Poll, 2018). Raising similar concerns on a smaller scale, Clark (2009) argues that even mild incivility in academia if left unchecked may result in a workplace desensitized to incidents of blatant discrimination, abuse, and assault.

Issues of faculty-to-faculty incivility are particularly concerning for social work education programs, where students are trained to become leaders in civil and empathetic discourse. The curricula (implicit and explicit) are rooted in the profession's core values, among which are dignity and the worth of the person, integrity, and the importance of human relationships (Ausbrooks, Jones, & Tijerina, 2011). Acknowledging and addressing faculty-to-faculty incivility in schools of social work has implications for how well social work educators are socializing students to the profession and modeling professional values. Potential faculty burnout and turnover caused by incivility can threaten the quality of delivery of the curriculum in a number of ways.

### Literature review

The terms used to describe uncivil behavior in the workplace are varied. These behaviors fall on a continuum of severity. In colleges and universities, bullying among faculty is often in the form of chastisement, public humiliation, and belittlement (Goldberg, Beitz, Wieland, & Levine, 2013; Twale & DeLuca, 2008). Bullying is most severe when there is a real or perceived power imbalance in which the bully has power or influence over the victim (Longo & Sherman, 2007; Twale & DeLuca, 2008).

Incivility, on the other hand, is less overt and does not require a power dynamic. Incivility involves a lack of regard for others, characterized by insensitivity and negative interpersonal social exchanges (Porath, Gerbasi, & Schorch, 2015). Andersson and Pearson (1999) suggest that although incivility always violates norms of mutual respect, it is not always obvious because the behaviors can be low intensity, and the intent to do harm can be ambiguous. Heinrich (2007) described incivility as times when respondents may have felt “disrespected, devalued, or dismissed” (p. 34). We have chosen to use the term *incivility* in this article because it applies to a wider range of behaviors and includes behaviors whose appropriateness lacks genuine agreement in the academic workplace.

### **Workplace incivility**

Workplace incivility appears to be a widespread concern. Estimates suggest that the majority of employees report encountering workplace incivility (Cortina, 2008), with some studies finding that as many as 98% of respondents reported experiencing incivility at work (Porath & Pearson, 2013). An examination of working conditions in higher education found that only 5% of 350 surveyed faculty members and administrators perceived faculty working well in a collaborative manner (Heinrich, 2006).

The existing literature suggests that rates of academic incivility and bullying among faculty and staff range from 32% to 62% in the United States (Cassell, 2011; Fox, 2010; Hollis, 2012; Keashly & Neuman, 2008; McKay, Arnold, Fratzl, & Thomas, 2008), with generally higher numbers among faculty compared to staff (e.g. McKay et al., 2008). When bullying does occur, it tends to be long standing rather than isolated incidents (McKay et al., 2008), with long standing defined as 3 years or more. Cassell’s (2011) review suggests that faculty from caring and helping professions (i.e., nursing and allied health professions) were disproportionately more likely to report bullying. No research to date explains why the rates would be higher for helping professions than in other disciplines.

Faculty-to-faculty incivility, the terminology used by Clark, Olender, Kenski, and Cardoni (2013) in their study of nursing faculty, refers to behavior intended to cause physical or psychological harm or distress to a colleague or subordinate. Unlike bullying, incivility can occur laterally as a power differential between the target and the perpetrator is not implied. In Clark’s (2013) survey of nursing faculty, respondents indicated that faculty incivility was indicated by failing to perform one’s share of the workload, being distracted by technology during meetings, engaging in gossip, using put-downs, challenging another’s knowledge or expertise, and frequent interruptions during meetings and conversations (Clark, 2013).

### **Consequences of incivility**

Incivility in the workplace has consequences for employees because it affects health, self-esteem, and mental well-being. Incivility also has consequences for academic institutions as it affects faculty retention and productivity (Raskauskas & Skrabec, 2011). In the context of an unhealthy organizational climate, workplace incivility is linked to declining job satisfaction, physical health, and psychological well-being (Miner, Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Brady, 2012). A study examining workplace bullying more broadly found that 38% of bullied employees resigned for health reasons, and 44% were ultimately terminated (Namie & Namie, 2009). As reported earlier, normalization of mild incivility may result in a workplace culture desensitized to incidents of blatant discrimination, abuse, and assault (Clark, 2009).

Raskauskas and Skrabec (2011) argue that workplace incivility and bullying can lead to occupational stress and burnout, which in turn have an impact on two of the fundamental tasks of academic faculty: the quality and quantity of scholarly work is reduced (McKay et al., 2008), and faculty relations with students are negatively affected (Blase & Blase, 2002). Raskauskas and Skrabec (2011) argue that stress and burnout manifest themselves as feelings of emotional exhaustion, fewer feelings of accomplishment or job satisfaction, and the depersonalization of students. These symptoms of burnout have a direct and negative impact on interpersonal relationships with colleagues and students.

## Social work incivility

There is ample evidence that faculty-to-faculty incivility is commonplace and frequently unaddressed throughout academia, and faculty in the helping professions may be particularly at risk (Cassell, 2011). An exploratory survey of female social work faculty found that social work faculty indeed struggle with incivility (Brocksen, 2018). The survey results suggest that for nearly one in five female social work faculty members, incivility and bullying in the workplace affects their physical and emotional well-being on a daily or weekly basis (Brocksen, 2018). Emerging research on workplace bullying suggests that social workers are also experiencing incivility in the field at higher than average rates (Cassie & Crank, 2018).

Incivility also has specific relevance to social work education in connection to accreditation standards. The Council on Social Work Education (2015) *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* have required program administrators who desire to attain or reaffirm their accreditation status to assess and reflect on their implicit curricula. As defined by the CSWE,

The implicit curriculum refers to the learning environment in which the explicit curriculum is presented... . The implicit curriculum is as important as the explicit curriculum in shaping the professional character and competence of the program's graduates. Heightened awareness of the importance of the implicit curriculum promotes an educational culture that is congruent with the values of the profession and the mission, goals, and context of the program. (p. 14)

This description of the implicit curriculum suggests that social work education should concern itself with not only content but also the context in which social work education takes place. Bogo and Wayne (2013) elaborate about the ways this should be used to reflect on faculty behavior. They start with the significance of the value of academic freedom to an institution, which for them means "all members of the community may question, comment on, and critique any relevant issue" (p. 4). They suggest that this freedom of expression should, as part of the implicit curriculum, "exist within an environment of civil discourse, respect for others' opinions, and the ability to handle disagreement and conflicting opinions in a civil manner" (p. 4) and tie these to professional boundaries, behavior, and identity. Bogo and Wayne emphasize that "powerful messages often are taught in ways that are not explicit, both inside and outside formal structures and that education for and the practice of self-awareness is a critical component in all social work educational venues" (p. 4).

Incivility may also affect the implicit curriculum if it is unchecked in social work classrooms. According to Ausbrooks et al. (2011),

Acknowledging problems of classroom incivility in social work education poses the risk of considering how well social work educators are socializing students to the profession as well as raising questions about the appropriateness of students relative to professional identity and fit. (pp. 255–256)

Research on incivility in social work education offers the opportunity to reflect on behaviors that are key to practicing our profession and to look at how our contexts affect our teaching, scholarship, and community engagement. It also provides us with an opportunity to consider how as individuals and in community we shape and react to the organizational cultures in our departments and institutions and how our identities shape our interactions with colleagues and others.

## Research questions

To improve the knowledge of faculty-to-faculty incivility in social work education and address the gaps in knowledge discussed here, the following research questions were proposed:

- (1) To what extent is faculty-to-faculty incivility perceived to be a problem in social work education?

- (2) Which faculty-to-faculty behaviors are perceived to be most uncivil?
- (3) What is the perceived frequency of uncivil faculty-to-faculty behaviors?
- (4) What factors contribute to faculty-to-faculty incivility?
- (5) What factors keep faculty from addressing faculty-to-faculty incivility?

## Methods

### Measurement

The instrument used for the current study is the Faculty-to-Faculty Incivility Survey developed by Clark for use among educators in the field of nursing (Clark et al., 2013). The instrument includes three sections, the first of which gathers demographic data. The second includes quantitative items and scales regarding faculty experiences with incivility and perceptions of effective ways to address the problem. This section includes 28 behaviors that may be considered uncivil. For each behavior, participants are asked first whether they consider that behavior to be uncivil on a Likert-type scale (1 = *always*, 2 = *usually*, 3 = *sometimes*, and 4 = *never*), and then how often they have experienced the behavior in the past 12 months, also on a Likert-type scale (1 = *often*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *rarely*, and 4 = *never*). This section also asks the extent to which participants perceive incivility to be a problem, the factors they see as contributing to incivility, and reasons they may avoid addressing the incivility. In the third section, open-ended questions provide participants with an opportunity to tell their own stories about incivility and offer suggestions to effectively address incivility. For detailed information about the survey's development, see Clark et al. (2013).

The survey was tested by Clark (Clark et al., 2013) for construct validity using factor analysis. Three factors emerged: a set of actions that demonstrated hostility toward individuals, actions that showed self-serving behaviors, and actions that demonstrated hostility toward the work environment. Interitem reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, which resulted in a score of 0.965.

### Data collection procedures

Clark granted us permission to use the Faculty-to-Faculty Incivility Survey. Institutional review boards at our two institutions reviewed and approved the study design. The research team created and tested the survey instrument using the online survey development software SurveyMonkey and provided participants with a link to SurveyMonkey. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were collected without identifying data. The link sent to participants included a consent form explaining research participants' rights and noted that completion of the survey was considered consent to participate in the study. Participants could end their participation at any time.

The target population for this survey included all faculty members at social work programs accredited by the CSWE. The 2017 CSWE Annual Survey of Social Work Programs reported a total of 13,340 social work faculty at accredited programs across the country, including 5,461 full-time and 7,879 part-time faculty (CSWE, 2018). The deans and directors of all CSWE-accredited schools and departments of social work were contacted individually by e-mail in January 2017 and asked to pass the survey link to their faculty. Reminders were sent out a few weeks later. A total of 133 responses were received through this method. To increase the number of participants, the link was sent again in August 2017 to social work education electronic mailing lists, including those for baccalaureate programs ([bpd-l@list.iupui.edu](mailto:bpd-l@list.iupui.edu)), masters programs ([msw-ed-l@list.iupui.edu](mailto:msw-ed-l@list.iupui.edu)), and policy faculty ([sw-policy-listserv@groups.pacificu.edu](mailto:sw-policy-listserv@groups.pacificu.edu)). A total of 243 surveys were completed.

Survey results were downloaded from SurveyMonkey and transferred to IBM SPSS Statistics (Version No. 24.0), where they were cleaned and analyzed.

### Sample

Although the number of respondents is small in comparison to the total number of social work faculty, a number of methods can be used to compare those who responded with the known

characteristics of the sampling frame. As reported in Table 1, the sample for this study was similar in most ways to the demographics of full-time social work faculty nationally as reported to the CSWE. Our respondents were primarily female ( $n = 184$ , 76%), similar to CSWE full-time faculty (72%). One difference is that this sample was more likely to identify as White (89%) than the CSWE (2018) full-time faculty as a whole (64%), primarily because those who identify as African American or Black were underrepresented in this study at 7%. Most faculty held the rank of professor (22%), associate professor (28%), or assistant professor (25%). Many (23%) also held administrative roles as program coordinator, director, or dean. Respondents were a relatively experienced group of faculty, with a mean number of years teaching of 14.7 ( $SD = 8.798$ ), ranging from less than 1 year teaching to 42 years teaching. The vast majority (98%) reside in the United States.

To protect the anonymity of respondents discussing sensitive topics, particularly for those in vulnerable positions such as contingent or tenure-track faculty, limited information about the participants' programs was collected. The primary program in which sample members taught was the master's level (44%,  $n = 105$ ), followed closely by the bachelor's level (40%,  $n = 96$ ). Thirty-seven (16%) were primarily teaching at the doctoral level. This compares with the overall assignments of full-time faculty members collected by the CSWE (2018), which shows that of 5,697 full-time faculty members, 54% ( $n = 3,103$ ) were principally assigned to master's-level programs, 35% ( $n = 1,981$ ) were principally assigned to bachelor's-level programs, and 11% ( $n = 613$ ) were principally assigned to doctoral-level programs. Compared to these totals, our sample is slightly overrepresentative of bachelor's-level faculty and slightly underrepresentative of master's-level faculty.

**Table 1.** Participant demographics

Demographic variables	Study sample		CSWE full-time faculty
	%	n	%
Gender			
Female	75.7	184	71.7
Male	24.3	59	27.9
Age group			
Under 35 yrs	5.1	14	5.9
35-44	15.8	43	23.0
45-54	26.7	73	25.0
55-64	25.3	69	24.0
65 or older	14.7	40	12.8
unknown	12.5	34	9.4
Racial/ethnic identification			
White (non-Hispanic)	89	209	64.1
African-American/other Black	7	17	16.3
Latino/Hispanic	3	6	6.5
American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Native	1	3	1.1
Asian	3	6	7.1
Other	5	11	3.9
Multiple race/ethnicity	7	17	1.0
Academic Rank			
Professor	22	54	17.8
Associate Professor	28	69	23.7
Assistant Professor	25	61	26.4
Instructor	7	16	6.8
Emeritus	2	6	0.7
Adjunct	6	15	2.3
Lecturer			6.2
Clinical Appointment			7.9
Field Director/ Coordinator	6	15	5.2
Program Coordinator/ Administrator	9	22	
Department chair/Director/ Dean	33	114	
Other	4	9	3.0

## Results

To explore construct validity, we performed a factor analysis on the data using principal components extraction and varimax rotation ( $n = 215$ ). The Kaiser-Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy, which examines sample sufficiency (Kaiser, 1974), had a value of .923, allowing analysis to proceed. Bartlett's test of sphericity, testing whether the structure of the data is significantly different from random (Nagao, 1973), confirmed that the data are suitable for factor analysis ( $p < .001$ ). Four factors were extracted with Eigenvalues higher than 1.0, which together explained 61% of variance, with the bulk of the variance explained by the first factor. Factor 1 (disrespectful and rude behavior) explained 42.60% of the variance, Factor 2 (directly aggressive and abusive behavior) was 10.03%, Factor 3 (othering or excluding behavior) was 5.05%, and Factor 4 (behaviors that undermine teamwork and collegiality) explained 4.27%. These factors differed somewhat from Clark et al.'s (2013) analysis of their survey, which found three factors among the items representing workplace incivility for nursing faculty: hostility toward individuals, self-serving behaviors, and hostility toward the work environment. The Faculty-to-Faculty Incivility Survey was found to be highly reliable among social work respondents (56 items,  $\alpha = .954$ ), at a level very similar to the level of .965 found in previous research (Clark et al., 2013).

### *Perceptions of faculty-to-faculty incivility in social work education*

Respondents were asked whether they perceived their workplace as civil or uncivil. On a scale of 0 (absence of civility in the workplace) to 100 (a completely civil workplace), the mean score was 57.84, 95% CI [53.7, 61.9],  $SD = 30.27$ . The mean score for women was 59.40, 95% CI [54.5, 63.8],  $SD = 29.16$ , and for respondents of color, it was 56.27, 95% CI [44.4, 68.1],  $SD = 29.36$ . Respondents were divided into lower rank (adjunct, instructor, assistant level) and higher rank (associate, full, and emeritus, not including coordinators, chairs, deans, or directors). Lower rank respondents ( $n = 69$ ) had a mean score of 53.28, 95% CI [46.4, 60.2],  $SD = 28.7$ , whereas higher rank respondents ( $n = 79$ ) reported a mean score of 58.14. Administrators ( $n = 61$ ) reported a mean score of 60.92, 95% CI [52.4, 69.4],  $SD = 33.15$ , and teaching and research faculty ( $n = 148$ ) reported a mean score of 55.87, 95% CI [51.1, 60.6],  $SD = 29.08$ . Using independent samples  $t$ -tests, the mean differences were not statistically significant; for gender,  $t(210) = -1.06$ ,  $p = .29$ ; for White and non-White,  $t(211) = -0.28$ ,  $p = .78$ ; for low and high rank,  $t(146) = -1.01$ ,  $p = .31$ ; for administration versus faculty,  $t(207) = -1.09$ ,  $p = .27$ .

Respondents who teach primarily at the BSW-level ( $n = 84$ ) reported a mean workplace civility score of 57.75, 95% CI [51.2, 64.3],  $SD = 30.34$ ; MSW-level respondents ( $n = 92$ ) reported a mean workplace civility score of 59.64, 95% CI [54.0, 66.5],  $SD = 30.50$ , and those working primarily at the doctoral level ( $n = 33$ ) reported a mean workplace civility score of 53.12, 95% CI [42.5, 63.7],  $SD = 29.82$ . A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to compare the effect of program level on perceptions of workplace incivility. The respondent's primary program level (BSW, MSW, or PhD) had no significant effect on ratings of workplace civility,  $F(2, 206) = 0.56$ ,  $p = .57$ .

Respondents were asked whether they perceived incivility as a problem in the workplace. Of those who felt they could give an answer ( $n = 212$ ), 33% ( $n = 70$ ) viewed it as a serious problem, 26% ( $n = 55$ ) as a moderate problem, 30% ( $n = 64$ ) as a mild problem, and 11% ( $n = 23$ ) as no problem at all. There was a statistically significant relationship between perception of incivility as a problem and an administrative issue versus their teaching and research role,  $X^2(3, N = 207) = 10.43$ ,  $p = .01$ , and between perceptions of incivility and program level,  $X^2(6, N = 207) = 17.9$ ,  $p = .01$ . Cramer's  $V$  values for these analyses are .25 and .22, respectively, indicating a moderate effect size. Respondents in administrative roles (field and program coordinators, chairs, directors, and deans) were more likely to say that incivility was not a problem at all or was a mild problem when compared to nonadministrative faculty at all levels. Likewise, respondents who work primarily in BSW programs were more likely to say that incivility was not a problem at all or was a mild problem when compared to



respondents who work primarily at the MSW and PhD levels. Chi-square tests indicate no significant relationship between perception of incivility as a problem and race,  $X^2(3, N = 212) = 1.31, p = .72$ ; gender,  $X^2(3, N = 211) = 0.62, p = .89$ ; or faculty rank,  $X^2(3, N = 146) = 1.10, p = .77$ .

### Perceived incivility of specific behaviors

Respondents were asked whether items on a list of 28 behaviors were uncivil (1 = *always*, 2 = *usually*, 3 = *sometimes*, to 4 = *never*). The majority of respondents rated the majority of behaviors always or usually uncivil (see Table 2). Physical threats showed almost universal (98%) agreement as always uncivil (with one respondent saying physical threats were usually uncivil, and four respondents saying physical threats were never uncivil). Similarly, 96% believed that racial, ethnic, sexual, gender, or religious slurs were always uncivil, 94% said personal attacks or threatening comments were always uncivil, and 91% reported name calling was always uncivil. The bulk of the behaviors that were seen as most uncivil were in the directly aggressive and abusive category.

A sum score was computed for the perceived incivility of all 28 listed behaviors for each respondent. An independent samples *t*-test found a significant relationship between gender and the total perceived incivility score,  $t(212) = -2.43, p = .02$ , with a small to moderate effect size (Cohen's  $d = .36$ ). Men ( $N = 52$ ) had an average total perceived incivility score of 49.52, 95% CI [45.2, 53.8],  $SD = 15.52$ , compared to women ( $N = 162$ ), whose average total perceived incivility score was 44.47, 95% CI [42.6, 46.6],  $SD = 12.09$ , suggesting that men were less certain these behaviors were uncivil. Independent samples *t*-tests did not find a significant relationship between race and the perceived incivility of behaviors score or between administrative role and the perceived incivility of behaviors score, with  $p$  values of 0.082,  $t(213) = -.76$  and 0.053  $t(208) = 0.48$ , respectively. There were no significant differences in the overall perceived incivility of the list behaviors between lower rank (instructor, assistant professor) and higher rank (associate, full, and emeriti) teaching and research faculty,  $t(212) = .11, p = .70$ . A one-way

**Table 2.** Assessment of uncivil behaviors

Behavior as indicator of incivility (1=Always, 2=Usually, 3=Sometimes, 4=Never)	Respondents indicating Always or Usually	
	n	%
Make physical threats (toward you or a co-worker)	230	98
Make racial, ethnic, sexual, gender, or religious slurs about anyone	229	96
Make rude remarks, put-downs, or name-calling (when done to you or a co-worker)	231	98
Abuse position or authority (e.g. make unreasonable or unfair demands, assign inequitable workload)	229	97
Make personal attacks or threatening comments (verbal comments, e-mail, telephone, etc. toward you or a co-worker)	228	97
Use gossip or rumors to turn others against you or a co-worker	222	95
Set someone (you or a co-worker) up to fail alone or in concert with others	222	95
Consistently fail to perform his or her share of the workload	222	95
Make rude nonverbal behaviors or gestures (toward you or a co-worker)	214	92
Circulate private emails, without knowledge or permission (to discredit you or a co-worker)	214	91
Take credit for work/contributions of others (yours or a co-worker)	214	91
Send inappropriate e-mails to other faculty	209	90
Refuse to listen or openly communicate on work related issues	206	88
Consistently demonstrate an "entitled" or "narcissistic attitude" toward you or a co-worker	205	87
Breach a confidence (share personal information about you or a co-worker made in confidence)	198	85
Consistently interrupt a coworker	199	85
Use the "silent treatment" against you or a co-worker	197	84
Invoke personal religious or political values or beliefs to impose a specific outcome	189	80
Circumvent the normal grievance process (e.g. going above someone's head or failing to follow procedures to resolve conflict)	187	80

analysis of variance found no significant relationship between perceived incivility of behaviors and program level,  $F(2, 208) = 0.884, p = .415$ .

### Perceived frequency of potentially uncivil behaviors

Respondents were next asked how frequently they had experienced or witnessed the described behaviors within the past 12 months (1 = *often*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *rarely* to 4 = *never*). The behaviors that had been experienced the most frequently included others failing to carry their load, meeting behind closed doors, creating friction to prevent changes, refusing to communicate on work-related issues, demonstrating entitled behavior, and interrupting. The least frequently reported behaviors were those that were most hostile toward individuals, such as physical threats, slurs, and rude gestures. See Table 3 for behaviors and their reported frequency.

A sum score was computed for the reported frequency of all 28 listed behaviors by respondent. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to compare the effect of respondent program level on the perceived frequency of these behaviors among respondents teaching primarily in BSW, MSW, and PhD programs. There was a significant relationship between program level and the frequency of experiencing the listed behaviors,  $F(2, 197) = 9.46, p = .000, \eta^2 = .09$ . Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean score for respondents who teach primarily in BSW programs,  $M = 84.75, 95\% \text{ CI } [80.3, 89.3], SD = 19.83$ , was significantly different from for those teaching primarily in MSW programs,  $M = 71.54, 95\% \text{ CI } [66.8, 76.2], SD = 22.59$ , and PhD programs, ( $M = 71.09, 95\% \text{ CI } [64.1, 78.1], SD = 19.53$ ). There was no significant difference in the average frequency of experiencing listed behaviors between those teaching primarily in the MSW and PhD levels.

A one-way analysis of variance was also conducted to compare the effect of faculty rank and role on the overall frequency of experiencing behaviors on the list. The four respondent categories were (a) adjuncts, instructors, and assistant professors; (b) associate, full, and professors emeriti; (c) field and program coordinators; and (d) chairs, directors, and deans. Respondents' rank and role had no significant effect on frequency of potentially uncivil behaviors at the  $p < .05$  level,  $F(3, 196) = 1.17, p = .323$ . Independent samples  $t$ -tests found no significant relationship between race,  $t(202) = 1.0, p = .30$ , or gender,  $t(201) = -.69, p = .49$ , on the overall frequency of experiencing behaviors on the list.

### Factors contributing to incivility

More than half the respondents indicated that uncivil behavior in academic departments of social work was because of a sense of entitlement and superiority (58.6%). This was the most commonly

**Table 3.** Behaviors reported to have occurred often or sometimes within the past 12 months.

Behavior Experienced or Witnessed <sup>a</sup>	Respondents Indicating Often or Sometimes	
	<i>n</i>	%
Consistently fail to perform his or her share of the workload	143	(65)
Engage in secretive meetings behind closed doors	134	(62)
Resist or create friction to prevent changes from occurring in the workplace	132	(61)
Refuse to listen or openly communicate on work-related issues	122	(56)
Consistently demonstrate an entitled or narcissistic attitude toward you or a coworker	120	(55)
Consistently interrupt a coworker	116	(53)
Abuse position or authority (e.g., make unreasonable or unfair demands, assign inequitable workloads)	115	(53)
Be inattentive or cause distractions during meetings	114	(53)
Intentionally exclude or leave you or a coworker out of activities	112	(53)
Use gossip or rumors to turn others against you or a coworker	109	(50)

<sup>a</sup>1=*often*, 2=*sometimes*, 3=*rarely*, 4=*never*.

supported response, as shown in Table 4. The next most frequently supported contributing factors were unclear roles and expectations (47.3%) and organizational conditions, including volatile and stressful work environments (45.4%). Nearly a third of respondents also selected the Other option ( $n = 81$ , 30%), and the most common write-in responses reflected individual causes rather than structural, including concerns about difficult or abrasive personalities ( $n = 28$ ) and concerns about the mental health of colleagues ( $n = 19$ ).

### Barriers to addressing incivility

Of those who reported their confidence in addressing workplace incivility ( $n = 216$ ), 14% ( $n = 31$ ) had high confidence in addressing it, 34% ( $n = 74$ ) had moderate confidence, 39% ( $n = 84$ ) had minimal confidence, and 13% ( $n = 27$ ) reported no confidence at all (on a scale of 1 = *high confidence* to 4 = *no confidence*), the mean score on this variable was 2.50, 95% CI [2.38, 2.61],  $SD = .89$ . Respondents were asked what factors might contribute to their avoidance of dealing with incivility (if they avoided it). Multiple responses were permitted. Of the 210 respondents who choose one or more responses (see Table 5), the most common responses included fear of professional retaliation (53%,  $n = 112$ ), lack of administrator support (45%,  $n = 94$ ), belief that addressing it would make it worse (41%,  $n = 86$ ), and fear of personal retaliation (37%,  $n = 78$ ). Of those who responded to this question, 17% ( $n = 37$ ) reported they do not avoid dealing with incivility.

### Discussion and implications

The social work educators who participated in this study perceived their workplaces overall as more civil than uncivil; yet more than half of respondents (58%) indicated that incivility is a serious or moderate problem. This combination suggests that although for many people incivility is not an everyday occurrence, when it does occur, it is significant and concerning to those involved. This may be a useful motivation for faculty members to begin and engage in discussions about what norms they want to see on incivility or for chairs, deans, and directors to observe incidents of uncivil behaviors and their effects on morale and productivity.

Behaviors perceived as most uncivil are, perhaps not surprisingly, physical threats, slurs, personal attacks, and threatening comments. It's worth noting that even behaviors perceived as the least uncivil, such as challenging a colleague's credibility or copying a supervisor on e-mails, were still seen as behaviors that could be uncivil depending on the context. Qualitative findings, to be discussed in a future paper, may inform the discussion of how the participants' identities and situational variables play into that perception. The most frequently experienced behaviors included colleagues who were not carrying their workload, resistance to change, meeting behind closed doors, and interrupting. It is reassuring to see that the most directly aggressive behaviors were the least frequently reported behaviors. One interesting note from Brocksen's (2018) study is that many of her participants noted

**Table 4.** Factors contributing to uncivil behavior.

Perceived Reason for Uncivil Behavior	Percentage of Respondents Indicating Agreement
Sense of entitlement and superiority	58.6%
Unclear roles and expectations and an imbalance of power	47.3%
Organizational conditions, including volatile and stressful working conditions	45.4%
Inadequate resources (financial, human, informational, etc.)	36.3%
Stress	35.9%
Demanding workloads	33.3%
Other	30.0%
Lack of knowledge and skills in managing conflict	28.2%
Juggling multiple roles and responsibilities	27.1%
Technology overload and changes	9.2%

**Table 5.** Most common reasons for avoiding dealing with incivility.

Reason	N	% of Total
Fear of professional retaliation	112	53
Lack of administrator support	94	45
Addressing it makes matters worse	86	41
Fear of personal retaliation	78	37
Do not have a clear policy to address workplace incivility	66	31
Addressing it may lead to poor evaluations	56	26

the difficulty of struggling with workload issues without support from colleagues. This is an example of the need to understand the context in a more nuanced way. Are faculty struggling to complete workload obligations without support? Are faculty with tenure or other advantages deliberately choosing not to complete workload obligations knowing that less senior or more vulnerable faculty members will be obligated to fill in the gaps? Are there other ways that workload affects the civility of an academic workplace?

Participants in this study saw entitlement and seniority as the most significant factors contributing to incivility, followed by unclear roles and organizational conditions. As a profession that identifies the interaction of person in environment as key to well-being, the propensity of faculty to point the finger at an individual rather than systemic cause of incivility is of some interest. We anticipate the forthcoming analysis of qualitative responses will inform this finding.

Faculty who primarily teach in BSW programs reported incivility as a less pressing concern than faculty who teach in MSW programs. One possible explanation is that because of accreditation requirements, BSW-only programs may have fewer faculty in the department than MSW programs; having fewer colleagues may increase the likelihood of stronger collegial relationships. Because we did not ask for department-level information, we hope the forthcoming qualitative analysis will provide some insight into this finding.

### **Limitations**

The small sample size is a significant limitation of the research. Other limitations include the potential challenges to validity of self-reported data and a potential lack of common understanding for the use of terms such as incivility presented in the research. It is also possible that those in a particularly vulnerable situation, such as tenure-track or contingent faculty positions, would be hesitant to complete the survey, even given the attempts at anonymity provided by the research team. Another limitation is that to maintain as much anonymity as possible, few questions were asked about the context in which incivility was occurring. It would be helpful to understand the structures of schools involved, to know, for example, whether incivility is more prevalent at teaching-focused schools or research-intensive schools. We also did not ask questions that might have revealed whether the incivility was coming primarily from the social work department itself or from faculty in other disciplines, which might have informed the conclusions of this study.

Finally, the information provided here includes only the perspective of the participants on behaviors and whether they were uncivil. The survey is unable to detect if the behaviors reported were caused by the necessities of policy or context. For example, closed-door meetings to discuss personnel matters may feel uncivil but may be necessary. Another example might be that interruptions were necessary if the faculty members being interrupted were not allowing others space to participate in meetings or conversation. These situational and context nuances are difficult to assess through a self-reported survey.

## **Identity and incivility**

When asked about their own capacity to address workplace incivility, 38% reported high or moderate confidence, yet 83% of respondents indicated that they avoid addressing incivility as it occurs. Reasons for not addressing incivility included fear of retaliation and lack of administrative support. A question for future research may be, Why do faculty who are confident in their ability to address workplace incivility find themselves unwilling or unable to engage in solutions?

It is important to note that the survey used here does not explicitly use a race and gender lens in its inquiry. This is an important shortcoming that should be addressed in future work. Cortina (2008) notes there is likely no such thing as “general incivility” (p. 55) in the workplace, but that female and minority populations are more frequent targets of uncivil behavior. In turn, efforts by women and faculty members of color to set protective boundaries against selective incivility may be seen by others as uncivil behavior, creating a circular problem wherein women and faculty of color are the target of uncivil behaviors but are also called out for incivility when they ask for protection or establish boundaries to protect themselves from these behaviors.

Despite what may be systemic pressure to behave in uncivil ways, research suggests it is in our personal and professional best interest to display civil behavior in the workplace (Porath et al., 2015). Colleagues who are seen as civil perform better on average and are more likely to be sought out for advice and more likely to be seen as leaders (another reason to be concerned that faculty members who identify with marginalized groups will be seen as uncivil). At a group level, civility has benefits as well: Civility promotes positive interactions and commitment. More civil behavior leads to employment opportunities, recommendations, and others being more willing to support the goals of the colleague demonstrating civility (Porath et al., 2015). This is clearly a call to act with civility in the workplace; however, it is also a call to be mindful that women, people of color, and colleagues from LGBTQ populations who stand up to discrimination or harassment (and are thus labeled uncivil) lose more than the good opinion of their peers. Their perceived incivility becomes the excuse to withhold opportunities, recommendations, invitations to collaborate, and mentoring supports.

In part because of the potential of this circular no-win situation for vulnerable faculty members, the American Association of University Professors (n.d.) has clearly stated the danger of invoking civility in decisions such as appointment, reappointment, or tenure, noting that “lack of collegiality or incivility may easily become a pretext for the adverse evaluation of politically controversial academics (para. 5)” and that care should be taken in using civility as a proxy for competence in professional behavior. In its discussion of collegiality (which civility is often seen to be a part of), the American Association of University Professors states the following:

Collegiality may be confused with the expectation that a faculty member display “enthusiasm” or “dedication,” evince “a constructive attitude” that will “foster harmony,” or display an excessive deference to administrative or faculty decisions where these may require reasoned discussion. Such expectations are flatly contrary to elementary principles of academic freedom, which protect a faculty member’s right to dissent from the judgments of colleagues and administrators (para. 4).

Our perceptions of incivility at the individual level are clearly complex, as illustrated by the write-in responses indicating that mental illness and personality differences play a significant role in causing uncivil behaviors. The data also suggest that our perceptions of incivility are influenced by power dynamics, as more than half of participants selected responses about a sense of superiority causing incivility, and more than half of respondents said they did not address incivility because of fear of retaliation. Although respondents also reported direct organizational concerns (lack of support from administration and poor organizational culture), the subjective experiences of others’ superiority and ability to retaliate were the most frequent responses. This may suggest that faculty experiences of incivility more often reflect experiences with singular individuals rather than a comprehensively toxic workplace in which incivility is the norm. We expect our forthcoming analysis of qualitative responses will inform this question. Future research may also be able to address whether helping professions like nursing and social work have higher rates of incivility than other professions, as at least one previous study has indicated.

Moving forward with the exploration of incivility in social work requires looking beyond individual motivations and actions and clearly addressing the organizational and structural realities that support uncivil workplace cultures. Academic bullying may be facilitated, in part, by a rigid top-down hierarchical structure (Twale & DeLuca, 2008). Academia may encourage uncivil behavior, particularly in regard to the unwritten rules of gaining tenure, promotion, and upward mobility. Issues of rank and power are often the overt or covert determinants of relationships among administrators and faculty, or between faculty members themselves. The academic workplace remains hierarchical and recently has exhibited an increasing centralization of decision making and proliferation of administrative roles (Cleary et al., 2013).

As we work toward long-term structural changes, there may be more immediate steps we can take to offset the psychological and physical harm caused by incivility. There is evidence that employees who receive social and emotional support in the workplace (perceptions of closeness, connection, mentoring, support from colleagues and supervisors) and organizational support (perceptions of being valued and cared for by the organization) do not experience the same degree of psychological and physical harm from everyday incivility in the workplace (Miner et al., 2012). This type of compassionate support would seem to promote the well-being of faculty in systems that might be slow to change and would also strengthen the implicit curriculum wherein schools model the application of social work values.

## Conclusion

Faculty-to-faculty incivility is prevalent and problematic and should be of great concern in social work education programs. As we train our students to uphold the profession's core values, among which are dignity and the worth of the person, integrity, and importance of human relationships (Ausbrooks et al., 2011), we should intentionally model those values in our collegial relationships. By acknowledging and addressing faculty-to-faculty incivility in schools of social work, we have the opportunity to infuse our students and the profession with the best of our professional values. We also must take the opportunity to look at the ways that power differentials, especially regarding gender and race, affect our perceptions of others' actions and how we balance the need for positive interpersonal interactions with the need for dissent in a strong academy.

## Notes on contributors

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