

# The concept of incivility: A case study<sup>1,2</sup>



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## Abstract

It is clear that a culture laden with incivility creates a difficult work environment. Incivility has not excluded nursing academe. Uncivil interactions in the academic workplace may deter qualified nurses from entering academia and encourage current faculty to leave. The concept of incivility was examined using Walker and Avant's method of concept analysis and clarified with a case study. The discussion illuminates ways to diminish uncivil behaviors between and among nursing faculty.

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## 1. Introduction

Arguably, today's culture applauds whim over self-control and inflammatory behavior over civility. At best, a culture fitting this description would be a difficult working environment. Although traditionally, a caring profession, nursing, and nursing academe are not immune to incivility in the workplace. The American Nurses Association Code of Ethics and Interpretive Statements (2015, 16) compels nurses to "maintain compassionate and caring relationships with colleagues" and "precludes... disregard for the effect of one's actions on others." Rich literature detailing incivility, precipitating factors, and costs to individuals and organizations exist (American Nurses Association, 2015).

Researchers in a variety of specialties have provided discipline-specific descriptions of incivility. As indicated during a session on incivility (Luparell, 2014) at the National League for Nursing (NLN) 2014 Education Summit, defining incivility in connection with nursing academe is a necessity in order to introduce policies into schools of nursing related to civil

behaviors and to recruit and retain qualified faculty. The nature of incivility will be illuminated by relevant literature review, concept analysis, and demonstration of the concept in a case study. Discussion of incivility in nursing education, research, and practice will be provided.

## 2. Organizing Framework

The concept of incivility among nursing faculty was examined using Walker and Avant's (2005) method of concept analysis. For the purposes of this article, a modification of the eight-step procedure for concept analysis was used: concept selection, determination of analysis purpose, identification of concept uses, determination of defining attributes, identification of a model case, contrary case, antecedent and consequence identification, and empirical referent definitions. Step 6, identification of borderline, related, invented, and illegitimate cases, was excluded.

## 3. Concept

A review of the literature was conducted using the following electronic databases: Cumulative Index for Nursing and Allied Health, MEDLINE, Education Resource

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Information Center, Humanities International Index, PsycARTICLES (psychology references), SocINDEX (social science references), Business and Management Practices (BusManagement), and Academic Search Premier from 1995 to 2013. The primary search word was *incivility*. The term *faculty-to-faculty incivility* was also searched in an effort to locate those articles specific to nurse faculty incivility. Articles were limited to English-only and peer-reviewed publications. Nearly 400 articles were obtained. A review of these articles revealed that a concept analysis of incivility had not been performed. Upon reviewing the abstracts and an ancestral review of relevant articles, 46 references incorporating quantitative, qualitative, and theoretical research were utilized. Literature from the disciplines of education, nursing, business/management, psychology, sociology, and government was included in this concept analysis.

### 3.1. Purpose

The major purpose of this concept analysis was to develop an operational definition of incivility and to clarify how incivility and uncivil encounters between and among nursing faculty affected their quality of life and decision to remain in academia. Commonalities that nursing faculty face related to incivility in academia were elucidated through the concept analysis process.

### 3.2. Definition

Incivility has been defined as a deliberate discourtesy toward another that wounds one's self-esteem and creates doubt about his or her abilities (Peters, 2014). Incivility may have an impact on nursing when uncivil behaviors filter to patient care. When nurses in the health care setting do not work collaboratively and continue to "eat their young" (Meissner, 1986, p. 51), the problem of newer nurses not remaining in nursing is perpetuated. A lack of qualified nursing faculty ready to replace retiring faculty has been noted to exist.

### 3.3. Origin

The word *incivility* has roots in the ancient Latin word *incivilitat* meaning a lack of civility, which means community or city. It may be expected that people who belong to a community treat each other with some degree of respect and courtesy. In the absence of respect and courtesy, incivility prevails.

### 3.4. In Higher Education

Incivility in higher education may be demonstrated by rude, discourteous speech or behavior that disrupts and shows disregard for a cooperative learning environment (Connelly, 2009; Feldmann, 2001). Students and faculty may each be affected by uncivil actions. Feldman suggested that

incivility is rooted in as many as three psychological factors: "a need to express power over another, a need for verbal release due to frustration over an apparently unsolvable situation, or a need to obtain something of value" (p. 137).

Colleges and universities have, or are in the process of, adopting policies regarding incivility. Recommendations have been made for the inclusion of specific language regarding the institution's policies on incivility in the course syllabus (Connelly, 2009). With the understanding that all colleges may not be able to fund such an endeavor, Connelly addressed the need for a first-year college seminar experience in order to reduce the amount of incivility observed on college campuses.

### 3.5. In Nursing Education

Heinrich (2006) ascertained that the concept of incivility among nursing faculty was "rarely discussed" (§ 1). During the NLN's 2005 Education Summit, Heinrich (2007a) collected 261 "free-writes" from nursing faculty regarding their experiences with incivility. These free-writes were treated as qualitative data even though demographic data were not formally collected unless participants volunteered the information. Results showed that the introduction of "faculty-to-faculty incivility" was met with "blank stares" from nurse educators from all levels of academia (Heinrich, 2007a, p. 34). A variety of types of "mean girl" games, such as setting-up, devaluing and distorting, misrepresenting and lying, shaming, betraying, breaking boundaries, splitting, mandating, blaming, and excluding, were identified, and recommendations were made to end such games.

Heinrich (2007b) identified "joy stealing" as those "experiences with students, colleagues, staff and administrators that rob nurse educators of their zest, clarity, productivity, feelings of worth and desire for more connection" (§5). Joy stealing expressed the way someone felt after having experienced an act of incivility. Although this term was specific to nurse educators, it does not specify faculty-to-faculty encounters exclusively because Heinrich suggested that one's joy could be stolen by administration, students, or faculty.

Clark, Olender, Kenski, and Cardoni (2013) identified the prevalence of faculty-to-faculty incivility in academic work environments and noted that incivility was a reason given for leaving a teaching position. Recently, 68% of nursing faculty participating in a national survey reported moderate to serious levels of faculty-to-faculty incivility in their schools of nursing (Clark et al., 2013). The most commonly occurring uncivil behaviors included opposition to change, not completing workload, distracting others during meetings with mobile devices, poor communication on work-related issues, and making rude comments. Demanding workloads and stress were most often cited as contributing factors to faculty-to-faculty incivility. Managing multiple and competing demands; handling taxing workloads; obtaining advancement, promotion, and tenure; working with

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