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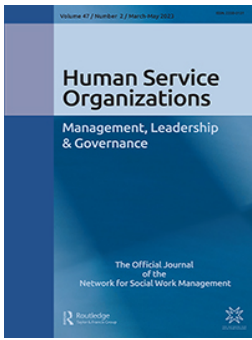

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"Challenge and Hold One Another Accountable:" Social Work Faculty Respond to Incivility

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ABSTRACT

Incivility within social work education reflects patterns seen across higher education and within society. Previous work has found that social work faculty are reluctant to report incivility and have limited confidence in their ability to address it effectively. In order to address potential solutions, this paper uses qualitative data ($n = 164$) drawn from a larger survey of social work faculty in the United States. The exploratory analysis focuses on strategies social work faculty use when experiencing incivility and bullying themselves, and methods recommended by social work faculty to confront incivility administratively and systemically within the social work academy. Responses were coded into four themes: values-based responses, leadership/institutional responses, individual and faculty level responses, and faculty disengagement. These themes suggest opportunities and recommendations to move toward a civil social work academy.

PRACTICE POINTS

- Academic faculty expect institutional leadership to have the skills to acknowledge and address incidents of incivility in the workplace.
- Social work faculty suggest a combination of values-based responses that tie workplace behavior and culture to professional values, institutional responses that support accountability and formal recognition for prosocial behavior, and establishing and maintaining positive relationships in the workplace.
- Social work faculty acknowledge and affirm the individual ethical mandate to address injurious workplace behavior and challenge institutional systems and patterns that reinforce workplace incivility.

Modern institutions of higher education face an array of complicated challenges. Some, like financial difficulties, challenges to academic freedom, the complexities of shared governance, and divergent views of free speech, have been around for a long time. Some, like racial inequality, gender inequality, and harassment, have always been a part of the academic landscape, but are the subject of long-overdue calls for action. And new challenges arise with relative frequency, as we grapple with

a changing climate, public health crises, and threats of authoritarianism. Many of these factors have contributed to cultures that promote, or at least are unable to address, incivility within the higher education landscape.

Incivility within social work education and other human service organizations has several problematic elements. Research suggests that even mild incivility can create desensitization within workplaces to blatant discrimination, abuse, and assault, particularly if it is unaddressed by those in power (Clark, 2009). Social workers in academia and other human service organizations have a particular ethical obligation to root out incivility that is in opposition to the core values of the social work profession, such as dignity and the worth of the person, integrity, and importance of human relationships. This is particularly important for schools of social work and other academic departments that train future nonprofit leaders and executives, where students begin to set expectations for professional behaviors. Social work academe has a particularly challenging responsibility of balancing aspirational values and inclusive practices within highly competitive and resource-scarce institutions of higher education. Hence, this paper explores strategies used by social work faculty to address incivility and bullying themselves, and also how social work faculty believe incivility should be addressed administratively and systematically.

Literature review

Incivility within social work education reflects patterns seen across higher education and within society, both in the U.S. and globally. Concerning behaviors that are described as bullying or as incivility range based on the study (as does the terminology used), and can include mild interpersonal discomfort up to assault (Clark et al., 2013). Previous researchers theorize that the academic workplace may be particularly at-risk due to a pervasive culture of competition over limited resources that creates interpersonal conflicts around gaining tenure and promotion, unmanageable workloads, and unclear roles and responsibilities (Cleary et al., 2013).

Terminology used in research regarding toxic behavior within workplaces is not consistent. Behaviors such as chastisement, public humiliation, and belittlement might be described as bullying (Goldberg et al., 2013; Twale & DeLuca, 2008). The term incivility may be used for less overt behaviors. It sometimes also refers to behavior between those who are peers or when the intent to do harm is not clear (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; McClendon et al., 2021). This research team generally uses the term incivility in order to capture a wider range of behaviors and potential motivations than bullying.

With varying terminology and definitions, studies reporting the rates of academic incivility and bullying among university faculty and staff suggest that between 32% and 62% of those working in U.S. higher education have experienced some sort of problematic behaviors (Cassell, 2011; Fox, 2009; Heffernan & Bosetti, 2020; Hollis, 2012; Keashly & Neuman, 2008; McKay et al., 2008). Social work is not exempt. A national survey of social work educators in the United States by the authors found that faculty incivility was perceived as a moderate to serious problem in schools of social work (McClendon et al., 2021), with "failing to perform one's share of the workload" being the most frequently cited behavior associated with incivility. The most commonly cited reason for uncivil behavior in the workplace was a sense of entitlement or superiority among colleagues, followed by unclear roles and expectations (McClendon et al., 2021). A smaller qualitative survey of female social work educators in the U.S. also found incivility and bullying to be prevalent, and respondents indicated these experiences impacted their physical and emotional well-being (Brocksen, 2018). Horton's (2016) discussion of bullying through the lens of the NASW Code of Ethics highlights the ways in which mentoring plays into bullying for social work faculty and social work students, specifically citing toxic mentorship as a possible source of harm for vulnerable people such as tenure-track faculty, faculty members who are members of marginalized groups, and students.

Annmarie Caño's recent reflection on the need for healing knowledge and practices in academic leadership calls for leadership practices that recognize and address faculty harm. Caño calls attention to the importance of "community-oriented leadership" as a response to workplaces and communities

that are under direct threat (Caño, 2021). The sequelae of community violence and racial crisis on faculty documented by Kezar et al. (2020) has resulted in a call for community-oriented leadership focuses on the implementation of three key tools: active listening, honest dialogue/speaking from the heart, and "acting with" by connecting with stakeholders and community to form a response (Kezar et al., 2020). These collective action strategies, employed mainly by unions and faculty governance organizations, have led directly to more protections and equitable pay for marginalized groups (e.g., Crawford, 2023).

Social work education purports to use a curriculum that includes both implicit and explicit tools to train students for values-based practice that respects the dignity and worth of persons, importance of human behaviors, and integrity, among other values (Ausbrooks et al., 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. Bordelon and Cousert (2018) suggest that incivility in the social work profession may be a continuation of attitudes and behaviors learned when students find incivility is not being challenged in the classroom.

Though these issues of incivility and bullying are widely known, strategies for addressing these challenges to workplace culture and productivity have been slow to emerge. In our previous national study, (McClendon et al., 2021) respondents were asked about their own capacity to address workplace incivility. Fewer than half (38%) reported high or moderate confidence in their ability to address incivility in their departments. Perhaps more alarming, 83% of respondents indicated that they avoid addressing incivility as it occurs, citing fear of retaliation and lack of administrative support (McClendon et al., 2021).

Academia is an exceptionally stressful work environment where peer review of merit, scholarship, and tenure decisions makes confrontation of peer-to-peer incivility a high-risk endeavor (c.f. Acker & Armenti, 2004). Social work faculty view entitlement and seniority as the most significant factors contributing to incivility, followed by unclear roles and organizational conditions (McClendon et al., 2021). Although both individuals and organizational factors undoubtedly share responsibility as mutual actors, the systemic causes of incivility such as workload, organizational culture, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities suggest that departmental leadership is key to successfully addressing incivility and supporting positive workplace culture; this is particularly relevant when only a third of faculty have any confidence in their own ability to address the problem (McClendon et al., 2021).

The experiences of social workers in higher education mirror concerns raised by social workers in other professional settings (e.g. Fink-Samnick, 2018). In both settings, investing in personal relationships with colleagues can provide opportunities for safety, support, and the development of social capital; the reward for building these relationships may be highest for faculty from underrepresented groups (Crowley, 2021; McLane Davison et al., 2018).

Collegial model

Human service organizations, including academic institutions and schools/departments of social work, can be examined using a number of structural models, including bureaucratic, political, and collegial models (Baldridge, 1971). The collegial or collegium model is designed around a community of professionals or experts rather than a strict hierarchy and overlaps with bureaucratic and political structures. While a pure version of this collegial model might involve a completely democratic "community of scholars" which makes nearly all decisions within the university setting (Baldridge, 1971), that is unlikely to be possible in today's economic and political climate. In any iteration, the collegial model relies on the technical competence of the professionals involved (faculty, in this environment), rather than a person's official place in the bureaucracy, and is a key component in the existence of academic freedom, and consensus-based decision making (Baldridge, 1971). The collegial model can be used in human service organizations outside of the academy which are designed around professional expertise and those which prioritize humane and participatory decision-making, although it may be more accessible in small organizations (Ramsdell, 1994).

As an example of the collegial model in higher education, Dill (2017) describes one typical way in which academic department leadership is developed, in which faculty members who volunteer or are chosen as a department chair are seen as "first among equals" within the department, and the general expectation is that the duties of the chair will be shared in turn by multiple members of the department rotating through the chair position over time. Dill also points out that in most departments and schools, faculty have the opportunity to vote on everything from curriculum design to their recommendations for new faculty or staff appointments. Dill considers this an opportunity for the departmental structure to create a "brake" on the authority of senior faculty, although it does leave open opportunities for incivility and bullying within these somewhat loose department structures.

Research questions

Considering faculty's self-reported reluctance to report incivility and bullying, and their limited confidence in addressing incivility independently, a need exists to better understand the strategies currently in use by social work faculty to address workplace incivility. Thus, this exploratory paper addresses two core research questions: (1) What strategies do social work faculty use to address incivility and bullying themselves? (2) How do social work faculty think incivility should be addressed administratively and systemically within the social work academy?

Methods

This study is the fourth in a series. The first three papers explored 1) frequency and intensity of faculty-to-faculty incivility in social work education (McClendon et al., 2021) 2) comparisons of reports of incivility between social work and nursing faculty (Lane et al., 2020) and 3) qualitative descriptions of the ways in which incivility manifests in the social work academy (Lane et al., 2022). This final study reviews the ways in which social work faculty members believe their leadership and institutions might be able to address bullying and incivility.

The data analyzed were collected in surveys of social work educators in 2017. The overarching survey was a quantitative study of perceived incivility in social work education, which was measured using tools developed in nursing higher education (Clark et al., 2013). Quantitative data from this study are discussed elsewhere (Lane et al., 2020; McClendon et al., 2021). A recent article discusses the findings from one qualitative question, which asked for participants' stories of their experiences with incivility (Lane et al., 2022). This paper discusses the findings from a separate qualitative question, reviewing potential solutions proposed by study participants. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from two universities from which primary data collection took place.

Sampling

Participants included faculty members in social work education throughout the United States, both full-time and part-time (adjunct). Faculty in teaching roles, tenure track, clinical and other non-tenure track roles, and administration were all included in the sample. Recruitment was conducted in two phases. In Phase One, a list of deans and directors of accredited social work programs (including departments and stand-alone schools) was compiled based on records from the website of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). In January 2017, all deans and directors on that list received an e-mail and were asked to share the survey link with the members of their faculty. Per the Dillman method, multiple reminders were sent (Dillman et al., 2014). While more than 600 deans and directors were contacted, there is no way to assess how many of them forwarded it to their faculty and the total number of faculty who received the e-mail. A total of 133 responses were received through this method. In order to increase the number of potential participants, Phase Two of recruitment occurred in August 2017. A request for participation in the study was sent to three social work education listservs, including those for baccalaureate programs (bpd-l@list.iupui.edu), masters programs (msw-

ed-l@list.iupui.edu), and policy faculty (formerly sw-policy-listserv@groups.pacificu.edu). Phase Two resulted in an additional 110 surveys, bringing the total to 243 surveys completed. Because the number of faculty subscribed to these lists is not publicly available, the response rate cannot be calculated. Open-ended responses were completed by 63% of the total participants. All of those who completed the open-ended questions were included in the subsample for this survey ($n = 164$).

Instrument

The instrument used in this survey is the Faculty-to-Faculty Incivility Survey (F-FI Survey), originally developed for use in nursing education (Clark et al., 2013). For this study, the relevant questions from the survey include demographics and open-ended opportunities to provide suggestions to effectively address incivility. The specific open-ended prompt that resulted in the data for this study has not previously been analyzed. The question read, "The most effective way to promote or address work-place civility is to (fill in the blank)...." Respondents were provided space for a long-form text response. The wording of this question is identical to the one used by Clark et al. (2013).

Data collection procedures

The research process began by accessing the F-FI Survey from Dr. Clark and requesting approval to conduct the research from the relevant Institutional Review Boards. The research team created and tested the survey instrument in Survey Monkey to ensure all questions worked correctly. Participation was voluntary and all responses were collected without identifying data. The link sent to participants included a study information form explaining research participants' rights, and completion of the survey was considered consent to participate in the study. Participants could end their participation at any time. The survey link was open for six months. Once completed, the results were downloaded from Survey Monkey and transferred via SPSS to Excel for coding.

Data analysis

While previous quantitative and qualitative analysis of this data examined descriptions of participants' experiences with incivility, analysis in this paper reviewed respondents' suggestions for addressing incivility. Specifically, this paper addresses responses to the open-ended survey question on the F-FI, "The most effective way to promote or address workplace civility is to (fill in the blank)...." Responses varied from brief two-word entries to paragraph-long entries of 103 words addressing specific skills and values.

The research team used a coding approach modeled on Saldaña (2016) two-cycle coding for their data analysis. In phase one the coders read through the data multiple times and developed an initial list of codes to categorize the data. This first cycle coding involved both attribute coding to describe participants (relevant attributes included demographics, position, and rank) and descriptive coding which categorized respondents' content-laden responses. The words and phrases used were oftentimes *in vivo*.

Following the first cycle of coding, the members of the research team met virtually to discuss the codes, impressions of the data, and assess underlying patterns in the data. This second cycle analysis process utilized a pattern coding approach from which four themes emerged with 49 freestanding codes.

Reflexivity

Data analysis was a collaborative process of all six authors, keeping in mind each author's positionality, including our experiences within social work education as doctoral students, faculty (adjunct, assistant, and associate), and administrators at several different schools, as well as our own identities and

connection of those identities to our interpretation of the data. Four of the authors are white and two are black. Four identify as cis-gender female and two as cis-gender male. One author's formative education and interaction with social work academics was outside of the United States and the rest have only been social work students and educators in the US.

Reflexivity regarding this positionality was addressed in a number of ways. First, at the team's formation all members engaged in discussion on how their identities including ethnicity, culture, religious and political ideologies, and professional affiliations could potentially impact data handling. As social work faculty, nonprofit leaders, and professional social workers, we acknowledge that each of the authors carries bias as we investigate questions about the systems we belong to and the positions we have held. Each of the authors has experienced or witnessed incivility in the workplace, including in higher education, with varying effects on career and well-being. These impacts have often been modified by our personal identities and positionality, which could lead to assumptions around intention and outcome as we analyze the data. In terms of positive bias, each of the authors is committed to the social work Code of Ethics and our professional responsibilities to promote social justice, act with integrity, and demonstrate respect for colleagues. These perspectives were discussed by the team prior to and during the analysis process, with the intention to explore implicit biases and support our neutrality as researchers. To the extent possible, we strove to set aside our insider positions and remain neutral observers of the data thereby centering the voices of these participants.

We were also conscious of ways in which reading others' stories of harm while in the systems where we work could negatively impact us as individuals. We used bracketing as a tool to increase rigor and provide some distancing for emotional safety. Coding was completed individually and in teams of two, followed by a review of the codes by the first three authors over several months. This review process included individual attention to each quotation selected to exemplify themes.

Results

Respondents ($n = 164$) primarily identified as white (87%) and female (75%). Nearly a third of respondents identified their rank as associate (30%), 23% reported a rank of assistant, and 23% reported their rank as full professor. The remaining respondents identified as adjunct faculty (5%), instructor (6%), or emeritus faculty (3%). Respondents could also identify their role in the department as chair/director/dean (16%), program coordinator (7%), or field coordinator (5%). The respondents reported years of teaching ranged from 1 to 46 years, with a median of 16 years in the profession. Respondents described their experiences with faculty incivility in both responses to scale questions as well as open-ended responses. The results of that data analysis are reported elsewhere (Lane et al., 2020, 2022; McClendon et al., 2021).

Study participants were asked about strategies to address faculty incivility both at the institutional and individual level. Four main themes emerged from the strategies proposed. The first two themes addressed structural issues. The first considered institutional values and incivility and the second ways in which institutions and administrations can respond to incivility. The last two themes addressed incivility responses from the individual perspective. The third theme examined the individual's responsibility in addressing acts of incivility, and the final theme discussed the cost to individuals of addressing faculty incivility. Each of these themes is discussed in depth in this section. In order to contextualize the results, information about participants' gender identity is included. All participants identified as either female (designated F) or male (designated M). In addition, the number of years that participants had taught in social work education is indicated. Further information, such as job title or program level, is included where relevant.

Theme 1: Making civility a workplace value

Several responses prioritized explicit, clear establishment of civility as a value in the workplace. Mechanisms to accomplish this ranged from incorporating civil behavior into the mission of the

institution and faculty orientation to having university and college administrations set policies and standards around civility. Participants urged academia to elevate values such as "*care, concern, team-work*" (F, 18 years) and "*professionalism*" (M, 6 years). A respondent proposed the need for "*promoting a culture of civility*" (M, 31 years), and another suggested institutions "*make [civility] a priority in training of faculty*" (F, 22 years). Disrupting institutional hierarchies, which are apt to create power silos, was proposed as another way to inculcate positive values, with the respondent suggesting that universities "*break down hierarchies so that all are valued* (F, 26 years).

Respondents further indicated that the value of civility should be clear to new faculty from their hiring. These respondents highlighted the poor workplace behaviors that new faculty may have experienced during their doctoral studies or previous academic careers, and suggested that an explicit introduction to and socialization into the expected culture would be required. As noted by this associate professor who taught primarily in her institution's MSW program, "*When we hire new junior faculty, most enter ready to steamroll their colleagues as competitors for grants, promotion, desired classes, etc. What are we teaching in doctoral programs that they just want to come into SW education and roll over everyone as better than everyone else?*" (F, 18 years). Similarly, a participant who spoke of the need for training to communicate values stated that training should, "*clarify roles and patiently train new employees*" (M, 4 years).

The discussion of values brought some respondents to the *Code of Ethics* and the core values of the social work profession. Some respondents directly interrogated ways in which social work administrators can use social work values to shape institutional culture. One respondent clearly made this connection, asking "*Why have we let administrators set this type of behavior as the standard, when it conflicts with our Code of Ethics and the very content we teach?*" (F, 18 years). Respondents suggested that focusing on common values could make this process collaborative and easier to manage. A respondent noted:

> "*If we social workers were to truly live the NASW [C]ode of [E]thics, we would not have need for the dialogue on all the isms amongst our ranks and could focus more on the balance of 'power' among the ranks of humanity in general*" (M, 6 years).

Tension was noted within responses between the need for policy change and institutional values change. This tension is illustrated by one respondent, who said, "*forget more policies, laws and performance evaluations. These just punish already stressed people. Instead, shift the climate so the VALUES of care, concern, teamwork matter.* (F, 18 years). The theme interacts with this tension, continuing from these discussions of institutional values and discusses ways in which leadership and administrators can respond to incivility.

Theme 2: Leadership and institutional responses to incivility

Participants who responded in this theme were in agreement that institutions and members of administration, who represent the institution, should help organizations move together from a place of mutually agreed upon workplace goals. Respondents believed this could happen within organizations with common norms that define, reward, and model civility. Several respondents therefore argued that workplace incivility could be addressed by making civility a workplace standard and by role-modeling appropriate behavior across multiple organizational levels within the university.

Addressing structural issues

Participants noted needed structural change and focused on addressing gaps in organizational policy that enable actors to engage in injurious behavior while circumventing the enforcement mechanisms put in place to redress incivility (e.g. McClendon et al., 2021). In light of this, respondents recommended that leaders and administration address incivility through administrative procedures and organizational policies. Respondents recommended these policies be "*clear*" and include "*clear consequences for incivility incidents*" (M, 16 years). An existing

example shared by this participant with more than 23 years in the profession was *"an 'Abrasive Behavior' policy from the university that provides a standard"* (F, 23 years) to assess inappropriate behavior. Another suggested institutions create a *"zero tolerance policy for incivility"* (F, 19 years). The difficulty in creating these policies was noted by a female respondent with the rank of associate professor who stated, *"...so we need effective policies for addressing this. It's difficult because it is so subjective, but there need to be some standards and a way of enforcing standards"* (F, 16 years).

Suggested policy changes encompassed procedures to ensure compliance, solicit employee input on supervisor performance, and elevate organizational transparency. One example included suggested changes to several areas, such as *"...evaluation process in which supervisors are evaluated by subordinates. Increase levels of accountability across campus. Establish an ombuds[person] to investigate complaints ...outside of the existing chain of command"* (M, 8 years). Another practical suggestion presented by this female instructor with at least 13 years of teaching experience was for leadership to include *"a check-in about team functioning in faculty meetings (and share responsibility to facilitate discussion about [team functioning] so it is not just seen as one person's issue)* (F, 13 years).

Training and other group interventions were included in this discussion of structural change. Participants wanted policy changes to be accompanied by training that makes incivility easier to identify and address, and contributes to a changing organizational culture. This included individual coaching, diversity training, and engaging external human resource professionals as this participant suggested, *"intervention by an outside professional – basically group therapy"* (F, 23 years). This assistant professor mentioned the need to acknowledge the spectrum of human diversity in these trainings, *"Increase the skill and capacity through awareness training and seminars, as well as many other methods, regarding the humanity in all people, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, etc."* (M, 6 years). Participants recommended that training be offered both periodically and as an immediate response to incidents of incivility, and as noted above, offered specifically to those new to the environment.

Accountability

A key recommendation from participant discussions on their experiences with incivility was the need for leaders to directly identify and address workplace instances of incivility and hold perpetrators accountable. Creating structures to hold everyone accountable for their actions and behaviors was a theme for participants. Occurring again and again in this discussion was the need for direct action. This was suggested by several respondents including this associate professor teaching primarily in her program's BSW program:

> *Hold people accountable for their behavior, address it directly. When people realize it will be addressed, they are less likely to engage in the behavior. It doesn't have to be ugly, it can be a confrontation that is empathetic and seeks to understand the needs of the person engaging in the uncivil behavior. But the person engaging needs to be honest about their motivations in order for this to work* (F, 12 years).

One strategy suggested for holding faculty accountable for their actions was to integrate discussions of civility in evaluations and performance review processes, particularly post-tenure evaluations. As an example, one respondent stated, *"this would include expanding post-tenure review evaluations and policies to focus on and require minimum standards for civility"* (M, 21 years). Another noted, *"tying this to evaluations and such could possibly help"* (M, 5 years).

Triangulating accountability was considered especially important given the hierarchies which make it difficult to hold all actors accountable for their behavior. As this assistant professor argued, *"I think there are many great options (such as education, training, advocacy, etc.) but I don't think the options would be well received by the faculty...I also think that those who would benefit most would not attend and use their tenured status as an exemption or excuse to not participate"* (F, 3 years).

Role modeling of positive behaviors

The most common method suggested by participants for underscoring shared values of civility was for those in leadership positions to use their own behavior as examples. Eighteen respondents specifically referenced "role modeling" in their response. Some of the positive behaviors respondents desired to see modeled included, in addition to civility, "*positive behavior*" (F, 5 years) and "*calm behavior*" (F, 27 years). One respondent stated, "*I feel that the director/leader/dean sets the tone for the department and can have a role in modeling and expecting civility*" (F, 7 years). Another individual added that there was a need to "*model [civility] and discuss it as a value*" (F, 20 years). This respondent gives a specific example of how to model desired behavior:

> *Model civility and remain calm knowing that the faculty obviously have some issues that need addressing. Be open and transparent in emails and conversations. Consult with other faculty prior to making assumptions. Resist the urge to triangulate. Refrain from gossip* (M, 5 years).

Effective leadership

Woven throughout all the strategies discussed in this theme is the need for effective leadership. The hierarchical structure in academia where collegiality and faculty collaborations are encouraged and celebrated but where tenure and promotion is tied to peer evaluations makes it difficult to institute accountability unless strong, consistent leadership prioritizes it. One female commenter stated this eloquently: "*Have a strong leader who will stop it from happening. Faculty do not police themselves because everyone evaluates everyone – eventually*" (F, 26 years).

Respondents envisioned leadership that modeled civility, celebrated transparency, created and clearly articulated organizational policy, held everyone accountable, and managed conflict in order to truly, effectively address organizational incivility. Examples of this included aspirations for "*leadership (Dean/Program Director) who models and expects civility and holds people accountable when they are not* (F, 16 years). and the need to "*ensure that leadership adopts and enforces policies and procedures at the unit and institutional levels can effectively sanction behavior that violates community norms and values*" (M, 21 years).

Theme 3: Faculty responsibility

The third theme revolved around each individual's responsibility in redressing and mitigating acts of incivility. This included directly addressing incivility for the purpose of building a culture of accountability and growth, while also acknowledging and rewarding colleagues' good behavior.

Holding individuals accountable

While administration does have a responsibility in setting positive organizational culture, respondents pointed out the need for individual self-awareness and internal accountability. This included recommending that faculty "*self-reflect on how we each may contribute to civility or incivility*" (F, 5 years), and act like "*adults, not third graders*" (F, 43 years). These respondents believed all individuals have a clear role to play in mitigating or addressing workplace incivility. Several participants made mention of each individual's responsibility in "calling in" or confronting incivility. Participants noted that peers can, "*Call [colleagues] out on their counter-productive and hypocritical shenanigans,*" (M, 23 years) and that all members of the school community can "*stand up and not tolerate the behavior and call it what it is*" (F, 27 years). Others requested that individuals "*start publicly calling people out who [act with incivility]*" (F, 25 years), "*confront it,*" (M, 32 years), "*address it upfront*" (F, 17 years), and "*address it head on*" (F, 25 years).

Others noted the ways in which incivility grows when left unchecked. They warned, "*do not allow bullying/incivility to continue- it leads to a toxic and unhealthy environment*" (F, 1 year). Therefore, participants advised that confronting incivility would directly discourage it from taking root. Participants also shared their belief that direct intervention provided clarity about

the behavior desired. Several respondents addressed the importance of direct and clear interpersonal communication. They recommended *"discuss[ing incivility] openly to draw attention to the need for change"* (M, 26 years), *"address[ing] inappropriate people individually instead of blanket statements toward the majority, zero-tolerance"* (F, 8 years), *talk[ing] openly about [incivility] and strategiz[ing] about other ways to handle conflict"* (F, 20 years). One recommended, *"be open with colleagues rather than being back biting or manipulators"* (M, 10 years).

Rewarding positive behavior

A sub-group of participants emphasized noticing and rewarding prosocial behavior, both to reinforce that behavior and encourage others to uphold organizational norms. These participants urged the use of positive reinforcement to shift the focus away from bad actors and reward good behavior. Examples included suggestions for both leadership and peers to *"acknowledge civil and kind behavior, and reward it. Supervisors and colleagues should point it out and acknowledge civil/kind behavior/actions"* (F, 20 years). They encouraged faculty to *"reward positive behaviors, not engage in the gossip . . . [l]isten respectfully to the views and standpoints of the faculty"* (F, 18 years). One respondent urged faculty to *"have more transparency; have people from different departments work together; give praise and recognition; and call it out when it is seen, felt, heard, etc."* (F, 23 years).

Interpersonal relationships

A final suggestion for individuals was that investing in interpersonal relationships allows individuals to offer support to colleagues who may be the target of incivility.

> *Develop relationships with colleagues and present - as a united front and in the presence of everyone affected - specific hopes and expectations about how the faculty can function better as a team* (F, 13 years).

> *One to one person connections [are important]. Through these relationships we challenge and hold one another accountable.* (M, 26 years).

Two participants commented on the role of mutual relationships among faculty to promote positive culture. One respondent with 11 years MSW teaching experience suggested a restorative justice approach *"where all parties work to gain a deeper understanding of each other. - strive for mutual acceptance of others – emphasizing tolerance"* (M, 11 years). A second participant with 31 years experience who suggested collective work and restorative justice to address incivility also highlighted some of the limitations of this strategy if not addressed correctly, stating that if restorative justice is attempted but *"the person committing the incivility does not want to participate, then that person should be let go"* (M, 31 years).

Theme 4: Disengagement

While respondents suggested many possible solutions to incivility, hopelessness and disengagement were reflected in many comments. Some respondents reported that they felt their best, or only, response when faced with incivility was to ignore the bad actors and to disengage from situations where the injurious behavior was occurring. Many reported their strategy was simply to *"ignore [incivility] when it begins or leave the room"* (F, 13 years). An extreme version of this was shared by a respondent who noted,

> *In our case, I do not believe it can be resolved without making the problem worse, since administration is not willing to confront the issue. I plan to retire ASAP, as I am exhausted by the whole issue* (F, 31 years).

Respondents attributed this hopelessness to a variety of factors. The commenter below described the academic structure as a significant factor, and, like many, felt they had paid a personal price for trying to address issues in the past.

This is a tough question. Many of the behaviors I see inside the academy would never be acceptable anywhere else. Yet, the person identifying problems in the academic workplace is generally targeted as the problem. Even though I've been doing this for 11 years, I'm not sure how to fix this. Early in my career I paid a rather high price for stepping on a few landmines. Since then, I generally stay outside the fray and focus on my work. Addressing bad behavior, meanness, and incivility is not [worth] the price (F, 12 years).

Another commented,

Have discussed this with [our Chair] often and her response is that "we've always done it this way"...Others have approached her and her rudeness in stopping discussions but nothing has worked. I don't know how to effectively address this (F, 17 years).

The power differentials in academia, including the tenure system, and academic freedom, are given as reasons for this belief of hopelessness. *"I am not sure as it is complex and often occurs when one person has more status or power"* (F, 11 years). *"This director has created the environment and punishes faculty in evaluations"* (F, 11 years). Especially because evaluation of performance in academia is conducted by peers through the tenure and promotion system, some faculty may feel disempowered and their voices incapacitated. Some respondents felt those with access to the protections of tenure, in particular, would be unlikely to participate in addressing incivility.

A final reason for hopelessness was found in the comments of those who perceived incivility as the result of internal factors such as mental health issues.

I am not sure because most [incivility I see] is due to personality disorders. Ten years and everything has been tried and people refuse to see their own issues or do anything about it. They need therapy and self work typically" (F, 13 years).

Discussion

As with earlier findings of individuals' experiences with incivilities (Lane et al., 2022; McClendon et al., 2021), perspectives on potential solutions were varied and affected significantly by positionality in particular gender and gender expression, race and ethnicity, physical abilities and ideologies. The results of this study do not point to a specific solution to the problem of incivility, but reflect a strong need and desire for action. The role of social work values was significant in the findings. In this study and the previous analysis of uncivil behaviors (Lane et al., 2022), respondents looked for leadership and colleagues to establish norms and make decisions that reflected the values and ethics of the profession, and expressed disappointment when that was not found. We also found support for the work of social workers in other professional settings who suggest that well communicated institutional norms and policies help regulate workplace behavior, even in the most stressful environment (Fink-Samnick, 2018).

Participants desired leadership that would explicitly address incivility. Barriers addressed by the participants in this study included the role of tenure and the overall structure of academia, consistent with previous research about the risks of confronting peer-to-peer incivility (Acker & Armenti, 2004). Respondents encouraged leaders and administrators to set the tone and address these issues, and raised questions about what resources and training leaders would need to be able to do so.

Positive reinforcement was an important message from the data. Positive reinforcement was seen as a way to create a supportive collegial environment that could help counterbalance the deleterious effect of incivility. Collegiality and behavioral expectations can be articulated and reinforced during onboarding and annual training. Respondents recommended that leaders incentivize prosocial behaviors through the annual review process and by publicly applauding these behaviors among faculty. Positive reinforcement may also come from individual faculty members creating collaborative and supportive networks of their own. This is particularly important for faculty from underrepresented groups.

The disengagement and hopelessness reflected by a number of survey respondents when asked for potential solutions was concerning to the research team. Respondents expressed a need for solutions, without faith that their leadership was ready or able to respond. Consistent with earlier findings (Lane et al., 2022), experiencing incivility that goes unacknowledged may lead to isolation, disempowerment, and disengagement. It is incumbent on departments and organizations to recognize uncivil behaviors in the social work academy, then examine how incivility manifests in one's own university context, and use this information to create a restorative approach.

Moving toward a civil social work academy

This study's findings on the need to validate the experiences of others, the importance of dismantling oppressive structures and barriers, and the need for building inclusive communities parallel Caño's call for leadership practices that recognize and address faculty harm (Caño, 2021). The impact seen here on faculty from ongoing incivility and microaggressions in the workplace includes anger, distrust, fear, and fatigue. The community-oriented leadership that Kezar and colleagues advocate for would help address these issues (Kezar et al., 2020). These leadership practices have clear implications for dealing with both community and interpersonal trauma that impacts departments of social work.

While the collegial model's theoretical creation of a democratic community of scholars seems that it can provide opportunities to narrow power dynamics and inequality within academic and other human service organizations, the findings of this study suggest that the broad distribution of power throughout a group of professionals without adequate systems in place to address incivility can be problematic. As Richardson (1974) highlighted decades ago, collegial models are not equipped to address serious conflict, and often do not include the structure needed to provide sanctions or consequences for those who refuse to follow the norms as established within the community. While social workers may find the ideals of a collegial model resonate with our core professional values, they may be impractical within today's bureaucratic and political climate of universities and other human service organizations.

Respondents mentioned open dialogue – and specifically restorative justice – as an approach for addressing incivility in higher education that also engages validation, active listening, and community practice. While no respondents provided specific examples of how this would be accomplished or what types of restorative practices would be desired, a restorative justice approach would also address many of the themes found in this study and also acknowledges the devastating personal and professional impacts of incivility. Restorative justice is a collaborative decision-making process that includes victims, offenders, and others seeking to hold offenders accountable. Restorative justice involves accepting responsibility, repairing harm, and reducing the risk of repeat offenses by building stronger community ties (Acosta & Karp, 2018). It would provide a values-based approach to incivility, provide a framework for leaders to use in addressing problematic behavior, and it would provide mechanisms for colleagues to hold each other accountable and increase personal responsibility. According to Acosta and Karp (2018), these practices are being incorporated into human resources departments as early intervention strategies for perceived mistreatment and abrasive behavior, and have been written into policy by at least one academic unit in the United States.

Restorative justice should not be considered as a potential solution without significant consideration. Critiques of restorative justice include concerns that it can be coercive to those who have been subject to damaging behaviors. As with many structural responses to damaging behavior, those with more power may benefit from restorative justice systems, including the possibility of manipulating restorative justice processes to create more oppression and social control and the possibility that those with more resources will be able to use the system more successfully. Restorative justice practitioners themselves raise concerns about stigmatization and shaming of both offenders and victims and potential use of these methods for damaging ends. Fundamentally, the success of restorative justice requires adequate resources and participants who are committed to the process, which can be challenging in any setting. The nuanced and informal processes embedded within restorative justice

make assessment of outcomes challenging, leading to questions about whether its effectiveness can be properly assessed (Menkel-Meadow, 2007).

Systemic solutions to faculty incivility and workplace culture require time to implement, and meanwhile those whose professional and personal lives are impacted by incivility need immediate and ongoing support and care. Internal mechanisms of consensus building and conflict resolution such as an ombudsperson could be a consideration. In addition to providing a space for neutral, non-punitive problem resolution, an ombudsperson models active bystander principles and other positive workplace behaviors.

Positive, prosocial professional networks have historically supported social workers in the field confronting incivility – and also race-based and gender-based discrimination and violence (Carlton LaNey, 1999; Gilkes, 2001; Jean-Marie, 2006). These networks may be even more important for social work scholars in the academy facing race-based and gender-based discrimination (Crowley, 2021; McLane Davison et al., 2018). Their preliminary findings on the Accountability Sistah Circle (ASC) model suggest that cultivated peer communities can "help us to collectively interrupt what can feel like personal attacks and neglect, and redirect that energy toward advancing our professional goals" (McLane Davison et al., 2018, p. 28). Based on long-standing social work values of community-building and collaboration, the ASC model may be an effective tool for creating prosocial collaboration and community as an antidote to incivility and systemic barriers.

It is clear from these participant recommendations we need to elevate a new archetype of social work leadership in higher education. Informed by the progressive traits of the founders of the profession, we will need to support leaders who can up-end historical processes to create a new paradigm of success and advancement that centers accountability and respect. While these leaders are willing to take risks, support must emanate from their faculty to protect these new ways of being and relating with one another from inevitable institutional resistance. The authors recognize the existence and contributions of historical and contemporary deans, directors, and administrators who have quietly and effectively disrupted systems of oppression and incivility. It is incumbent upon our field to locate and document the collective wisdom, strategies, and successes of these leaders.

Limitations

This study includes several limitations. First, the information collected here represents only the answer to one single-question response. Several other studies have focused on single question responses as the basis for their findings (Bartle-Haring & Lal, 2010; Berger et al., 2013; Cesario et al., 2010; Perkins & Luster, 1999) and have been able to show useful insights based on this method. Further studies should be conducted using more robust qualitative methods to be able to deepen the understanding of participants' experiences. Secondly, this study used convenience sampling, so we cannot be certain the degree to which our participants' views are representative of social work faculty more broadly, nor can we be certain the degree to which responses represented the overall breadth of faculty feelings about incivility. Finally, the results of the study reflect the 2017 experiences of social work educators, prior to significant events such as the COVID-19 epidemic, the racial justice movement following George Floyd's murder, and the 2020 election, and therefore may not reflect educators' current experiences.

Conclusion

As funding cuts, a global pandemic, community violence, and challenges to academic freedom impact our universities, faculty and administrators endeavor with difficulty to find resources to adequately support themselves and their students. Growing perceptions of scarcity, competition, and interpersonal disconnection are likely connected to uncivil behaviors. It is time for academic leaders to build and maintain communities within academic settings that are based on a culture of care, and that respect

the dignity and worth of all people. By implementing healing leadership practices, open dialogue and restorative justice, and professional circles of care and support, social workers can use the strength of the profession's roots and values to take the lead and show by example how to create positive, inclusive, safe and supportive workplaces.

Disclosure statement

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