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.

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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