When Acts Belie Principles: The Incongruity of Academic Leaders or Senior Faculty Who Violate the Nursing Code of Ethics

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The nursing literature is replete with discussions addressing incivility in nursing education. Most of this literature focuses on the uncivil behavior of Student-on-Faculty and Student-on-Student and, to a lesser extent, Faculty-on-Student and general Faculty-on-Faculty dyads. A much-overlooked set of dyads, Academic Leader-on-Faculty and Senior Faculty-on-Junior Faculty, is a less discussed form of incivility. While there is a large body of literature and media attention of "bullying or mean bosses" in the business world, this issue has been largely ignored in nursing higher education. The reasons for this near absence are manifold. No one would deny that incivility, bullying, relational aggression or lateral/horizontal hostility by academic leaders or senior faculty (including mobbing) exists; however, it is rarely discussed in nursing circles and the nursing literature. Its prevalence and impact on individual faculty and the larger academic nursing organizational unit certainly warrants greater examination. In this discussion, the rationale for why these dyads have not been the focus of a broader ethical discussion is presented. One reason is that this problem presents an obvious paradox, as nursing, by its own definition and history, is characterized as a “caring profession.” It is certainly unsettling that there is incivility among nursing students (future nurses) or among nursing professors (supposedly role models). The consequences of Senior Faculty (who usually exert significant influence) and Academic Leaders (responsible for ensuring a civil/ethical work environment) engaging in these behaviors are even more troubling. When the individual or collective actions of leaders and senior faculty belie or violate the principles of the Nursing Code of Ethics, the academic nursing unit may be significantly damaged. In the many cases reported anecdotally, ethical leadership and ethical conduct were in short supply. A robust discussion is required to address this ethical problem.