

Incivility's Many Variations and Influences
Comm 281: Intro to Comm Messages
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Imagine you are ten years old again. Your elementary school yard is the setting, recess, and you are playing basketball with your friends. You pull up just before the bright orange hoop and release the ball. It soars through the air spinning and turning on its axis, inching closer and closer to the hoop. It hits the rim head on and falls back down to the ground. A missed shot. One of your friends exclaims, “Ha! You suck!” Taken aback, your heart sinks in your chest, and suddenly, you don’t feel like playing anymore. You walk away from the game feeling confused, and hurt. Even this little example, is considered incivility, or in some cases bullying.

Remember the old, timeless phrase, “suck it up?” I’m sure many have heard the expression, but how many people actually hear it anymore? The truth of the matter is it is seldom heard due to the growing intensity of incivility in America today. With different outlets and mediums for people to bash others, how can one “suck it up?” It is becoming more and more impossible to escape from the constant noise that social media emits. Think of how many deaths the world has seen in recent years due to incivility online. Take a ballpark guess. Got it? Well, rest assured that guess is nowhere near the actual number. In 2013 forty two percent of teenagers with some form of technology reported being cyber bullied. That’s a huge number; of that number, twenty percent of kids that due experience cyber bullying have thought about suicide. One in ten kids actually attempt it.

The problem with incivility online is that the Internet and social media is such a crucial role in our society today. Many people see things that are written online or posted on social media channels, and they almost never go away. So, as a whole, people have to be careful about what they post, and think twice about whether it may hurt someone or not, because you never know what might happen. Incivility affects millions of people every day and is considered a

national dilemma that has presented itself in the classroom, online, even at work, and the repercussions are more serious than ever.

The classroom is supposed to be a safe haven for students, especially younger ones. A classroom is meant for learning, creativity, nurturing, and most importantly, an environment where students can make friends. How can that happen if students are being bullied in this so-called “safe haven?” If students are being stripped of their innocence in class and being made fun of why would they ever want to return? This is why so many kids that are bullied never want to come back to school, which is unfortunate because the more school they miss the more they are behind, ultimately at risk of not passing depending on the severity. Dr. Ken Shore reveals, “Bullying can give rise to a climate of fear and anxiety in a school, distracting students from their schoolwork and impeding their ability to learn” (www.educationworld.com). How can a student worry about being bullied and focus on school at the same time? It cannot be done. Additionally, once a student falls behind in school it is very difficult for them to recuperate and catch up. As I stated earlier, the whole notion of the “suck it up” attitude is no longer existent in today’s society. So, what is different from the type of incivility we see now compared to decades ago?

Let’s take a closer look at what bullying was twenty plus years ago. The whole dynamic was different than it is today. Teachers and parents were far less involved in kids’ lives than they are today, and for no specific reason other than it was just a different time. There was no need to be involved in everything. Kortney Peagram of *Chicagonow.com* states that “20 years ago, we all knew who the bully was and how to avoid him/her” (www.chicagonow.com). Kids were far more independent than they are today. If there was a problem they encountered, they were always told to ignore or avoid it. If you were bullied you either stood up to them or dealt

with it yourself. That's the key. Too often we see that kids are too afraid to stand up for themselves, or are embarrassed to get help. Incivility has evolved over the years, and bullying is definitely a part of it. Words and actions cannot simply be shrugged off anymore; the times have changed and frankly, the degree of incivility has as well. It is more and more common in today's society, but not just in the classroom, thanks to the help of the Internet and social media it has spread its influence across multiple outlets.

Think about the most basic form of incivility. Most likely it is probably a snarky, disrespectful comment along the lines of, "shut up," but it can also be drastically different. One we see a lot in today's world is sexual harassment, a very severe form of incivility. However, as most things do in history, technology evolves. Our generation has seen that first hand, and now more than ever, incivility along with its multiple branches has taken hold of the online realm. How many times have there been stories of people taking their own lives due to comments they received on media platforms like Facebook or Twitter? The answer is too many. Online incivility is cowardly and solves nothing. When online incivility is brought up the immediate response is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has become a huge topic for discussion in recent years due to many teen deaths over social media posts. For example, in 2010, Rutgers student, Tyler Clementi, was recorded by his roommate while having interactions with his gay partner. The roommate then shared this video via the Internet. Soon after, Clementi posted on a social media site that he was going to kill himself. A week after the video was shared, Clementi jumped off the George Washington Bridge.

Cyberbullying is probably the worst form of online incivility there is. Today the Internet is so accessible; twelve year olds are already making Facebook pages. If it is that easy to make a profile, imagine how easy it is to type something you don't mean and have it remain on social

media forever. That's the thing about posting online; it is there for a very long time, sometimes forever. ABC news conducted a report on adults who have never seen cyberbullying firsthand. Their reaction directly coincides with the severity of the situation. Hemanshu Nigam, the writer, states that parents "are shocked by how severe it is, how long it perseveres online, and how far-reaching it can be" (www.abcnews.com). People, especially kids, cannot grasp the fact that offensive and demeaning comments can be seen by anyone if they are posted online. A lot of the content involved in cyberbullying is pretty heavy stuff, and a lot of the time is the reason people like Tyler Clementi choose to take their own life. Once something is up there, it is up there for good. Everyone takes that risk when putting items on social media and the web. Of all the contributing factors that make up incivility, cyberbullying is perhaps the most serious and most prolific today, and there are a lot of other divisions of incivility.

Is it possible for adults to experience incivility? Sure, but we may not always refer to it as bullying. Incivility for adults is just as chaotic as it is for kids, and can be just as damaging too. Too often we see coworkers fighting over a client, or that old cliché of a subordinate imagining ways in which his boss has a horrific accident and can no longer work. We've all seen them. But what makes incivility for adults different? As an adult, we are more likely to use words rather than physicality to deal with people that are irritating us. In fact, Weber Shandwick from *Press Release* notes that, "one of the more worrisome workplace trends is the rise in Americans leaving their jobs because of workplace incivility" (www.webershandwick.com). One would think that as adults they would be more civilized about dilemmas, right? Actually, there are several cases where grown adults act just as childish as the elementary school students discussed in the previous paragraph. The odd thing is that incivility, bullying and even forms of harassment are some of the chief points companies and

business aim to reduce. Nowadays, with every aspect of oneself being scrutinized and under a microscope, there is no room for error. If accusations arise involving incivility in any form, the majority of the time the company or business will come right back and release the offender. So the real question is what can we do to stop it?

As we've seen incivility is very prominent in the workplace. In fact, Diane Berenbaum from *Human Resources IQ* notes that the rate of incivility is seen very often in the workplace, "96 percent have experienced incivility at work." The study comprised of eight hundred employers from different companies, although, ninety six percent is a whopping statistic. That's close to all employees experiencing some form of incivility. The prominence is overwhelming and should be dealt with. *Human Resources IQ* also provides several methods to deal with incivility should one be the victim of it, or see it in the workplace. Here are the steps the website provides: "Increase awareness, create workplace standards, provide internal training and coaching, and encourage open communication and feedback" (www.humanresourcesiq.com). So, the issue at hand seems more serious than first glance.

Let's break down these steps. The first item concerns increasing awareness. Firstly, one must accept that incivility is a serious matter, especially in today's society. A good way to spread awareness is to sit down with all the employees and go over the gravity of the situation that incivility brings with it. Now, the next item deals with creating workplace standards. For this it is imperative to know what is crossing the line and what is suitable for fellow employees and the workplace. Communication is key here. If the proper etiquette is not conveyed to all workers, there will be no standards to abide by. Next comes the third step, providing internal training and coaching. With this concept it is important to make sure everyone knows how to deal with incivility should it come up. Sometimes outside resources such as trainers can be hired

to speak to companies or business to inform them of the details of incivility. In doing this, employees will understand that the working environment is a place for communication and cooperation, not discourteous actions. Lastly, the simplest step is to let employees know that everyone's office is always open. Bosses and CEO's crave feedback, like humans crave attention. The head of a company's sole purpose is to make sure their company is functioning efficiently, and any form of incivility can certainly deter that. A lot of people don't realize that civility is what makes the world go around. Being civil with one another is vital to efficiency and sociability, without it we would never branch out and become friendly with new people.

Of all the components of incivility there is undeniable evidence that it has consumed much of our daily lives. Whether it is in classrooms across the country, online with social media, or even at work with fellow employees, incivility is a huge part of our lives, whether we like it or not. We must be aware of the dangers of incivility as we continue our daily routines, even something as simple and harmless as an impolite comment can do more damage than one thinks. Remember the Tyler Clementi case discussed earlier? That tragedy not only sheds light on the notion of cyberbullying and online incivility, but also how social media can present a real problem when used incorrectly or with ill-intent. Actions must be taken to ensure that people, especially teenagers and young adults, know the repercussions of online incivility. The fact of the matter is, online incivility is at the forefront of everyone's attention, because it has been in the news a great deal as of late; however, the other forms of incivility – workplace and classroom – must not be forgotten or overlooked. Actions need to be taken to reduce those types as well. In essence, it all boils down to incivility in terms of words. Rhetoric is at the forefront of incivility and people need to realize that words can do a lot more than one thinks. To put it frankly, one never knows the power words have on another until after they are spoken, which is

unfortunate because if a negative outcome is produced it will already be too late. When in doubt, we can revert back to a timeless phrase, a phrase I was taught in kindergarten: *If you don't have anything nice to say, keep it to yourself.*

Works Cited

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