

## Chapter 12

# Welcome to Academia, Expect Cyberbullying: Contrapower and Incivility in Higher Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Academic contrapower harassment occurs when those with less perceived power harass someone with more power. Cyberbullying as contrapower occurs when students express varying levels of incivility and bullying through assorted online mediums such as email, online evaluations, or social media sites. This project examines the experiences of three faculty women with different racial/ethnic backgrounds, age differences, years in the academy, and at different levels within their career, and explores the connection between sexism and racism that persist in academic settings. Experiencing varying levels of cyberbullying the authors have found departments, administration, and universities fail to provide training or policies to protect faculty from student bullying behaviors. The concept of hegemonic civility is used to illustrate how the actions of students and inaction of administrators uphold the hegemonic order.*

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# INTRODUCTION

## Cyberbullying in Higher Education

Research on bullying in higher education has typically had two different foci: (a) faculty members bullying each other, and (b) faculty members bullying students. The “toxic” culture of academia is often blamed for the prevalence of workplace bullying, with the tensions between academic freedom, tenure pressures, and an increasingly corporatized business model often causing friction between colleagues (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Twale, 2017; Twale & De Luca, 2008). In other cases, workplace bullying in higher education is seen as a consequence of the lack of institutional policy on workplace bullying (Schmidt, 2010, 2011; Starobin & Blumenfeld, 2013). In addition, research has pointed out how different identity groups are often victims of bullying and harassment among and between faculty members, including women (Lester 2009), racial, and ethnic minorities (Frazier, 2011; Sallee & Diaz, 2013), and LGBTQ+ faculty (Sallee & Diaz, 2013).

On the other hand, research on bullying at institutions of education often focuses on faculty who bully students (Goodboy, Martin, & Johnson, 2015; Sylvester, 2010), or student discontent with faculty (Goodboy, 2011ab, 2012; Goodboy & Frisby, 2014; LaBelle, Martin, & Weber, 2013; Marraccini, Wyandt, & Rossi, 2015). This research suggests that faculty should be responsible for changing their teaching styles and classroom behaviors in order to create a comfortable classroom climate (e.g., Frisby, Goodboy, & Buckner, 2015). Additionally, it suggests that faculty incivility toward students in the classroom decreases the likelihood of students interacting with professors outside of the classroom (e.g., office hours), thus having a far-reaching impact on student learning (Crossbourne, 2018). Similar to faculty-to-faculty bullying, Students of Color are more likely to be bullied (Bishop & Casida, 2011).

While research about faculty members bullying other faculty and bullying students is certainly valuable, it ignores students who bully faculty. Indeed, student bullying of faculty is “rarely defined, empirically studied, or meaningfully discussed within academic circles” (Espelage et al., 2013, p. 2). One part of the difficulty of researching student bullying of faculty is the slippery definition of the term, with much disagreement of how to recognize and define bullying, particularly when it is a student bullying a faculty member (Garrett, 2014). Another part has to do with lack of policies and processes in place that fail to provide faculty with a means of support when facing student harassment issues (Blizard, 2016; Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2014; Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013). In addition, the Buckley Amendment, also known as the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), protects the educational record of the student. These protections include any range of information about a student that is maintained in schools in any recorded way (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Once an act of incivility or harassment is reported it becomes part of the school record thus falling under FERPA. As such, it becomes even more difficult to resolve student-to-faculty incidents, which may further allow this type of behavior to manifest. While there is a growing body of research on bullying in education, less is known about the experience of faculty being cyberbullied by students.

Despite the relative lack of research about student bullying of faculty, the American Psychological Association (2004) referred to it as “a silent national crisis” and urged for greater attention and policy to address the issue. Although their focus was on K-12 faculty, this recommendation can easily be extrapolated to higher education. Moreover, as with faculty-to-faculty and faculty-to-student bullying, student-to-faculty bullying disproportionately targets women, People of Color, and younger faculty

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(Lampman, 2012). Thus, research on cyberbullying in higher education should also focus on student-to-faculty bullying, and particularly on experiences of marginalized faculty.

Given the limited research on faculty being cyberbullied by students, this chapter explores the authors' own experiences of cyberbullying. This chapter 1) contextualizes issues of cyberbullying in higher education by discussing contrapower, identifies three overarching ways faculty are cyberbullied by students, discusses the lack of response by administrators, and reviews the effects of bullying; 2) identifies a theory of hegemonic civility that can be linked to cyberbullying; 3) shares the authors' own experiences with issues of cyberbullying; 4) analyzes these experience; and 5) provides future directions for research relating to cyberbullying in higher education.

**BACKGROUND****Conceptualizing Student-to-Faculty Cyberbullying****Contrapower**

Most people are familiar with cyberbullying and issues of power from the student perspective and from the student being bullied, harassed, marginalized, and oppressed from sources of power; e.g., teacher, principal, professor. However, contrapower allows us to examine the inversion of the educational power structure: student-to-faculty. Perhaps student-to-faculty bullying is under-researched because it is seen as less pervasive due to the power that faculty hold over students (Garrett, 2014). However, the concept of contrapower explains the phenomenon of someone with lesser power within an institution harassing someone with more power (Grauerholz, 1989; Misawa, 2015). Additionally, despite the lack of research on student bullying of faculty and contrapower, it appears to be far more common than previously assumed, and researchers have recently called for more research into the phenomenon (Brabec, Yancey, Daniels, Barger, & Wijata, 2019).

Within the university, research on contrapower harassment has focused on sexual or sexist student behaviors (Grauerholz, 1989; Lampman, Crew, Lowery, Tomkins & Mulder, 2016; MacLennan, 2000; Mohipp & Senn, 2008; Morgan, 2010). Relatedly, others have looked specifically at students who moved beyond verbal harassment to stalking faculty, finding that it is far more prevalent than most people realize (Morgan, 2010; Morgan & Kavanaugh, 2011). Other contrapower research has focused on bullying in the classroom, incivility, and racial-ethnic harassment (DeSouza, 2011; Lampman, Phelps, Bancroft, & Beneke, 2009; May & Tenzek, 2018; Misawa, 2015). More recent contrapower research analyzed students pressuring professors to change grades and sending rude/insulting emails (Brabec, et al., 2019, Lampman et al., 2016; MacLennan, 2000). However, regardless of the type or experience of contrapower, most research agrees that student-to-faculty bullying causes a deviation of norms surrounding the student-teacher relationship, which negatively affects student learning and classroom climate (Lampman, et al., 2009; May & Tenzek, 2018).

Contrapower can be experienced by any faculty member. However, in her 2012 article where a study of 524 professors from 100 colleges and university across the United States were surveyed, Lampman found women, People of Color, LGBTQ+ faculty, younger faculty, and newer faculty reported more incivility from students than their White male counterparts. Research has shown that male students were more likely to engage in vengeful dissent (Goodboy, 2012). Moreover, an intersectional perspective recognizes

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that, for instance, women of Color, LGBTQ+ faculty of Color, etc. often experience contrapower harassment due to the intersections of race and gender (Misawa, 2015). Further, individuals in positions where their jobs are less secure, such as a lecturer or non-tenured track faculty, have reported even more severe negative effects such as stress related illness, depression, and anxiety about losing their jobs (Lampman, 2012; Lampman et al., 2016). It is through these acts of contrapower where harassment occurs.

**Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is a growing concern in higher education. In fact, using digital technologies to communicate is second nature to a large percentage of college-aged students. As such, the heavier use of digital communication may result in students having experienced or been engaged in acts of cyberbullying. The authors have chosen to use the term cyberbullying as an encompassing term covering the continuum of cyber related communication from digital incivility to cyberharassment and cyberstalking. The act of cyberbullying typically includes such online actions as posting comments intended to defame an individual, disclosing personal information or private facts to inflict personal distress, and harassing someone online with the intent of embarrassing, harming, or causing emotional or professional damage (Beale & Hall, 2007; Beran, Rinalidi, Bickham, & Rich, 2012; Bhat, 2008; Mason, 2008). Cyberbullying is done using any form of electronic communication, such as emails, texting, and instant messaging (Minor, Smith, & Brahsen, 2013; May & Tenzek, 2018). Most recently, social media sites, such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Rate My Professors, are growing areas of cyberbullying because larger percentages of individuals can witness and/or participate in the harassment (Brak & Caltabiano, 2014; Festl & Quandt, 2013; May & Tenzek, 2018; Minor, Smith, & Brahsen, 2013).

Evidence suggests that instructors and professors are increasingly at risk of being the victim of cyberbullies (Daniloff, 2009; Smith, A., 2007; Smith, C., 2010). Studies have found upward of 30% of faculty have reported being cyberbullied by students (Blizard, 2014; Minor, Smith, & Brahsen, 2013; Vance, 2010). Research by Li (2007) and Willard (2005) identified multiple ways that individuals are cyberbullied. For example, cyberharassment involves repeatedly sending messages, and cyberstalking refers to the offender sending threatening messages to the victim. Langos (2012) explained that elements of cyberbullying include repetition, power differences, and intention that help determine if the act is malicious. She further noted that cyberbullying takes place in two different ways. The first is direct cyberbullying that occurs between the cyberbully and the victim. The second is indirect cyberbullying when the cyberbully posts things about the victim in a format where multiple people can see it.

As of this writing, the authors have only encountered a few studies specifically documenting student-to-faculty cyberbullying (Blizard, 2014; Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2014; May & Tenzek, 2018; Minor, Smith, & Brahsen, 2016; Vance, 2010; Vogl-Bauer, 2014). By using communication technologies, students are able to threaten or harm faculty physically, professionally, and/or psychologically (Vogl-Bauer, 2014). Reviewing the literature around uncivil electronic discourse by students aimed at faculty, Wildermuth and Davis (2012) argued that there has been an increase in student incivility caused by declining civility and changing definitions of politeness, students' sense of entitlement, consumerist attitudes toward education, and the inherent features of online interactions.

Blizard (2014) reported that most cyberbullying messages contained derogatory remarks, challenges to faculty authority, reduction of assignments or difficulty of assignments, and demands for higher grades. Research on classroom justice and instructional dissent may provide some groundwork as to why students engage in cyberbullying of faculty. If students feel like they have been treated unfairly, they may

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feel justified to engage in cyberbullying acts (Chory-Assed, 2002; Horan, Chory, & Carton, 2013) in order to vent their frustrations with limited backlash (Rose, 2012) and frequently with anonymity. The same techniques are used to cyberbully faculty as are for cyberbullying peers: creating fake Facebook pages, hacking or spamming email accounts, sending abusive messages, and posting negative reviews on public websites (Reid, 2012). Additionally, Conn (2010) found evidence that students also created YouTube videos and blogs that attacked their faculty members.

While there is evidence of the more extreme cyberbullying incidents like creating videos, blogs, and fake Facebook pages, most documented evidence is found in email communication, course evaluations, and professor rating sites like *ratemyprofessors.com*. Research suggests email was the most common form of cyberbullying (Blizard, 2014; Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2014; Vance, 2010). Some of the most egregious emails included derogatory language directed at the faculty (Blizard, 2014; May & Tenzek, 2018), physical and verbal threats (Blizard, 2014; May & Tenzek, 2018; Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013), and accusations of racism or discrimination (Blizard, 2014).

### **Harassment Through Digital Incivility, Trolling, and Cyberharassment**

Uncivil electronic discourse is overtly aggressive, hostile, intimidating, insulting, or offensive communication from the student directed at the faculty in order to disrupt the learning and teaching process (Morrissette, 2001; Widermuth & Davis, 2012). This type of communication is typically found in emails and student evaluations. Nearly all institutes of higher education employ some type of instructor/course evaluation. These evaluations are often used to determine retention, promotion, and compensation. While course evaluation is a valuable tool for improving teaching, research indicates that evaluations are biased against a number of groups: People of Color (Anderson & Smith, 2005; Ho, Thomsen, & Sidanius, 2009), women (Kimmelmeier, Danielson, & Basten, 2005), and LGBTQ (Ewing, Stutkas, Jr, & Sheehan, 2003). Although there are some inconsistencies in findings, faculty of Color are typically evaluated more negatively than White faculty (Boatright-Horowitz & Soeung, 2009; Smith, B. 2007).

Research has also shown that in order for women to be evaluated the same as men, they must have additional characteristics beyond competency, such as humor and friendliness, to be considered as competent (Kierstead, D'Agostino, & Dill, 1988; Van Giffen, 1990). Lampman et al. (2009) found that approximately 45% of faculty said they received hostile course evaluations and about 25% had received some type of hostile or threatening communication. Lampman's (2012) research on women faculty facing bullying or harassment in some form estimated that about one-third of faculty will experience hostile comments on course evaluations. Blizard (2014) also noted that faculty were receiving defamatory comments on their evaluations. One subject in the Cassidy, Faucher, and Jackson (2017) article explained that evaluations can be a mechanism within the university that unintentionally enables cyberbullying and its effects.

Often, the uncivil behavior moves beyond the email or anonymous evaluations to public forums. To troll is to post false or inflammatory messages on a newsgroup or electronic forum with the intent to elicit a hostile response. Although there are a multitude of places for students to troll their professors, one of the most popular places is the teacher rating site, *ratemyprofessors.com* (RMP). RMP is a social media site developed in 1999 to provide students with a source to optionally rate their professors and share their evaluations with other students. RMP allows students to give an overall rating on a 5-point Likert scale for the professor and provide a narrative to be more specific. The site has changed over time and has eliminated its teacher "hotness," "helpfulness," and "clarity" ratings. RMP has also added some "Do's" and "Don'ts" guidelines that address what you can and cannot include, policies for removing

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content, and professor guidelines. While these actions may have added an air of credibility, the site still contains many hostile and inappropriate posts that cannot be removed by the faculty who were defamed.

Research indicates that RMP is used by students to inform their decision about taking a particular faculty member (Davison & Price, 2009; Field, Bergiel, & Viosca, Jr., 2008; Gregory, 2011; Legg & Wilson, 2012; Reid, 2012; Ritter, 2008). While anonymous teaching sites like this can be a valuable source for students selecting professors and courses, multiple studies have indicated instances of cyberbullying and/or inappropriate content on this site (Daniloff, 2009; Davison & Price, 2009; Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2014; Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013). As noted by Legg and Wilson (2012) negative RMP comments have detrimental effects on the professor and students, creating a vicious cycle that becomes increasingly damaging. While RMP is the only online social media posting that has been extensively studied, we can surmise that any type of negative social media posting will have similar effects.

Cyberbullying can move beyond incivility and trolling to more long term and intense forms of cyberharassment. Research has found faculty members experienced significant issues of harassment, including death threats, stalking, threats of violence, threats of physical harm, and even death (Lampman, 2008; Morrisett, 2001). Minor, Smith, and Brashen (2013) detailed examples of how and to what extent some students cyberstalked faculty, including one faculty facing ongoing and escalating posts in a variety of social media sites and another being told by the student he knew where he lived. No matter the extent of cyberbullying, it can have negative effects on the faculty.

### **Effects of Cyberbullying on Faculty**

Just like other forms of bullying, cyberbullying can be toxic for both the immediate targets and those around them (Vogl-Bauer, 2014). Faculty may experience physical and emotional effects such as trepidation about their teaching and loss of confidence around students (Blizard, 2016; Kowai-Bell, Guadagno, Little & Balley, 2012). Other effects include being depressed, anxious, irritable, emotional and fearful of the student or losing their job (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2014, 2017; Lampman, et al., 2016; Vogl-Bauer, 2014). Faculty also experienced relational and professorial effects like adjusting the content they teach or changing their classroom demeanor (Lampman, et al., 2009; May & Tenzek, 2018; Vogl-Bauer, 2014).

Another issue is faculty reputation (Blizard, 2016; Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2017; Kowai-Bell, et al., 2012). Course enrollment may impact evaluations and pay. Low enrolled classes might be canceled leaving an instructor out of a position or with a pay cut. Additionally, public comments through RMP or on other social sites can be used as an unofficial resource that influences official decisions about hiring, pay, and tenure (Johnson & Crews, 2013; Montell, 2006). Cyberbullying causes effects that can harshly affect the individual and can spread beyond impacting students, colleagues, the department, and the university as a whole. Even with these negative effects, there is still limited support on campuses.

### **Limited Support and Lack of Reporting**

Cyberbullying is a particular problem in higher education because of the lack or perceived lack of resources available to help. Multiple studies indicate that faculty were unaware of support or policies for these types of issues and administrators were not aware of the extent of cyberbullying on their campuses (Blizard, 2016; Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2014; Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013). Vogl-Bauer (2014)

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even suggested that sympathetic individuals were often unprepared to help. Others doubted that authorities would help or that it was even a reportable offence (Vance, 2010).

The lack of perceived support may be one of the causes for the lack of reporting. Another issue is that of embarrassment or concern for reporting cyberbullying. Minor, Smith, and Brashen (2013) believed that embarrassment might be a barrier. Blizard (2016) also explained that some faculty are too ashamed to report an incident or were concerned they would experience further victimization. Lampman, et al. (2016) suggested that women were more likely than men to report an incident, because male faculty's harassment was more sexual in nature. They suggested male professors may fail to report this type of harassment for fear they might be accused of inviting that type of behavior. An additional concern noted by Minor, Smith, and Brashen (2013) was that reporting an incident may result in having to pursue action. This can result in the expense of time and money which many faculty may not have, especially adjuncts or part-time faculty. Just like other forms of harassment, victims feel unsupported by their superiors or the university. It is clear that many universities are not providing support, avenues of reporting, or counseling for faculty victims of cyberbullying.

### **Hegemonic Civility: A Theoretical Perspective**

Digital incivility, trolling, and cyber harassment are pandemic problems found in all workplaces from fast food restaurants, to business industry to colleges and universities. Part of the problem is a reduction in face-to-face communication and more reliance on smart phones, social media, and texting. The lack of in-person dialogic communication allows for people to communicate in silos, thus, decreasing and/or erasing dyadic communication. Terms like "keyboard warrior" have become synonyms for incivility and cyberbullying as one way for people to anonymously express their anger, rage, and voice via computer mediated norms without the risk of face-to-face communication and dialogue. What this communicative behavior leads to is what Patton (2004) termed as "hegemonic civility."

Hegemonic civility refers to normalized or naturalized behavior—appropriate behavior—even as the action can be uncivil or even silencing in order to uphold the hegemonic order. This is different from civility that supports a common good for an inclusive collectivity. Hegemonic civility is an organized process, which results in suppressing or silencing any opposition, in favor of the status quo (Patton, 2004, p. 64-65). In its earlier definitions, civility referred to "a social virtue and an old idea" (Barrett, 1991, p. 146). Originally from Greek, civility "involved adherence to the four cardinal virtues: courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom" (p. 146). Civility was a term contrasted with hubris: "excessive pride, insolence, and arrogance" (p. 146). Carter (1998) defined civility as

*an attitude of respect, even love, for our fellow citizens, an attitude, as we shall see, that has important political and social implications. Moreover, civility is a moral issue, not just a matter of habit or convention: it is morally better to be civil than to be uncivil. (Carter, 1998, p. xii)*

In contrast to the classic definitions of civility, there is a counter-civility movement that has grown and been embraced by the United States since President Barack Obama was a democratic candidate. This was a time when overt racism in speech began being treated as just another opinion in media, and has now ushered in a linguistic and social justice movement divide. This counter-civility movement is hegemonic civility, which also includes cyberbullying.

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Hegemonic civility and cyberbullying are the opposite of “talk.” Talk can be experienced and understood or coded as “civility.” Coded as civility, civil speech, or controlled discourse allows one to save face whilst expressing ideas that might be seen as classist, disenfranchising, heterosexist, marginalizing, racist, and sexist, but is carefully framed not to “disrupt the niceness in which [dominant groups] embed interpersonal relations, and not wanting to deal with the discomfort of personal racism [or sexism]” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 46). It is through the mask of civility that hegemony, racism (covert or overt), and sexism are reinscribed. For example, when someone says they “tolerate diversity,” says, “I’m not sexist I hired a woman, I just hope she’s half as smart as the men,” says “I won’t make your wedding cake because you’re gay, or says “I’m not anti-immigrant, but I am for a border wall; people need to come here legally” are all examples of hegemonic civility. This mask of hegemonic civility, contributes to structural and institutionalized forms of racism and sexism, which has affected all aspects of daily and social life, as well as infiltrated business industry, education, laws, and media. Hegemonic civility allows a society to ignore, erase or blame the marginalized and disenfranchised other for their own oppression, after all, no one is responsible for their own use of invoking hegemonic civility.

Cyberbullying is the next step in hegemonic civility, because it includes things like digital incivility, trolling, and cyberharrasment. Cyberbullying includes sending emails, direct messaging, posting comments on websites like RMP, and causing torment and emotional distress to their victims. It also includes flaming which are digital messages designed to show “hostility, aggression, intimidation, insults, offensiveness, unfriendly tone, uninhibited language, and sarcasm” (Turnage, 2007, para. 2). While some students/people who have used computer-mediated communication as their primary form of interaction rather than face-to-face dyadic communication may view their online actions as authentic self-expression, their behavior is, at best, inappropriate and sarcastic and at worst hostile, immature, uncivil, intimidating, and rude.

Civility and cyberbullying are inextricably bound with power because it precludes overt or covert challenge to the White supremacist hegemonic order. As Hall (1997) aptly reminded us so often in his research, power includes economic exploitation, physical coercion, and cultural or symbolic representation (p. 259). Universities are inextricably bound with power and often in conflict with traditional definitions of civility. But the university’s nature as a large, powerful institution means that it is likely to value eight elements of civility: knowledge and awareness, will, respect, courage, ability, independence, freedom, and responsibility (Barrett, 1991, p. 148-150). However, the reality can be that universities mirror, rather than challenge, the same attitudes and generalities about cultural, gender, and racial differences that plague the larger society. Therefore, an increase in the number of women and people of Color will not remedy issues of marginalization that occur on campuses, particularly if there is no challenge to marginalized issues and concepts surrounding hegemony—especially discussions as they pertain to current U.S. racial hegemony.

**Cyberbullying: A Continuum of Bad Student Behavior**

In this section, the authors have chosen to share their own personal experiences with cyberbullying. The authors vary by age, ethnicity/race, and years in academia. Additionally, the experiences they share span more than a quarter century beginning in graduate school from their MA and Ph.D. programs and continued through the duration of their careers, and occurred in a variety of schools in multiple states. It is important to note that these examples are only one-part of their teaching story as each author has also been nominated and/or won teaching awards, typically receives positive course and teaching evaluations,

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has positive feedback on RMP, and/or receives good feedback from their supervisors. The authors have endeavored to keep each situation as anonymous as possible to protect their own identities, the identities of the students, the identities of the administrators, and the identities of the institutions. Throughout the following sections, examples of digital incivility, trolling, and cyberstalking are highlighted. The authors have used the exact, unedited language, from emails, evaluations, and RMP.

### **Digital Incivility**

The consumerism model of education has ushered in digital incivility and permits students and parents to pressure faculty to give the student what they paid for, but not something they earned. It has become normalized for some of these students to attempt to pressure a faculty member into changing deadlines, grades, or providing some type of leniency toward a student who has not done his or her work. Additionally, when students have to take a required class or take a class they do not enjoy, it becomes the faculty's fault for the students' lack of engagement or failing to meet unknown expectations of a student. Hegemonic incivility results when students verbally blame the faculty for something the student did or did not do, the poor choice in course selection, or other issues beyond the control or knowledge of the faculty.

In the authors' own experience, they have dealt with a number of these types of situations. While many students might use an intimidating or inappropriate email to request something, when the faculty says "no," they frequently backpedal seemingly to respect the decision of the faculty. However, a few continue to engage in digital incivility until they get what they want. For example, one of the authors proctored an essay exam in a 90-minute class period. One student who performed poorly on the exam, writing only 2-3 sentences in response to the essays stated, "I would like to discuss my midterm with you. The very short amount of time given for the amount of essays required to write is unreasonable. Would it be possible if I can retake it with more time allotted?" The author replied no, and in detail explained why as related to course policy and the syllabus. The student's response was "you clearly didn't read my email and your reply was not helpful." The professor ended up having to set up a meeting with the student and with the department chair.

In another experience one author receiving an email from a male student upset that he had received a failing grade in a 1-credit online course. In the email, he stated that he "recognized that he hadn't [completed] most of the work, but had completed the major assignments." The author re-checked the grade and let the student know that because he did not do much of the work he did not receive enough points to earn more than an "F." The author advised that the student should "take this as a lesson learned about completing work." Unfortunately, the F in this class was preventing him from graduating that started a chain of emails with his comments becoming more hostile and insulting, including calling the author "unreasonable," the class "worthless," accusing the author of not grading in a timely manner, and eventually going to the department chair and the dean to get this taken care of because the author was "unfair and incompetent." The author was strongly encouraged by her department chair to give the student a passing grade to allow him to graduate. The chair also advised that the student could take this much further and cost the author her reputation or job. Even after no evidence of an error, the author was not supported and was made to feel incompetent by both the student and superior. As a new lecturer, this just added to the imposter syndrome already felt and was a factor when the author chose to accept another position.

Finally, one of the authors' experienced digital incivility as a graduate student teaching a large, diverse course in a different college. Because of the size of the course, the students worked often in self-selected teams. Towards the end of the semester, the author received an email from a male Asian student com-

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plaining about a grade. In the email, he called the author “racist” and told her he was going to report her to the dean of the college. The email stated that he and two other Asian students in his group had been given a lower grade on the final project than the White students in the group. The incident was reported to one of the graduate directors letting him know her concern and asking for direction on how to proceed. The author was simply told to meet with the student and discuss it. One of the worst pieces of advice to give a graduate student is to meet alone with a potentially hostile student who was already planning to report them to a dean. The author met with the student and after much uncertainty and uncomfortable-ness it was discovered that two of the White males in the group told him they received better grades because the author did not like the international students. While the situation was positively resolved, no one ever followed up to check on the welfare of the instructor or find out if a solution had been reached.

Evidence of hegemonic civility is present in the above examples. First, we see evidence of blatant contrapower. As noted by Lampman (2012), women, faculty of Color, younger faculty, and those with less experience are more likely to victims of bullying. Second, we see comfort from students expressing their anger via email. In these cases it was both female and male students “calling out” a female professor to blame for the student’s own actions. By choosing to communicate online, a sender can be more focused on what is being said and less focused on to whom they are saying it (Wildermuth & Davis, 2012) leading to a more impersonal treatment of another. This detached method of communication can cause the sender to be more negative, insensitive, or less tolerant (Elder, Seaton, & Swinney, 2010). Third, we see with the responses of department chairs that the behavior of the student is upheld over that of the faculty. The case of sending a female graduate student to face her accuser alone potentially sets the graduate student up for failure. The actions by the department chairs and supervisors reifies the students’ uncivil behavior. In each situation, the female faculty was unsupported by her supervisors, effectively usurping her power. The behaviors of both men and women in the supervisory roles supports hegemony by placing men over women.

Sometimes this digital incivility comes in the form of student evaluations. One of the authors taught a 9:00 am Saturday class with 12 students enrolled. Typically, the same three showed up regularly, with the other nine rarely attending, yet the author received more than three evaluations. One of the evaluations noted, “The tone of her correspondence was condescending and rude, I felt like the emails sent out were like being chastised by a middle school educator in a position of power.” Another evaluation stated, “The instructor...did not care at all about what she was talking or lecturing about.” In these particular examples, it seems that students felt the need to critique the professor’s personal style rather than her teaching or the course content.

Another example illustrates how a student’s poor class selection is somehow the fault of the professor.

*Quizzes and responses were due BEFORE discussion in class. 95% of class attendees were disengaged and showed disapproval of the instructor’s onstage bantering. Assuming students know about the pop culture references you elude too is hilarious- I haven’t spent oodles of my life facing a TV or screen, I (like many others) choose to spend my time outdoors or with real people. I felt disconnected from the class during discussions...and spent class time developing a distaste for mainstream America.*

Although the student recognizes they potentially chose a class that may not have been a good fit, and even though the course title and description clearly stated that the focus of the course was media and popular culture, the poor fit of the class was essentially blamed on the faculty. In addition, the student

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tried to support his/her claims against the faculty by pulling in unsubstantiated evidence of other students disliking the class, which was not borne out in other evaluations.

While the authors' own evaluations are largely positive, other research has shown that 45% of faculty received inappropriate or hostile course evaluations (Lampman, 2012), that there is gender and racial bias in student evaluations (MacNell, Driscoll, & Hunt, 2015; Peterson, Biederman, Ditonoto & Row 2019) and faculty felt like they had to justify course evaluations (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2017). These outcomes can have negative implications for faculty. One of the authors had to account for course evaluations that fell .5% below the departmental expectations. The overall good course evaluations were negatively skewed by one student who noted to the question, "would you recommend this instructor to others," the student selected "definitely not." Based on language used, it was obvious this evaluation came from a student who had previously been emailing due to poor performance on a midterm and with whom the author had earlier negative experiences which involved the department chair.

Teaching evaluations are able to be drastically skewed positively or negatively when few students fill out the course evaluation. In this case noted above, fewer than half of the students filled out the evaluation, and all comments were positive, sans one student. When the professor asked what to do with regard to the evaluations, the chair responded that "low evaluations can be cause for dismissal." Clearly upset by learning this outcome for a class that was only slightly below the departmental average (0.5 on a 5 point scale), the chair then replied, "or you can write a rebuttal." Alone and unassisted, the professor responded to the evaluation packet by writing a rebuttal without any idea of the consequences that might develop once the rebuttal was crafted and sent. In these particular scenarios, we see additional linkages between cyberbullying and hegemonic incivility. With anonymous evaluations students take no responsibility for what they say. This anonymity provides no follow-ups for what is said and there are no linking evaluations with student's achievement, attendance, or in-class performance. Evaluations have also been a source of controversy in higher education. As Peterson, Biederman, Ditonoto, and Row (2019) noted, "student evaluations of teaching are widely believed to contain gender bias" (para. 1), and our experiences reify Peterson's scholarly results. And MacNell, Driscoll, and Hunt (2015) found that when controlling for variables like gender, when students were given the identical online class material with the only difference being a "male" name and a "female name," "...female professor and instructors continually received[ed] lower evaluations from their students for no other reason than that they are women..." (p. 301). And if ethnicity is taken into consideration, "women and men of color, as well as white women, still face far more hostility, mistreatment and process-based inequality than their white male counterparts" (Jaschik, 2019, para. 5). Because women and People of Color are more likely to receive lower or more subjective evaluations, they are more likely to change or expected to change their classroom behavior to accommodate students. This ultimately plays into the hegemonic order by keeping women and faculty of Color in their place in higher education. In addition, to the professor writing the rebuttal, we see a department chair tell the professor what she can do to try and counteract a poor evaluation by one student, but offer no other support, nor offer in ameliorating the feeling of being alone and isolated. Rather, the professor is left with the feeling that being off by .5% can potentially end her career.

**Trolling**

The next step in the continuum of cyberbullying is trolling. Trolling is when a person posts or writes degrading, hateful, mean, and inflammatory statements that are intentionally defamatory in order to "bait" someone into a response. Trolling is primarily done in spaces deliberately set up for others to see and

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even engage in the trolling behavior. It can take place through online evaluations, where it is expected that faculty supervisors can see specific comments or in venues, like RMP, where other students can see comments and post their own. In some instances, schools actually provide online links to faculty evaluations. This was the case of two of the authors. Students may not be able to see the qualitative comments, but they are able to see the quantitative scores that individuals received.

Trolling is different than digital incivility in online evaluations. Digital incivility in evaluations are unidirectional comments directed at the faculty that may be considered rude or discourteous but with ambiguous intent to harm the target. Trolling evaluations are those that are often directed at the faculty member's superior by providing content deliberately trying to cause some type of punishment or distress to the faculty. One example of this is the following comment:

*The professor solely used assignments from past professors without fully understanding their application to the course or requirements. She has said that she doesn't even read the readings prior to class because they are boring for example Grades were not posted on assignments on blackboard or in class so it was impossible to know how you were doing on assignments or the course in general and on several occasions she said she just doesn't have time for grading. I am not sure what this professor's qualifications are to teach this ... course...*

While faculty may reuse assignments or read new material along with students, the statements that were made do not reflect the kind of behavior that most faculty would ever engage in. Another faculty shared the following evaluation comment:

*Worst teacher I have ever experienced in my five years at the University... She was absolutely horrible and rude. Her feedback was long, repetitive, and unhelpful. Her assignments were excessive for a 3000 level class; My 5000 level classes was easier than hers. She believes she is always right and it is her way or no way. Words cannot express how pointless this class was and how horrible of a teacher she is. She should not be allowed to teach...*

In this case, not only was the student being rude and defamatory, but was specifically attempting to punish the instructor by getting her fired. Additionally, phrases like "too liberal," "too feminist," "man hating," "radical feminist agenda," and "reverse racism" come up in the authors' evaluations. Because students believe that supervisors read these comments, they invoke hegemonic civility by disrupting the professor's power of control over the class and students.

A major site of student trolling is ratemyprofessors.com. While it is difficult to know how many students actually use this site, two of the authors stated that students have specifically told them they have used it to determine classes to enroll. Below are excerpts from various RMP comments the authors have received.

- "Very scatterbrained prof. Paper requirement are VERY long, 10-15 pages."
- "Sadly the class was women and leadership and neither the professor or the TA had any leadership qualities at all!"
- "You could say shes a real misguided professor who doesnt understand that adults taking college classes might have lives or emergencys. She offers no leaway and shoved her own political agenda down your throat."

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- “If anyone needs a reason why grad students should never teach undergrad courses, she is the reason...Get a grip!”
- “She...constantly gives vital info in the last 5 minutes to screw over people who leave early.”

Research by Johnson and Crews (2012) found that RMP scores on clarity, helpfulness, and overall quality were influenced by the easiness of the instructor. Students were more positive to faculty who provided them with higher grades and lower stress. Men were also rated as having more clarity than women (Johnson & Crews, 2012). You see this with one of the reviews identifying the author as scatterbrained and another calling one of the authors misguided. Just like other evaluations, racial bias is found in RMP. White faculty received higher ratings in helpfulness, clarity, and quality. RMP showed across the board bias against persons of Color (Johnson & Crews, 2012). Based on the above reviews and knowing the authors are female and identify racially different, the results support Johnson and Crews (2012) research.

Trolling, in terms of this paper, is both hegemonic civility and cyberbullying, and the result is the same: the professor endures an uncomfortable or hostile work environment. Racial and gender stereotypes often govern student expectations of faculty. Research shows women faculty are often expected to be more accommodating (Lampman, 2012; Lampman et al., 2016), faculty of Color are perceived as easier than White faculty (Reid, 2010) and Black women faculty may be perceived as angrier (Landrine, 1999). When the stereotypical expectations are not met, students may feel the need to respond more harshly. As explained by Horan, et al. (2013), if a student perceives a professor's behavior as being unfair, it does not matter if the student was actually treated unfairly, but it will be difficult for them to believe otherwise. This may result in retaliation through cyberbullying.

Additionally, academic entitlement and the consumeristic model of education may lead students to see their professor as a service rather than a person (May & Tenzek, 2018). According to Goodboy and Myers (2012), students have the tendency to blame failure on their instructors. Chowning and Campbell (2009) explained that students expect academic success, but fail to take any personal responsibility for obtaining a successful outcome. These factors allow students to treat their professors with incivility and lack of respect.

Universities play a large role in maintaining this hegemonic incivility. If women and underrepresented faculty consistently receive lower evaluations, they are more at risk for failing to fill a class. Also, for newer graduate students and faculty, they may not have had a strong background in teaching, therefore, they struggle with the skills needed. On the contrary, easily evaluated courses become overenrolled, leaving academically rigorous courses under enrolled. Underrepresentation of women and individuals of Color in an institution can suggest they have less power; therefore, they are more likely to be vulnerable to student hostility (Lampman, 2012). Thus, when students do not see women and individuals of Color in higher positions, they may feel that they have power over them, resulting in cyberbullying. Wildermuth and Davis (2012) noted that, “the level of course and topic of course may influence the likelihood of incivility” (p. 389).

Faculty teaching courses relating to diversity issues are potentially more likely to receive hostile comments, especially if what is taught contradicts or challenges the beliefs of students. Finally, annual reviews can further harm a faculty member who has received negative evaluations. The authors have each experienced evaluations when the main focus has been on a single negative evaluation or incident that has happened in class. Rather than supporting the faculty or focusing on positives, department heads often rely on the gendered and racial stereotypes of the faculty. Suggestions have been made to faculty to have observers in their classroom, obtain additional training, and even to reduce the number

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of assignments or the difficulty level of the class. Furthermore, university administration often makes excuses for students' racist, sexist, homophobic incivility and cyber bullying. In terms of RMP, none of the authors reached out to have anything removed and it has not adversely affected their jobs, although it has had demoralizing consequences on their mental health. All of these actions serve to encourage cyberbullying techniques that ultimately result in hegemonic civility.

### **Cyberharassment and Cyberstalking**

The authors define cyberharassment as unwanted and unconsented conduct such as email, messaging, or posting on social media with the intent to torment an individual. With cyberharassment there is generally not a credible threat. Cyberstalking is the use of electronic forms of communication to stalk an individual with threatening or malicious behaviors that communicate a credible threat of physical harm. These types of cyberbullying are less likely to happen overall; between 7 and 8 percent of Americans have been cyberstalked with women being the most vulnerable group (Duggan, 2017; Lenhart, 2016). Although these experiences are rare, the authors have experienced both cyberharassment and cyberstalking.

One author explained that a student started emailing her with information unrelated to the course. After multiple emails per day, over several days, with no administrative response, the author contacted the Dean of Students. The emails continued and included sexual harassment, but the Dean of Students refused to remove the student from the course. After the student harassed a graduate student in the department, the department involved the police and finally removed the student from the author's course. However, the harassing emails continued, and a police officer personally reached out to the author to note that the student said disturbing things about her during a wellness check. Ultimately, the Dean of Students representative told the author that she could file a harassment complaint, but she did not have any grounds for a complaint and that she should not bother doing so. Eventually, the student stopped emailing the author, but this was long after the Dean of Students had closed the case.

In one of the most extreme cases, one of the authors had an experience with a non-traditional aged white male who identified as a white supremacist. This student hijacked the course and attempted to derail the learning environment. The department chair advised her not to seek any outside assistance from upper administration nor from the campus police. This professor had no support from colleagues and was left unprotected by the administrative process. Apparently, the student felt emboldened by his unchecked in-person behavior and shared his feelings online because the next day the professor received phone calls from the media and hate emails, some of which contained the word "nigger." Ultimately, the situation became so toxic that there were undercover police posted in and outside of the classroom. While the student was eventually removed from the class, the professor was left feeling exposed, violated, and unsafe.

In each case the faculty were left bereft of administrative assistance that laid both the problem and solutions in their laps. Administration is well-trained in what to do when faculty exhibit hegemonic civility against a student, but not the reverse when the faculty member is harassed, thus fulfilling the notion of contrapower. Furthermore, digital incivility was breached, because rather than the inappropriate behavior remaining in the digital realm, the student breached the veil of acceptable behavior, violated the Student Code of Conduct in the aforementioned situations, and the universities reified hegemonic civility by normalizing the student's actions through their own lack of policies protecting faculty.

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### **SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

One of the biggest difficulties in facing cyberbullying has to do with the overall lack of understanding and support from departments and administrators. If you are not straight, white, older, and male, you are more likely to face cyberharassment or other forms of online incivility (Feldmann, 2001). When we consider who are department chairs and administrators, typically older, white men (Seltzer, 2017) it is no wonder so little attention and support have been given to these issues. In fact, Cassidy, Faucher, and Jackson (2017) reported no administrators in their study experienced cyberbullying, and none knew the extent of cyberbullying on their campuses or the negative impacts the victims experienced. In examining the literature and the authors' own experiences, there are many ways that campuses can reduce student cyberbullying against faculty. As noted by Wildermuth and Davis (2012) campuses need to have both proactive and reactive strategies for faculty and administrators.

#### **Proactive Strategies for Faculty and Administrators**

There are some proactive strategies that faculty can take such as creating explicit and detailed syllabi with course expectations, clearly delineating rules and expectations for students and faculty in the class, and examining their own teaching styles (Wildermuth & Davis, 2012). Additionally, to address issues of harassment and bullying, universities should create a statement that would reference inappropriate conduct and language by faculty, staff, and students and be clearly stated in every syllabus and in student, staff, and faculty handbooks. Universities can also support faculty by providing resources for faculty and their courses to be evaluated by the staff of Centers for Learning and Teaching, have their syllabi reviewed, have support for online course development, and provide ongoing training for all faculty.

Faculty themselves cannot be the only agents against cyberbullying. Administration must take a proactive role in preventing cyberbullying and assisting faculty members with this issue. First and foremost, administrators must develop and implement campus wide approaches regarding behavior and language of faculty, staff, and students. These standards should be published campus wide and all faculty, staff, and students must be provided training related to face-to-face and online incivility. Second, administrators must create a written policy defining cyberbullying and other forms of uncivil behavior, identifying the consequences of this behavior for faculty, staff, and students, guidelines to take when faced with cyberbullying, and an explanation of the universities' support of individuals who are victims of cyberbullying (Feldmann, 2001; Wildermuth & Davis, 2012).

Administrators need to listen to and support their faculty when they believe they have been victims of cyberbullying. Research has shown that faculty are often caught off guard by this type of behavior due to lack of pedagogical training and are unclear how to handle the behavior (Morrissette, 2001). This becomes even more problematic for faculty when they find that many universities have no policies or support for faculty in these situations. Or when they think that a Dean of Students, VP or Chief Diversity Officer will help, only to learn that the person in that position is a gatekeeper for the university status quo and not necessarily a faculty advocate as it relates to cyberbullying. After reporting an instance of verbal harassment in a diversity class to the Dean of Students after a student said "the professor should be taken out and raped," one author was told the student was in violation of the Student Code of Conduct, but nothing happened to the student. The student was not removed from the professor's class. Rather the Dean of Student's response invoked the student's First Amendment Rights and the Buckley Amendment, saying that "this course is an excellent learning opportunity for the student." Then the pro-

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essor was told to “change the course material” so the student in question would be more comfortable. Ultimately, observers were sent to the classroom watching the content of the material covered and the student’s behavior. While the observers could have been appointed to help the professor feel better and less alone in a hostile classroom climate, it emboldened the student who assumed the observers were watching the professor. Had there been proactive strategies in place addressing the complaint process and the consequences of behavior, the author could have been more supported and the student aware of how her actions would be treated.

Because of the lack of support for faculty, a message is sent that cyberbullying is a result of poor teaching and uncivil behavior is an acceptable means for students to get what they want. Additionally, without support the faculty may believe they have to handle the situation alone, which can lead to a variety of issues for the faculty, students, and school. Therefore, administrators who listen to and provide support and ongoing training dealing with these issues can create a supportive environment for their faculty. Just as universities need proactive strategies to prevent cyberbullying, reactive strategies are needed to address cyberbullying when it happens (Wildermuth & Davis, 2012).

### **Reactive Strategies for Faculty and Administrators**

School supported training can help with these reactive strategies. The first strategy faculty must remember is to remain polite and professional with their students. If possible, faculty should move their communication offline and encourage face-to-face meeting; however, this should not be done alone. A dean, department chair, or another faculty member should be present.

Second, documentation of emails, evaluations, conversations, and how and when you responded are necessary. This documentation can help if a student needs mental health help or other support, can make other faculty and administrators aware of a particularly volatile student, and can provide faculty with protection in the case of a legal situation (Feldmann, 2001; Wildamuth & Davis, 2012). This is when it is particularly important that the department and university have clear reporting policies in place.

Finally, it is important that faculty have support both on and off campus. Because disclosing these issues can be detrimental to faculty, especially those in term or adjunct positions, having trusted people to speak to is essential. It is crucial that faculty recognize that they should not have to put up with cyberbullies or uncivil behavior, but it is almost always going to be part of their job. Faculty need to recognize a student acting out may be a result of other issues. In the authors’ own experiences, the cyberbully actions often overshadow the positive evaluations and other achievements. Finally, faculty must recognize that teaching is only one aspect of their identity. Most educators do not enter the profession with the hope and goal of becoming rich, but rather giving back to society and one’s community. When someone is cyberbullied, this is an assault and an attack on one’s identity. Reaching out for assistance is one avenue whether or not that is on campus.

Administrators must also have reactive strategies to support their faculty. As noted by Cassidy, Faucher, and Jackson (2017) a lack of university response allows uncivil behavior to reoccur. Additionally, they found that faculty who reached out to administration were frustrated by the inadequate responses. The authors also experienced this same frustration. First, administrators can listen to and believe their faculty. For instance, in the case of the student arguing about the grade, the department chair could have worked with the faculty member to see what her syllabus policies had established and looked at the student’s coursework. If the chair felt satisfied, they could have simply told the faculty, “I will support you to change the grade or leave it.” Second, administrators should not leave their faculty alone in deal-

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ing with a potentially hostile situation. A graduate program chair should never send a teaching assistant alone to meet with a student who called her a racist, nor should administration disregard a faculty member's concerns about a student within her class. Conversations, not emails, need to happen between the administrator and faculty on what is needed to allay concerns or solve problems. Third, during reviews administrators should talk through concerns they or their faculty have with evaluations or other non-urgent anonymous comments. If there are concerns or themes within anonymous evaluations, administrators can recommend solutions. If not, faculty, especially junior faculty, should talk about strategies to keep up their good work. Finally, in the case of personal or classroom safety, administration must listen to faculty and act. The lack of concern for personal safety was an issue for two of the authors and addressed by Cassidy, Faucher, and Jackson (2017) and Vance (2010). Research suggests violence and harassment against faculty is a real and ongoing issue that must be taken seriously (Lampman et al., 2009). Ultimately, each of these strategies come down to how supported and valued faculty feel within their departments and universities. Institutions need to develop holistic solutions to the systemic problem of cyberbullying, rather than promoting an individualistic model that leaves faculty responsible for students' incivility.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Future research on the topic of student-to-faculty bullying should be solution-focused. For instance, research could pilot-test training programs that educate professors, students, and administrators about cyberbullying. Additionally, research could focus on administrative responses to cyberbullying incidents in order to develop a set of best practices for managing cyberbullying from an administrative perspective. Other research might include focus groups of faculty to brainstorm potential proactive and reactive strategies for managing cyberbullying.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter reviewed the literature surrounding student-to-faculty cyberbullying. Research has shown that student-to-faculty cyberbullying is a problem in higher education, causing even larger burdens on faculty. Current research examines causes and effects of student cyberbullying, as well as faculty experiences. One of the major problems is that historically universities have focused on keeping their students safe, while assuming faculty are exempt from or immune to student bullying. As such, most institutions have little or no support to assist faculty facing any form of incivility from students. Within this chapter, the authors shared their own stories about cyberbullying and the lack of support they received from administration. The authors have provided proactive and reactive strategies for faculty and administrators and suggestions on how future research should be solution driven. In order for faculty to continue effectively encouraging the growth and development of their students, their growth and development must not be limited by the actions of a few students and the inaction of administration.

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**KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Contrapower:** When someone in a subordinate position oppresses or bullies someone in a position of authority.

**Cyberharrasment:** Ongoing, unwanted, and unconsented electronic conduct such as email, messaging, or posting on social media with the intent to torment an individual.

**Cyberstalking:** The use of electronic forms of communication to stalk an individual with threatening or malicious behaviors that communicate a credible threat of physical harm.

**Digital Incivility:** Electronic discourse that is overtly aggressive, hostile, intimidating, insulting, or offensive communication. It may be through texting, email, or other forms of computer-mediated communication.

**Hegemonic Civility:** Normalized behavior that is often uncivil or silencing used to uphold the hegemonic order.

**Hegemony:** The dominance of one group over another that has been established and supported through social, cultural, ideological, or economic norms.

**Student-to-Faculty Cyberbullying:** Students sending or posting harmful messages through various forms of computer mediate communication directed at faculty.

**Trolling:** Posting false or inflammatory messages on any electronic forum with the intent to elicit a hostile response.