A Phenomenological Study of University Faculty Experiences with Disruptive Undergraduate Students in a Face-to-Face Classroom or Laboratory Setting

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY EXPERIENCES WITH DISRUPTIVE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A FACE-TO-FACE CLASSROOM OR LABORATORY SETTING

by

Anne Marie Gillespie

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology Western Michigan University
August 2014

Doctoral Committee:

Donna Talbot, Ph.D. Chair
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Suzie Nagel, Ph.D.
Behavioral review teams on university campuses have become the standard since the shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University. An institutional assumption is that faculty members will make referrals to these specialized teams when encountering disruptive students within their classrooms. Unknown is what actions faculty members actually take when faced with disruptive students in the classroom. This phenomenological study captures the experiences of faculty members with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face university classroom or laboratories.

All of the participants in the study described experiences with disruptive undergraduate students. Three female and three male faculty members, split evenly between tenured/tenure track and non-tenure track, participated in this study. The participants represented three different universities in central and west Michigan.

Disruptive student behavior does not automatically result in referral to behavioral review teams. Using the dual lenses of attribution theory and symbolic interaction theory themes emerged that describe and interpret the lived experiences of the faculty members. These emergent themes involved pervasiveness of disruptive behavior, feeling of powerlessness and fatalistic thinking from the faculty, collegial support, classroom influences, emotional costs, and perceptions of disruptions.
Disruptive student behavior is a constant issue in postsecondary settings that disrupts the educational environment resulting in a variety of responses by faculty. Additional research in this area needs to continue to identify dynamics surrounding disruptive behavior and ways to prevent it from snowballing. A greater understanding of faculty experiences aids departments and institutions, giving faculty members a voice and an opportunity to be empowered in their own classrooms.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Before I “check next” and move on to another adventure, I want to dedicate this study to my daughters, Katie and Maggie Bolter, who creatively and masterfully endured many hours of mum multitasking, busily doing schoolwork, and keeping it together. You kept me centered, grounded, and calm throughout this process. I also dedicate this to my dad, Dick Gillespie, who completed his own form of cheerleading, unrelenting optimism, and a focused “sunshiny” disposition all along the way. It’s always a beautiful morning with you, dad.

I will always cherish everyone’s encouragement throughout this endeavor. Having you three believe in me, knowing I had your unwavering support, and sharing your excitement when I wrote the last page, was wonderful. Knowing that my daughters are on their own path, following the same advice that my dad has always given me that, “anything is possible when you work hard, believe in yourself, and put your mind to it,” fills me with pride and happiness. Thank you, I could not have done it without you!

Everyone tells you that completing a dissertation is similar to competing in a marathon. You train and you practice, but even so, you don’t know what you’re getting into, until you’re actually out the door. By then, you’re committed and it’s too late to back out. I didn’t accomplish this research without help, lots of it. Because I didn’t go it alone, there are many others to whom I must also express my gratitude.
Thank you to the faculty members who were willing to share their experiences and participate in my study. I appreciate your candor and trust in adding your voice to the discussion on disruptive students in higher education.

Thank you to my committee: Dr. Donna Talbot, Dr. Sue Poppink, and Dr. Suzie Nagle. I appreciate the contributions you made, your perceptions into this topic, your understanding of both the dissertation and the research process, and your willingness to give so freely of your time and energy. Your suggestions greatly improved my study. I especially appreciate the guidance, patience, and insight of Dr. Donna Talbot. Donna helped me move from the micro, minute detail into seeing the global, bigger picture.

Thank you also to Diane Bourgeois for tracking and making sure that I turned in the things I needed to on time. I understand how getting things super efficiently to the graduate school can be similar to “herding cats” and I appreciate your efforts during these past few years by making sure things were organized and ready to go.

Thanks to my friends and colleagues at work who have cajoled, guided, pushed, encouraged, and helped me. Knowing I had the support of both my dean, Rick Kurtz, and my associate dean, Andy Karafa, gave me the added freedom to do the work that I needed to successfully write and defend this dissertation. Rick, your daily mantra of “a good dissertation is a done dissertation,” was also highly motivating and encouraging.

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Acknowledgments – Continued

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Finally, again, to my daughters, Katie and Maggie, I cherish you both and I am grateful to you for all of your support and belief in me. It has been the three of us for a long time. Over the years, we’ve accomplished a lot and I consider this a shared win. Now it’s your turn. Go out and do good within the world, but remember, “wherever we go, whatever we do, we’re gonna go through it together…” I love you, I thank you for being you, and for enriching my life in so many ways.

Anne Marie Gillespie
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The campus shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University drew global attention setting off a chain-wide reaction. Concerned stakeholders demanded the development of multidisciplinary teams designed to assess concerning student behaviors and target potential threats to the safety of the campus community including faculty members teaching at those institutions (Campus Security Task Force, 2008; Stambaugh, 2008; Suthers & Lynch, 2007; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). Nationally, this resulted in a proliferation of behavioral review and threat assessment teams created on university and college campuses (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008). Effectively and consistently developing successful procedures for postsecondary behavioral review and threat assessment teams requires, in part, an understanding of faculty members’ experiences with disruptive behaviors of undergraduate students in classroom or laboratory settings.

If we know how faculty members experience disruptive undergraduate student behavior, it increases our knowledge and understanding of the choice of action made in reaction to that type of behavior. A faculty member often makes the choice of (a) action (e.g., conversation, direct or indirect confrontation, sanctions according to the syllabus, humor), (b) acceptance (e.g., reframe of the situation or the behavior), (c) nonaction (e.g., avoidance, minimization, ignoring behaviors), (d) redirection (e.g., appoint discussion dominators as discussion leaders, incorporate texting as part of lesson plan), and/or (e) referral (e.g., department head/chair, student conduct, behavioral review and/or threat assessment team, police) based upon that experience (Amada, 1999; Anthony & Yastik,
2011; Ausbrooks, Jones, & Tijerina, 2011; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black, Wygonik, & Frey, 2011; Boysen, 2011; Carbonne, 1999; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; King, Hilber, & Engley, 2007; Luparell, 2005, 2007). Creating institutional behavioral review and threat assessment teams without first understanding how faculty members experience the behaviors of disruptive undergraduate students and without understanding what decisions faculty members make in response to those behaviors, based on their experiences, weakens the effectiveness of the teams.

This phenomenological study investigated the phenomenon of how a university faculty member experiences undergraduate students, in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting, who behave in a disruptive manner. I recruited faculty members who experienced one or more cases of disruptive undergraduate student behavior in their face-to-face classroom or laboratories since the April 16, 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The faculty members at these public Midwestern universities had access to their institution’s behavioral review or threat assessment team via their institutional protocols, but did not need to have utilized them. They also had access to training about students who might be distressed, disturbed, and/or threatening through various delivery methodologies, though were not required to have attended or accessed the materials.

In this study, I am making an ethical decision to remove the names of those who have perpetrated violence on college campuses. While I believe it is important to study the effects their actions have on higher education post-Virginia Tech, my goal is not to add to their infamy by placing them in the spotlight again. Each time we give celebrity status to those who perpetrate such violence; we raise the stakes and increase the
potential that another pathetic individual will seek media attention by creating a body count (Levin, Fox, & Mazaik, 2005). I choose not to partake in that action.

**Background**

On April 16, 2007, a current member of the student body killed two students in West Ambler Johnson Hall at Virginia Polytech Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in Blacksburg, Virginia. He proceeded to Norris Hall where he murdered 30 additional people and wounded 17 others prior to killing himself (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The actions of this one young man succeeded in forever changing the landscape of higher education, much as the brutal killings at Columbine High School affected public and private schools at the K-12 level. College and universities reacted in alarm. Campuses sprang into action by developing behavioral review and threat assessment teams. This was due, in part, to the scathing indictment of the *Virginia Tech Review Panel Report to Governor Kaine* citing a “failure to connect the dots” (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007, p. 52). This term became synonymous for reporting the failure of checks and balances that allowed the tragedy to occur at Virginia Tech.

Prior to Virginia Tech, the most notorious act of campus violence was the 1966 killing spree perpetrated by a University of Texas engineering student. The ex-marine, who, soon after murdering his wife and mother, killed 16 and wounded 30 others at the University of Texas, Austin before an Austin police officer killed him. He was the “face” of campus shooters for many years until the Virginia Tech student’s image became associated with campus murders (Stearns, 2008). Because many considered the University of Texas engineering student’s clock tower rampage as an aberrant act by a mentally ill man, it resulted in the establishment of postsecondary student counseling
centers. The four decades that passed between the actions of the University of Texas rampage and the actions at Virginia Tech were relatively quiet, lulling those in higher education into a false sense of security. While many in academia consider college and university campuses universally safe, postsecondary education became complacent believing that our institutions are exempt from the actions of a dangerous person (Baker & Boland, 2011; Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008; Fox & Savage, 2009). The killings at Virginia Tech changed that perspective. The attack at Virginia Tech has resulted in the development of institutional behavioral review and threat assessment teams at most colleges and universities (Heilbrun, Dvoiskin, & Heilbrun, 2009).

Then “lightening” struck twice. On February 14, 2008, a former Northern Illinois University student entered Cole Hall, murdered five people and wounded 18 before killing himself. One recommendation, included in the State of Illinois Campus Security Task Force Report to the Governor, was to “develop threat assessment teams and procedures that delineate actions that should be taken in the face of a potential or actual threat” (Campus Security Task Force, 2008, p. 15). Nationwide, postsecondary institutions closely examined the two instances of campus violence in order to develop strategies designed to protect their own campus communities (Fox & Savage, 2009). Again, the primary recommendations from multiple task forces were the development of a behavioral review and/or threat assessment team designed to minimize the potential for targeted school violence.

Behavioral review teams (BRT) handle individual students, faculty, and/or staff members in a crisis who are behaving in a disruptive or disturbing manner. This may occur because of a medical or psychiatric disorder. There is a shared expectation for an
official institutional response determining an appropriate reaction to the situation that meets the needs of both the institution and the individual (Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2011; National Campus Safety and Security Project, 2008). Threat assessment teams (TAT) identify, assess, and evaluate situations for potential threat, as well as, develop plans to mitigate potential risk, threats, and violence at the institution. Threat assessment teams attempt to identify individuals who pose a threat to themselves, others, and to the greater campus community (Cornell, 2010).

Institutions developed teams using the Delworth model to determine who should be members (Dunkle, Silverstein, & Warner, 2008). The development of training protocols for team members and the campus community used research on school shootings conducted by the Department of Education, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Secret Service (Cornell, 2010; Fein & Vossekuil, 2000; Fein et al., 2002; O’Toole, 2000). Training for BRT and TAT members is often extensive and comprehensive, focusing on assessment and interpretation of disruptive behavior. Faculty training is often limited in scope, with a focus on reporting disruptive student behavior that concerns them (Keller, Hughes, & Hertz, 2011). An institutional assumption most often made is if a faculty member attends training on “concerning students,” he or she will automatically refer a disruptive undergraduate student to a BRT and/or TAT when encountered (Keller et al., 2010). There is scant research that supports this notion.

Other instances of premeditated violence occurred on college campuses. There were acts committed by former students. These included attacks by a previous English as a Second Language (ESL) student in Binghamton, New York at the American Civic
Association (Chuang, 2012), an ex-Hampton University student (Woodrow, 2009), and a former nursing student at Oikos University (Collins 2012; Miller, 2012). Assaults also occurred by current students. These included a nursing student at Louisiana Technical College (Simpson, 2008), a University of California, Los Angeles undergraduate student (Gordon, 2009), a math major at University of Texas (Goldman, 2010), and a student at Lone Star College, CyFair (Nelson, 2013). Both the former attackers and the current attackers share many similarities. According to Chuang, the former ESL student returned to the American Civic Association, after having dropped out of his English lessons and killed 13 people. His written manifesto, sent to a news organization, indicated he was planning on killing people, in part, due to his poor English-speaking abilities.

This was a similar complaint of the former nursing student, prior to his rampage at Oikos University (Collins, 2012; Miller 2012). He entered the classroom searching for the female administrator with whom he was angry, lined his seven victims up against the chalkboard and proceeded to kill them (Collins, 2012; Crimesider Staff, 2012; Miller, 2012). The former nursing student, who the college expelled for unknown reasons, returned with a grudge towards those whom he felt disrespected him (Crimesider Staff, 2012). While the nature of his expulsion was never publically stated, the University’s dismissal policy requires a perceived harm to the school, to students, faculty, or staff (Collins, 2012).

The former Hampton University student was suicidal and he was concerned he “would not follow through” on his self-destructive impulses. Therefore, he decided to return to his former campus and shoot people, thus “forcing him” to kill himself. He returned to Hampton University, following a pizza delivery driver into a residence hall,
shooting the driver and the night dormitory guard, prior to shooting himself. He survived, as did the two men who he shot (Dujardin, 2009; Woodrow, 2009).

The attacks by a nursing student at Louisiana Technical College, a current student at UCLA, and a math major at University of Texas, are also of note. The nursing student calmly walked into her classroom with a loaded weapon before shooting two classmates and killing herself. Unknown is why she selected her particular victims, but mental illness is suspected (Hoover, 2008; Simpson, 2008; Turvey, 2013).

Also unknown is why the UCLA student stabbed his classmate in the throat during their shared chemistry lab (Smith, 2009). Almost a year prior to the attack, a faculty member alerted campus authorities regarding his concerns about the student’s erratic behavior (Gordon, 2009; Gordon & Faturechi, 2009; Smith 2009). The survivor and her attorney have filed suit against the Board of Regents for not protecting the victim against this student’s action (The Associated Press, 2010).

The University of Texas math major began shooting his AK47 above the heads of passersby’s at the clock tower where the University of Texas engineering student committed the largest shooting spree prior to Virginia Tech (Daily Mail Reporter, 2010, Stearns, 2008). He evidenced no behaviors of concern, until the day of the shooting (Finnegan, 2010; Haurwitz & Plohetski, 2010). He had the opportunity to shoot multiple people, yet, ended up only taking his own life (Daily Mail Reporter, 2010).

The student at Lone Star College, CyFair was another unexpected attacker. On April 9, 2013, he stabbed 14 students before onlookers thwarted his continued assault (Davies, 2013; Erin, 2013; Nelson, 2013). Prior to his attack, the university’s website
had profiled him as a success story for his good works and community outreach (Erin, 2012).

In addition, I cannot ignore the shootings in Tucson, Arizona (Canbanillas & Feldmeier, 2011) and in Aurora, Colorado (Johnson, 2012). Each of these two men had recently been taking classes at their local community college prior to engaging in their rampages. The former student in Tucson had recently dropped out of Pima Community College the week before killing six and wounding 14. The college police planned to prevent him from returning to the college campus because they were concerned about his potential for threatening actions (Anglen, 2011; Couch, 2011). Many considered the former student in Aurora to be a model student; yet he raised enough concerns for his University psychiatrist that she attempted to seek help from local law enforcement (Leonnig & Dennis, 2012). While neither student brought their violence onto the college campus, they each raised enough red flags they came to the attention of the institutional behavioral review team as potential threats.

One characteristic shared by each of these students is a history of mental illness. The Virginia Tech student evidenced a history of mental illness ranging from selective mutism in the summer between sixth and seventh grade, to suicidal and homicidal ideation when he was in the eighth grade. Although treated with antidepressants, he continued to have issues with depression and suicidal ideation throughout his academic career (Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008; Stambaugh, 2008; Stearns, 2008; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The University of Texas engineering student, upon autopsy, had a brain tumor and expressed homicidal ideation to his psychiatrist with the expressed desire to shoot people from the tower where he eventually completed his act (Stearns, 2008).
The former student from Northern Illinois University had multiple hospitalizations for suicide attempts during high school; diagnosed with bipolar disorder with psychotic features, he continued to be non-compliant with his medications (Stambaugh, 2008). The former ESL student reportedly suffered from depression prior to his act of violence (Chuang, 2012). The nursing student displayed signs of delusional behavior, poor touch with reality, and paranoia (Kelly, 2008; Turvey, 2013), giving away possessions and calling a suicide crisis-hotline prior to commencing with her shooting (Kelly, 2008). The former Hampton University was suicidal, having written about ending his life in an essay for his English class school; officials discovered he had not left his room for over a month resulting in his hospitalization for five days (Dujardin, 2009). Expressions of concerns about the UCLA student’s paranoid and threatening behavior occurred close to a year prior to his slashing Katherine Rosen’s throat (The Associated Press, 2010).

Faculty members at Oikos University considered the former nursing student to be mentally unstable (Miller, 2012), but there are questions whether it was mental instability or anger management issues over mounting debt that was the trigger (Collins, 2012). The student at Lone Star State College, CyFair expressed a desire to harm others since he was a small child (Davies, 2013). There were spoken concerns about the former Tucson student’s “touch with reality” that brought him to the attention of his community college’s behavioral review team (Anglen, 2011); since incarceration, he has received a diagnosis of schizophrenia (Follman, 2012). The former Aurora student was under the care of a university psychiatrist with an unknown diagnosis. He had come to the attention of his behavioral review team prior to his dropping out of the institution and his mental health is pivotal in his legal case (Johnson, 2012).
An increasing number of students with mental illness attend colleges and universities (Gallagher, 2011; Mowbray et al., 2006). This increases the likelihood that faculty members will encounter undergraduate students with mental illness in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings. How faculty members experience these students' behaviors are dependent upon her or his understanding or prior life experiences with mental illness (Corrigan & Watson, 2007; Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008; Pescosolodio, Fettes, Martin, Monahan, & McLean, 2007; Phelan & Link, 2004; Phelan, Link, Stueve, & Pescosolodio, 2000; Wolkenstein & Meyer, 2009).

Another trait shared by the Virginia Tech student, Lone Star State, CyFair student, and the former Northern Illinois student is all three received special education services. The Lone Star State, CyFair student’s family homeschooled him when they did not like his placement by public school authorities. The student, who is Deaf, received services in a classroom for children with special needs (Davies, 2013). Both the Virginia Tech student and former student from Northern Illinois received special education services after a diagnosis of emotional disturbance (ED) prior to coming to their respective colleges (Stambaugh, 2008; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The student from Virginia Tech received an individualized evaluation plan (IEP) and counseling support. Despite numerous hospitalizations, the parents of the former Northern Illinois University student only received a brochure for disturbed students (Stambaugh, 2008). Eventually his behavior resulted in his moving into a residential treatment facility and group home (Newman & Fox, 2009; Stambaugh, 2008).

An increasing number of students with disabilities are attending colleges and universities (Collins & Mowbray, 2005; United States General Accountability Office,
2009). This increases the likelihood that faculty members will encounter undergraduate students with disabilities in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings. How faculty members experience these student’s behaviors are dependent upon her or his understanding or prior life experiences with disabilities (Cook, Runrill, & Tankersley, 2009; Denhart, 2008; Rao, 2004; Vogel, Holt, Sligar, & Leake, 2008).

A final commonality involves the student from Virginia Tech, the student from UCLA, the former nursing student from Oikos, and the ESL student’s immigrant or international status. While the others stand the test for being native-born American males, the murderer from Virginia Tech is singled out as being a Korean-American “other.” The student from UCLA is identified as a Belizean “other.” The former nursing student is seen as a South Korean “other,” and the former ESL student was characterized as a Vietnamese “other” (Chuang, 2012; Collins, 2012; Kim, 2007; Smith 2009). Often after such newsworthy events like the Virginia Tech massacre or 9/11, perceived immigration or international status brings out xenophobic responses. Reports of the perpetrators focus on the differences between the identified other and Middle America. This emphasis on the perceived differences did not occur with the University of Texas engineering student, the former Northern Illinois student, the Lone Star State, CyFair student, the former Tucson student, or the former Aurora student (Chuang, 2012; Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008; Kim, 2007).

An increasing number of international students are attending colleges and universities (International Institute of Education & United States Department of States Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2012). This increases the likelihood that faculty members will encounter an undergraduate international student in their face-to-face
classroom or laboratory settings. How faculty members experience the student’s behaviors are dependent upon her or his understanding or prior life experiences with international students (Altbach, 2004; Bradley, 2000; Lee & Rice, 2007; Misra & Castillo, 2004).

The shared commonalities of the campus perpetrators including mental illness, disabilities, and international status may be of particular concern to faculty members as they experience disruptive undergraduate students in their face-to-face classrooms. This may also factor into the faculty member’s decision-making when determining whether to access a behavioral review team or threat assessment team after a disruptive behavior incident within the classroom.

According to an article in the Boston Globe, most colleges and universities have some form of behavioral review or threat assessment team, but there is no one organization tracking statistics associated with team development, faculty training, or cases reported and brought to some form of resolution (Sampson, 2012). Creating teams, without understanding the mechanism of how faculty members experience disruptive student behavior and determine referrals, have profound implications. The human element is the initial determinant for forwarding the name of a disruptive student to the behavioral review or threat assessment team. It becomes crucial to understand the decision-making processes by which a faculty member decides whether he or she will access the teams when faced with disruptive students. Knowing what is occurring not only protects potentially vulnerable populations from scapegoating or bullying by an uninformed campus community (Dixon, 2007), it also protects the faculty member (Dobmeier & Moran, 2008), and the institution (McBain, 2008; Stone, 2008). In this
section, I explain my approach as the instrument of the research and provide a description of the problem associated with the phenomenon of university faculty members’ experiences with undergraduate students, in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting, who behave in a disruptive manner. I also provide an overview of the theoretical approach, research methods, and conceptual framework for this research.

**Initial: The Researcher as Instrument**

In this section, I describe my role as the researcher.

**Researcher as Instrument**

In qualitative research “the researcher is the primary instrument for data analysis and collection” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). It uses the researcher to gather information from a variety of sources to interpret and holistically examine naturalistic data. As an instrument, I inductively analyze the participant’s meaning as the design itself emerges (Creswell, 2009). To use myself as an instrument, gives me the first-hand knowledge I need to make decisions. By not filtering it through anyone else’s perceptions, it gives me a real-time view of what is occurring during this study.

Qualitative research requires me to describe and interpret the context, the situation, and the phenomena, not only with empathy and rich description, but also with a healthy dose of skepticism (Stake, 2010). This required me to go into each interview with suspended belief, understanding that each participant’s narrative filters through her or his own perceptions. Their truth is their truth (Creswell, 2009).

**Reflective journal.** Prior to the start of my research, I used bracketing to achieve *epoche*, in which I attempt to set aside my biases and preconceived notions and attend to
what is present in the moment and to gain the perspective of the participant (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005; Merriam, 2009).

As a way to achieve bracketing, to set aside my preconceived notions of the phenomena I am studying, I completed reflective journaling throughout the study (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). Reflective journaling is the creation of a document following my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions on my study as its themes developed and my interviews progressed (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

**How I bracket my assumptions, preconceived notions, and biases.** There are many systemic flaws and obstacles which are difficult for teachers in the K-12 system to overcome (e.g., federal mandates, state mandates, local school boards, parental involvement or lack thereof, SES, infrastructure, policy, funding). Students who arrive in postsecondary education are a product of that system (Morrissette, 2001, Murphy 2010). Faculty members at most colleges and universities are wholly unprepared to teach classes in their subject level. While experts in subject matter, they have not received rigorous training in curriculum and instruction or learned the basics of how to teach college students (Deering, 2011; Seidman, 2005).

During my time as a young faculty member, I had a student in my interpersonal communications class who developed a frightening fascination with me. I was teaching a night class. One assignment, which I had used many times before with no unusual responses, was to keep a journal using prompts in the textbook to connect the material to their experience while explaining how it would help them become a better interpersonal communicator. In response to the prompts, this student used a photo of disassembled mannequin pieces from the book and expressed that he would like to see me that same
way; his entries devolved and always utilized some form of torture porn or sexual sadism. I spoke with him each time and told him it was inappropriate. He would cite back my syllabus stating that it did not say he could not use this material. I went to my department head who suggested that I invited this behavior by having this type of assignment. He agreed with the student saying my syllabus did not explicitly state this type of writing was inappropriate. Finally, I had to have someone escort me from the classroom. The student noticed and wrote angry pieces in his journal about “not trusting” him. Eventually, the semester was over and I did not see him again. That does not mean he did not see me, it just means I did not see him.

In retrospect, I was lucky. I hated feeling powerless. My department head played the “blame the victim” card. This is something many faculty members fear (Amada, 1999; Deering, 2010). There was no behavioral review team. I was an adjunct who was fearful of losing her job, so I did not go higher. If I had, where would I have gone? If he did not listen to me, who else would? I had to figure out the work-around. While I am comfortable fighting many of my own battles, this student unnerved me, and I needed to feel safe. To restore my feelings of safety, the next semester I added my first “disruptive behavior clause” to my syllabus, and took it to as many people as possible to see whether it could be misinterpreted.

I am also a licensed professional counselor. Having worked at community mental health, a university counseling center, and disabilities services, I am accustomed to working with individuals with mental illness, personality disorders, substance use disorders, developmental disorders, and learning disabilities. At one time, I completed psychiatric on-call for community mental health and was the mental health provider for
the county jail. I have seen the gamut of people in crisis and people “who think” they are in crisis. I am aware there is a difference between the individual who is likely to commit an act of harm to self or others, versus the individual who is noisily saying whatever comes to mind without a filter, but has no intention or plan to harm self or others. It is a fine line.

When some faculty members encounter a student with mental illness, personality disorders, developmental disorders, or learning disabilities they may be uncomfortable interacting with that individual (Brown, 2008; Corrigan, Edwards, Green, Diwan, & Penn, 2001). They examine the student’s behavior closely and often react based on assumptions and preconceived notions (Quinn, Wilson, MacIntyre, & Tinklin, 2009; Tinklin, Riddell, & Wilson, 2005).

I also serve on my institution’s Behavioral Review (BRT) and Threat Assessment Team (TAT). I helped write my institution’s policies. I was also co-chair of the university’s presidential task force examining my university’s student services post-Virginia Tech. We often get cases brought before the BRT. Our BRT is for low-level issues and concerns and is an advisory group. The TAT is for higher-level concerns and requires immediate action. I also worked with my previous dean to develop a CARE Team for my college. This triage team allows us to examine whether a situation is a classroom management issue or whether it needs to referral elsewhere. Many of the issues are managed in-house, and when we appear before the BRT, we have well-prepared documentation. Our college is the only one at our institution that has this model.
Previously, I worked as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and tutor. During that time, I was able to know many of the international students. They were far from home and needed to have someone to talk to who could listen to their experiences and advocate for them. Many of the cultural questions I worked to answer had to do with “why Americans do what they do?” The students would experience (a) appropriation of their cultures (e.g., Caucasians wearing dashikis or saris), (b) speaking loudly because the student did not speak English well, (c) growing frustrated with the student’s attempts at speaking English or learning American customs, or (d) not taking the time to learn about them or their culture. I saw many international students paraded around for the “Polaroid shots” and asked to be the stereotype of their culture, not a student from an international country who was studying abroad. When events occurred in their home country, especially those influencing our country, there was often an expression of American ignorance and bigotry. There was an implicit expectation the international students would “do as the American students do” because they are in the United States. There was not a lot of understanding of how remarkable it was the student had even had the tenacity or the resources to make the journey.

I have trained faculty members on students of concern, disruptive students, behavior review, threat assessment, and diversity related issues. I have developed materials for each of these presentations. Faculty members seem to be thirsty for this information, even when it is a mandatory presentation.

As I have stated before, I am a licensed professional counselor. When I am in counseling mode, I listen to facilitate movement towards growth, self-understanding, and self-awareness. Sometimes being able to articulate thoughts or feelings is difficult. I
take the time to build rapport, and most importantly, trust. In my training, counseling is not a two-way sharing. I remain connected, but apart, because the work is the individual’s and not my own. I observe and bring present what I see and hear, especially the incongruencies between verbal and nonverbal, thought and action, feeling and being. It requires great levels of self-awareness to understand why we do what we do. For me, the interviews were difficult because I wanted to slip into counselor mode since it is familiar and comfortable. I used it to gain additional depth in the retelling of their experience, but I did not move beyond that scope.

As someone who has served as a counselor, a faculty member who experienced disruptive behavior, a member of my university’s behavioral review team, and an ESL instructor/tutor, I have had many experiences that shape my preconceived notions about students, just as I am aware that each of the faculty members I interviewed had their own experiences and preconceived notions that shaped them. I needed to make sure that I did not allow these experiences to interfere with my ability to hear my participants’ stories and so I engaged in bracketing, or the putting aside of my beliefs, preconceived notions, and biases of disruptive students while engaged in interviewing and the analysis process (Bednall, 2006; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Tufford & Newman, 2012).

I recognize that my experiences bound me to the study, by way of my own beliefs, including how I defined or conceptualized disruptive student behavior. In the development of my study, I had already used this as the measurement for these kinds of behaviors, minimizing or overlooking the other student behaviors that create the foundation for what my participants described occurring within a classroom. Once my first participant pointed this out to me during her interview, I became increasingly
mindful of detaching from my own experiences, in order to hear theirs better (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). In an attempt to maintain my neutrality, I also worked closely with my dissertation chair who allowed me to integrate reflexive memos within my analysis (Day, 2010; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). I continued using my reflective journaling, in order to add clarity to a nonlinear process and to maintain awareness of my assumptions, preconceived notions, and biases as I worked throughout my research study (Ortlipp, 2008).

**Problem Statement**

Since the shootings at Virginia Tech, colleges and universities rushed to develop multidisciplinary behavioral review and threat assessment teams. Postsecondary institutions began developing these teams as a direct result of the recommendations from numerous task force reports (Butterworth et al., 2007; Campus Security Task Force, 2008; Fingerhut, 2007; Leavitt, Gonzales, & Spellings, 2007; North Carolina Campus Safety Task Force, 2008; O’Neil, Fox, Depue, & Engleander, 2008; Stambaugh, 2008; State of Wisconsin Governor’s Task Force on Campus Safety, 2008; Suthers & Lynch, 2007; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). Emphasized within these reports was the need for faculty training and student referral to behavioral review and threat assessment teams when disruptive behavior occurs. An assumption made by many institutions was that training equals access or referral. Often, these trainings occurred in isolation from a faculty member’s experience with disruptive undergraduate students within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting.
Practical Problem Statement

There is the likelihood a faculty member may encounter an increase in disruptive behaviors within a postsecondary setting (Amada, 1999; Gilroy, 2008; Harrell & Hollins, 2009; Seeman, 2010; Seidman, 2005). As the individuals most closely working with undergraduate students, faculty members have the opportunity to recognize warning signs that a student poses a danger to the greater campus community (Van Brunt, 2012). Behaviors that first draw a student to the attention of a behavioral review or threat assessment team are often dependent upon how a faculty member experiences the undergraduate student’s actions within the face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. There is an implicit desire to “connect-the-dots” between the noted disruptive behaviors of concern and potential threats to the safety and security of the institution. Depending on the faculty members’ experiences, these disruptive behaviors may or may not result in a referral to a behavioral review or threat assessment team. Making connections between what behaviors occur in the classroom and what may potentially happen on university campuses is of primary importance, especially since one rationale for the massacre at Virginia Tech was the failure to have the systems in place allowing that to occur (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007).

Faculty members inadvertently introduce bias regarding the student’s disruptive behavior if he or she makes attributions based solely on her or his own experience (Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007). Students may be acting in a normative manner for her or his culture, disability, or mental illness, but due to a faculty member’s prior experience with someone who they knew or experienced, they may engage with that person based upon that previous interaction, rather than based upon this new relationship. Faculty
members attempt to explain undergraduate student behavior based on attributions they
developed as explanatory mechanisms (White, 2013). This adversely affects individual
students when a faculty member negatively attributes their non-normative behavior as
disruptive behavior. The mere act of knowing an undergraduate student has a mental
illness, disability, or a different cultural background may “prime the pump” when
assuming a student’s disruptive behavior is threatening, and increases the likelihood a
faculty member refers the student to the behavioral review or threat assessment team.
Currently, there has been little to no research as to whether faculty members
preconceived attitudes about a student’s behavior leads to an increased likelihood of such
a referral.

**Research Problem Statement**

A review of the current literature does not provide a clear, complete
understanding of how faculty members’ experience undergraduate students’ disruptive
behavior in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory. Studies focusing on the behavioral
review or threat assessment process (Cornell et al., 2004; Delworth, 2009; Dunkle et al.,
2008; Jablonski, McClellan, & Zdziarski, 2008; National Campus Safety and Security
Project, 2008; O’Toole, 2000; Vossekuil et al, 2002), institutional responses to the
shootings at Virginia Tech (Butterworth et al., 2007; Campus Security Task Force, 2008;
Leavitt et al., 2007; National Campus Safety and Security Project, 2008; Randazzo &
Cameron, 2012; Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008; Suthers & Lynch, 2008; Virginia Tech
Review Panel, 2007), training protocols (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010;
Delworth, 2009; Deisinger, Randazzo, O’Neil, & Savage, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran,
2008; Fein et al., 2002; Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008; Futo, 2011; Gallagher, 2011;
Jablonski et al., 2008; McNiel et al., 2008; O’Toole, 2000; Reynolds & Miles, 2009; Sokolow, Lewis, Wolf, Van Brunt, & Byrnes, 2009; Storey, Gibas, Reeves, & Hart, 2011), incivility effects on faculty members (Luparell, 2007), and identification of students of concern (Cornell et al., 2004; Delworth, 2009; Dunkle et al., 2008; Jablonski et al., 2008; National Campus Safety and Security Project, 2008; O’Toole, 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002) have been conducted. The literature does not indicate the tipping point whereby a faculty member determines whether a student’s behavior is disruptive enough to warrant a referral to the behavioral review or threat assessment team. Although these ongoing efforts provide us with information about the threat assessment process itself and the individuals who are assessed, we know little about the breadth and depth of the faculty members who actually initiate these referrals.

This study contributes to the literature in that it is useful to faculty, staff, service providers, behavioral review and/or threat assessment team members, and policy makers in postsecondary education. As stated by McBain (2008), “the institutional goal should be to balance both the needs of a troubled student and the common good of the community to accommodate both as much as is reasonable and appropriate” (p. 17). In order to develop effective procedures for postsecondary behavioral review or threat assessment teams, it requires an understanding of faculty experiences with disruptive undergraduate student behavior in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting.

By understanding faculty members’ experience with disruptive behavior, it increases understanding of potential actions a faculty member may take when such behaviors occur and whether he or she makes a referral to the behavioral review or threat assessment team. By understanding the types of experiences faculty members have with
disruptive undergraduate students and learning what led these faculty members to experience those behaviors as disruptive, it aids in the development of new strategies and training for faculty members. Having the opportunity to examine the faculty members shared experiences leads to a shared institutional language that aids in the development of a commonality of terms and actions. By understanding the mechanisms by which faculty members experience disruptive undergraduate student behavior, it increases the amount of appropriate referrals for undergraduate students in need. It also aids the behavioral review and threat assessment teams in targeting their marketing and communication to increase accessibility for faculty referrals.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the experiences of faculty members at four-year public postsecondary institutions who encountered undergraduate students’ disruptive behaviors in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories. Using the dual lenses of attribution theory and symbolic interaction theory, I developed themes to describe and interpret the faculty members’ lived experiences by using inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006), in a deductive manner (Groenewald, 2004).

I conceptualize “disruptive” and “threatening” behaviors as being on a continuum with disruptive and threatening anchoring each end. I am utilizing the following definition for disruptive behavior (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, attendance, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), and (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members ego,
expertise and/or authority) (Amada, 1999; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Seidman, 2005; Sharkin, 2006).

The study answers the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

1. How do faculty members’ describe and interpret their experiences with undergraduate students who behave in disruptive manners in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
   a. How do faculty members differentiate between normative, disruptive, and threatening undergraduate student behaviors within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
   b. How do faculty members attribute why disruptive undergraduate students do what they do?

2. How do faculty members’ previous life experiences help them to make meaning of why they regard an undergraduate student’s behavior as disruptive?
   a. What previous life experiences do faculty members incorporate to make meaning regarding their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
   b. If, and how, has this experience with disruptive undergraduate student behavior affected faculty members and their teaching?
Methods Overview

This study is exploratory in nature. In this section, I give a brief explanation of my research design, including the bounding of the study itself.

Research Design

This is a phenomenological study. Creswell (2007) suggests a phenomenological study is one that attempts to describe and interpret the lived experience. Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest this shared experience allows for the narration of a worldview understood by those individuals with a similar awareness. Sharing the narratives of those faculty members who have similar experiences allows for greater insight into the phenomena. I describe and interpret the experiences of faculty members at four-year public postsecondary institutions with undergraduate students’ disruptive behaviors in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories.

In order to investigate the phenomenon of university faculty members’ experience with undergraduate students, in face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings, who behave in a disruptive manner, I identified members of the faculty who had experiences with disruptive students since the Virginia Tech shootings on April 16, 2007 (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). Since there needs to be an opportunity for these faculty members to refer students to a behavioral review or threat assessment team, these faculty members also needed to teach at an institution that had a behavioral review or threat assessment team that had been in operation during that time.

To identify potential participants, I chose the Carnegie classifications of very high and high undergraduate four-year public universities in western and central Michigan (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2013). I maintain a regional
focus because I assume there are shared values, cultural mores, and common beliefs that
govern how faculty member respond to a disruptive student (Hofstra, 2006; Kowalewski,
2003). I extended an offer for participation in the identification of the individuals by
contacting potential training resources and common faculty-centric entities within the
institution (e.g., faculty centers, human resources, administrative heads of colleges,
counseling centers, behavioral review or threat assessment teams). I used a semi-
structured interview, facilitated by an interview guide with open-ended questions. I
chose this type of interview to allow participants the opportunity to respond in a natural
way without attempting to force their responses into a particular category. Themes and
patterns emerged during my analysis of the interviews. This study combines elements yet
unexplored in the current research.

**Initial: Conceptual Framework**

In order to understand the connections between the components of a proposed
study, I am using a conceptual framework to identify relationships between ideas
(Creswell, 2008). Jabareen (2009) suggests that a conceptual framework provides
understanding by allowing for the interpretation of the reality of the qualitative analysis.
It provides a construct that shows the linkages between the ideas. Maxwell (2005)
identifies the conceptual framework as an important tool for applying theory, while not
restricting the researcher by its use. It gives an understanding of where the holes are
within the literature and how to ask the research questions, as shown in Figure 1.
To understand the conceptual framework, the historical antecedent is important. Because of campus shootings, as well as other emerging campus concerns, (e.g., faculty experiences with disruptive student behavior, and the increasing frequency and intensity of mental illness-related issues on campus), colleges and universities responded by developing a two-pronged approach to tackling the matter.

One avenue to address this subject was the implementation of a variety of campus safety initiatives, including the creation of internal behavioral review teams designed specifically to assess the potential for student threats (Sokolow et al., 2009). Eighty-two percent of respondents of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact reported formal procedures or protocols existed on their campus for faculty and staff to communicate concerns about student behavior. Sixty-five percent of respondents acknowledged the existence of a “care team” or similar group of faculty and/or staff that met regularly to discuss troubled and potentially troubled students (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008).

A second avenue used to address concerns was the development of training programs. Over two-thirds of the institutional respondents of a survey conducted by the
Midwestern Higher Education Compact (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008) indicated they provide training for faculty and staff designed to recognize disturbing, distressing, or “potentially” threatening student behavior. Identification of what constitutes a threat is at the heart of many faculty-training sessions. There is an institutional assumption that because an increasing number of faculty members have exposure to training sessions on the identification of potentially distressed students, that training equals use of system resources.

To understand the conceptual framework, a faculty member experiences disruptive undergraduate student behavior in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. Disruptive behavior in a college or university setting is a growing concern (Alexander-Snow, 2004; AlKandari, 2011; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Clark & Springer, 2007; Gilroy, 2008). Disruptive behavior in a college classroom, not only inhibits learning and retention (Seidman, 2005), it also could be an indication of something far more severe than a lack of civility (Gilroy, 2008). Many faculty members are ill equipped to deal with classroom management issues as they arise (Harrell & Hollins, 2009). For many faculty members, determining whether the behavior is disruptive or a threat becomes a judgment call (Jokinen, 2010). Watching for warning signs and fearing disruptive students is a balance that many faculty members struggle to maintain (Pavela, 2008).

A faculty member’s life experience determines whether he or she perceives a student’s behavior as disruptive and/or threatening. A faculty member’s experience with students with mental illness, disabilities and/or international status may color definitions of disruptive behavior (Lee & Rice, 2007; Norman et al., 2010; Vogel et al., 2008).
A faculty member who knows little about the student attributes the undergraduate student’s disruptive behavior to a personality characteristic or cause (Farrell, Shafiei, & Salmon, 2010). A faculty member who believes the world should be a fair and predictable place downplays instances of disruptive behaviors (Begue & Muller, 2006). A faculty member’s explanation of the situation affects her or his interpretation of the experience and choice of action (Hausmann, Jonason, & Summers-Effler, 2011).

Each interacts and interplays with the other as faculty members describe their experience with the undergraduate student’s disruptive behavior in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting.

Combining each of the factors (e.g., based on her or his experiences and the theoretical influences), the faculty member makes a determination as to how he or she responds. A faculty member makes the choice of (a) action (e.g., direct or indirect confrontation, sanctions according to the syllabus, humor), (b) acceptance (e.g., reframe of the situation or the behavior), (c) nonaction (e.g., avoidance, minimization, ignoring behaviors), (d) redirection (e.g., appoint discussion dominators as discussion leaders, incorporate texting as part of lesson plan) and/or, (e) referral (e.g., department head/chair, student conduct, behavioral review and/or threat assessment team, police) based upon that experience (Amada, 1999; Anthony & Yastik, 2011; Ausbrooks et al., 2011; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Boysen, 2011; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; King et al., 2007; Luparell, 2005, 2007).

**Theoretical Foundation**

Attribution theory suggests individuals make suppositions about the cause and controllability of a person's behavior leading to inferences about individual responsibility
(Lagnado & Channon, 2008; Rosset, 2008). How a student acts toward the professor, influences the ways in which the faculty member makes attributions about her or his behavior (Tipper & Bach, 2008). Those who infer causality of mental illness and dangerousness to the individual may be more fearful and angry towards that person (Corrigan, Watson, & Ottati, 2003).

Fundamental attribution error suggests an individual grants more credibility to her or his intuition about another person’s dispositions and less credibility to any type of situational influences affecting a person’s behavior at any given time (McPherson & Young, 2004). A person determines he or she “knows” the character of an individual using confirmation bias to find facts that lend credence to the explanations developed about the person’s behavior (O’Laughlin & Malle, 2002). This tendency for faculty members to “intuit” whether a student’s behavior is disruptive has profound ramifications within the classroom. By conveying her or his beliefs regarding the “student” and the “behavior” to the class and to the student, it negatively influences the classroom climate thereby, unintentionally, inferring malice or incivility (Kulinna, 2007/2008).

The just-world hypothesis assumes the world is generally an orderly place (Hafer & Begue, 2005). The belief that negative events will not happen to them serves as a protective mechanism when life becomes stressful (Begue & Muller, 2006). A faculty member who believes in a just world attributes the behaviors of students differently than a faculty member who does not subscribe to this belief.

Attributions about behavior reflect personal experience, educational level, and cultural background (Riley, 2010; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). A brief review of the literature suggests, the more experience the individual has with someone from another
culture or someone with mental illness, the more it influences how he or she identifies disruptive behavior. By gaining insight into how faculty members attribute the cause (i.e., the why) of disruptive behavior, I hope to gain a greater understanding as to whether a faculty member’s beliefs about her or his experience personally affects the identification of disruptive behavior.

Turner (2011) argues that attributions are critical for understanding interpersonal processes. Interpersonal processes give meaning to our interactions. The basic tenet of symbolic interactionism is that events are not truly objective but instead influenced by the meanings the individual gives to those events (Moore, 2012). As one of the founders of symbolic interaction, Blumer (1966) describes a “joint action” (p.540) in which each individual identifies, interprets, and defines each of their individual and mutually combined acts as a way of making meaning.

Goffman (1977), another seminal voice in symbolic interaction, assumes an individual’s definition of reality arises from her or his interpretation of the situation. Since meaning is determined within the individual, it makes sense that each person will define her or his own reality as to what is disruptive. Understanding the process by which a faculty member creates meaning leads to a greater understanding of how he or she experiences the phenomenon of a disruptive student in her or his classroom.

Chapter Summary

The shooting at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University drew national attention to disruptive student behavior. It accentuated the need for developing teams to assess behaviors of concern. A key component of those teams is the referrals put forth by faculty members. Even with such preparation in place, there have been additional high
profile killings and violence on college campuses. The students shared a commonality of mental illness, disability status, and non-domestic student.

Higher education administrators and task force members consider faculty members the first line of defense against such killings. Even so, training on spotting warning signs is limited. There is an institutional assumption that faculty members will refer students to behavioral review teams, that faculty members will attend trainings, and that once trained they will make referrals.

Understanding a faculty member’s experience with a disruptive undergraduate student in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting aids in developing insight into what actions occur when this happens. Gaining knowledge into how faculty members describe situations as disruptive and whether it is impacted by either her or his (a) attributions or (b) meanings, aids in developing a common set of institutional language for this type of occurrence. Developing a sense of the shared experience by the faculty members at universities in central and western Michigan aids further outreach and training by the administrative body.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

After the campus shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007, colleges and universities across the nation developed trainings and procedures to determine which students may be a potential threat to campus safety (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008). One reason is the belief that faculty members are first-lines of defense in recognizing a student who may be a potential danger to the campus community. It is the assumption of many institutions, that faculty members who encounter a disruptive student will make an automatic referral to the institution’s behavioral review or threat assessment team.

The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the experiences of faculty members at four-year public postsecondary institutions with undergraduate students’ disruptive behaviors in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories. I developed themes to describe and interpret the faculty members’ lived experiences by using by inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006), in a deductive manner (Groenewald, 2004).

I conceptualize “disruptive” and “threatening” behaviors as being on a continuum with disruptive and threatening anchoring each end. I am utilizing the following definition of disruptive behavior (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, attendance, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), and (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members ego, expertise and/or authority) (Amada, 1999; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Feldman, 2001; Seidman, 2005; Sharkin, 2006).
Understanding how a faculty member experiences a disruptive undergraduate student in her or his face-to-face classroom and how he or she describes disruptive behavior aids in the development of effective procedures for postsecondary behavioral review or threat assessment teams. It also clarifies the conditions under which he or she makes a referral to the behavioral review or threat assessment team.

For this phenomenological study, I recruited faculty who believe they have experienced one or more cases of disruptive undergraduate student behavior in their face-to-face classroom or laboratories since the April 16, 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). Using the Carnegie classification system as a guide, I chose faculty members employed at public four-year high or very high undergraduate institutions (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2013). Each university has an active behavioral review or threat assessment team, but faculty members did not need to have referred a student to the team. The faculty members have access to some form of training regarding disruptive, distressed and/or students of concern, but did not need to have attended any training.

In this review of the literature, I examine the institutional responses to campus shootings by explaining the nationwide responses, identifying the development of behavioral review and threat assessment teams, and exploring the institutional focus on training as a preventive measure. I also examine the perceptions associated with the shared commonalities of the campus perpetrators including mental illness, disabilities, and international status, and explain how these lenses influence a faculty member’s classroom experience. I also explore the theoretical constructs of attribution theory and symbolic interaction theory and their influences on a faculty members experience with an
undergraduate student who is disruptive in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory. Finally, I identify the prevalence of disruptive behavior at colleges and universities, its definition, and the common responses of faculty members to such behaviors in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory.

**Institutional Responses to Campus Shootings**

Campus shootings and campus related violence resulted in the development of behavioral review and threat assessment teams on most college campuses. There is an increasing number of training sessions for faculty members on the subject of responding to a threatening classroom situation (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008). Concomitant to the increase in training sessions, there is also a marked increase in perceived incivility and disruptive behavior in postsecondary classrooms (AlKandari, 2011; Clark 2008). In this section, I examine the impact of the nationwide response to campus shootings, the development of behavioral review and threat assessment teams, and the focus on the training imperative, as it relates to the faculty experience.

**Nationwide Responses to Campus Shootings**

On April 16, 2007, a current member of the student body killed 32 and wounded 17 others prior to killing himself at Virginia Polytech Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in Blacksburg, Virginia (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). After these events, then President of the United States, George W. Bush, instructed Health and Human Services Secretary Michael O. Leavitt, United States Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, and United States Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, to canvass state governors, educators, mental health providers, law enforcement personnel, and others to provide recommendations to prevent such a tragedy from occurring again. The key
recommendations from this task force included (a) training faculty members to recognize characteristics of mental illness and potential threatening behavior, and (b) developing a campus-wide reporting mechanism responsive to such a referral (Leavitt et al., 2007).

Alongside the presidential task force, Thurbert Baker, Georgia State Attorney General and president of the National Association of Attorneys General, established an ad hoc task force focusing on campus safety and school violence. Its mandate was to provide recommendations for preventing and responding to campus and school violence. The two key recommendations resulting from The National Association of Attorneys General Task Force on School and Campus Safety were nearly identical to the presidential task force. They tasked college campuses with developing (a) training for faculty to identify disruptive and disturbing behavior, and (b) an internal mechanism for reporting and responding to potential referrals (Suthers & Lynch, 2008).

Upon request from the Presidential Task Force, on April 30, 2007, then Governor of Florida, Charlie Crist, signed Executive Order 07-77, forming a task force to examine campus safety (Butterworth et al., 2007). The charge for this task force was to examine methods of (a) identifying at-risk students, (b) sharing information, (c) developing emergency notification systems, (d) creating interagency collaboration, and (e) training. Recommendations from this task force were similar to the previous two. They included (a) requiring training for all faculty, staff, students, and parents regarding potential mental health issues, and (b) developing a multidisciplinary team that could act when receiving a referral about a student of concern.

After the shooting at Virginia Tech, nearly 87% of postsecondary institutions engaged in some form of internal review to examine their institution’s systemic policies,
procedures, and protocols (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008). Just as with the Presidential, the States Attorneys General, and Florida’s examination, the findings from these multiple task force reports typically resulted in two important recommendations. The first stressed the need to train faculty members as a preventative measure designed to avert targeted school violence. The second stressed the need for the creation of multidisciplinary teams designed to assess disruptive, disturbing, and potentially threatening behavior.

These recommendations mirrored the findings contained within the Virginia Tech Review Panel Report to Governor Kaine (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The assumption from each of these panels is that faculty members are integral to the safety of the campus. They consider them as the initial line of defense in both recognizing and reporting disturbing and potentially threatening student behavior (Delworth, 2009).

The necessity for postsecondary institutions to have protocols in place for handling such issues intensified, when, on February 14, 2008, a former student, murdered five people and wounded 18 before killing himself at Northern Illinois University. Recommendations from the State of Illinois Campus Security Task Force Report to the Governor were similar to the previous task forces on the Virginia Tech shooting. The two key recommendations included developing (a) training programs for faculty to recognize and report disturbing and potentially threatening behavior, and (b) a team that would be responsive to such a referral (Campus Security Task Force, 2008). Because of their shared experience, both the Commonwealth of Virginia and the State of Illinois passed laws requiring the development of threat assessment teams at postsecondary institutions (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012).
Development of Behavioral Review and Threat Assessment Teams

Colleges and universities across the country developed some form of behavioral review team utilizing the Delworth Assessment Intervention of Student Problems (AISP) model (Delworth, 2009; Dunkle et al., 2008; Jablonski et al., 2008). The AISP model uses referrals as the key source of information to notify teams when there are behaviors of concern. When knowledge of a student is brought to the attention of the team coordinator by way of a referral (e.g., faculty member), the team is called together to assess the behaviors and make recommendations to intervene (e.g., student conduct proceeding, suspension or other disciplinary sanction, counseling center attendance, or follow-through by case manager). By individualizing the interventions, this potentially results in changing institutional policy (Pochini, 2008). Using a faculty member as the first contact assumes a special relationship that others within the university do not have with the student.

By 2008, over two-thirds of the respondents of the National Campus Safety and Security Project Survey positively identified the development of a behavioral review team on their college campus (National Campus Safety and Security Project, 2008). Of those who did not currently have one, between 13 to 25% were in the process of developing one. Less than half of the combined respondents had already developed a threat assessment team, though close to one-fifth were in the process of developing one. These numbers correspond to a survey of 331 chief student life officers and safety/security directors from a cross-section of institutions conducted by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008).
As defined by National Campus Safety and Security Project (2008), behavioral assessment teams (BAT) are teams dealing with individual students or faculty and/or staff members in a crisis who are evidencing disruptive or disturbing behavior possibly resulting from a medical or psychiatric disorder. There is a shared community expectation in favor of an institutional response for an appropriate reaction to the situation that protects both the institution and the individual. These teams have multiple names, e.g., crisis intervention teams (CIT), behavioral intervention teams (BIT), behavioral review teams (BRT) or care teams. Each is used interchangeably, depending upon the institutional culture (Delworth, 2009; Eells & Rockland-Miller, 2011). For the purposes of this research, I am referring to them as behavioral review teams (BRT).

Threat assessment teams (TAT) are teams identifying, assessing, and evaluating situations for potential threat. They also develop plans to mitigate potential risk, threats, and violence at the institution. Threat assessment teams attempt to identify individuals who pose a threat to themselves, others, and to the greater campus community (Penven & Janosik, 2012). Sokolow and Lewis (2009) do not consider it a best practice that some colleges and universities have separated a threat assessment team from the behavioral review team because of its emphasis on violence aversion. Regardless of what the institution calls the group, faculty members should know there is someone to contact if they encounter a disruptive undergraduate student.

During the threat assessment process, it is critical to evaluate the circumstances bringing the individual to official attention (Penven & Janosik, 2012), while keeping in mind the central question is whether a student “poses” a threat, not whether the student “made” a threat (Fein et al., 2002). Since the late 90s and early 2000s, threat assessment
has become a more effective means of identifying a potentially violent individual than the use of a profile (Cornell, 2004; O’Toole, 2000; Sewell & Mendelsohn, 2000; Vossekuil et al, 2002). Profiling extends beyond the scope of known facts to supposition (Sewell & Mendelsohn, 2000). Threat assessment develops a contextual set of guidelines for use when considering whether an individual poses a threat (O’Toole, 2000). A faculty member, therefore, remains the first line of defense in discerning whether he or she feels threatened by an undergraduate student’s disruptive behavior.

**Focus on Training**

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) identifies the need for collaborative training and resources between faculty members and student affairs personnel. Because faculty members are encountering troubling behavior in a student’s assignments and classroom behaviors, NASPA personnel believe it is imperative to develop an alliance between academic affairs and student affairs personnel. Those working in student affairs understand it is important for effective training to occur and there also needs to be a multidisciplinary group empowered to act upon referrals received by individuals concerned about a student (Jablonski et al., 2008).

Behavioral review team members often receive extensive training. This intensive training enhances their comfort level and increases confidence, accuracy, and knowledge for conducting violence risk assessments (McNiel et al., 2008; Reynolds & Miles, 2009; Storey et al., 2011).

Conversely, faculty training often increases exaggerated alertness to potential issues faced in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting (Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008). Yet, training for faculty members remains an integral part of the Assessment Intervention
of Student Problem (AISP) model found on most campuses (Delworth, 2009). The goal of this training is to aid faculty members to differentiate between students who may be “acting out” versus students who may be in “actual crisis” or a “potential danger” to themselves or others. There is limited research on the efficacy of this training.

Nearly three-quarters of college counseling center directors train faculty to recognize signs of distress in students (Gallagher, 2011). This number continues to grow. More students with a variety of emotional and psychological issues continue arriving on college campuses across the nation (Mowbray et al., 2006). There is an increasing probability that the majority of campuses offer some form of training designed to recognize a distressed, disruptive, and/or student of concern to most faculty members.

Training for faculty members is designed to (a) promote campus safety by focusing on the importance of reporting concerns, (b) aid in the recognition of behaviors of concern, (c) identify available resources, (d) emphasize the importance of a faculty member’s role in this process, and (e) provide a much needed campus wide discussion about the issue (Deisinger et al., 2008; Futo, 2011; Hernandez & Fister, 2001). Faculty members often request classroom management training (e.g., training on techniques of conflict management strategies), to prevent issues from escalating to the point of referral (Dobmeier & Moran, 2008).

Research conducted by the Department of Education, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Secret Service are used in developing the training protocols recognition of student threats (Borum et al., 1999; Fein & Vossekuil, 2000; Fein et al., 2002; O’Toole, 2000; Sokolow et al., 2009). O’Toole (2000) indicates that all threats receive an evaluation. Even though most people who make a threat will not carry it out,
the possibility for an occurrence exists and therefore behavioral review teams treat it as real, until proven otherwise. All threats, like all who make a threat, are unique and not assessed in the same way. In the threat assessment process, clusters of behaviors come together and increase the likelihood the threat is more concrete than abstract. Each faculty member’s report adds to the picture the behavioral review or the threat assessment team has of the individual. This works to prevent the “failure to connect-the-dots” (Virginia Tech Review Panel, p. 52) that was a hallmark of the Virginia Tech case.

Findings in the Safe School Initiative (Vossekuil et al., 2002) support O’Toole’s (2000) assertion of “leakage” (p.16). Leakage is the revelation of the intention to act. It may be intended or unintended, but regardless, it gives a clue to a potential threat of violence. In most acts of school violence thus far, someone was concerned about the student. Generally, one or more people expressed concerns about the individual involved in the act of targeted violence. This is the anticipated “job” of the faculty member, to report “leakage” to the behavioral review team.

In the case of the Virginia Tech student, several faculty members and students expressed concern about his behaviors (Jones, 2009; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The former student in Tucson was identified as a student of concern to the Pima Community College police prior to the shooting off-site (Anglen, 2011; Couch, 2011). In Aurora, Colorado, the former student came to the attention of both the behavioral review team and his psychiatrist who attempted to reach out to law enforcement prior to his off-site rampage (Leonnig & Dennis, 2012). Almost a year prior to the attack on the UCLA student’s lab partner, a professor alerted campus authorities about his behavior. This has become grounds for the survivor’s lawsuit against the Board of Regents (Gordon, 2009;
Gordon & Faturechi, 2009; Smith, 2009). In these instances, faculty and staff members reported but their concerns were not acted upon in a timely enough manner.

We currently do not have any developed “best practices” for training programs. We also have no way to determine the efficacy of the programs, the assessments themselves, or the interventions (Borum et al., 2010). Sewell and Mendelsohn (2000) suggest that even when explaining that checklists are merely a suggestion of what to look for, many individuals in training assume they represent a totality of characteristics of threatening behaviors. Antecol and Cobb-Clark (2004) propose the more training we receive in a particular area, the more sensitive we become to the content in which the training has occurred. The more sensitive we are regarding the content, the more likely we are to see those very same characteristics in others, resulting in the potential for an increase of false-positive assumptions regarding behavior.

Most institutions assume faculty training equals access and automatic referral to resources such as a behavioral review or threat assessment team. Yet, for many, it is dependent upon whether there has been any transfer of skills to the faculty member’s behavioral repertoire. This will depend upon the type of training and the characteristics of the faculty member her or himself. Most often, unless the faculty members feel there is (a) immediate applicability, (b) mastery of the subject, and (c) institutional support (e.g., professional development monies) then transfer of training is limited (Nikandrou, Brinia, & Bereri, 2009; Santos & Stuart, 2003; Velada, Caetano, Michel, Lyons, & Kavanagh, 2007).

It is the fervent belief that training sessions identify issues that equip faculty members with the tools necessary to recognize disruptive students within their
classrooms. Dewey Cornell (2010), director of Virginia Youth Violence Project, suggests training works to reduce the anxiety that many faculty members feel with potentially disruptive students in the classroom. It allows the faculty member to view the student’s behavior differently, giving the faculty member another tool to have in her or his toolbox when working with students who may be acting in nonnormative ways. Yet it does not mean the faculty member will institute a referral on all cases of disruptive behavior in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory.

**Shared Commonalities of Campus Shooters and Perceptions of Threat**

When reviewing recent campus shootings and campus related violence, there are some similarities amongst the perpetrators. The students involved in the targeted violence on campus share commonalities of mental illness, identified disabilities, and ethnic vilification. In this section, I identify issues related to faculty experiences with students with mental illness, students with disabilities, and international students.

**Students with Mental Illness**

Colleges and universities work with a growing number of students with mental illness. This trend will persist (Wood, 2012). According to the 2011 *National Survey of Counseling Center Directors* (Gallagher, 2011), the five year increase of students with mental health issues continues to rise, with over one third of the directors identifying their clients as having severe psychological issues. Of those students, close to 6% are unable to complete their education or can do so only with extensive supports. These are the number of students who have opted to seek counseling services at the various institutions. According to the *American College Health Association National College Health Assessment* (2012), overwhelming anxiety (50%) and depression (30%) continue
to be the top two mental health problems facing college students and affecting their ability to function academically. Many students needing services are not seeking services or are unable to gain services due to limited institutional resources (Wood, 2012). As a result, many of these students continue to struggle in a classroom or academic setting.

Postsecondary institutions continue to work with a growing number of students currently prescribed psychotropic medications. This number has “increased from 9% in 1994 to 25% in 2006” (Campus Security Task Force, 2008, p. 15). Inferences related to mental illness leads to emotional reactions, such as anger or pity, that, in turn, determines the likelihood of helping or punishing behaviors (Corrigan et al., 2003), therefore, increasing the potential for identifying students with mental illness as possible perpetrators (Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008). It is significant to remember someone may be violent without being mentally ill, just as someone may be mentally ill without being violent (McBain, 2008). It is important that members of the university community do not fall prey to existing stereotypes that all mentally ill individuals are violent perpetrators.

Twenty percent of college freshmen can be labeled disturbed and in need of mental health care. As a result, there is an increased need for faculty awareness of mental health issues (Collins & Mowbray, 2005). Concomitant with this increased need, there is stigmatization towards the act of seeking psychological services (Corrigan, 2004; Estroff, Penn, & Toporek, 2004). As a result, individuals avoid treatment in order to reduce the consequences associated with mental illness (Vogel, Wade, & Ascheman, 2009). This may have a chilling effect on the number of students seeking treatment on college campuses. Students who are noncompliant with medications or treatment may not only affect themselves, they may affect others. A faculty member can misinterpret the
student’s behavior. A student’s eccentric behavior may be the result of medication noncompliance, mental illness, or because the student “is” eccentric. While the student’s behavior may be out of the norm, it may not necessarily constitute a threat (Corrigan, Markowicz, Watson, & Kubiak, 2004). Unbeknownst to the student, their actions may inadvertently draw the attention of a faculty member, who could potentially refer her or him to the campus behavioral review or threat assessment team. If the student is mentally ill, but not a threat, it may again reinforce the stigma associated with mental illness.

Often, individuals with a familiarity towards depression or mania engage differently with a person based on her or his preconceived notions of mental illness. When faculty members have prior experience with depression or mania, they perceive students with depression more fairly than they perceive students with mania (Wolkenstein & Meyer, 2009). This could result in an increased amount of referrals to a behavioral review or threat assessment team based on predetermined beliefs about behavior associated with the mental illness or manic-like behavior.

The knowledge that an individual has a mental illness diagnosis alters how we label her or his behavior. Individuals who label situations as caused by mental illness were five times more likely to report likelihood of violence than those who did not label it as caused by mental illness (Pescosolodio et al., 2007). A faculty member who is aware a student is diagnosed as mentally ill, may be more inclined to contact a behavioral review or threat assessment team if that student’s behavior is nonnormative. A faculty member who labels the student’s mental illness as causing her or his disruptive behavior may perceive the student as more likely to be violent. This belief predicates the choices about what actions to take in response to the behavior. Individuals who view people with
mental illness as dangerous are more likely to fear her or him and avoid them as a result (Corrigan & Watson, 2007). This includes individuals assigned to teaching our students with mental illness. A very normal reaction is to fear that which we do not understand, and many people do not understand mental illness.

Corrigan examined prejudicial attitudes towards individuals with mental illness. He wanted to understand whether people who had prior experience and knowledge of psychiatric symptoms would distance themselves from individuals with mental illness (Corrigan et al., 2002). He and his team discovered those who were part of an ethnic minority or those with more exposure to mental illness were less prejudicial towards individuals with mental illness. Corrigan et al. suggest the reports of lessened prejudice of ethnic minorities might be more likely as a result of reactance to being a member of an out-group than it is to acceptance of those with mental illness. Those who perceived individuals with mental illness as either being “childlike” or as someone who is “less than,” typically exemplified greater prejudice and discrimination towards the individual. This supports Corrigan’s earlier work suggesting people who perceive mental psychiatric disorders in a negative manner will treat those with mental illness in a negative way (Corrigan, 1998). A faculty member’s belief about mental illness influences how he or she experiences the behavior of that undergraduate student.

Stigma, as defined by Link and Phelan (2001), is the loss of status and discrimination associated with having a mental illness. Corrigan et al. (2004) suggest this also speaks to the shame and devaluation an individual feels as they work to maintain the illusion of normalcy, while withdrawing from others to maintain her or his secret of mental illness. The internalization of these feelings of stigma inhibits an individual’s...
course of treatment and increases her or his willingness to accept stereotypes associated with mental illness (Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivan, 2009; Ritsher, Otlingham, & Grajales, 2003). Public stereotypes blame individuals for mental illness and perceive them as being dangerous (Boysen & Gabreski, 2012; Corrigan et al., 2001; Kroska & Harkness, 2006). Family members and friends typically distance themselves from individuals with mental illness (Conrad et al., 2009; Corrigan et al. 2001). It follows that faculty members may also distance themselves from their students who report a diagnosis of mental illness.

Corrigan and Watson (2007) in their research on stigma determined that women were less likely to act in a prejudicial or discriminatory fashion towards someone with mental illness. They also propose individuals with more education typically saw those with mental illness as less dangerous. This suggests that if a student with mental illness has a highly educated, female faculty member, he or she may receive a more empathetic, less fearful response.

Interacting with people who have mental illness acting in a disruptive or threatening manner influences even those individuals with a positive attitude towards mental illness (Pescosolido, 2013). There continues to be a perception of people with mental illness as being dangerous to others (Phelan & Link, 2004; Pescosolido, 2013; Van Dorn, Swanson, Elbogen, & Swartz, 2005). In a groundbreaking study of 1444 people by Link, Phelan, Bresnahan, Steuve, and Pescosolido (1999), one-third of the respondents perceived an individual with symptoms of major depression as dangerous, and almost two-thirds of the same respondents perceived those with schizophrenia as being a danger. The belief that individuals with depression are likely to be dangerous is
supported by research conducted by Pescosolido et al. (2007). In their survey of 1,152 individuals, they identified an increased perception of dangerousness of adolescent males with major depressive disorder, as well as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. These are two of the most common psychiatric disabilities seen on college campuses today (United States Government Accountability Office, 2009). The issue is whether the faculty member accurately perceives the undergraduate student’s disruptive behavior or if the faculty member’s beliefs affect her or his perception of how a student with mental illness is acting within the face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting (Corrigan et al., 2003).

**Students with Disabilities**

A growing number of students with disabilities are attending college. According to the United States General Accountability Office (GAO) (2009), almost 11% of all students in higher education are receiving some form of accommodations for disabilities. The top three reported disabilities are (a) emotional or psychiatric conditions, including depression (24%), (b) attention deficit disorder (19%), and (c) orthopedic or mobility impairment (15%). With a growing number of students with disabilities attending classes, most faculty members will encounter an undergraduate student with a disability in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory. Yet, the report from GAO (2009) suggests the majority of faculty members do not have experience or training in teaching students with disabilities.

Even with an increase in the number of students with disabilities attending colleges and universities, many undergraduate students still face barriers (e.g. faculty members not understanding) in the academic setting (Denhart, 2008; Rao, 2004).
Success for a student with disabilities is often dependent upon the relationship he or she has with faculty members (Cook et al., 2009; Paul, 2000). Often, stigma associated towards students with disabilities deters a student’s access to services (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005). According to Vogel et al., (2008), “when faculty lacked knowledge about disabilities, especially nonvisible disabilities such as learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and psychiatric disabilities, they sometimes exhibited behaviors that students described as skeptical or suspicious regarding the existence of their disability” (p. 16). Faculty members do not have the training of special education teachers in the K-12 system and show a gap between their understanding of disabilities accommodations and working with students with disabilities (Cook et al., 2009). This influences how a faculty member understands the behavior of an undergraduate student receiving accommodations for disabilities. If a faculty member is initially skeptical and suspicious of a student’s nonvisible disability, he or she may be likely to report an undergraduate student’s non-normative behavior.

In a study of 16,273 K-12 students, Kaplan and Cornell (2005) attempted to understand the number and types of threats made by students in special education as compared to students in general education of that same system. The researchers found special education students, primarily those students with an emotional disturbance diagnosis, such as the diagnosis for both the Virginia Tech student and the former Northern Illinois student (Stambaugh, 2008; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007), generally made more threats than general population students make, but did not follow through on those threats. Students and teachers were more likely to perceive these threats as dangerous and to take them seriously. They were more likely to report the student to
the schools administrative team assessing for threats of violence. Post-threat, others continue to perceive the student’s behavior as worsening, even though the student did not carry out the threat. This type of carry-over may be likely to occur as potentially one out of five undergraduate students with psychiatric disabilities enters postsecondary classrooms and laboratories (Collins & Mowbray, 2005).

At the postsecondary level, a positive relationship with faculty is essential to the success of students with disabilities (Rao, 2004). Dowrick et al. (2005) used focus groups at 10 university sites nationwide to examine the postsecondary experiences of students with disabilities. One consistent finding across sites was the perceived stigma related to disability accommodation. Faculty members and other students are often skeptical regarding hidden disabilities. This supports previous research suggesting students will not disclose their disabilities because they are fearful of the negative attitudes attached to such a disclosure (Konur, 2006; Megivern et al., 2003; Vogel et al., 2008). Additional research has suggested a greater acceptance of hidden disabilities by faculty members who are (a) female, (b) teaching in education or the social sciences, (c) at the assistant or associate professor rank, (d) understanding of the laws surrounding disabilities accommodations, and (e) who have experience with teaching students with disabilities (Cook et al., 2009; Rao, 2004; Vogel et al., 2008). For the undergraduate student with disabilities, “who” is teaching them influences how the faculty member within the face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting experiences them.

**Release of confidential information.** Faculty members may err on the side of caution when determining whether it is allowable to discuss what is occurring within the classroom, because they are concerned about conflicting with laws protecting student
privacy of records or not understanding what is allowable under disabilities accommodations (Davies, 2008). Updates in 2008 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and in 2009 of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), resulted in increased clarity surrounding the information that faculty members may release to others (McBain, 2008).

Educational records are those records maintained by the college or university and contain personally identifiable information of the student (Ramirez, 2009). If information is not an educational record, the release of it to others is easily accomplished. These are not considered educational if they are (a) personal faculty notes, (b) not ones shared with others, and (c) direct observations about the student (Davies, 2008; Ramirez, 2009; Van Dusen, 2004).

A lack of clarity and confusion regarding what was allowable under FERPA may have led to the silos observed pre-Virginia Tech (Chapman, 2008; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). In a survey of 390 faculty members, slightly more than 40% of the faculty members, regardless of either rank or tenure, reported a lack of familiarity with even the most basic principles of FERPA (Gilley & Gilley, 2006). One key change to the law has been a broadening to the health and safety emergency concerns (Cossler, 2010; Ragle & Paine, 2008; Rinehart-Thompson, 2008). In order to make that determination, the institution must (a) examine the context of the situation, (b) conclude the behaviors are a threat to health and safety, and (c) document as to the exigency of the decision (Rinehart-Thompson, 2008).

Referral to behavioral review and threat assessment teams. Students with disabilities (e.g., behavioral, psychiatric) face many obstacles. These include referrals to
behavioral review teams, threat assessment teams, student conduct, or requests to leave the institution (Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008; Hoover, 2006; Megivern, Pellerito, & Mowbray, 2003; Pavela, 2006). The Office of Civil Rights has upheld the rights of institutions to act when student behavior presents a danger to the campus community (Heyward, 2011; Lundquist & Shackelford, 2011). Student codes of conduct and federal law hold a student with an identified disability to the same standard of conduct as a student without an identified disability (Van Brunt, 2012). A faculty member assumes he or she is unable to act when an undergraduate student with a disability is acting in a disruptive manner in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory. Having a disability is not a protection from facing the consequences of disruptive behavior (Heyward, 2011). Faculty members may choose to act, if they deem it necessary. There is nothing in the law that prevents them from doing so. Faculty members who perceive themselves or their students as being threatened have a duty to report the student through the student conduct process (Marcum & Perry, 2010).

**International Students**

Lee and Rice (2007) suggest issues such as “disadvantaging institutional policies, hostility towards cultural attributes (e.g., language barriers and foreign accents), and the negative stereotyping of whole nations or cultures” (p. 405) negatively affect the richness of an international student’s experience at an American institution. Shupe (2007) suggests interpersonal conflict negatively influences the ability to work and to adapt to a college campus. The acculturation process affects mental health amongst groups attempting to acclimatize. Depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic problems are some of the most common complaints of acculturating international students (Sam, 2000). The
behavior of students attempting to acculturate may bring itself to the attention of faculty members because the manifestations of stressors that affect international students differ from domestic college students (Misra & Castillo, 2004). A student who is struggling to transition to American culture is far different from a student who poses a significant threat on a college campus.

There are a growing number of international students seeking degrees on American campuses. According to the 2012 Open Doors Report (International Institute of Education & United States Department of States Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2012), international students currently make up only 4% of all students at the postsecondary level. This number has been on an upward trajectory growing 31% since September 11, 2001 (9/11). Students coming to the United States to study for the first time need time to acclimate to the United States postsecondary education expectations. This leads to issues of cross-cultural adjustment within the academic setting as they work to adapt academically, interpersonally, and intrapersonally (Andrade, 2006).

Since 9/11, there have been increasing reports of suspicion towards international students (Altbach, 2004; Lee & Rice, 2007). Reports of decreases in international students from Muslim countries were due to perceptions of “not having a feeling of personal safety” while studying in the United States (Altbach, 2004; Branch-Brioso, 2009). Kim (2004) surveyed 1009 adult Americans post 9/11 to determine the attitudes of individuals with religious beliefs and whether they supported racial profiling for people who were Arabic, Muslim, or who “looked” Arabic or Muslim to determine if someone is a suspected terrorist. Kim’s data suggests that individuals with Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish backgrounds were more likely to support racial profiling. Age, race,
and educational level also merited inclusion. Those with more education were less likely to support racial profiling. Knowing someone who was Muslim did not play a role in whether or not racial profiling should be allowable. This can be of concern for a Muslim student studying in the United States. Depending upon the composition of the classroom, or the beliefs of the faculty member, even the culture of the campus, he or she may not feel as accepted as other international students. As more students from Middle Eastern countries come to the United States to study, this can become problematic.

Lee and Rice (2007) suggest that since 9/11 there has been a growing trend of neo-racism towards people of other nationalities negatively affecting the student’s acceptance at the host institution. Native-born American ethnic minorities in the post-Obama era have experienced an upswing in prejudice directed towards them (Levin et al., 2012). After the attacks on September 11, 2001, Muslim students became targets of victimization, anger, and blame as Americans attempted to gain an understanding of the machinations surrounding the tragic events (Peek, 2003). Anecdotal reports across campuses described students of Asian descent being harassed after the slayings at Virginia Tech and have become the material of urban legends. Unfortunately, there is limited research as to the impact of these cataclysmic events on the lives of students who share superficial similarities with the perpetrator of those events.

International students often attempt to prevent cultural misunderstandings and problems, sometimes to no avail (Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007). Issues of miscommunication are concerning when considering the human element involved in the decision making regarding disruptive behavior in the classroom or laboratory. Being the
focus of a behavioral review or a threat assessment team because of a cultural difference is not a way to increase feelings of safety and security for the international student.

How well an international student acculturates to the American educational system affects the mental health of an international student. A variety of factors (e.g., acculturative stress) negatively influences the acculturation process leading to diminished academic success and potential negative effects to the student’s feelings of stress and well-being (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008; Smart & Smart, 1995). Acculturative stress is the psychological impact of adapting to a new culture that is a combination of cultural and social factors (Smart & Smart, 1995). Often high levels of stress or depression develop in those international students whose expectations are not met (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004). These students may go from being in the top of their class in their country-of-origin, to the middle, or even lower. They may have difficulties with (a) changed academic structures, (b) perceived discrimination, and (c) typical adjustment issues (e.g., homesickness or development of new social supports) (Andrade, 2006; Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008; Constantine et al., 2004; Mori, 2000; Tung, 2011). International students often seek medical care for physical symptoms of distress before they will seek psychological help (Mori, 2000). They approach their friends, family, and professors before asking for any type of professional help for emotional or psychological stress (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007). These students reach out to their faculty members as lifelines, attempting to make connections without understanding the social mores of the typical American faculty-student relationship. This may be discomfiting to American faculty members who do not understand and who may refer the student to a


behavioral review or a threat assessment team because of a misunderstanding regarding acculturation.

For many international students, key to their adjustment is whether they have a positive relationship with faculty members (Hyun et al., 2007). Kim (2007) suggests the importance of a “caring imposition.” She argues, had someone looked past the Asian stereotype of insularity, he or she, may have seen the acculturative stress within the student from Virginia Tech and helped to avert the Virginia Tech massacre. For this student, there was an attempt by the department chair to work with him. There were others who saw past the stereotype, many who feared him, and those who did attempt to intervene. Due to constraints at the institutional and state level, as well as misunderstanding federal policy, many were unable to act (Jones, 2009; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007).

In a study by Bradley (2000) on international student mental health issues, the perceptions of 429 members of the academic staff, was that international students with mental illness were not responsive to friendly overtures and/or unwilling to explain the extent of the issues surrounding their illness. Even though the faculty member is the first point of contact for the international student who may be having mental health issues, cultural differences and language ability divide the student and the faculty member. Not only did the respondents report a discomfort with moving beyond the scope of their ability as academics into the realm of mental health, they also were concerned regarding honoring the student’s cultural background. Many faculty members felt ill equipped to deal with such matters.
Differences in cultural mores result in perceptions of disruptive or threatening behaviors. Faculty members may identify behaviors associated with Middle Eastern students as being non-normative because of their perceived passivity. Arabic students are accustomed to having professors act as experts who maintain authoritarian control within the face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. As a result, a Middle Eastern student may act in a socially inept or immature manner in comparison to American students (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006). Japanese students development of amae or “sweet dependency” (Yamashita & Shwartz, 2012, p. 59) on a close, revered, older person may become problematic in a typical American classroom. The student expects the professor will show increased empathy and awareness of the contextual underpinnings of the communication process in which they engage. The American faculty member is unaware of this expectation. Listeners may perceive students who come from a culture where they use argumentation and debate (e.g., Russian, eastern European) to make a point as threatening (Mori, 2000). They may have a difficult time understanding the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness. Chinese students expect professors to be the authority (e.g., well organized, lecture from the textbook, provide summaries, write on the board, act formally) in the classroom. They follow the Confucian method of working hard to achieve academic success and become frustrated when hard work does not equal high grades (Huang, 2009). International students who are unaccustomed to the American notion of plagiarism perceive the professor’s insistence of paraphrasing or using citations of sources as an affront to the primary author (Mori, 2000). This also increases the likelihood there will be a charge of academic misconduct leveled against them. For many of these students, a mere misstep may be cause for a cultural
misunderstanding that may be enough for any faculty member to experience a student’s well-intentioned belief about how a classroom “should” be run and how a professor “should” be treated with how a faculty member believes it ought to work. Depending on the faculty member, any of these miscommunications and cultural missteps could ultimately give rise to a referral to the behavioral review or threat assessment team.

**Attributions and Symbolic Meaning of Behavior**

For a faculty member to establish whether an undergraduate student is behaving in a disruptive manner, he or she ascertains the cause and identifies whether the behavior is disruptive. To perceive the behavior as disruptive, the faculty member determines the meaning and the intentionality of the student’s actions. The faculty member processes the actions of the student by identifying and determining the contextual influences. In this section, I identify the impact of attribution theory, and symbolic interaction theory, as well as, how both blend into the understanding of a faculty member experiences of an undergraduate student’s disruptive behavior within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting.

**Attribution Theory**

Faculty members use their experiences and beliefs to determine and define the causes of disruptive behavior. In its simplest terms, attribution theory is the study of the perceived cause of an individual’s behavior (deHaan & Wissink, 2013). It is an attempt to understand the impact of a faculty member’s perceptual processes and emotional reactions regarding the student’s behavior (Cothran, Kulina, & Garrahy, 2013). The development of an attribution is an intrinsically subjective process of “meaning making” designed to understand the actor’s intentionality (Hammer, 2005; Lim, Cortina, &
Those with a better concept of self and others will make normative attributions resulting in perceptions of appropriate behaviors, while those with a poorer concept of self and others will make fuzzier attributions resulting in perceptions of maladjusted behaviors (Martinez, Martinko, & Ferris, 2012). How we see ourselves influences how we see others. A faculty member with a good understanding of self and others is more likely to make a normative attribution about a student’s behavior than a faculty member with a poor understanding of self or others.

In higher education, the negative influence of incivility rarely spares any department (Felps, Mitchell, & Byington, 2006; Williams, Campbell, & Denton, 2013). As a result, faculty members share information with their colleagues regarding the issues they face within the classroom (deHaan & Wissink, 2013). Having these types of discussions with their departmental contemporaries allows the faculty member to engage in social comparison to determine how they measure against one another in the sphere of incivility (Alexandrov, Lilly, & Babakus, 2013). As a result, they gain a sense of whether it occurs more frequently in their class, if the intensity is greater towards them, and if they are managing it appropriately.

One of the most robust biases in attribution theory is correspondence bias. There is a tendency to believe that when a person acts, he or she is behaving because of some innate predisposition, rather than reacting to the surrounding context (Jones, 1979). Therefore, if a student is participatory during lecture, it is because he or she is a “good” student and very conscientious. However, if a student is somehow disruptive during lecture, it is because he or she is a “bad” student and something is wrong with her or him. There is also a belief that behavior and attitude are inexorably linked (Jones & Harris,
1967). If a person should behave in a nonnormative way, even if it is unintentional, the observer will perceive the other as being a “willful” participant in that act. Consequently, if a faculty member has a student who is behaving “differently” (e.g., because of symptomology of mental illness, disability or, cultural variation), the faculty member assumes the undergraduate student is “choosing” to act in a disruptive manner.

In their seminal work, Jones and Nisbett (1971) suggested an individual tends to view her or his own behavior as being the result of a contextual or environmental influence, while the behavior of someone else is the result of that person’s own personal characteristic, trait, or disposition. Therefore, when someone attempts to make sense of disruptive behavior, because of its blameworthy nature, there is an assumption it is an individual’s stable attribute. Jones and Nisbett suggest this occurs because we can only understand the meaning of the behavior contextually. Each individual involved within the context will only have her or his own understanding of the experience. This process derives its information from (a) the consequence of the behavior, (b) assumptions about the cause of the behavior, (c) the historical context between the parties involved (i.e., knowledge of the individual’s history), and (d) how each processes information. A student assumes he or she is blameless, just as a faculty member assumes he or she is not to blame. Both assume the other is at fault, while each believes they themselves remain blameless. They also assume the other has control over what is occurring since they each believe it is a core component of her or his personality. Because each faculty member brings a different way of processing experience to any given situation, each behavioral interaction has its own nuances. Each faculty member brings different assumptions about her or himself (e.g., cool teacher, boss, expert, counselor) into the classroom. Each
faculty member brings different assumptions about student behaviors (e.g., zoo, audience, interactive, war zone) into the classroom. They make different assumptions about individual students (e.g., good student, problem student, quiet student, cipher student). When a student acts in a disruptive manner, they assume the student is acting in a purposeful manner. The more information the faculty member has about the cause of the behavior (e.g., mental illness, disability, cultural context), the more complex or different the attribution. The relationship the faculty member has with the student (e.g., friendly, neutral, hostile) also makes a difference in how the faculty member processes the behavior. These calculations about the student, the faculty member, and the context influence any responses to the action and the actor (Gailey & Lee, 2005).

The way someone responds to a behavior is dependent upon how he or she determines causality. An individual bases this on her or his beliefs and biases (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). When a disruptive event occurs, there is a need to restore balance. In order to do so, the observer attempts to blame the victim for her or his behaviors (Crandall, Silvia, N’Gbala, Tsang, & Dawson, 2007). In an attempt to create balance, he or she does so by using black and white thinking. In believing bad things happen to those who “deserve” it (e.g., bad, negative or not-liked faculty members have disruptive students, while good, positive, and well-liked faculty members have great students), the person creates a sense of security for her or himself (Dalbert, 2009). This becomes a guiding principle for many people. As part of the social contract, there is an assumption that by acting in a positive way, you will receive a reward for it, just as if you act in a negative way, you receive consequences for the behavior (Hafer, Begue, Choma, & Dempsey, 2005). When making assumptions about the causes of behavior, there is a
tendency to focus on the personal characteristics of the individual instead of focusing on contextual underpinnings of the situation (Dalbert, 2009). Depending on how a faculty member defines the context surrounding the disruptive undergraduate student behavior, this works to justify later actions that involve contacting a behavioral review or threat assessment team.

Individuals assume a spotlight effect in which they are the center of attention (Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000). Unless behavior is egregious to someone other than the actor, it is overlooked (Gilovich et al., 2000; Savitsky, Eply, & Gilovich, 2001). A faculty member experiencing a disruptive undergraduate student assumes the undergraduate student directs every action toward her or him. The student could be acting in a manner typical for her or himself and unaware of the effect this behavior is having upon the faculty member resulting in an emotional toll on the faculty member and on the student (Halpern & Desrochers, 2005; McCormick & Barnett, 2010). When the behaviors are subtle (e.g., occurring, but difficult to articulate), they have a cumulative effect on the faculty member (Samnanai, 2013). As a result, there is an attempt to create an illusion of perceived control over those behaviors that appear random or uncertain, especially for individuals who exhibit more “Type A” tendencies (Keinan & Tal, 2004; Kimhi & Zysberg, 2009).

When someone is confronting nonnormative behavior, a typical reaction is a desire to punish the individual (Tetlock et al., 2007). In order to reduce personal guilt and to reestablish perceived control, people scapegoat the individual for her or his disruptive behavior (Rothschild, Landau, Sullivan, & Keeper, 2012). If someone perceives a student as being dangerous, people tend to distance themselves from that
individual (Marie & Miles, 2007). Each of these plays a role in how a faculty member experiences an undergraduate student’s behavior, especially if the faculty member experiences the disruptive behavior as threatening.

**Just-world hypothesis.** The just-world hypothesis suggests individuals desire predictability. This need to know what will occur, when it will occur, and how it will occur is commensurate with what a person deserves (Lerner, 1980). How a person attributes behavior and attempts to make sense of what is occurring determines what someone deserves. A person with a just-world perspective (a) blames the victim, (b) downplays the severity of the issue, (c) ignores their own culpability, and (d) evaluates the other’s behavior as just or unjust. The resulting belief is good things happen for good people because only bad things happen to bad people (Dalbert, 2009).

In a study of 128 introductory psychology students, Hafer et al. (2005) determined that individuals with a strong just-world perspective believe people get what they deserve, even if the conditions under what happened were unfair. The faculty member who ascribes to this (a) has fewer disruptions, (b) minimizes the potential threat of a situation, or (c) chalks it up to something occurring within the individual causing the disruption. Therefore, a faculty member who operates from a just-world perspective is less likely to perceive her or himself as deserving when a disruptive situation.

Faculty members who have an unjust-world perspective believe the opposite is true. They regard the world as a chaotic and arbitrary place in which a person’s behavior does not necessarily result in an equal distribution of rewards and punishments (Lench & Chang, 2007). In two separate studies of psychology undergraduates, Lench and Chang determined that people who believe in an unjust-world tended to react angrily,
defensively, and saw any situation as unjust regardless of the circumstances. If ascribing
to an unjust-world perspective, a faculty member may unknowingly escalate a disruptive
situation because he or she is experiencing the situation negatively.

Lerner (2003) suggests emotional provocations result in a stronger desire for
justice. People who are involved in situations considered low emotional events respond
using impression management reactions (i.e., expected normative behaviors such as
compassion). Individuals with an increased emotional reaction to events employ greater
just-world behavior reactions (e.g., blaming the victim, minimizing the situation,
maximizing outcomes, utilizing outraged justice balancing) as a way of gaining “justice.”
Faculty members reacting emotionally to disruptive students may utilize just-world
mechanisms as a way to cope with an ever-increasing chaotic situation. This is one way
for a faculty member to restore predictability and stability within her or his environment.

**Symbolic Interaction Theory**

Symbolic interaction is the process of interpreting and defining the words or
actions of another individual (Moore, 2012). It is a subjective process by which
individuals socially construct meanings of reality and create attributions as to how the
shared environment works (Turner, 2011). Each individual makes her or his own
meaning and understanding of events (Gusfield, 2003).

Goffman, widely considered the important voice in symbolic interaction, provides
a foundation for understanding the multiple, overlapping frames of reality that create a
person’s experience (Hancock & Garner, 2011). Goffman (1956) examined the shared
definition of a situation created when people interact with one another. At the heart of
this interaction is the desire to prevent embarrassing oneself or the other person. Due to
this innate need, a social contract forms between the two interactants. This results in the alteration of our behaviors depending upon the context.

Individuals base their organization of experiences upon the conceptual frame for how we will behave (Goffman, 1977). Goffman suggests individuals use a “key” (i.e., words or behaviors that signal the meaning of the interaction) to convert our “frame” (i.e., the understanding of what is occurring) into a “stage” (i.e., our status and role pushes us to front-stage to act out particular parts when interacting with others, while in private we are allowed to be back-stage and allowed to be ourselves) that we use as our primary factual reality. The symbolic activities of framing, keying, and staging form the basis of our verbal and nonverbal communication with others. In each of our interactions with others, we have two goals (a) to gain information from the other person so we can define and interpret the situation, and (b) to control the situation by managing the impressions we give to others. In a classroom or laboratory setting, the faculty member and the undergraduate student engage with one another to establish the stage for the interaction. Through both verbal and nonverbal interactions with one another, there is an ongoing conversation, where each learns about the other and the situation. When an undergraduate student is disruptive, it develops through the shared interaction between the faculty member and the student. It does not happen in isolation from one another.

Fundamental to this theoretical orientation is that in every encounter with others we each make our own meaning (Gusfield, 2003). Each meaning is unique to both the individual and to the context in which it exists (Maclean, 2008). Time is itself a mutable essence. The present is the only objective now, while the past and the future exist only as a part of the narrative (Flaherty, 2001). Our past memories and future retellings of an
incident changes and alters the meaning that is made within a classroom or a laboratory setting. Each time a faculty member tells the story of her or his experience, it changes the experience through its retelling. In talking with the student, with administrators, with colleagues, or with members of the behavioral review or threat assessment team, it changes the essence of what the faculty member experienced.

Trust is an essential component within any relational interaction. Within any university community, trust between a faculty member and her or his student is imperative (Gawley, 2007), just as is trust within the institution itself (Gawley, 2008). Much of what occurs within the educational setting results from the belief that faculty members and students follow the normative rules within the face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting (Hancock & Garner, 2011). When belief in rules collides with disruptive undergraduate student behavior, problems arise. Our identity, who we believe ourselves to be, defines the rules under which we operate. We have multiple identities dependent upon our multiple roles (e.g., faculty member, parent, friend, licensed professional). Trust is lost when we do not follow the rules of our operating identity and we do not meet the expectations of how those roles should be performed (Hausmann et al., 2011). An undergraduate student acting in a nonnormative way upsets the balance of expectations for the situation of how an undergraduate student “should” be acting in a university setting.

Meaning springs from how we behave in a situation (Mazzotta & Myers, 2008). How the individual views her or himself develops from the social interaction, the reflected response of the social experience itself, and her or his own subjective inner experience (Lundgren, 2004). In order to resolve problematic issues, individuals
typically (a) define the issue for greater clarity by using personal experiences that incorporate both relevant and irrelevant cues, (b) identify her or his role in the situation, (c) understand the role of the other by attempting to use perspective, (d) examine the facts of the situation itself, and (e) transmit meaning both denotatively and connotatively (Gusfield, 2003). This process of problem resolution leads the individual to act and react to not only what is occurring, but also to what consequences may occur because of her or his initial reaction.

Meaning also arises from the interaction itself (Smith, 2011). Faculty members interact in a myriad of ways. They develop and create relationships with their colleagues (Salo, 2008). They co-construct meanings and definitions with students (Dixon & Dougherty, 2010; Wagner, 2007). From this creation of meaning making, they determine risk (Innes, 2004). This gives them the opportunity to increase their power and control over the situation by determining whether to act or not to act (Hallett, 2007). Individuals with a greater awareness of the emotional climate are better able to modulate the outcome of the situation and to aid students in internalizing how others may see them (Hartel, Gough, & Hartel, 2008; Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010).

How a faculty member makes meaning affects her or his experience of an undergraduate student with disruptive behavior within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. Much of what the faculty member experiences is dependent upon what cues he or she decides to focus upon. Attributional processes influence the perceptions of roles that each play in the situation. When examining the “facts” of the situation, realize there are the immutable facts of the senses (e.g., time of day, participants) versus those fluid facts (e.g., interpretations, reactions, emotional responses)
that change through the retelling of the narrative surrounding the experience (Flaherty, 2001). During the transmission of meaning, the faculty member assumes the student utilizes the same symbols of meaning that he or she is using to create a shared cultural understanding within the classroom or laboratory context (Turner, 2011). When this does not occur, there may be a misinterpretation of the situation.

**Experiencing Disruptive Behavior**

Faculty members differ in perceptions when it comes to defining disrespectful behavior (Quddus et al., 2009), disruptive behavior (Seidman, 2005), or threatening behavior (Pavela, 2008). There is a snowball effect when a small act of incivility turns into a larger disturbance because a faculty member ignores the behavior at hand (Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Gilroy, 2008; Harrell & Hollins, 2009). Many new faculty members feel underprepared for the professional role (Campa & Moretto, 2012). Faculty members feel inadequate or frustrated when facing a disruptive undergraduate student because the professional training he or she has received is not sufficient for the situation (Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Hernandez & Fister, 2001). Faculty members have the additional burden of protecting the other students in their classroom when determining whether a student is a potential threat (Noonan-Day & Jennings, 2007). Not only must he or she assess the behavior of the student, the faculty member must also make a reasonable determination as to the level of risk that exists should he or she choose action or inaction in response to her or his appraisal of the experience. Faculty members differ in perceptions when it comes to defining disruptive behavior (Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010). In this section, I define disruptive behavior and discuss faculty responses to such behavior.
Defining Disruptive Behavior

An increasing number of faculty members at colleges and universities describe a growing trend towards disruptive and uncivil behavior in their classrooms and laboratories (Alexander-Snow, 2004; AlKandari, 2011; Amada, 1999; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Clark & Springer, 2007; Gilroy, 2008). Feldman (2001) defines incivility as any action that “interferes with a harmonious and cooperative learning atmosphere in the classroom,” (p. 137). This could run the gamut from (a) arriving late, (b) doing homework for another class, (c) swearing, or (d) threatening the teacher or other students. He further breaks these down into the categories of (a) petty irritations that typically are small acts interfering with the learning process, (b) classroom terrorism allows the student to gain control of the topic of conversation or the classroom, (c) intimidation and verbal harassment towards the faculty member, and (d) threats of physical violence. Feldman conceptualizes disruptive behavior on a continuum escalating from minor infractions to threats of danger.

As defined by Clark, Farnsworth, and Springer (2008), disruptive behavior results in psychological and physical distress to those encountering the behavior and impedes learning within the classroom environment. These behaviors include (a) those resulting in potential harm to self or others, (b) abuse of substances, (c) verbal and nonverbal profanity, and (d) interference with classroom discussions and activities resulting in the prevention of academic engagement. Hernandez and Fister (2001) include rebellious and emotional subsets to the identification of disruptive behavior. A student engaged in rebellious behavior is one interacting with the faculty member in a seemingly intentionally hostile, antagonistic, or disrespectful manner. The student engaged in
emotional behavior is one interacting in a seemingly unintentionally dramatic fashion (e.g., filled with tears, moods, changes in emotional states) or with noticeable differences in affect between their written work and their interpersonal interaction. As the intensity of the situation builds, so does the experience of the perception that it has moved from uncivil to disruptive to threatening.

In his landmark work on disruptive students in higher education, Amada (1999) defines disruption as behavior that is continually interrupting the educational process and interfering with both teaching and learning. It requires an excessive focus of time, energy, and attention of various parties because the student has demanded it (i.e., through her or his actions or via her or his passivity). Amada goes on to describe disruptive behavior ranging from classroom incivility (e.g., chronic tardiness, talking, or sleeping in class) to actual forms of bullying (e.g., verbal or physical intimidation). For many faculty members, it is similar to Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s definition of obscenity in Jacobellis v. Ohio (1964) wherein he refrained from actually defining the subject but made clear that he “knew it when he saw it.” A faculty member experiencing an undergraduate student’s disruptive behavior in her or his classroom reacts in much the same way; he or she knows it when he or she sees it.

I conceptualize disruptive behavior as being on a continuum with disruptive and threatening anchoring each end. I define disruptive behavior for this study as (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, attendance, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), and (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior,
threats to faculty members ego, expertise and/or authority) (Amada, 1999; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Feldman, 2001; Seidman, 2005; Sharkin, 2006). Research indicates faculty members have exposure on the continuum from incivility to threats. How he or she identifies the behavior determines her or his response to the behavior.

Black et al., (2011) examined the prevalence of disruptive behaviors in the college classrooms of 228 faculty members at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Ninety-six percent of the respondents identified required undergraduate courses (80%) as more likely to have disruptive students. The students most likely to be disruptive were freshmen and sophomores (45%) followed by juniors and seniors (15%). Only 4% of the faculty felt the issue was extremely serious, while another 16% viewed the issue as moderately serious. The most serious of disruptive behaviors (a) physical attacks, (b) making threats, and (c) verbal attacks, were the least likely to occur. While there was no common standard as to how faculty members defined each event, those who were involved in classroom management training reported fewer incidences of disruptive behavior.

Research by Quddus et al. (2009) attempted to determine if there was a difference between how faculty members identified disruptive behaviors within a college setting. They discovered there was no difference between male and female definitions of disruptive behavior. The most significant finding involved faculty rank. Faculty members who were part-time and/or instructors reported far more disruptive behavior than faculty members who were full-time and/or at the assistant or associate level. Faculty members at higher ranks perceive many of the student actions as discourteous
rather than disrespectful and disruptive. The experience of disruption remains within the defined realm of the individual.

**Issues of disruptive behavior in today’s undergraduate students.** Research related to disruptive behavior on today’s undergraduate students is intriguing. Twenge (2013) argues there is a plethora of evidence supporting an increase in narcissism in the Millennial generation (i.e., born after 1982). Multiple researchers have supported the idea of an increase in narcissistic traits (e.g., self-involvement, “aura of entitlement,” inflated expectations) in today’s college students (Bergman, Westerman, & Daly, 2010; Brown, Sautter, Littvay, Sautter, & Bearnes, 2010; Cain, Romanelli, & Smith, 2012; Westerman, Bergman, Bergman, & Daly, 2011).

There is an increase in the association between the students beliefs of academic efficacy and consumerism (Baker, Comer, & Martinak; 2008; Cain et al., 2012; Gross & Hogler, 2005; Kopp & Finney, 2013; Lippmann, Bulanda, & Wagenaar, 2009; Nordstrom et al., 2009). Many students believe this gives them carte blanch to act as disruptive as they deem fit because they are consumers purchasing the right to earn an “A” and to have a seat in the class (Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Clark & Springer, 2007; McKay, Arnold, Fratzl, & Tomas, 2008).

This also explains the technological divide between students and faculty members. There is the unrealistic expectation that faculty members will immediately respond to any phone call, text, or email from students, regardless of time of day or day of week (Foral et al., 2010; Kolanko et al., 2006; Nworie & Haughton, 2008; Pacis et al., 2012). Students also have differing opinions as to the appropriateness of the use of personal technology within the classroom believing they may access it at will, regardless
Disruptive behavior in direct service majors. Nursing education has predominately conducted the most research related to disruptive student behavior in regards to programs preparing students to be direct service providers (Clark, 2007; Clark et al., 2008; Luparell, 2007). Research examining direct service majors with internship and practicum components (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, psychology, social work) is limited, even though these students will be directly affecting others, even as undergraduates. There has been some research in social work and teacher education.

Ausbrooks et al. (2011) explains that social work education depends on immersing students in the professional core values and molding the student into a member of the profession from the start. Acknowledging there is an issue by actively researching the topic, suggests faculty members may not be successful at determining which students should be licensed social workers. King et al. (2007) recognizes a similar issue in teacher education. For them, it becomes an issue of training preservice teachers on expected “classroom dispositions as emergent professionalism” (p.17). For both, it is an issue of molding the student into the expected mores of her or his new profession, rather than addressing the issues of disruptive behavior.

Clark (2008) suggests there is a concern that disruptive classroom behavior will generalize into behavioral issues in non-academic settings. Anthony and Yastik (2011) interviewed 21 prelicensure nursing students, suggesting “nurses still eat their young” (p.140) is true more often than not. Their immediate concern was how a nurse is
educated carries over into nurses mentoring new nursing students in a clinical setting. This has ramifications for faculty members working with disruptive undergraduate students, as it has a spillover effect into practical application. This has real world implications, not only for the faculty member who is the site supervisor, but also for the student and the patients the student encounters during her or his practicum or internship experience.

With respect to nursing students, Luparell (2005) argues for the need to address disruptive behavior. It is important not only because of the ethical code of conduct governing the major, but also because there is an expectation these students can work collaboratively on teams in an accountable, professional manner. The student also represents the program from which they have graduated. This holds true not only for the nursing profession, but for all direct service majors as well. The behavior of the student out in the field affects the professional reputation of the program.

**Faculty Response to Disruptive Behavior**

Feldman (2001) suggests the responsibility for responding to disruptive undergraduate student behavior within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting is twofold. The first reason some type of response is necessary is the ethical obligation to ensure an appropriate learning environment for all students enrolled within that class or lab. The second reason is one of safety. There is not only the concern for the protection of the faculty member and the students within her or his classroom or laboratory, but also for any faculty member who encounters the student next. There is also an inherent responsibility regarding the prevention of yet another Virginia Tech (Clark et al., 2008). Faculty members do not want to make a misstep, yet faculty members at the
postsecondary level often are not trained in classroom management issues like their K-12 peers (Deering, 2011; Seidman, 2005).

**Classroom management and policies.** Research proposes using similar interventions for addressing disruptive behavior by (a) setting clear expectations in the syllabus, (b) directly confronting disruptive behavior when it occurs, (c) modeling appropriate behavior, (d) documenting and punishing inappropriate behavior, and (e) developing a positive relationship with students (AlKandari, 2011; Boysen, 2012; Deering, 2011; Harrell & Hollins, 2009; Seidman, 2005). Reducing conflict by using effective classroom management skills decreases the amount of disruptive behavior of students (Meyers, 2003). There is general agreement that it will not prevent all disruptive or threatening behavior (Boysen, 2012; Harrell & Hollins, 2009; Meyers, 2003; Seidman, 2005). There is student behavior beyond the scope of a faculty member’s training or ability, and the institutional expectation is that he or she will contact appropriate campus resources (Feldman, 2001; Harrell & Hollins, 2009). This becomes the issue of a faculty member’s personal identification of disruptive undergraduate student behavior and how he or she is experiences the behavior within her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting.

Faculty members vary in their responses to disruptive behavior. A faculty member often makes the choice of (a) action (e.g., conversation, direct or indirect confrontation, sanctions according to the syllabus, humor), (b) acceptance (e.g., reframe of the situation or the behavior), (c) nonaction (e.g., avoidance, minimization, ignoring behaviors), (d) redirection (e.g., appoint discussion dominators as discussion leaders, incorporate texting as part of lesson plan) and/or (e) referral (e.g., department head/chair,
student conduct, behavioral review and/or threat assessment team, police) based upon that experience (Amada, 1999; Anthony & Yastik, 2011; Ausbrooks et al., 2011; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Boysen, 2011; Carbonne, 1999; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; King et al., 2007; Luparell, 2005, 2007). There is no, one correct response to the behavior. It is as individual as the faculty member and her or his way of making meaning. It is as unique as the experience of the situation itself.

**Emotional responses.** Increases in incivility and disruptive behavior lead to increased stress on the part of a faculty member (AlKandari, 2011; McCallum & Price, 2010). There are many reasons for ignoring disruptive behavior. A faculty member may decide not to confront disruptive behavior, mistakenly believing (a) ignoring it will make it go away, (b) the administration will not support the right to address disruptive behavior, (c) disruptive students are a negative reflection on teaching abilities, and (d) students or concerned others will potentially retaliate (Amada, 1999; Deering, 2011; McKay et al., 2008). They may also choose to avoid reporting it because of concerns about (a) tenure, (b) future employment, (c) lack of knowledge, and (d) disempowerment (Cassell, 2011; Lampman, Phelps, Bancroft, & Beneke, 2009). There is even a likelihood the faculty member may leave the profession (McCormick & Barnett, 2010; McKay et al., 2008).

Dealing with continual disruptive student behavior may lead to future burnout on the part of the faculty member (Ditton, 2009; Evers, Tomic & Brouwers, 2004). Burnout, as described by Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), is a response to job-related interpersonal and social stress that is reflected by emotional exhaustion with its concomitant personal distancing and task inefficiencies. In a study on the effects of
Incivility on faculty members, Luparell (2007) reported increased (a) sleep disruption, (b) self-doubt and self-blame, (c) posttraumatic stress response including a residual retriggering of the original emotional reactance to the behavior, (d) time, energy, effort, documentation and administrative oversight of the incident, (e) financial costs such as travel, attorney fees, alarm fees, private investigators, (f) disconnection from the educational process and connection with students, and (g) potential for quitting the profession. All of these become important considerations for faculty members when deciding how or whether to act in the event of an undergraduate student who is behaving in a disruptive manner in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory.

In a study of teacher burnout conducted by Evers et al. (2004), they identified an increased likelihood of disruptive behavior. While faculty members perceived themselves as managing the disruptive student behavior well, the students did not agree. The 411 students and 73 faculty members responded similarly about gauging the level of emotional exhaustion of faculty members. They differed with respect to key components of burnout. The students perceived a faculty member with burnout as increasingly depersonalized, less likely to perceive disruptive behavior, and less able to cope with that behavior when it occurs. While faculty members perceived themselves as emotionally exhausted, they did not see themselves as increasingly depersonalized. Faculty members also perceived their high levels of personal accomplishments are a protective mechanism, therefore allowing them to address disruptive behavior within the classroom in a competent manner. Male students were more likely to perceive high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Male faculty members were more likely to report high levels of both. This plays a role in how a faculty member experiences disruptive
undergraduate student behavior in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. A faculty member who has been experiencing disruptive undergraduate student behavior or a faculty member who may be feeling burnout has a different experience within her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory, then one who is not. It becomes an issue of the chicken or the egg, which came first, the disruptive undergraduate student behavior or the burnout?

**Collegial support.** In order to manage disruptive student behavior, faculty members often wrap themselves in the supportive embrace of their colleagues (Gazza, 2009; McKay et al., 2008). According to MacDonald (2013), as part of their identity development process, faculty members gain a sense of their place within the organization (e.g., departmentally, institutionally) through their interaction with peers. This allows them to understand how they “fit” within this new context. The faculty member assimilates their similarities and differences as they determine their status as a member of the in-group (Gomez, Seyle, Huici, & Swann, 2009; Suplee & Gardner, 2009). Faculty members are willing to share knowledge with one another as a way of cementing those bonds of collegiality (Kim & Ju, 2008). Talking with colleagues helps to make sense of what is occurring within the classroom to determine what action to take (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Swann & Brooks, 2012). If there is conflict between colleagues regarding perceptions (e.g., student’s behavior, actions taken, fairness, correctness), relationships may suffer and so they will often consider those intangible connections prior to acting (Fontana, 2009).

Often, faculty members remain autonomous; developing parallel lives that are discipline and departmental specific rather than institutionally focused (Holyoke, Sturko,
Wood, & Wu, 2012; Lee, 2004). Some faculty members develop formal or informal mentoring relationships (Suplee & Gardner, 2009; Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008). Many reach out to faculty members who are a similar level to themselves to best share their experiences (Kawalilak & Groen, 2010). They share concerns about unpreparedness when it comes to teaching students with disabilities, emotional issues, and incivility (Suplee, Gardner, & Jerome-D’Emilia, 2014).

For some faculty members, there is concern about how “the administration” will perceive disruption within the classroom. According to a survey of members of university leadership (e.g., provost, vice-presidents of academic affairs, faculty senate presidents or faculty shared governance councils), conducted by the Chronicle of Higher Education, close to 75% of the faculty members trusted the administration to watch out for the “best interest of the institution.” Yet, when it comes to dealing with disruptive students in the classroom, there is a belief that administrators will not support faculty members in these instances (Amada, 1999; Cassell, 2011; Deering, 2011; Lampman et al., 2009; McKay et al., 2008). There is a disconnection between these two ideals, especially when recognition is lacking as to what creates this type of disrupting situation in the first place (Cassell, 2011). Many of the individuals in leadership positions were previously faculty members and lack training in these areas (Fogg, 2008; Laursen & Rocque, 2010). There is an assumption that because they have reached a level of leadership, they automatically know how to handle various situations. Yet, they continue to manage with the tools they know, much as they learned to teach in the same way they learned from their professors (Fogg, 2008). There is also concern that many administrators are either far removed from their time with student contact, or are
professional administrators with limited understanding of student interaction, and therefore, may not have the contextual underpinning for the faculty experience (Johnson & Deem, 2003). Yet, communication amongst the principals is a key component (Hoppes & Holley, 2014). Interaction between administrators and faculty members increases trust, transparency, and the likelihood that a faculty member may confide in someone other than a colleague.

Chapter Summary

In order to develop effective behavioral review and threat assessment teams, it is important to understand the experiences of faculty members in face-to-face classroom and laboratory settings with disruptive undergraduate students. To be effective, one must have an understanding of how a faculty member experiences this phenomenon within her or his classroom or laboratory. When an institution assumes that training equals referral, it ignores the human element determining what or who is a student of concern.

By examining the institutional responses to campus shootings and the antecedents of how most institutions came to develop a behavioral review (BRT) or threat assessment team (TAT), it becomes easier to understand the purpose surrounding the assumed need for referrals from faculty members. Gaining an awareness of how institutions created BRTs and TATs and how to define a threat, works to give a deeper understanding of the institutional perception of using as a preventive measure. It also aids in developing an understanding of what the institution assumes a faculty member is supposed to be doing when faced with an undergraduate student who is behaving in a disruptive manner in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory.
Using the lenses of undergraduate students with mental illness, undergraduate students with disabilities, and undergraduate international students as a way to explore faculty descriptions of disruptive behavior associated with the shared commonalities of the students who enacted campus violence, explains the potential impact on a faculty member’s face-to-face classroom and laboratory experience. A faculty member’s background and exposure to mental illness influences how he or she experiences a student with mental illness in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory. Whether a faculty member describes an undergraduate student with mental illness as being dangerous may have the most impact on how he or she reacts to exhibited disruptive behavior. If a faculty member assumes the disruptive behavior of an undergraduate student with mental illness is a danger to her or himself and others, he or she may be more likely to make a referral to a behavioral review team or threat assessment team.

There are a rising number of undergraduate students with disabilities attending colleges and universities. Referrals of undergraduate students with disabilities to behavioral review and threat assessment teams occur often. For some faculty members, understanding his or her ability to confer with others or to hold the student to the same standard of conduct as a student without disabilities regarding the disruptive behavior may alter how he or she experiences the undergraduate student within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory.

With the rising number of undergraduate international students in American classrooms and laboratories, cultural misunderstandings are apt to occur. For many faculty members, these cultural expectations, along with the needs of the international
students may push the faculty member beyond the boundary of her or his comfort level resulting in increased referrals to behavioral review teams and threat assessment teams.

In examining disruptive behavior from the theoretical construct of attribution theory, I define attribution and explain how a faculty member makes sense of the behavior of an undergraduate student influences her or his experience of a situation. Faculty members who lean towards a dispositional explanation of behavior may be more likely to experience the behavior as purposeful and therefore feel more justified in punishing that behavior. This may result in additional referrals to behavioral review teams and threat assessment teams.

When examining disruptive behavior from the theoretical construct of symbolic interaction theory, I explain how a faculty member creates the reality he or she believes they will find. The meaning of the experience the faculty member describes is the creation of the individual and the situation. A faculty member reacts to the meaning developed through her or his interaction with the undergraduate student. Based on how the faculty member views her or himself, the student, and the situation, it determines how the faculty describes the experience of the student’s disruptive behavior. Each time the description of the behavior alters and shapes the reality of the situation. These narratives influence and inform the faculty member’s experiences and actions when encountering the disruptive undergraduate student behavior in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories and may result in a referral to a behavioral review team or threat assessment team.

Finally, in identifying the prevalence of disruptive undergraduate student behavior at colleges and universities, I give a better sense of the definition and the common expectations regarding how faculty members “should be” responding to the behavior in
their face-to-face classroom or laboratory. Disruptive behavior becomes a subjective point on a continuum that moves from uncivil to threatening. Understanding the experience of the faculty member is essential to determining what disruptive behaviors require a referral. Most institutions expect the faculty member to respond to disruptive behavior in the classroom by referring all cases of concern. For many faculty members, this may not be what occurs. Unknown, is how faculty members experience disruptive undergraduate student behavior in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories and what choices are made about that experience.

Both attribution theory and symbolic interaction theory explain how a faculty member experiences an undergraduate student who may be disruptive in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory. To develop a greater understanding of what is occurring, it is important to understand the faculty members experience with disruptive undergraduate student behavior in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting, so we can begin to understand what happens from the very beginning.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the experiences of faculty members at four-year public postsecondary institutions with undergraduate students’ disruptive behaviors in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories. Using the dual lenses of attribution theory and symbolic interaction theory, I developed themes to describe and interpret the faculty members’ lived experiences by using inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006), in a deductive manner (Groenewald, 2004). I first created themes in an organic fashion (e.g., clustering, grouping) by allowing them to emerge from multiple contacts with the data (Creswell, 2008). I then applied the two theoretical constructs of attribution theory and symbolic interaction as a means of interpreting and analyzing each theme after it emerged.

I conceptualize “disruptive” and “threatening” behaviors as being on a continuum with disruptive and threatening anchoring each end. I am utilizing the following definition: (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), and (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members’ ego, expertise and/or authority) (Amada, 1999; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Feldman, 2001; Seidman, 2005; Sharkin, 2006).

In order to be able to achieve this, I chose an appropriate research design. This study uses phenomenological methods to elicit rich descriptions of how university faculty
members experience the phenomenon of students who are repeatedly and/or significantly disruptive. This study uses a semi-structured interview protocol as a way to seek to understand how faculty members respond while experiencing disruptive student behavior and how they process these experiences afterward. The study answers the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

1. How do faculty members’ describe and interpret their experiences with undergraduate students who behave in disruptive manners in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
   a. How do faculty members differentiate between normative, disruptive, and threatening undergraduate student behaviors within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
   b. How do faculty members attribute why disruptive undergraduate students do what they do?

2. How do faculty members’ previous life experiences help them to make meaning of why they regard an undergraduate student’s behavior as disruptive?
   a. What previous life experiences do faculty members incorporate to make meaning regarding their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
   b. If, and how, has this experience with disruptive undergraduate student behavior affected faculty members and their teaching?
In this section, I give a brief explanation of my research design, including the bounding of the study itself. I also describe the methodology overview, its rationale, the context, the study participants (including sampling, recruitment and consent procedures), data collection (including the types and sources, and procedures), data analysis (including approach and procedures), delimitations, limitations, my role as the researcher and the chapter summary. According to Creswell (2009), these components are the plan for my research design. Interwoven within the description for each of these sections, I also provide a justification and rationale for each of my choices.

**Methodology Overview and Rationale**

Qualitative research is an inductive form of research used when attempting to understand the meaning an individual gives to an experience. Quantitative research is a deductive form of research used when attempting to test theories, hypothesis, and relationship between variables in an objective manner. Mixed-methods research is an attempt to utilize the strengths of both the quantitative and the qualitative into one research design (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Gall, Gall, Borg, 2007). Each has their own unique strengths and weaknesses, but I only chose one for this research study. In this section, I define my chosen research design, identify its characteristics, explain why it is appropriate, and describe my specific type of study.

**Research Methodology and Approach**

Research methodology is the systematic plan created to solve the research problem (Kothari, 2004). It becomes the logical rationale for the development of the study, its methods, and the analysis of the data.
Research design refers to the specific steps and procedures that describe the collection and analysis of data (Creswell, 2007, 2008). An appropriate and recognized research approach “enhances the rigor and sophistication of the research design” (Creswell, 2007, p.45). The qualitative approach I am using for this study is the phenomenological method of exploring the lived experiences of faculty members with disruptive undergraduate students within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010).

**Qualitative research defined.** Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest qualitative research attempts to make the invisible, visible by using empirical methods intended to make meaning of an individual’s experience and meaning in time. As an observer, the researcher attempts to make sense of the phenomena through the worldview of the person experiencing the phenomena within her or his own natural setting.

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because I want to understand what faculty members have experienced in the face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. While using an objectively defined instrument may have given me data regarding how often such events occur and to whom, it would not have given me the narrative or the in-depth understanding of the faculty members’ experience with these disruptive students in their face-to-face classrooms or laboratory settings.

I chose to use qualitative research because it attempts to capture the myriad dynamic, holistic, and individual features of the human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009). I engaged with the faculty members using phenomenological interviews in an effort to gather rich descriptions of their experiences with disruptive
undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

**Phenomenological research defined.** Phenomenology is the attempt to understand the lived experience from the participant’s point of view and to seek meaning from the analysis of their descriptions (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010). Phenomenology attempts to view an experience from a multi-perspective whole, describe it in rich detail, and seek meaning through intuition and reflection (Moustakas, 1994).

Descriptive research involves explaining both the observable and the connections made based on what I observe (Merriam, 2009). Descriptive phenomenological research requires intentionality, throughout the entire process, from subject selection through data collection procedures (England, 2012). Descriptive phenomenological research is appropriate in this study because I am attempting to understand the experiences of the faculty members with disruptive undergraduate students in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings without analyzing the meaning behind why faculty members do what they do, but rather to understand what they are experiencing (Reiners, 2012).

**Context and Participants**

In this section, I describe the participants, my role as the researcher, how I collected data, my choices for data analysis, my methods of validity and reliability for this study consent procedures, and ethical considerations.

**Context (Setting)**

The participants for this research are faculty at four public postsecondary institutions in central or western Michigan who meet the criteria for inclusion. Each of
the institutions meets the Carnegie classifications of high or very high undergraduate students. According to their websites, each of the universities presented trainings on disruptive, distressed, and/or students of concern since the Virginia Tech shootings. Each of the institutions also has a behavioral review and/or threat assessment team process the faculty member might access. In an effort to avoid “backyard research syndrome” and potential conflict of interest, I initially only used participants from three of the institutions described above, reserving the fourth in case I was unable to procure enough participants from the other three universities (because the fourth is my home institution). In the end, I did not have to use participants from my home institution.

**Participants and Sampling**

In qualitative research, sampling often begins with a plan guided by both the theoretical orientation and the research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). It is important to remain flexible in the approach, as sampling may change during the research process (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). To that end, this is the sampling plan I used for this study.

**Research population.** Individuals who share the same or similar characteristics make up a research population (Creswell, 2008). The population for this study included faculty members at public postsecondary institutions in central or western Michigan, who experienced a disruptive undergraduate student in her or his face-to-face classroom or laboratory since April 16, 2007. The central or western Michigan postsecondary institution, where both the event occurred and where the faculty member is a current employee, must have a behavioral review and/or threat assessment process the faculty member might have accessed had he or she chosen to do so as a result of the experience.
The faculty member did not need to have accessed the team; it just needed to have been available to her or him. The central or western Michigan postsecondary institution, where both the event occurred and where the faculty member is a current employee, must have presented training on distressed students, disruptive students, and/or students of concern during this same period. The faculty member did not need to have attended the training; it needed to be available to the faculty member. The faculty member taught in a program related to direct service providers (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work); the faculty member did not have to be a practitioner in that area. Gender, rank, or years of experience while identified are not exclusionary for this study.

**Sampling.** When sampling there is an attempt to select a portion of the population that conforms to the identified characteristics that are being studied (Gall et al. 2007). Purposeful sampling is one of the most common types of sampling in phenomenological research. It requires the identification of individuals who offer descriptions, information, and experiences that work to clarify the phenomena being studied (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2009) suggests purposeful sampling is the hallmark of qualitative research. I selected the sites and individuals purposefully to answer the research questions and to assist in understanding the phenomena.

Criterion sampling is a form of purposeful sampling. Criterion sampling identifies individuals with a designated set of specifications or knowledge (Palys, 2008). For this study, the criteria I am using are faculty members who (a) identify as having experience with disruptive undergraduate students in their face-to-face classrooms or laboratories since the shootings at Virginia Tech, (b) have access to a behavioral review
and/or threat assessment team at their institution, and (c) have access to training on disruptive, distressed, and/or students of concern from their institution (e.g., faculty center, student affairs, counseling center, student conduct, public safety). This is my primary filter for this research project.

For this study, I used faculty members at three public Midwestern four-year public postsecondary institutions in central or western Michigan with the Carnegie classifications of high or very high undergraduate students. I kept the fourth institution in reserve, in case I did not reach saturation with my initial group of participants.

I accepted a variety of faculty members for this study. Research on disruptive behavior and incivility suggests there may be differences in experiences of faculty members depending upon rank, years taught, and gender (Black et al., 2011; Quddus et al, 2009). While I noted each within this research, the focus of the study is on describing the faculty members experience with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings.

I also limited my sample to faculty members who teach in programs related to direct service providers (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work). Clark (2008) suggests there is a concern that disruptive classroom behavior generalizes into behavioral issues in the non-academic settings as well. As a licensed counselor and as the director of student academic affairs at my home institution for one of the undergraduate colleges, this has direct relevance to not only the faculty members with whom I work, but also to the practicum and internship sites many students work at while completing their programs.
I did not use the fourth institution approved for my study because I was able to procure enough participants. Had I needed to recruit participants from my home institution, I would have used appropriate protocols to ensure I was not involved with any of the cases these faculty members might have brought before the behavioral review or threat assessment team. I would also have made sure any faculty members potentially involved with this study did not connect to incidences that I had direct involvement with as the chair of the CARE Team specific for my college. I would also not have worked with a faculty member who had a student incident that I was required to intervene in my position as director of student academic affairs. I would also have avoided working with a faculty member who had any incident that I was required to intervene while I was the co-interim department head for social sciences.

I identified this sample for three important reasons. First, I believe interviewing is the gold standard for phenomenological research (Sandelowski, 2002). Because I am a counselor, my preference is to conduct face-to-face interviews. It allows for the development of rapport (Ryan & Dundon, 2008) and to distinguish nonverbal communication cues that may not be readily accessible with the technology of today (Driscoll, 2011).

Second, I chose central and western Michigan because this area shares similar Midwestern values, traditions, and processes. Regionalism becomes a sharing of collective historical memory, regional distinctiveness, and a shared identification of values and cultural mores (Kowalewski, 2003). Regional identity (Hofstra, 2006) is more often an expression of who a person believes her or himself to be than her or his gender, socioeconomic class, race, or ethnicity. It is the place an individual feels he or she
belongsTo and the place where he or she shares a common interest, common beliefs, and common values by sharing a common space. While the faculty members may not have been native-born Midwesterners or native born to the central and western Michigan area, by default, living in the area and working on a common campus, they may share commonalities of place.

Third, I chose to look at faculty members who teach students who are studying to become direct service providers (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work). Luparell (2007) suggests faculty members who teach in these majors (e.g., nursing) who encounter these types of disruptive behaviors experience self-doubt, along with other physical and psychological reactions.

For these three reasons, this not only became an issue of convenience for me, as I wanted to have an opportunity to conduct face-to-face interviews with faculty from multiple regional locations who met my criteria, but it also gave me the opportunity to talk with faculty members who might be affected by those students who will be directly affecting others.

I conducted a Google search with the terms “identify colleges and universities in 100 mile radius of [city omitted], Michigan” where I currently reside and work. I used this as a filter for developing my sample. Of the 50 colleges and universities I identified, I struck any public, private, and for-profit two-year colleges and the four-year for-profit, private and professional institutions (e.g., law school, medical school, divinity school) from the list. These colleges and universities did not fit my population of four-year public universities and therefore were not useful to my sample. The additional filter I used to identify similar institutions and to develop my sample were Carnegie
classifications (McCormick, 2007). Initially the creation of these classifications were to aid researchers (McCormick & Zhao, 2005) as a way of defining terms and being able to create useful comparisons, I feel they were useful for my study.

There are 758 classifications with an enrollment profile of very high undergraduate and 607 for high undergraduate. Very high undergraduate enrollment is defined by the Carnegie classifications (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2013) as having less than 10% of full time enrollment being made up of graduate or professional students, while high undergraduate enrollment means those students are limited to between 10 and 24% of full-time enrollment. I used these as one of my initial filters for the universities I contacted for my study. From my initial list of 50 universities and colleges, four remained. As I stated previously, the fourth institution is my home institution where I am currently a member of the University behavioral review team (BRT) and threat assessment team (TAT), as well as, the chair of my college’s CARE Team, that serves as triage for my institution’s BRT and TAT. Since each fits the criteria I sought, I had a large enough sample for my study without needing to put the protocols in place to conduct research in my home institution.

Once I identified the universities I used for my study, I went to each of their websites. On their websites, I searched for references to a “behavioral review team” or “threat assessment team.” I used one of the various synonyms for such a team. I also used the key word of “student of concern” to identify potential areas on their website. Once I ascertained that the institution does have some form of a behavioral review team, I identified whether there has been any training on students of concern, disruptive, and/or distressed students since 2007. Again, I used the institution’s website to search for
relevant terms related to that type of training. I also looked at the faculty center page, dean of student life page, counseling center page, and human resource page to identify potential training in that area. I was able to determine that all of the universities have offered training on this subject since April 16, 2007.

Englander (2012) argues that since phenomenology is research on lived experience, at minimum, it requires three participants, but might require anywhere from five to 20, depending upon when I have reached the point of saturation. Saturation is the point at which no new information, themes, or descriptions arise from the analysis (Saldana, 2009). Creswell (2007) suggests phenomenology requires between three to 10 participants, with all participants having a vast amount of knowledge of the phenomena studied. Mason (2010) conducted research on sample size and saturation. He completed a content analysis of 560 dissertation abstracts using structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interviews as a means of data collection and determined there was a consistency in sample size. He determined all of the phenomenological studies had at least six participants, but could go up to 25 as suggested by Creswell (2007). For my study, I identified a range of six to 25 with the understanding that I needed to be flexible in order to reach saturation. I began with six participants, and did not have a need to add an additional five participants at a time to reach the point of saturation. Since I have been a trainer on the subject of disruptive, distressed, and students of concern, I understood people would be willing to speak with me on this subject. In my experience as a presenter on this topic, I have found faculty members are very willing to share their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students. This is a matter of great concern to
many of them. I found this to be true when speaking with my participants. They were forthcoming and shared their experiences in a robust manner.

**Sampling Criteria**

Inclusionary criteria for this study are twofold. The first filter for criteria are identified as setting and program specifications and include (a) public postsecondary institutions in western or central Michigan considered very high or high undergraduate by Carnegie classifications, and (b) programs related to direct service majors (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work). The second filter for criteria are related to the faculty member experience and include (a) faculty members who have experience with undergraduate students who have been disruptive within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting since the shootings at Virginia Tech (i.e., April 16, 2007), (b) faculty members on campuses that have access to behavioral review and/or threat assessment teams, and (c) faculty members that have access to training sessions on disruptive students, distressed students and/or students of concern through their institution (e.g., faculty center, student affairs, counseling center, student conduct, public safety).

I conceptualize disruptive behavior as existing on a continuum, with disruptive and threatening anchoring each end. I define disruptive behavior as (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, attendance, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members ego, expertise and/or authority) for this study (Amada, 1999; Bjorklund
& Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Feldman, 2001; Seidman, 2005; Sharkin, 2006).

For the purposes of this study, the faculty members did not have to access the behavioral review or threat assessment team because of the disruptive behavior. The faculty members did not have to have participated in any training regarding disruptive students, distressed students, and/or students of concern.

**Recruitment and Consent Procedures**

Negotiating entry into a site or recruiting participants can often be difficult (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As a result, I used my designed recruitment plan and consent procedures to increase credibility.

**Recruitment of participants.** I identified four universities in western or central Michigan meeting the criteria of (a) level four year or above, (b) public, and (c) either meets the enrollment profile of very high undergraduate enrollment or high undergraduate enrollment. My home institution, where I am an administrator, is included only if I was unable to draw a large enough sample of participants from the other three institutions. I serve on the University behavioral review (BRT) and threat assessment teams (TAT), and act as the chair of my college’s CARE Team, a triage team that is used to refer students to both the BRT and the TAT. I am also the director of student academic affairs for the College and work with faculty members and academic leadership to resolve issues of concern. At the time I started my interviews, I was serving as co-interim department head of social sciences. Because the campus community knows me, it provides me with access to the undergraduate colleges and programs I identified for my study. I believe this may have increased participation and a willingness to discuss
uncomfortable situations with frankness because I am familiar. I have also presented
trainings on the subjects of students of concern, distressed students, and disruptive
students to our campus community and that lends a sense of credibility to this type of
discussion. I am aware I needed to refrain from interviewing participants who came
before the behavioral review team, threat assessment team, CARE Team, and who were
are members of my college with an active situation with a disruptive student. I needed to
maintain a divide so I did not create a dual relationship. As a counselor, I am familiar
with ethics regarding this type of situation (American Counseling Association, 2005). I
already have such rules in place when working in my official capacity. I am glad this
was a nonissue.

I used two forms of recruitment for my study. My first was an email request for
“assistance in reaching participants” (Appendix A) I sent to university administrators
(e.g., behavioral review teams, threat assessment teams, student conduct, counseling
center, faculty center) and college administrative heads (e.g., deans, associate deans,
assistant deans, department heads, department chairs) as noted by college and university
organizational charts. I explained my study and asked them to forward my invitation to
participate in research (Appendix B) to potential participants.

The second form of recruitment I used is a snowballing technique to identify
prospective participants. As my last question on my semi-structured interview, I asked
for recommendations to other faculty members who may have similar experiences.

For my first step in the recruitment of participants, I used email (Appendix A) to
contact university administrators (e.g., behavioral review teams, threat assessment teams,
student conduct, counseling center, faculty center), and college administrative heads (e.g.,
deans, associate deans, assistant deans, department heads, department chairs) requesting they share my email with their faculty members.

For the second step, I asked the university or college administrative heads to forward an email attachment to potential faculty members (Appendix B). I also used snowball sampling to identify prospective participants as my last question on my semi-structured interview.

Contained within the email to the faculty member was a link to an online demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). By their responding to that link, they granted assent for me to use their responses as screening for participation. This was the beginning of the informed consent process. For faculty members who did not meet the protocol criteria for this study, I sent them a “does not meet participation criteria” email (Appendix D). It is important to note that I still maintained any information gathered from contacts expressing interest in the study with the same level of confidentiality that I did for individuals who eventually became participants for my study.

For faculty members who granted assent by completing the online questionnaire (Appendix C) and who met my strict protocol criteria, I began the informed consent process.

Upon receipt of assent via the completed online questionnaire (Appendix C), and after the initial screening, I sent the potential participant the “expressed interest in participation” (Appendix E) that included a copy of the informed consent (Appendix F). I requested that he or she complete the consent form (Appendix F) and return it to me via email, fax, or U.S. mail. Because I already gained initial assent through the online questionnaire (Appendix C), for those potential participants who did not return the
consent form to me prior to the scheduled interview, I had the participants complete the consent form during our face-to-face interview. Contained within this email (Appendix E), I developed our arrangements for the interview time and place.

Even though I had assent for screening purposes, I did not begin any part of the pre-interview or the interviewing process until I had a signed consent form from the participant. He or she did not become a participant until that point in the research process. Without a signed consent form, I had limited direct contact with the potential participant. They only received the email inviting them to participate in the research (Appendix B) and the email thanking them for their expressed interest in participation (Appendix E).

I began my initial sampling of the first six-10 respondents. Since I am using both criterion sampling and snowball sampling, each of the first six-10 respondents in theory would have lead me to my next five participants. If I had not reached saturation, after my initial six, I would have continued adding up to five participants at a time.

I set up a face-to-face interview. Face-to-face interviews, though more expensive and time consuming, allowed me the opportunity to observe nonverbal communication and decrease social desirability bias (Knox & Burkard, 2009). The criteria I used for determining acceptability for a chosen interview location was (a) convenience to my potential participant and myself, (b) maintenance of both confidentiality and a safe place for meeting, and (c) quiet for recording (Jacob & Furgurson, 2012).

**Rights of participants.** Participants have the right to confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy (Creswell, 2007). Confidentiality is information maintained and not shared without authorization. Anonymity is a tool to maintain confidentiality by not linking
information to data. Achieving privacy by protecting the raw data from others continues by breaking the connection between the identity of the participants and their narratives (Christians, 2005). In order to maintain his or her rights, I asked each faculty member to develop her or his own pseudonym that I used throughout this study. I also omitted any reference to their institution or position to blur their identity. I also omitted the name of my home institution to make it more difficult to ascertain their university. Only I know who they are.

I am maintaining confidentiality to the best of my ability based on the technology available and my limits as a licensed professional counselor. Using my expertise as a counselor, I was mindful to make a professional referral had such an occasion arisen, but also using the ethical guidelines of my profession, confidentiality, becomes doubly important. My ethical obligations as a licensed counselor guide me. I am also a mandated reporter. If I believed someone intended to harm her or himself, or others, or is involved in child or elder abuse, I have an obligation to report. I included this information in my informed consent (Appendix F) so my participant’s were aware of my limits of confidentiality from the outset. I do not believe this was an inhibitory factor for my potential participants. I was concerned that some considered this a counseling session and I needed to maintain my boundaries as a researcher, as well as a counselor. I did not need to make appropriate referrals to the faculty member’s employee assistance program (EAP) or community mental health in their area.

I guarded against unauthorized access to data so that it was available only to my committee chair and me. The digitally collected information is stored on a password protected flash memory storage device. The hardcopies of the transcripts, including the
signed consent forms, are in a sealed envelope in a locked cabinet that only my chair and I are able to access. I redacted revealing materials (e.g., names of participants, institutions, names of disruptive students) to ensure unnecessary disclosure of the identity of the participant. Since I am using pseudonyms developed by the participant for themselves and any disruptive student, no actual names exist linking them to the research material. I also continue to maintain and respect the privacy of the participant’s responses in all personal matters to minimize exposure and to diminish personal intrusion into the participant’s intimate sphere (Stake, 2010).

Data Collection

In qualitative research, data collection is the collection of information through the use of interviews, observations, and documentations that are informed by my (a) theoretical lens, (b) purpose of my study, (c) research questions, and (d) sample I have selected (Creswell, 2008; Gall et al, 2007; Merriam, 2009). I identify the research data through a combination of data collection methods. In this section, I describe the data types and sources, as well as the data collection procedures I use for this study.

Data Types and Sources

In phenomenological research data collection and data analysis are often intertwined (Englander, 2012). The goal is to utilize a methodology that is rigorous and credible (Giorgio, 2002), so I can build validity within my research. To that end, I use interviewing, field notes, and a brief online questionnaire.

Interview. I conducted interviews with university faculty members in central and western Michigan. I requested and received permission to record digital audio recordings
of my interview with each participant to use for later transcriptions. I also maintained detailed notes of each encounter.

Interviews are recognized as the main data collection method in qualitative research (Collins, Shattell, & Thomas, 2005; Englander, 2012; Kvale, 2006). These conversations with a purpose allow the researcher to identify a participant’s perspective of a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Interviewing is not an inherently neutral process. Culture, context, and historical coincidence bound it (Fontana & Frey, 2005). I remember its subjectivity when reporting information I gather from this process. I chose this method to allow my participants to share their experiences in their own words, rather than allowing my pre-conceived beliefs about what occurred within the face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting to influence them. Using methodology based on the work of Husserl to describe the participants’ experiences, interviews allow me to explore and gather the narrative of their encounters (Bradbury-Jones, Irvine, & Sambrook, 2010; Giorgio, 2007; Sadala & Adorno, 2002; Wilson, 2003).

**Semi-structured interview.** I directed the semi-structured interview questions towards the participant’s experiences and feelings. I used a semi-structured interview as a tool for data collection because it allows the participants the opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words, while also building upon my understanding of the relevant issues connected with disruptive students in classroom and laboratory settings (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviewing does not mean developing multiple questions, following a script, and leading the participants to an answer, but rather it is the development of a broad outline of questions with the flexibility of adapting according to the interview circumstance (Englander, 2012). I chose face-to-face interviewing so I
could observe nonverbal communication (Jacob & Furgurson, 2012; Knox & Burkard, 2009; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). Multiple studies on incivility in the classroom have been conducted using survey research (AlKandari, 2011; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Quddus et al., 2009; Seidman, 2005), vignettes (Boysen, 2012), surveys on faculty member feelings of safety (Bryden & Fletcher, 2007; Fletcher & Bryden, 2009; Morgan & Kavanaugh, 2011), and surveys of faculty member burnout with disruptive students as a key variable (Evers et al., 2004; Lackritz, 2004). I identified only two studies using interview techniques of faculty members (Ekstedt & Fagerberg, 2004; Luparell, 2007), even though interviewing is the gold standard in qualitative research (Collins et al., 2005; Englander, 2012; Kvale, 2006).

**Interview Guide.** I developed an interview guide (Appendix G) for my semi-structured interview. This allowed me the freedom to explore the phenomenon, have my research questions answered, and allowed for appropriate flexibility within the interview process (Englander, 2012). The questions contained in the interview guide are open-ended to allow the participants the freedom to describe their experiences in a rich and meaningful manner.

**Field notes.** I used field notes (Appendix I) to guide my own process as the observer. Field notes give me the opportunity to maintain a representation of my observations during the interview process, identifying not only the concrete behavioral cues I recognize, but also my interpretation in the moment of those cues (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I believe my background as a licensed counselor aided me in my acuity with both the interview process and the development of field notes.
These included a description of the setting, of interviewee and connections made during the interview process. I created these as soon as possible after the interview, so as not to interfere with the interview process itself (Merriam, 2009). As a former practicing licensed counselor, I have experience with the creation of documentation after counseling sessions. This is an analogous situation.

**Questionnaire.** I used an online demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) to gather participant contact information, minimal demographic data, and verification the participant meets the criteria for the study. I contacted university administrators (e.g., behavioral review teams, threat assessment teams, student conduct, counseling center, faculty center), and college administrative heads (e.g., deans, associate deans, assistant deans, department heads, department chairs) via email (Appendix A) requesting they share my email with their faculty members. Contained within the email to the faculty member was a link to a participant demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). By their responding to that link, the faculty member granted assent.

**Data Collection Procedures**

In order to maintain rigor in my methodology and subsequent analysis, I adhered to a carefully developed plan for data collection (England, 2012).

**Interview**

The interviews were a 60-90 minute face-to-face interview. For my first step, I asked if he or she had any further questions, reminded her or him of rights as participants, and had each sign consent forms (Appendix F). I also reinforced that I am a licensed professional counselor. As such, I have limits to confidentiality. I have a duty to report if I believe he or she intends to harm her or himself, harm someone else, if he or she is
involved in child neglect and/or abuse, or elder neglect and/or abuse. I also explained making a referral to the participant’s employee assistance program (EAP) or community mental health, or other appropriate referral, should it be necessary.

Using an interview guide, all of the participants received the same open-ended questions (Appendix G), so all described their own experiences from their own point of view. I audiotaped each participant. I transcribed the sessions for further examination. I maintained minimal notes during the interview session. I completed my final field notes (Appendix I) immediately after the interview.

I used follow-up questions for extrapolation and clarification, as well as to help each participant more richly tell the story. All of the participants received similar open-ended questions, so all described their own experiences from their own point of view. I coded all responses for confidentiality by using the pseudonym the participant chose for her or himself. I requested the participant choose a pseudonym for the disruptive student, there were none. I reviewed data after each interview so that I could begin the initial analysis process.

Each participant was audiotaped. I transcribed the sessions for further examination. I maintained minimal notes during the interview session. I find that notes during an interview tend to be distracting to both the interviewer and the participant. I used them for noting nonverbal emphasis and example. I compiled and collected both the transcriptions and the written observations.

I recorded the interview using a Phillips Voice Tracer digital recorder with speech to text capabilities to aid in the transcription of interviews (Brooks, 2010; Matheson, 2007). The Phillips digital recorder has Dragon Naturally speaking access. I also have
the Dragon Naturally Speaking Premium edition. Matheson (2007) suggests a strategy for converting the text of the interviews to mesh with voice recognition software trained to one voice. It is possible to use the listen and repeat technique, but she suggests saving the file to the computer and reading it to the software by converting it to a text file. Then using Brooks (2010) method of embodied transcription as a crosscheck, I was able to ensure I have a clear transcript of my interviews without resorting to hiring a transcriptionist (Brooks, 2010; Matheson, 2007).

I used an Echo smartpen with Livescribe interactive software. I utilized both as a built in redundancy for recording. I chose to use a 2g smartpen because it did not require access to a cloud drive. I was able to manage the confidentiality of my information by downloading it onto an encrypted travel drive that is accessible only to me. The Echo smartpen allowed me to make notations of nonverbal communication during the interview situation and improve my data collection (Linenberger & Bretz, 2012), plus, my participants were curious about it. I found it successful for rapport building.

Linenberger and Bretz used the smartpen with its Livescribe technology in conjunction with a semi-structured interview. Their interviews were audio and video recorded. Even though I only conducted audio recordings, I wanted to be sure that I had both my digital recorder and smartpen as redundant systems for one another. I was glad I did because during one interview my digital recorder failed to record.

I maintained an audit trail of each encounter with a participant. I attempted to schedule multiple interviews for each institution on the same day. Because of faculty schedules, I met with each faculty member on individual days.
My second step was for potential participants identified through the snowball method. I sent them an email (Appendix H) inviting them to participate. I would have then followed the same procedure as above, but I did not have any respondents.

**Post-interview Contact**

For my first step, I sent my participants a follow-up thank-you for their participation. As a form of member checking, within this email was a full transcript of the participant’s responses. This allowed participants the opportunity to determine the accuracy of my interpretation of our interview prior to my submission of the data (Appendix J).

For my second step, for the participants who returned the transcript with corrections, I sent a follow-up thank-you upon receipt of transcript (Appendix K). I only received one with corrections. Two emailed me telling me the transcripts encapsulated the content of our interview. I did not hear back from the other three.

For my third step and final step, upon the conclusion of my study, I emailed each participant a summary analysis of my results (Appendix Q).

**Data Analysis**

Key to phenomenological research is the use of rich description. It becomes the cornerstone for the scientific method (England, 2012). Data analysis and collection of data is often interwoven in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this section, I describe my data analysis approach and data analysis procedures used within this study.
Data Analysis Approach

Using the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl, I describe the experiences of faculty members with disruptive students in a classroom or laboratory setting (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010; Giorgio, 2007; Wilson, 2003). To achieve *epoche*, or the setting aside of judgments (Moustakas, 1994), I used bracketing in an attempt to set aside the preconceived notions I have about this subject and the participants experience (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). It is through processes of *noema*, the meaning that is given, and *noesis*, the act of meaning-giving, that I begin to understand the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Analysis Procedures

Once I collected the data, the next step was to categorize the information by identifying any themes and patterns in it (Saldana, 2009). I began by listening to the recordings prior to transcription to determine whether there is any nuance or background information that might become lost in the transcription process (Brooks, 2010; Matheson, 2007).

Data analysis continued by my transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews using the methods espoused by Matheson (2007) and Brooks (2010). I transcribed the interviews. The Phillips Voice Tracer digital voice recorder converts speech to text using Dragon speech recognition software. In training the software to recognize my voice, I was required to repeat my participants’ words. This evolved into a familiarity that allowed me to develop a transcription “script” that I then used to fill in with the details of the interview with the participant.
I used a melding of both Creswell’s (2008) modified version of Moustakas’ (1994) already modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method and I used Shosha’s (2012) interpretation of Colaizzi’s (1978) descriptive phenomenological data analysis to provide rich, thick descriptions of the participants’ stories of disruptive undergraduate students and their subsequent impact upon the faculty member. Creswell suggests the following considerations for phenomenological analysis (a) description of personal experience with the phenomena, (b) development of significant statements, (c) grouping significant statements into themes, (d) textual descriptions of participant experiences, (e) structural descriptions of participant experiences, and (f) composite descriptions of the essence of the participant’s experiences. Shosa used a similar method, but added greater detail for the analysis: (a) multiple readings of the transcripts, (b) extraction of significant statements, (c) formulation of meanings, (d) development of categories, clusters, and themes, (e) integration into an exhaustive description, (f) description of fundamental structure of phenomenon, and (g) validation from research participants. I believe that by combining the two methods for handling data, I was able to gain a holistic view of the phenomena I was studying.

I continued by individually reading and rereading the transcriptions. To aid in their analysis, I coded each of the responses using this coding scheme. The use of this coding system permitted me to classify responses into themes, thereby allowing me to develop a coding table suitable to aggregate and analyze data. I coded and categorized each participant’s interview session and my notes as they were completed.
Validity and Reliability

All research needs to be accountable. It carries the requirement it should appear internally valid and trustworthy. It should also, possibly, allow for the generalizability and transferability to others through its external validity (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Collingridge and Gantt (2008) suggest focusing on analytical generalization in which the researchers logically make comparisons between the research contexts to develop their generalization argument fully. They suggest it is akin to building the same sort of claim for case law. This is dependent upon whether or not the original researcher followed appropriate research methodologies within her or his research to begin within the development and the analysis of the study. Because it is impossible to know each potential context in which this research may be used, Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate it is necessary the original researcher develop rich descriptions so that future researchers might apply the results to their studies in the form of transferability. Stake (2010) posits that generalization is a part of human nature and as a result, researchers need to be aware of this tendency to draw such conclusions. I maintained an awareness of this as I embarked upon this portion of my study.

Validity and trustworthiness. When developing a qualitative study, it is important to provide sufficient details that have been richly described so the conclusions make sense (Merriam, 2009). Trustworthiness is one means to show rigor, competency, and ethical regard for data (Tobin & Begley, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) established trustworthiness as a rejection of the term validity. It is demonstrated through credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, peer debriefing, audit trail, member checks, and triangulation (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008; Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman,
I made the concentrated decision to utilize many of these for my study.

**Triangulation.** With triangulation there is an attempt to use multiple checks to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomena (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). By using interviews, field notes, and maintaining my own journal, I attempted to see the phenomena from multiple perspectives. Combining this with my review of the literature, I am able to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the participants’ experiences.

**Member checking.** An additional method of providing internal reliability is by using member checking. To achieve reliability, you ask those who have been interviewed whether your interpretation has captured their experience accurately (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The important factor for me to remember is that while member checking may be important to my study, it is not a concern shared by the person I interviewed. When I contacted each of my participants for member checking, I remembered to make the request soon after the interview occurred (Stake, 2010). I asked those I interviewed to review my perceptions of our interactions in a follow-up email within four-to-six weeks after the initial interview. Three of the six responded.

**Engagement through saturation of data.** To saturate is to analyze the data using self-reflection, analysis, and intuition to the point the same theme or the same narrative is repeated (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Miller & Crabtree, 2005; Saldana, 2009). I developed my coding to the point where no new themes emerge (Saldana, 2009). During my initial analysis, the themes and ideas surfaced early. Each additional
interview added to the initial information, building to the first general ideas. This repetition of concepts was the reason why I did not add to my participants.

**Presentation of contrary data.** Not every participant experienced the phenomena in the same or the *expected* way. Presenting information contradicting multiple themes gives data the ring of truth (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). One of the opportunities I looked for is the chance to find those stories or those narratives that do not fit. The chance to present information that contradicts my initial themes allows me to present multiple perspectives in this case and rounds out the experiences present in the description of how faculty members describe their experiences with disruptive students in classroom and laboratory settings. While there is consensus in the expression of the themes, there is not unanimity of the experience. I believe this adds to the complexity of the narrative and the rich descriptive of the experiences.

**Peer Review.** I am fortunate this component is part of the dissertation process (Merriam, 2009). In developing my themes, I worked closely with my dissertation chair to modify and constantly check the accuracy of my interpretation. We went through several iterations during the refinement of my entire research study. Members of my dissertation committee are also read my research project and added their voices and expertise to its structure. Having this additional check of the data adds another layer of reliability and validity to my research.

**Reliability.** Using many of the same validity tests (e.g., triangulation, reflexivity, peer review, and audit trails) also makes a case for internal reliability (Merriam, 2009). In order to increase my potential for transferability, I was careful in my sample choice
and highly detailed in my use of rich description (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008; Merriam, 2009). Even though my initial sample are those who self-select (Berk, 1983), I also attempted using snowball sampling to add their voices to my study. I used criterion sampling as a final basis for selection of my sample in order to increase the reliability for this study (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008).

**Triangulation.** Triangulation affords you the opportunity to check your evidence to be sure its quality is good and the information contained within is accurate (Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Stake, 2010). By using the multiple modalities of interview, field notes, and maintaining my own journal, I hope to ensure data quality.

**Reflexivity.** Having an awareness of the biases, values, and prejudices that I bring to the research study aids in reducing the subtle influences I brought to bear upon the research project (Creswell, 2007; Kitto et al., 2008). This requires my having appropriate HSIRB approval, maintaining ethical data collection, and analysis procedures, as well as explaining my reasoning for my choices throughout my writing process (Merriam, 2009). I conducted both an initial and a final self as instrument to identify and explain my thought processes in the development of this research.

**Audit trails.** An audit trail allows others to see the details of choices made by a researcher throughout the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). During this research study, it was important to keep meticulous notes. Since it tends to be a common practice for me anyway, I believe this is something I easily incorporated.
Delimitations and Limitations

A research study cannot be all things to all people. Limits are set up that outline its boundaries and frame its conditions for others (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this section, I describe the delimitations and limitations of this study.

Delimitations

This study involves only those faculty members in central and western Michigan who have experience with disruptive undergraduate students in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory since April 16, 2007. I also limited it to those faculty members who taught in programs related to direct service majors (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work). Additionally, I selected only those faculty members willing to participate in this study and those who met the criteria. This prevented participants from declining in the middle of the study resulting in unfinished and unusable data for analysis.

Limitations

As with any exploratory research, any conclusions I am reaching are tentative at most. Four potential limitations may be found with respect to the size and selection of my sample and the relationships between faculty member experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting with behavioral review or threat assessment teams, faculty training in disruptive, distressed, or students of concern, or direct service majors (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work). While I chose participants consistent with phenomenological guidelines, the process may ultimately affect my potential transferability to other institutions (Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2010). Currently, there is no
definitive relationship between faculty member experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings and having a behavioral or threat assessment team on a postsecondary campus. There is also a limited relationship between a faculty members experience and access to faculty training in distressed, disruptive, or students of concern. Finally, there is a limited relationship between faculty member experience and direct service majors (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the research methodology I used in this qualitative study, which is a descriptive phenomenological research design. I included information on the data collection processes, as well as data analyses, which includes identifying themes from the answers of faculty members who have experiences with disruptive students in their classroom or laboratory settings. I also discussed the delimitations and limitations of the research.

In the next chapter, I provide the results of my research findings and analysis of six interviews with current faculty members with disruptive undergraduate students in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

In this chapter, I provide the results of my research findings and analysis of six interviews with current faculty members with disruptive undergraduate students in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings. I develop themes to describe and interpret the faculty members’ lived experiences by using inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006), in a deductive manner (Groenewald, 2004). I first created themes in an organic fashion (e.g., clustering, grouping) by allowing them to emerge from multiple contacts with the data (Creswell, 2008). I then applied the two theoretical constructs of attribution theory and symbolic interaction as a means of interpreting and analyzing each theme after it emerged.

Overview of Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the lived experiences of faculty members at four-year public postsecondary institutions who encountered undergraduate students’ disruptive behaviors in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories. I conceptualize “disruptive” and “threatening” behaviors as being on a continuum with disruptive and threatening anchoring each end. I am defining disruptive behavior as (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, attendance, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), and (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members ego, expertise and/or authority) (Amada, 1999; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008;
Seidman, 2005; Sharkin, 2006). This definition also forms the foundation for further inquiry and discussion with my participants.

The research questions guiding this study include:

**Research Questions**

1. How do faculty members’ describe and interpret their experiences with undergraduate students who behave in disruptive manners in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
   
   a. How do faculty members differentiate between normative, disruptive, and threatening undergraduate student behaviors within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
   
   b. How do faculty members attribute why disruptive undergraduate students do what they do?

2. How do faculty members’ previous life experiences help them to make meaning of why they regard an undergraduate student’s behavior as disruptive?
   
   a. What previous life experiences do faculty members incorporate to make meaning regarding their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
   
   b. If, and how, has this experience with disruptive undergraduate student behavior affected faculty members and their teaching?

**Final: Self as Instrument**

Englander (2012) asserts that in phenomenological research, even while the individual is important, it is the phenomena being described that is the most important.

My understanding during the interviewing and analysis phase is that I was not there to get
to know the person better, but rather, I was there to get to know the phenomena better. I was interviewing the person in order to gain a description of her or his lived experience. I find this an important distinction while encountering my data.

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument attempting to make the unknown known (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). Because of this role, my attitudes and beliefs influence all subsequent data collection and analysis. In order to set aside as many of my preconceived notions, assumptions, thoughts, and feelings as I could, I engaged in the reflective process of bracketing (Finlay, 2009). It is this “setting aside” that I find important in my journey towards understanding the nuances between what I believe to be true and what they actually experienced. I used a reflective journal process to aid me with my bracketing. I divided this process into four stages: (a) pre-reflection, (b) reflection, (c) learning, and (d) action from learning (Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004). I find it helps me in identifying my own beliefs, working “arm chair” hypothesis, attitudes, and hunches regarding my participants’ experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in their classroom and laboratories. I believe it also minimizes the impact of each upon my study.

**Pre-reflection**

During pre-reflection, I used bracketing to write my initial self as instrument for Chapter One. I wanted to identify any issues I believed might interfere with my study. I also wanted to understand the origin of my interest in this subject matter. Throughout the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) process and prior to my first interview with a participant, I began my reflective journaling. Not only did I have my “aha moments” for my initial chapter, I discovered this aided me with the frustrations of
waiting for the acceptance of my proposal. This was also beneficial because it
maintained my commitment to why I was exploring the topic.

**Reflection**

During reflection, I took time to examine and reflect on the research process
itself. I remained vigilant of my bracketing techniques so I could mindfully maintain my
focus on my participants’ experience with the phenomena and not my expectations of
their experience. I remained aware of my own experiences and expectations of what I
thought I “might” find when I interviewed them. I kept detailed notes and memos
regarding the process itself. The key areas I identified were: (a) concerns regarding
gaining HSIRB approval in a “timely enough” manner to secure enough participants for
my study, (b) gaining a minimum number of participants by the end of the semester, and
(c) insights.

My first concern involving HSIRB approval had to do with my self-talk regarding
the process. Though I had received approval via email, I received the actual consent
form via post. They first sent it to the department office on-campus and then sent to my
home a hundred plus miles away. Because I was not on campus to receive it, I had a
considerable lag between receiving HSIRB approval and receiving the document. During
this time, I let (a) panic take hold, (b) my “Type A” drive to the finish line consume me,
and (c) my sense of humor evaporate. In hindsight, this seems like a small thing. My
lead advisor gave me permission to begin recruitment prior to receiving the hard copy. In
great anticipation, I did. I sent them all out. This was my first mistake. I did not have a
plan for sending them out in waves (e.g., request to institution A, institution B,
institution C). I was focused, I was looking “now” and not at the big picture. I did have
one department chair from an institution chastise me for only sending a copy of my approval letter and not the consent form for the recruitment. I doubt she sent my request for participation on to her department. I had initial interest in the study, but because of when I made the choice to send them out in the semester, I believe I lost some participants because of this. Part of my “urgency” had to do with the “internal clock” I had ticking in my head. Working in academia, I know semesters have their own rhythm, but I ignored everything I knew. I blinded myself with the “need” to get it done and to get the data collected. Because “I believed” I was getting such a late start, I created my own sense of crisis by “having” to send them out “that late” in the semester. I was the one who thought I would not get enough participants for my study. Because of the choices I made, I almost did not. In hindsight, I should have waited or I should have staggered them and not sent them all out at once. I still had my institution I could have used but had I sent them out to them, I would have needed to amend my HSIRB because I let my own self-talk create an exigent situation that was not true. If I could only talk to my fall-semester self, I would tell her to take a deep breath and knock it off.

My second concern was gaining a minimum number of participants “by the end of the semester.” Again, it was that same mental clock ticking away, pushing me forward. I was always aware of what point it was in the semester. I recognized that if “I wanted” to complete my interviews prior to the holiday break, “I needed” to get the requests out as soon as possible or else “I would” lose my “window of opportunity.” I was concerned about “losing” an entire semester because of paperwork. I was feeling behind. Again, it was my own internal sense of urgency pushing me forward. When I finally received the green light, it was late in the semester. I could have waited, but I did not. I know that as
a result, I may have lost some potential participants because of how a semester builds for faculty members and their workload requirements. Again, the need for recalibration of my internal mental clock was important. Over the holiday break, I was able to regain my balance, find my sense of humor, and throttle back my drive. I realized if I was going to complete this, I had to quit trying to control the outcome of it. Since then, it has worked quite nicely.

When it came to other insights, two things struck me. The first occurred during the initial interview. I learned I needed to be flexible. In this interview, the definition and the “picture” I had of disruptive behavior was not what my one participant had experienced at all. As I was speaking with her, I had to regroup and see that disruptive behavior is not one big event. For me, I had only been thinking along those lines. “Small snippets of pockets of disruptive behavior” had never occurred to me, but once she said it, the idea coalesced and I could not believe I had missed it.

That leads to the second insight. The experiences of the faculty members are frighteningly similar. I feel as if someone has duplicated many of the same occurrences in each of their classrooms. Had I considered their definitions when I first bracketed my experiences, I realize I would have been able to describe and develop many of the same examples from my teaching career.

**Learning**

Learning includes both the lesson I learned from the study itself and from my own bracketing process. One major lesson I learned, was how thankful faculty members are that I am doing this study. They expressed gratefulness that someone was willing to hear their stories. They also wanted to be of service. They wanted their experiences to be
able to help a colleague. To know someone has heard her or his voice was an extra bonus. Faculty members are telling their many stories and they all have similar themes. I find this disturbing on many levels.

I found the interviews themselves to be fascinating. I learned quite a bit from each of the faculty members. There were times when I had to refrain from engaging in the type of probing or confronting I would do in a counseling session. I found that to be the most difficult. I had to “just be there now” and to experience their description of the phenomena neutrally. I had to let the story be what the story was.

**Action from Learning**

The action from learning stage is where I expand upon what I learned in the interviews to other situations (e.g., other interviews). In writing my reflective journal and memos at the end of my interviews, I was able to make connections between my ideas and start the analysis process. I was also able to increase my flexibility so I could adapt between interviews. When I realized that my mindset of the description of what a disruptive student behavior did not match my participants, I used that as an example to offer future interviewees. Every participant resonated with that first adaptation. Being able to use bits and pieces of what each participant gave me allowed me to refine my interviewing and to wrap myself around their narratives in a holistic way. As a result, each subsequent interview became longer because the picture became more complicated. I felt as if I was seeing just a tiny bit of a huge interrelated story.

**Description of Method and Participants**

After receiving HSIRB approval, I sent out 37 emails to university administrators (e.g., behavioral review teams, threat assessment teams, student conduct, counseling
center, faculty center) and college administrative heads (e.g., deans, associate deans, assistant deans, department heads, department chairs) for “assistance in reaching participants” (Appendix A) to my initial postsecondary institutions. From this initial request for participation, 18 people accessed the online demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). From those initial 18, 14 respondents completed the questionnaire. Of the 14 who completed the questionnaire, 10 indicated their willingness for interviews by leaving contact information. Three subsequently dropped out or were nonresponsive to setting up an interview time. One did not meet the criteria for the study as the disruptive incident did not occur at one of the three identified institutions and I sent the “does not meet participation criteria” email (Appendix D). Two other potential respondents contacted me via email and I redirected them to the survey so I could consider them for participation. They did not subsequently complete the survey. I have summarized the demographic information of both the respondents and the participants in Appendix P.

Data Collection

I collected data from November 2013 through December 2013. The method I used to conduct this study included six semi-structured, open-ended interviews with faculty members from three, four-year, public institutions of higher education in Michigan. I employed the snowball technique to identify additional participants, but invitations to participate did not result in any additional interviews. I was able to interview at least one participant from each institution without utilizing my home institution. I had faculty members who ranged from adjunct to full professors in my sample, with a wide variety of teaching and life experience. I also had an equal distribution of female and male participants. While this is not something I was studying,
research on disruptive student behavior and incivility suggests there may be differences in experiences of faculty members depending upon rank, years taught, and gender (Black et al., 2011; Quddus et al, 2009). While I am noting each within this research, the focus of the study is on describing the faculty members experience with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings.

**Interviews**

The interviews lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. I used a pre-developed interview guide to facilitate the interview with the participants. This afforded me the opportunity to examine both the research questions and to explore other areas that arose during our discussion (Englander, 2012; Merriam, 2009). This further elaboration and exploration also added to the richness of the description contained within this analysis (Englander, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

**Member Checking**

Once I transcribed the audiotaped interviews, I sent each one out for member checking (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). I requested they respond within 14 days or I would assume the transcript was correct (Appendix J). Of the six interviews sent out for checking, three participants responded. Of the three, two noted the transcripts captured everything accurately (i.e., Stacey, Doug) and one (i.e., Julie the Cruise Director) opted to make additional comments that I included into the analysis.

**Method of Analysis**

This is a qualitative study designed to describe the lived experiences of faculty members’ experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom
or laboratory settings. As described in chapter three, I used two modified approaches during analysis to provide rich, thick descriptions of the participants’ stories of disruptive undergraduate students and their subsequent impact upon the faculty member. The faculty members responded to two specific lines of inquiry:

1) How the faculty members’ describe and interpret their experiences with undergraduate students who behave in disruptive manners in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting, and

2) How the faculty members’ previous life experiences help them to make meaning of why they regard an undergraduate student’s behavior as disruptive.

This method of phenomenological inquiry includes interviewing participants, taking detailed field notes, listening and transcribing recorded interviews, then reading and re-reading the transcripts to develop a broad understanding of the content of each participant’s narrative. I listened to the interviews prior to transcribing them and then multiple times throughout the transcription process, jotting down insights as they materialized.

The initial reading of the verbatim transcripts revealed that while each of the participants had distinctive and diverse encounters, their descriptions and interpretations of disruptive student behavior were relatively similar, as was their meaning making. Each faculty interview became an echo of the previous with repeating narratives and descriptions, adding new dimensions, but no new paths to the descriptions. For that reason, I determined I reached a point of saturation and did not seek any additional participants.
I extracted and developed significant statements pertaining to the phenomenon I am studying on a separate document noting both pages and line numbers. Using a line-by-line analysis of the transcripts, I extracted phrases and sentences pertaining directly to the faculty members’ perceptions of disruptive students. I carefully avoided repetition while extracting the significant statements, but I attended to how often participants noted the same concept. During this process, rather than delete data, I marked passages I did not use as not applicable (NA) so I would have the opportunity to recover any potential information that could be used to bring the descriptions together (Saldana, 2009).

I formulated each of the significant statements into themes. I sorted the formulated meanings into categories, clusters of themes, and emerging themes. I reduced the findings of the themes into an exhaustive description. I described and developed a composite description of the essence of the participant’s experiences. I have used the participants’ exact words as much as possible to avoid misrepresentation. I have remained cognizant of continually using bracketing throughout the study and the data analysis process.

In this analysis, I have changed all of the names of the participants using pseudonyms chosen by each one at the time of the interviews. I have also changed the names of any students or colleagues brought up during those discussions. Specific position titles, departments, and institutions are also not included so that I may further protect the identity of my participants.

Participants

Each faculty member brings her or his own unique way of experiencing the phenomena based on a culmination of life experiences and perception. While I did not
set out to have an even sample of three tenured or tenure-line faculty members and three non-tenure line faculty members, those individuals volunteered. Just as I did not attempt to split my participants between three females and three males, they are the ones who volunteered. Each faculty member engaged in a free and open dialogue regarding their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students.

I interviewed three faculty members who are in tenured or tenure-line positions. These three faculty members are Stacey, Jane Doe, and Cody. I also interviewed three faculty members who are not in tenure-line positions. The three non-tenure track faculty members are Julie the Cruise Director, David, and Doug.

**Stacey.** Stacey is a White American, female, tenured, full professor. She has taught for more than 16 years at a variety of institutions in both education and in psychology. Her area of specialization is special education. Stacey views her professional career as one of change.

She was very composed and curious throughout the entire interview spending much of the time with her chin resting on the heel of her hand or her arms loosely crossed on the table, leaning forward. Her field works predominately in the quantitative realm and she wanted to have experience with qualitative research. During my interview with her, she inquired if she had to discuss only one incident. Based on her professional experience, she had multiple incidences and “one did not just stick out” in her mind.

Stacey views the changes she sees in the classroom as part of the larger context emphasizing multiple cultural shifts influencing postsecondary education. She claims this allows students to be less responsible for their education, encourages a consumer mentality towards grade accumulation without content mastery, and permits a creeping
“aura of entitlement” to invade the classroom setting. She has observed an increase in disruptive undergraduate student behavior since she has begun teaching.

She is troubled about this topic. She shows apparent concern about the faculty members and graduate students she supervises in her department leadership position at her institution. She also expresses the belief, that she and many of her faculty members have, that institutional protocols are designed as an “a CYA [cover your ass] sorta thing” and are not designed to protect the faculty member as much as it is to protect the institution.

**Interviewer observations.** I enjoyed being in Stacey’s presence. She exuded a warm confidence that I believe resonates well with her faculty, staff, and students. I also noted her frustration with the seeming inability to have institutional support for her faculty members and teaching graduate students. When discussing how her roles have changed from when she was a young, teaching faculty member, to the administrator she has become, I noted she is bothered by the self-realization that she no longer is “in touch” with her undergraduate students. She remained relaxed and amused with the process throughout much of the interview. In talking with her, I understand how she might easily diffuse disruptive student situations within the classroom.

**Jane Doe.** Jane Doe is a female, African-American, assistant professor. She has taught between six and 10 years in criminal justice. She has previously worked at another institution and has a variety of experience working with survivors of physical or sexual victimization. Her area of specialization is human trafficking.

This is her second semester at her institution. She is already experiencing disruptive student behavior. Part of it has to do with her perception of classroom
dynamics and the lack of engagement she sees with students who overuse personal technological devices.

Jane Doe spoke in a very precise and self-contained way during the interview. She had a difficult time articulating what it was about the classes, or about the student or students that were bothering her. When she was speaking about a particular student who had pushed the boundaries in her class by possibly lying to her about why he was being disruptive, there was a momentary flash of anger or irritation because he was not taking responsibility for his actions, but that soon subsided.

When I finished the interview with Jane Doe, she said she was “riding out” the semester. She “just wanted it to be over” and was opting to “leave things alone” because a new semester would be starting soon. Jane Doe volunteered for the interview because she was concerned.

Jane Doe mentioned she wanted to be part of the solution in finding ways to help her colleagues and to show her institution they need to figure out what to do to support faculty members. This is something she reads about “…and so when I read something like the Chronicle for Higher Education [sic] and there’s… like…article upon article upon article about…like…students playing games while professors are lecturing…so I know it’s not just my class.” The awareness that what happens in her class or on her campus is not an isolated incident is what spurs her to action.

**Interviewer observations.** At first glance, I found Jane Doe to be a very refined and serious faculty member. She initially appeared inhibited in her speech and her nonverbal communication. She seemed to embody the example and characteristics of an introvert. As we spoke, she relaxed, and became increasingly animated, passionate, and
humorous. I noticed that she kept herself in a very conscripted and precise role in our interview together. I always felt that I was in the presence of “Dr.” Jane Doe, with the emphasis on the doctor. She carried a quiet dignity about her that warranted a certain level of respect and awareness that she is a professor and I am a graduate student who was interviewing her. I was aware I needed to maintain that professional distance. As an introvert myself, I wonder whether students may mistake her introversion as aloofness and disengage in the educational process thereby creating her perceptions of disruptive behavior.

**Cody.** Cody is a White American, male, associate professor. He has taught between six and 10 years in criminal justice. He has taught previously at another institution. His area of specialization is rehabilitative criminal justice. Cody volunteered to be a participant because he remembers the difficulty in getting participants for his qualitative dissertation. He said he wanted to be supportive. He was congenial, laughing and storytelling throughout much of the interview.

Cody took great pains to emphasize that he looks for a pattern prior to acting on disruptive behavior. He also made sure I understood that his perceptions about students are different from his older colleagues; he relays more hope for his students’ futures. While explaining his belief about disruptive behavior he stated, “…more than anything for me, it’s that…it’s that demonstrating that level of professionalism, where you have rules in the classroom and if you can’t follow them you’re not always going to be able to get away with that.”

Cody divulges he is able to convey the passion and love for his subject to his students. He claims his love for his job is one reason why he does not have as many
disruptions as other faculty members have in their classrooms. He is sincere in his attempt to explain the actions of his students, almost as if giving them a pass on their immaturity, until the disruption reaches the point where his good humor fades and he describes it as “consuming his concentration.”

**Interviewer observations.** Cody was the one in control of the interview. I found he preferred a monologue to a dialogue. I asked questions or redirected, but he spent the time in our interview as a storyteller. To me, he seemed to be a series of contradictions. He appeared affable and easygoing, yet he also described many boundaries that students must not cross. He shared with me with his tales of “tossing” students from class, but also how he takes pity on someone who is socially awkward and plants himself in his office. He discussed the pet peeves that “made” him angry, but did not necessarily want to make changes to his classroom policy because he wants to be one of the younger, hip professors. I agree with Cody when he says he thinks his students may be inadvertently disruptive, “But again it doesn’t…it doesn’t stop them. Um…I don’t think they probably view it as them being intentionally disruptive that’s kinda the way I perceive it because…um…it is…it is disruptive.” It sounded as if many times the students were acting in the way they “always” acted i.e. there was no increase in disruptive behavior. The students went about their day in a typical fashion until he was “fed up” with their behavior. Cody explained that he considers it waiting until “seeing a pattern or a routine in the students behavior” prior to acting. Yet, he shared stories where he reacted to challenges to his authority based on one incident (e.g., the first time he kicked a student out of class was because of one basketball shot). When he acts upon patterns of behavior, he describes himself as “reminding the class about policy” or “catching the
student after class for a talk,” but when a student is challenging to him, he describes not being able to “take it anymore” and then he addresses it immediately. The student behavior has not really changed, but his perception of the behavior or his willingness to tolerate it has changed.

**Julie the Cruise Director.** Julie the Cruise Director is a White American, female, faculty member in a non-tenure line position. She has a clinical background and has taught for between six and 10 years in social work. Her area of specialization is social work.

She was very composed throughout the interview. I found it interesting that she arranged herself in a “clinical” pose (e.g., lean forward posture, hands under the armrests, centered position) in her chair while I conducted the interview. I assume it is a natural stance based on her therapeutic experience. She rarely made hand gestures, unless they were deliberate. Julie the Cruise the Director and I had the most similarity with respect to background and experiences (e.g., clinical practitioner, community mental health, advocacy for mentally ill, disabilities services, doctoral student). Because I recognized a kindred spirit, I worked especially hard to remain neutral throughout this interview. Julie the Cruise Director recognizes she works through the lenses of her training and her professional background when dealing with disruptive students.

And…um…also some of my background is in military social work. So I kinda bring that kinda like more of an awareness again of like…strong risk assessments and even security level assessments for in…for in my case sailors who are presenting risk related to their psychiatric or substance use symptoms. Or …you know… some other symptoms unrelated to that …that…in terms of security or
military response. In keeping the rest of the community safe from people who are not safe and who are armed and trained. So which is not a great combination (laughs)

Julie the Cruise Director serves not only as a faculty member, but also as the field service coordinator. Because of this secondary role, she works with all of the social work students who are out on field placements. This position also exposes her to every disruptive student behavior that occurs on site.

Julie the Cruise Director understands that much of this angst may be occurring because, “in social work classes we’re often talking about issues…you know… related to our own experiences. In our own experiences and what we bring. And in both instances [she described two intense instances of threatening behavior]… it was like…the student felt like others were not hearing them.” She attempts to understand why the student was acting in a disruptive manner, looking at multiple other areas for the reason why. Julie the Cruise Director is not content to examine just one facet; she examines multiple components as explanatory elements for why students do what they do. She questioned the admissions process, especially when it resulted in armchair quarterbacking. She questions why students would do well in the classrooms, but fall apart in the field experience. She questions whether her veteran students were receiving enough services, whether there was a good fit between student and field placement coordinator, whether the student’s disability or mental illness is interfering with self-advocacy or fulfillment of requirements. She worked her way through multiple contextual scenarios prior to looking at the student her or himself. Even then, she likens the disruptive behavior to the student who needs to learn. She is a strong proponent of social justice, expecting the
students to take responsibility for their own actions while she is fighting for them at the same time.

Julie the Cruise Director was very helpful in her conversation about disruptive undergraduate students. She is the only one who reported having gone through all of the trainings and is knowledgeable about the actual names and protocols of the resources of her university. She also describes the most threatening situations, but did not describe having gone through any behavioral review processes at her postsecondary institution. She also describes feeling threatened in one instance, but did not believe the student was an actual threat.

**Interviewer observations.** Julie the Cruise Director appeared very organized and precise. She attempted to run the interview as if it were a counseling session. At times, it was a battle of the techniques between the two of us. She reports a very directive approach to teaching, her students, and her work. Things seem to work in the world of Julie the Cruise Director. On the one hand, she advocates for those individuals who need a voice, on the other hand, she holds those students accountable for their actions. Julie the Cruise Director has a defined sense of what it means to be a social worker, a student, and even a faculty member. She expresses the belief that students meet those expectations and I believe when they work with her, that ultimately, they will or they will struggle. Based on our discussion, I am not surprised she uses her therapeutic skills to push emotionally while she is teaching her classes, so her students will be prepared, because that seems like something she believes would be of paramount importance. She also takes the role of leader seriously. She mentioned several times that the faculty
member is the leader in the classroom or that students look to the faculty member for leadership, especially in times of crisis.

**David.** David is a White American, male, faculty member in an instructor position. He has taught for between one and five years in dietetics. He has limited experience in teaching. He was curious about the research process and had little contact with disruptive undergraduate students. His previous experience is developing various seminars for interested groups until the department leadership recruited him. His area of specialization is that he is a chef first, and a faculty member second.

David is still finding his way. Every semester, he continues to add something new to his teaching repertoire. He is very passionate about his area of expertise. He was also apologetic about not having a “disruptive enough” student for my study. As we talked about disruptive behavior being on a continuum, he understood the connection and the need to hear all of the experiences.

David continually expressed a desire to help and understand throughout the interview process. According to him, this is one of the hallmarks of the hospitality profession. He also sees that he continues to grow and that his learning curve as a faculty member shortens every semester.

David is inordinately proud of the fact that he progresses in his techniques as a faculty member. He realizes that it is not because of training, “I haven’t had the course background as far as the techniques, but it’s just from human experiences and from what I’ve done.” He also wryly comments on the idea that while the students may respect his background and his experience, they also understand one other very important variable to maintaining classroom decorum and that is “knowing that their grade kinda hangs in the
balance is… you know… kinda a little bit of a motivator for them.” David has already learned one important lesson when it comes to classroom management and that is the power of a student’s grade.

**Interviewer observations.** It seemed like David went out of his way to be nice. He was hard for me to get a read on because he is just so darn nice. He described the key hospitality management responsibility as meeting the needs of his customers. He explained that was why he volunteered to be a part of this research project and why he was willing to give his time to do so. I felt he was having a difficult time stepping outside of that role during our interview, which made for a very pleasant interview, but also maintained a certain level of surface discussion. He would nod and look intently as I spoke. He peppered his nonverbal acknowledgments with verbal “yes” or “go on.” When he confidently discussed his area of expertise, I gained a sense of how he operates as a leader in the kitchen. He described how he is frequently learning and trying new things in his classroom to make it better. I believe he is constantly adapting his teaching “recipe” until he gets it perfected. I think as he continues to teach, he will refine the management of his classes. He reminds me of the male version of Stacey. He describes himself as a go-with-the-flow type of person who manages the situation before things get out of control.

**Doug.** Doug is a White American, male, faculty member in a lecturer position. He has taught for between one and five years in gerontology and family studies. Doug is in the most precarious position of all of the faculty members I interviewed. When I arrived on his campus, he had been asked to vacate his office to make room for a new faculty member. Doug is an adjunct who teaches for two separate areas in one
department at his university, and he teaches at the local community college. He does not have a true area of specialization, as he was teaching for multiple areas within the University. Even at the community college, he teaches differently aligned subjects. Multiple times throughout the interview, he explained that he thought he had issues with disruptive students because he does not have a terminal degree. Doug teaches very large lecture classes, and he states that “…in my syllabus I’m pretty lenient about certain…certain behaviors. I ask that they don’t disrupt me or they don’t disrupt fellow students,” and fears losing his job if he directly confronts students.

Because he described feeling threatened in the past, Doug admitted operating on the assumption that all students are experiencing emotional distress until proven otherwise.

…I learned very quickly that I need to heed what I say because I do not know if my students are experiencing a significant amount of stress and then I need to be considerate of that. I...I operate on the assumption that until I know my students better that they all could be especially… when I don’t know them. Doug explains the reason for this has to do with context. He was very self-protective regarding threat against self and threat against livelihood. He describes putting the emotional work and energy into the position that is going to have the greatest professional payoff

… if I think that I am going to be able to continue working at the place, I am. So I put more of that emotional effort because… I mean my personality is… I am more direct of a person.
Doug wonders if part of the reason why some students might be disruptive in his classrooms is because they mirror his behaviors, “given my default behavior is usually directness and asking them direct questions they may be mirroring me and that might’ve been the way that I’m inadvertently constructing my classroom environment to challenge my authority.” However, he also is concerned there may be “more males going into it [disruptive behavior and challenging authority], so it might be part of it male posturing as well.”

Doug examined his empathetic connection with his students. He describes himself as not being “a stellar undergraduate student,” one who missed many classes, and did not participate in his classes. He explains it was because he was self-medicating his bipolar disorder. Additionally, he grew up with a mother who had substance abuse issues and was “raised in poverty.” Doug says he believes this makes him more empathetic to his students. As a result, he is willing to tolerate more disruptive behavior, in case it stems from situations that are similar to his own.

For Doug, he says being the best faculty member he can be is his way of paying back those faculty members who helped him. He remains insecure in his position. He describes remaining non-confrontational and fearful, but he is also willing to provide scaffolding for student success, listen to feedback, and to try “a nice kind email that’s…that takes their humanity into account and…and asks them basically how are they doing… is there anything going on, or… and things like that.”

**Interviewer observations.** I struggled in my interview with Doug. At some points, I felt as if I were conducting a counseling session with him, rather than an interview. Doug exudes a victim-like aura. As I spoke with him, he was an amalgam of
insecurity, pretentiousness, prejudice, empathy, and fear. How much of this was Doug and how much of this was my reaction to him, I do not know. The victim-speak and the belief that he could not act, the need to conduct surveys to ask student’s for permission to manage the classroom, negative comments about females, about African-American females, about males, but then bookending it with comments like “I know this is not very PC [politically correct],” was frustrating. I was reactive because of my own frustration, because if it were a therapy session, I would have challenged and confronted what he was saying. Since this was an attempt to gain insight into his experiences, I listened to his story and as a result, I feel culpable because I did not speak up.

The remainder of this chapter includes the theme clusters that emerged from data analysis. In the thematic breakdown that follows, I highlight significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants expressed their experience of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007). The participants express and describe some themes more frequently and cohesively. As a result, these themes have additional supporting quotations or examples to develop their lived experiences. I believe the themes are nonhierarchical. Each one is equally important and one does not build upon the other, therefore I have not enumerated them as such.

**Analysis of Themes**

Disruptive undergraduate student behavior is a concerning issue endemic to the teaching profession. Left unchecked, ignored, minimized, or unrecognized it erodes a faculty member’s confidence in her or his teaching, enjoyment and enthusiasm in engaging with students, and interferes with both the teaching-learning relationship and
the educational environment. All of the participants describe encounters with disruptive undergraduate students and, to varying degrees, how each encounter affects them.

I analyzed each interview in order to find the key concepts from each. During this analysis, I reviewed and explored each one to assist me in understanding the shared experiences of the participants. I have identified the following seven themes:

(1) Pervasiveness of disruptive behavior,
(2) Faculty feeling of powerlessness,
(3) Fatalistic feeling of faculty members
(4) Collegial support
(5) Classroom influences
(6) Emotional costs, and
(7) Perceptions of disruption.

In the thematic breakdowns that follow, I highlight particular responses to provide a rich description of the lived experience of the participants. Depending on the subject, the faculty members involved in this study express and describe some of their experiences more fully than others. I attempt to capture the essence of their meaning making as best as I am able. The participants expressed and described some themes more frequently and cohesively. As a result, these themes may have additional supporting quotations or examples to develop their lived experiences. I believe the themes are nonhierarchical. Each one is equally important and one does not build upon the other, therefore I am not attempting to enumerate them as such. I also provide a summary of each theme as a way of further encapsulating their essence.
Table 1

*Theme One: Summary of Pervasiveness of Disruptive Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pervasiveness of disruptive behavior</td>
<td>Disruptive student behavior goes with the job. Disruptive student behavior begins when a faculty member first starts teaching, and continues throughout her or his teaching career. Each semester, faculty members assume, or “know,” they will have students who will be disruptive. The majority of students do well, but every semester there is always a small percentage acting out and drawing the faculty member’s attention to the behavior. It is something everyone will experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Theme One: Pervasiveness of Disruptive Behaviors**

According to my participants, no one is immune from having disruptive students in her or his classrooms (see Table 1). From Stacey, who has taught the longest, to David, who has taught the least amount of time, each experience these phenomena. This is not new to the profession. Amada (1999) was the first to discuss the effects of disruptive student behavior in the classroom.

For Stacey, there was not one key moment, throughout her years of teaching. Many students stand out because of their classroom demeanor. She said it has been “little snippets here and there…students who you remember because of… (laughter)… some of their behavior …um… yeah.” The disruptions for her ran the gamut from benign incivility to distressed signaling (Appendix O). Because it was unique, she still cites a distressed signaling example from when she was first teaching in the College of Education. This involved a student whose disruption of the educational process had to do with her lack of personal hygiene, rather than behavior typically thought of as disruptive …so if you had…so this one student I can think of, had pretty poor personal hygiene. She looked like she just rolled out of bed every morning. Her clothes
looked really wrinkled… (pause)… and probably hadn’t been washed… um… the smell was totally noticeable… and… um… she’s going out in a classroom and working with kids and teachers… sorta having to have that discussion with her about what’s okay and what’s not okay… you know… it’s not a very comfortable discussion to have.

As a department leader, she mentors graduate students who are already experiencing disruptive behavior in their classrooms. It starts from a new faculty member’s first exposure to teaching. She reports these types of experiences are common. I’ve also supervised lots of students who are teaching college classes uhh… uhh… or helping me do supervision of practicum students who had a lot of experiences with disruptive students who have come to me to talk to me about them and they’re sorta secondhand but I’ve helped them deal with that… umm… Some are severe, as in the case of one of her graduate students, “I was actually just observing one of my GAs teach and the other day and she actually had a student in her class sitting right next to me, thoroughly disruptive, so I observed that behavior.” Even though the student was aware the department leader was attending the classroom, the student continued engaging in disruptive behavior.

Cody encountered disruptive student behavior at his former institution. It was the first time he ever kicked a student out of class … and in the middle of the… in the middle of lecture… I was talking in lecture, he got up and walked over… like… towards the trash can and got relatively close and… like… and then… you know… like… basketball shoot… you know… tosses it towards the trash and it doesn’t go in. And then so… you know… I of course
stop and kind of just look at him …you know…just giving him the look like “what in the world are you doing” (mimics look, laughter)…and…and… he looks back at me…and gives some like some smart-ass remark…like…um…”I never said I was any good at basketball.” It was something like that. And I said…well…whoa…“well…go ahead and grab your stuff and…um…you can leave the classroom.” And then, I just stood there and did not say anything so everybody was uncomfortable in the silence and… (laughs) …but they were just watching and waiting until he was done and then he left.

For him, it was not the kicking out that was the difficult part; it was what happened when the student returned the next class period. He described his frustration because he did not create a plan for reentry. The student “just” returned the next day and Cody let him back into class as if nothing had happened. There was no apology to him or to his classmates. There was no discussion with him during his office hours. He realizes there was no follow through on his end. “You know… I don’t know. I …I think it was… when I got …when …when…I hadn’t …I had thought a little bit about that beforehand and never really…you know…never really committed to it…” He has students who engaged in similar behavior throughout his teaching career and he reports continuing to respond in much the same manner. The first experience appears to have set the tone for future encounters.

Jane Doe described issues with students challenging her in the classroom. For her, she explains and defines the only type of disruption she had seen was challenges to her authority when she first began teaching
…the only type of disruptive student that I’ve had …are students…especially when I first started teaching that would challenge me…continually. Um…and I would just deal with that by talking about the literature…you know…and not by necessarily putting them in their place…but, putting them in their place…because I understand what they’re doing.

She explains it as, “um…and I was a female…, probably I was a new teacher, and it showed. And sometimes…you know…it’s like blood in the water…you know they can smell weakness and they’re going to go for it.” She found that as she gained more experience it happens less. While she stated this has “mostly” stopped, she still gives examples of students challenging her authority. She describes a “loss of presence” with her students due to overuse of personal technology. She finds one class “challenging,” but cannot explain why, only that there was an “air” about them. She also mentions an “over politeness” in her classes that she finds disconcerting

Um…I haven’t…I trying to think whether I’ve had students challenge me and I really haven’t. And here at [institution omitted] they’re very different in that they don’t. Which is…kind of…they don’t challenge each other….or me…or anything. They’re just really polite…all the time. I’ve heard that’s a west Michigan thing and I don’t know if that’s true. But…um…I think…um if I had…and maybe a few years ago when I was teaching…I might have had one or two students challenge me. And I …because I’m more confident …because…I’ll just ask them…we’ll talk about it. I won’t take it as much as an affront …um…I’ll be okay…let’s talk about this. And we’ll talk about it and that kind of defuses it right then and there.
Doug has the duality of confronting disruptive student behavior at both the university and the community college level. Doug said he has certain assumptions about university students and is surprised when they do not meet them. Simple things such as leaving early, letting doors slam, or coming late confound him, “so clearly things that I would…maybe I’m assuming too much …that a typical university student would understand those are significant disruptive behaviors.” Yet, Doug believes, “the university students are far less disruptive in my experience than the community college students.”

When Doug describes his community college experiences, he tells of darker encounters. He believes “about 10% of those students who sign up for the class sign up exclusively to collect Pell grant and financial aid money.” He explained still many students attend the community college for these economic incentives and if the students perceive him as interfering with their ability to collect their money, it produces disruptive behaviors in his classroom. Because of the possible monetary motivation, some of these disruptive behaviors tend to take on a more ominous tone then his university experiences. I’ll have a lot of problems with individuals sleeping in class or showing up late. Or not showing up on time but emailing me and saying I missed class for this reason and blah…blah….blah…please mark me here. You know…essentially playing me, so they can end up getting their financial aid at the end. You know…I find that anti-social. (laughs)…I find that severely distressing. Um…not because I fear the classroom environment immediately…but because it’s such a problem…um…with them. But there are sometimes when a student will not show up to class….for the first few weeks…and um…I will mark them as
nonattending and they will show up to class afterwards. And...some of the individuals who show up are fairly aggressive looking...males. And given the community college environment...oftentimes they are parolees...and things like that. So I’ve had a number of parolees in my courses and they...they’ll...they’ll block me in a corner...they won’t say anything verbally...but their nonverbals are clearly sign this, so I can get the money. So that...that’s threatening...

Even a new faculty member like David has to work with student disruptions. He has only taught for three semesters, and yet is able to report disruptive student behavior. He observes behavior disrupting the educational flow of the classroom. He professes that his students have a “tendency to be distracted and not necessarily focus” on what he is saying at any particular time. He explains it is a combination of factors in his classroom. Because some of the material is a little dry...you know...so. Probably the most disruptive is small conversations happening on the side again while I’m trying to talk...um. Sometimes when we have the hoods going, which is the ventilation system for the fans that’s really loud too so that...that kinda inhibits...that piece of it. So, you try not to have the fans going when you go through directions and things like that. So, not frustrating to where we can’t get anything done but definitely a delay in timing. Um...you know... waiting to proceed until we get through those little minor things and I get people kinda calmed down... quieted down.

The only one who did not discuss her previous experience is Julie the Cruise Director. She focused on recent-past disruptive behavior within her narrative at her current institution. When she discussed her experiences, she refers more to her clinical
work than to her early teaching work. At the beginning of our interview, she asked me the parameters of our discussion, probing to be sure she understood the nuances and bounding of the study. Because of our prior conversation, her present orientation and not focusing on previous teaching experiences is not surprising to me. Since the focus of the study is faculty experiences with disruptive students at their current institution, Julie the Cruise Director strikes me as someone who does not go beyond the strictures of the discussion with extraneous details.

Cody expressed his belief that every class will have disruptive students. While the majority of students will be attentive, there are always those consistent few that create disruptive issues in class. Stacey, Jane Doe, and Julie the Cruise Director seconded this conviction. Jane Doe said that, “5% of students who will be challenging students and will take up 95% of your time.” According to Julie the Cruise Director, this percentage is similar to students whose field placements eventually end up broken. She reports that, “it’s roughly about 5% that have significant problems at some point or that end up with a field placement that ends up being broken for one reason or another.”

Doug, David, and Jane Doe agree that most students are fulfilling classroom expectations by doing what they need to be doing. They are the students who do not cause any issues for faculty members. Jane Doe said that, “...95% of students who aren’t challenging, take up 5% of your time.” Julie the Cruise Director said the majority of her students meet the expectations of their field placements, “most of who are doing wonderfully in their field placement and a couple of which who will have problems here and there.” Cody summed it up by stating, “So um…I wouldn’t say that it’s even gotten
any worse. It’s consistent (laughs)...a consistent problem with a small number of students every single semester (laughs).”

Table 2

**Theme Two: Summary of Faculty Feeling of Powerlessness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty feeling of powerlessness</td>
<td>Faculty members believe they have limited control of student behavior. They attempt to combat this by determining the policies they put in their syllabus. They also have the option of whether they refer the student elsewhere on campus. Neither of these things will necessarily influence whether the student changes her or his disruptive behavior. Faculty members’ feelings of powerlessness result in (a) feelings of blame and responsibility, (b) concerns about job security, (c) conviction of their inability to act, (d) belief in an institutional black hole for student of concern referrals, and (e) how faculty members utilize available resources.</td>
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**Theme Two: Faculty Feeling of Powerlessness**

In this study, faculty members discussed developing self-reliance by dealing with disruptive student behavior. Participants lack a sense of institutional empowerment when it comes to working with disruptive students in their classrooms (see Table 2). David assumes his experiences need to be threatening in order to be concerning.

Participants see few options for managing disruptive behavior. One choice is to reach out to their institution for student of concern referral. To use this referral system is to document and “hope.” The graduate students and faculty members in Stacey’s department believe it is nothing more than an opportunity for the university to protect itself. Jane Doe claims that using this type of referral results in blame and punishment. Two separate institutions with two different ways of viewing accessing the institutional referral system, one area cynically views it in terms of protection from institutional
liability, while the other fearfully views it as punitive. A second alternative is changing their syllabus policies. While a faculty member may makes changes, it does not mean the students behave any differently. It only increases options for managing disruptive student behavior should the faculty member choose to do so.

The faculty members’ belief in their powerlessness leads to differing relationships with their institution. This results in (a) feelings of blame and responsibility, (b) concerns about job security, (c) convictions regarding their inability to act, (d) belief in an “institutional black hole” for student of concern referrals, and (e) low utilization of available resources.

Every participant, except Cody, spoke about their relationship with their home institution. In this study, the faculty members do not view the situations with disruptive undergraduate students as an institutional issue, but rather as a departmental issue. Cody describes some issues as being departmental, but does not extend the issues beyond that sphere. He reported handling disruptive student behavior during the course of the class and then letting the issue go. Many faculty members do not look past their departments when there is an issue, preferring to keep the disruptive student issues in-house. Jane Doe explains the reasoning for this cloak of silence amongst the faculty and the institution

I think that it is a concern among faculty members, and …ah…. I think that …um…there’s always been disruptive students, but you know for faculty members, I think that this type of disruption is a little more concerning and a lot of faculty feel isolated. Because…it’s…it’s…because some faculty are made to feel like it’s about them versus it’s about this disruptive student. And so I’ve
noticed that faculty…they won’t…they won’t talk about it unless they’re with other faculty who are willing to say… “gosh I’m dealing with this student and I don’t know what to do.”

Jane Doe discusses her belief that her institution blames faculty members for the disruptive behaviors of students rather than receiving institutional support or resources. She compares the policy at her current university with her previous university and finds it lacking. She relays an incident that vicariously influences her, “myself and two other faculty members here…new faculty members here at [institution omitted] and…um…one of the faculty members had a pretty challenging student her first semester, who did some really, really…um…just… some…um…concerning things.” She believes her institution looked at what the faculty member was doing wrong, rather than at the student’s disruptive behavior

…and I just feel like she didn’t get the type of support she needed to know how to deal with this student. It was more …it’s about you….and not about the student….or providing resources. And I thought that was really unfortunate.

Doug is the most overt about discussing the connection between “job security” and having disruptive undergraduate students in his classroom. Doug teaches for two different programs at his university. He reports having a good relationship with one member of department leadership, and trusts that he will teach again in future semesters. For that department, he feels empowered to take control of his class. For the other department, he stated he does not have a similar relationship. Because he does not have that type of job security, he reported he is less willing to take risks. He expressed concern he will lose his job, and so is willing to ignore disruptive behavior. Rather than trusting
his own instincts about the student disruptions, he uses continual buy-in and anonymous surveys asking the students to give him permission to discipline disruptive students who do not meet class expectations. As a result, his communication becomes restricted and self-monitored in these instances

… if I were to be honest about it, the context does matter. Um… (pause)… I am more likely to use more hedges in two different circumstances. One, If I feel the student could a possibly be a threat or two, if I think that I am going to be able to continue working at the place...

I feel there is an undercurrent and nuance to the interview with Jane Doe. She mentions she is a new faculty member several times. She discusses being in her first year and her tenure observations. She mentions her colleague with the disruptive student and the institutional focus of “blaming the victim,” more than once. She compares the situation to her previous university that offered more resources. She talks about her concern for poor teaching evaluations several times. I know many new faculty members have to “fit” within the department in which they are seeking tenure. I am left wondering if she is feeling some internal, or external, job security pressure.

For the participants there is not clarity as to when they might be able to do something about disruptive student behavior. Until a student’s conduct worsens, Stacey contends disruptive behavior in the classroom has to be tolerated

It’s not really escalating. It’s just not getting better and at some point there’s just not anything you can do about it. But, until they escalate it to the level, this student hasn’t done any of these things yet (points to Threatening Behavior on the Disruptive Behavior Continuum; Appendix O) but she is certainly at this level
(points to Distressed Signaling; Appendix O) and she is certainly hanging at this yellow level [Distressed Signaling] and until she escalates it to another level there’s really nothing…

Julie the Cruise Director witnesses and identifies behavioral changes that were occurring with a student (e.g., sweating, shaking, clenched jaw and fists), but because they were not specific, articulated words of threat by the student, she did not feel empowered to act officially

…but they did not make …they did not make specific and credible threats to where I felt like I could say, and then they said, “if you don’t such and such, then I’m going to such and such…” (emphasized with hand gesture on arm of chair)…to somebody else or to themselves.” So I don’t feel like it met that direct and immediate threat. And it …and there’s no, “I’m gonna whatever.” There’s just behaviorally you can witness they were getting upset …just ah…”this is just out of control” …”I’m feeling really out of control.” It was a lot of that or “you can’t talk to me like that.” There was no, “you can’t talk to me or I will …punch you in the face.” It was just “you can’t talk to me.”

Twice, Stacey mentions her concerns regarding an “institutional black hole.” She asserts that faculty members fill out her institution’s student of concern forms multiple times on the same student and yet nothing changes

…but we’ve had one this semester where the GA identified a concern. We asked her to fill out the concern form and she did. And she has correctly dealt with the student as well via email. And the problem just has not resolved itself, despite her
repeatedly talking with the student, repeatedly going to the student concern office.

I think three times we’ve filed.

This leads many of the faculty members in her area to believe the division at her university that oversees disruptive student behavior does so in order to protect the institution from any type of liability issues because faculty members never hear an outcome.

You know when it comes to the concern reports we file, we have a lotta faculty who think it’s a CYA [cover your ass] sorta thing. They get frustrated because we don’t ever hear anything back. It kinda goes into a black hole and we don’t ever know what happens. And the student’s still in the class and you don’t see anything happening.

Julie the Cruise Director utilizes the training resources available at her institution. She contends there is an expectation that a faculty member is in control of the classroom, should there be a crisis. She advocates training for faculty members because, “it’s amazing how much students will really turn to you …to…I mean…to…even in a fire drill. They turn to you like ‘well, what are we supposed to do.’” And her greatest concern is that faculty members who do not take advantage of the training offered by their university, do not understand that

I …I remember going through all the active shooter training and kinda coming to that recognition that …you know…even in …even a faculty might have little or no training …even compared to other…students might have extensive…they might have law enforcement or military background. They might have all kinds
of training about how to handle situations involving an active shooter, but still…like…people will defer to the instructor as like “what do we do now?”

Stacey has utilized the referral resource at her university multiple times. She has completed paperwork on students of concern, but cannot name the department, “we have an office on campus…sort of…what do they call it…(long pause) student affairs or something…where they…where we can file a concern.” She also is unsure what policies are available and whether she can officially remove a disruptive student from class. During our discussion, this is not something she had considered as an alternative. David knows there are resources. He does not know where the resources are located, what to call the resources, or exactly what they do, but he does know they are available to him if he needs them. Since Doug is in his precarious adjunct position, he describes rarely making waves. He explains that he prefers to manage things in-house and work through his department. He is one of the faculty members who has been through disruptive student training, but not at his current institution. He utilized the faculty-training resources at his community college on disruptive and disturbing students. This has resulted in a hypervigilance of his surroundings and student actions.

Because I felt that scared. Um…about…about…the behavior…because it …this email was so out of left field …that I didn’t know…that I didn’t know …plus it didn’t help that we had just had a professional development day of security in our classrooms.

Jane Doe mentions a lack of support or resources at her institution when it comes to managing disruptive student behavior. She reports this is something that has caused
her great frustration and concern. She reveals there is finally administrative recognition of the need for faculty resources at her university

…so it seems like there’s a gap between faculty and administration in terms of getting the help you need to deal with …um…students like that. And just this semester they sent out an email from somewhere in administration that came out …um…that came out to say that we’re having training on how to deal with these type of students. So…I mean obviously…more faculty are saying we need more resources.

Table 3

**Theme Three: Summary of Fatalistic Thinking of Faculty Members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fatalistic thinking of faculty members</td>
<td>Faculty members tend to minimize the micro disruptions occurring within their own classrooms as not being “bad enough” because they did not meet the threshold of a Virginia Tech threat. There is a tendency to use the worst-case scenario as the rule, rather than the exception. They are just waiting for the “big event” to occur and find they are lucky that it has not already happened.</td>
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**Theme Three: Fatalistic Thinking of Faculty Members**

Each participant opened our discussions apologizing for not having a “bigger event” to share with me. In this study, there is a presumption the disruptive behaviors should be worse (see Table 3). At the beginning of each interview, the faculty members reiterated there is no “big” event or “major” disruption to share with me. Cody told me, “um…but generally speaking …um… (pause)… I…don’t …don’t…have anything that I perceive to be very disruptive. And that I guess is a fortunate thing.” This is repeated by Stacey, “I’ve had students texting on their phone or talking to each other during class
when it’s not, you know, group discussion… um…(pause)…you know, they’ve been pretty mild in terms of personal experiences.” Yet, they want to take part in this research.

Faculty members who made initial contact with me, prior to becoming participants, sent emails or left comments expressing they do not have anything “bad” and they hope it is okay I consider them for participation. They assumed I needed to be studying something “more important” or hearing descriptions of “major event” disruptive student behavior that were “more dramatic.” The faculty members habitually judged the micro disruptions occurring within their own classrooms as not being severe enough for this study.

I found the emailed and the face-to-face apologies prior to taping, interesting. While willing to talk with me, these faculty members already were minimizing the experiences they are having in their classes with disruptive students because they did not meet the threshold of a Virginia Tech threat. They believe they are making a “big deal out of nothing,” and are attempting to use the worst-case scenario as the rule, rather than the exception.

Part of my discussion with David involved explaining the importance of hearing about the entire experiences faculty members are having in their classrooms so I can have insight into what is actually occurring. David’s understanding went from apology to acceptance

…you can’t jump right to end of the most extreme situation (points to Threatening Behavior: Appendix O) and only focus on that because lots of times maybe some of the earlier steps is how that individual got there and you could’ve effectively nipped it in the butt [sic]for the group as a whole.
When it came to looking at events that are more serious, there is a presumption the disruptive behaviors should be worse. Jane Doe considers herself lucky the only issues she has dealt with up until now are minor, “I’ve been very fortunate, thus far, that I haven’t had to deal with any serious…um…student …um…like a conduct violation type of issue…um…or a student who’s really disruptive.”

She suggests there will come a point in her professional career that she will have an extremely disruptive student, “but, I know that it’s not a matter of ‘if,’ it’s a matter of ‘when.’” She asserts, “you just sometimes get students and they’re just very, very disruptive.” She says she is thankful that it “just hasn’t happened yet,” because “I don’t think that it’s any different than any other population. You’re going to come across really challenging students.”

Cody has an optimistic view of students and their behavior, especially when compared to his colleagues

… I don’t necessarily see it as quite as big of a problem as some of them. I mean certainly I understand where they’re coming from and maybe it…ah…maybe it…is an issue, but maybe some of them think these kids are doomed. They’re gonna be totally incapable of talking to each other and I don’t know if I necessarily see it as that way.

During our interview, he describes student behavior focusing on how it affects him in the present moment, rather than extrapolating out to an examination of the changing behavior of students. He said, “I look at it [disruptive behavior] and think, this isn’t that serious, this isn’t really that big of a deal and while its disruptive, if in my head, I’ve gotten to a point where I need to say something…” He continually asks himself,
“You know… I… ah… um… (pause)… how big of a deal is it, really?” Then he moves on.

Stacey indicates many of the issues occurring with student disruption have to do with a lack of preparedness on the part of the students. In her attempt to make sense of what was happening with the students and why they are becoming increasingly disruptive she hypothesizes

… I do believe students are less prepared to be in college now. But, I feel like a real old fuddy duddy when I say that, because are they really less prepared or is my perception changing? I’m having a hard time sorting that out. I used to think they weren’t the greatest writers. They had some grammar problems, but I have students now who have difficulty creating a cohesive paragraph. I mean it’s not just a couple grammar issues it’s that the writing makes no sense. So maybe they are less prepared then they used to be. They certainly don’t seem to be able to cope with a lot of university life situations and stressors you know. Just dealing with… um… being able to budget my time, and being able to keep track of what’s due when and handling feedback well from a professor… um… they just seem they just seem less prepared to do that (laughter).

She contends this change adds to increasing disruptiveness and will continue affecting students. She draws parallels between students with disabilities and those without disabilities. With her expertise in the area of disabilities assessment, she asserts we will see more cases of disruptiveness because of issues with student motivation

… some individuals with disabilities often display aggression noncompliance self-injury when they are faced with a very demanding task that they don’t know
how to or don’t want to do. And, they don’t have good verbal language repertoires and so they do what works for them, which is to smack somebody. And then people go away and leave them alone and don’t make them do it. So when I think about human motivation, I can certainly see, where, when demands are really high and I’m not performing well and I’m frustrated I may engage in certain behaviors out of that frustration as a way to express my frustration, because I don’t know what else to do, because I don’t know to make this better (laughter). Um… and I think to some extent that entitlement attitude figures into that, because… “but wait a minute I came in with this expectation of how things are gonna be and it’s not that way, but you’re actually gonna make me work.”

While Julie the Cruise Director described being on the lookout for violence and aggression in her classroom, she explains threatening occurrences as being self-protective of the individual. Even though she does not use the same human motivation angle as Stacey, she makes the assumption it occurs

But their…their…their response was they don’t like me, they’re disrespecting me, they’re being mean to me…um…and I need to defend myself… So I don’t think they thought…I don’t think in either case they thought of themselves as being aggressive. I think they thought of themselves as being defensive of their own rights…

Julie the Cruise Director shares a similar fatalistic point of view as Jane Doe. She thinks it has to do with her background as a “clinical social worker,” a “chemical addictions specialist,” and her continuing practice as a working clinician. She discovers
that when she encounters these disruptive behaviors, she is primed to evaluate them in a
diagnostic fashion and to react differently than many faculty members

…I think I continue to see my experiences with students with disruptive behavior
through that lens. I’m also doing some clinical and also some risk assessment…
um…with students in deciding how to respond to them. And since I have a
background with people who have a severe substance abuse disorders and mental
illnesses, I notice that when I compare myself to other faculty members that I …
my…um…my… boundaries …and my kind of safety protocols maybe come in to
place a little bit sooner than other peoples.

Because of these experiences, she describes planning for the worst and hoping for
the best

I have not had someone be… be…ah…physically violent or aggressive in any of
my classrooms for which …you know I’m grateful and I …I realize that…that’s
…that there is some preparation and that it is partly just dumb luck that I have just
not at this point in my career not been involved in any of that.

She prepares herself for any eventuality. She has attended faculty trainings and
she encourages other faculty members to do the same thing. She believes in preparation
because

Now …you …better know. You better have the what- do- we- do- now game
plan. Um…because even in those situations they’re not gonna be like…you
know…you’re just a social worker…you know …you might not know any better
than the rest of us. And so may…that might be one of those …you gotta know
some of those keys about …so what do we do in a situation with an active shooter?

Julie the Cruise Director presented herself in terms of safety first. She watches out for her classroom, her colleagues, and herself. She continues using her clinical skills to maintain her “boundaries” and put her “safety protocols” into place. She really believes it is essential all faculty members understand, “…that if a situation starts to get out of control that because as a faculty member it’s amazing how much students will really turn to you,” and as a faculty member you have to be ready, willing, and able to take charge for when it does occur.

Table 4

Theme Four: Summary of Collegial Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collegial support</td>
<td>The grapevine is strong in academia. Faculty members talk to each other, about each other, about themselves, and their students, a lot. A faculty member’s professional life is played out on a public stage and it seems that “everyone” knows “everything” that is happening within the classroom. When a faculty member has a disruptive student, he or she has colleagues to depend on who already know the score about the situation, the faculty member, and the student.</td>
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Theme Four: Collegial Support

One constant I found in this study is the reliance on colleagues for help with disruptive students (see Table 4). There is a considerable amount of assumed knowledge. They know what is happening in each other’s classes. They go to each other for advice. They count on one another for support. They use peers as a yardstick for measuring themselves. Participants get a sense of what is appropriate or realistic by talking with their colleagues. They understand that eventually a student in their class ends up
circulating into someone else’s class. It also influences how a faculty member sees her or himself and the actions taken in the classroom. “Everything” that occurs within the class becomes public knowledge to a faculty member’s colleagues. They maintain awareness that if something happens in her or his class, “everyone” will know about it and have an opinion about it. This also seems to lead to some fears that if something like this happens in my colleague’s classroom, it can happen in my classroom and so therefore, I should do something about that possibility.

Stacey recalls the cohesive departments of her past when they would share impressions of the students in the program with one another, “…like all of the faculty were really close, we all knew what was going on with all of the students in the program the whole time.” While she cannot currently explain how students are doing in their program of study, she can tell how colleagues react to their behavior. She describes one of her colleague’s reactions to disruptive behaviors

…she is… um… much more intense than I am on these matters. She’s on it (gesture). She’s crazy when someone’s starting to display these (points to Benign Incivility: Appendix O) and her tolerance level is… her threshold is a lot lower than mine.

Much like other participants in the study, Stacey shares experiences colleagues had with disruptive students. She describes the experience of one faculty member who had a threatening student leave the class. She said, “I have a faculty member who told me she did that in class one day who said, you need to leave because the student was really being (points to Threatening Behavior: Appendix O), I’d say in this verbal threatening level…(Appendix O),” as well as other past experiences some may have had
We have had a couple of times in our department where people have had to call security too, even having someone removed because of their behavior or like one had a person who was passed out in class and he wasn’t sure if he was drunk, on drugs, sick, having a seizure (laughter). So, I know in that case they called for help (laughter).

Doug discovered that students complain about faculty members in other classes, “…[the student] did not show up to class and I find out from another faculty member…this student was complaining about …about my course. He kept on saying…talk to him. …express your concern.” However, it was the result of his colleague’s encouragement that Doug was able to resolve things with this student. Doug also said his colleagues disparage students because he has “heard other faculty members say, well they just lie about everything,” and he expressed concerned about how that affects their perceptions of what the students are saying.

Cody told multiple stories about what is happening with his colleagues. He distinguishes his beliefs from his colleagues about disruptive student behavior in the classroom. He uses examples that differentiates himself from his peers, “…my colleagues are obviously more strict about that sorta thing [use of personal technology] and I’m less strict about it but I don’t know that it ever…” or “I mean some of my colleagues have gone to the point where they have where it’s like every semester they’re adding something new to their syllabus and that’s just not my personality.” He can recite policies his colleagues have regarding laptops in the classrooms, “I have colleagues that don’t allow students to bring laptops and take notes on laptops…and many of them prefer to do that. But, just straight won’t even allow them.” He shared their experiences with
their students, as if they were his own. He was using them to illustrate his own perspective. Cody made statements like, “something that you’re probably familiar with and all of my colleagues up and down the hall are familiar with (laughs) is a student who routinely comes to class late,” “there are stories that some of them have brought into faculty meetings that are hilarious,” or “I have colleagues here who deal with…who deal with threats to their…I dunno…I’m not entirely sure it’s to their ego…I’m not entirely sure what threats to their ego…but certainly threats to their expertise or their authority.” Cody was able to repeat many incidents involving his colleagues all throughout our interview.

Cody explained there is a generational difference between faculty members who express concern about students who are able to connect interpersonally with others, both professionally and relationally, and those who are more optimistic

Some of my colleagues…my colleagues are really…are really even …I mean I’m not overly concerned about it, but I have colleagues who…um…and they tend to be…my old…my older colleagues who are really concerned about the fact that you are in a discipline where you’re gonna have to…have to be able to deal with people. I mean look…that’s… that’s what you work with in criminal justice and no matter what you go into, you’re going to work with people and you’re going to have face-to-face interactions with these people and you’re gonna talk to these people and they’re really concerned there’s an entire generation who is losing the ability to do that.

He stated the generational difference have to do with a faculty member’s ability to adapt, utilize, and tolerate the use of personal technology, as well as the changing cultural
mores, with those faculty members who are unable to do so deciding to leave because they are frustrated with what they see happening in the classroom. He uses their stories as part of a cautionary tale

And …and I haven’t been at this job as long as they have… and ah… not just here you see what happens to people when they get in this career and they’re in here long enough (laughs). Uh… their ability to tolerate some of the things that students do they seem to… they seem to lose some of that. They seem to get more angry about that. I had a colleague who recently had retired and one of the things he said was, “you know what… I just can’t deal with students anymore”… and he’s not dealing with anything that I’m not dealing with as well. He’s just… at this point really fed up with dealing with those things semester, after semester, after semester. And I… I’m always thinking inside my head man, I just don’t ever want to get to the point where I can’t deal with… where I can’t deal with all of this.

So, he said, “I can either become a real jerk or I can retire.” And so he… he was in a position where … you know… financially well positioned and could retire and so much as he could still enjoy some things about it he said, “I don’t want to become that guy” and so he got out.

Jane Doe describes sharing course policy information with colleagues. They share the multiple ways they manage the overuse of personal technology in the classroom and their perspectives on dealing with disruptive students. She reports using her colleagues as a sounding board and states, “what I’ve always done… and then, when issues have come up, I have asked my colleagues, well how do you handle this? And… and change accordingly.” She is careful about what she changes and how she
changes. She does not want to make change, just for change’s sake. She explains wanting to learn from them and their experiences

…when I hear faculty talking about this same issue [disruptive personal technology use in the classroom] and some faculty say that they have their students…if they choose to use their laptop…they have to send their notes right after class. Like… they have all these ways they deal with it. I think…gosh that’s a lot of work.

She uses her colleagues for more than just helping with students who are disruptive in the classroom. She contended no one trains new faculty members for the socio-emotional aspects of the profession (e.g., disruptive students, sexual assault) and often relies on her faculty mentors for help

I’m a part of this faculty mentor group that [institution omitted] has and it’s faculty who have been faculty for a while giving kind of advice to new faculty. And we were talking about …um…how you’re prepared in a lot of ways for this profession, but you’re not prepared in a lot of ways. Some of the ways that you’re not prepared are…you know…the emotional aspects of it or dealing with your students coming in and disclosing they’ve been sexually assaulted or students who are really disruptive. Um…because you don’t have a lot of training as it relates to that.

She is also aware when one of her new colleagues has an issue with a disruptive student and when that student was moving from class to class

And… um…and she talked with the unit head…and… um…he ended up finishing her class and enrolling in another professor’s class who has had years of
experience here and was very challenging for that faculty member. And then he ended up being in the unit head’s class and has been very challenging for her and he…um…has a very serious mental health issue.

Julie the Cruise Director depends upon support staff and the lack of soundproofing of offices should an alarm be raised when dealing with a disruptive student. She describes feeling safer if office doors had windows so colleagues could see in, should something could get out of hand. She contends everyone in the surrounding area will come to her aid if that were necessary. Because she observes, “and I feel safe…and the reality is these offices are relatively soundproof (points to adjoining walls), but they should not be soundproof to the extent that if someone should start hollering it couldn’t be heard from…from the vicinity.” Since the rooms are not overly insulated she is confident her colleagues will come to her aid by moving into position (e.g., knocking, poking their head in), just as she would come to theirs, “…and if people are saying something really loud, I want to be able to hear that and I want other people to be able to hear that.”

Julie the Cruise Director also contends, secrets are dangerous. By not talking with her peers, she is in essence keeping something quiet that can become toxic. Assuming you can hide the difficulties of a classroom is an impossible feat resulting in a new faculty member acting in a surreptitious fashion. Secrets negatively affect young professionals, but, in using her colleagues for perception checks, she maintains her professional integrity by using them to determine whether she is appropriately managing the situation.
I mean I’m a big believer in secrets have their own really separate power. Even if it’s a secret that even a classroom ends up sharing…or a group of people ends up sharing. I believe in the power of consulting with my peers. And… and… checking myself in…what do you think about this. Um…all that…because, there will be times when I get on a line of thinking and I’ll be really focused on something… on something like…this student needs to experience consequences and that may be one thing I might be really frustrated dealing with the student. And I might be… you know… what they might just need to learn, life might not be set up for them. You know…to operate at their behest…all the time. So, they need to learn that lesson. And then if I talk to a colleague, I can back off from that and not be so …so…all right yeah…I guess I’ll take that step back. I don’t need to be…you know… I don’t need to do this just to teach them a lesson. Um…and I think that…and I have several colleagues that…that…we really use that strategy with each other. And can just consult and can be like really…which can really allow us to have a more modified …more moderated approach. You know after you talk to somebody…you know I really need to express that…you know…I’m real annoyed with this person who…

David is the only one who did not discuss working with colleagues. He mentions working with his department chair to develop curriculum for additional classes. He discusses his trainings he conducts as a chef and he is able to provide a name and mini biography when asked about additional participants for snowball sampling. I do not know if this is because he does not immerse himself in the department because he is only
teaching one class, if it is because he is new to his role as a faculty member, or if there
are some other factors at work.

Table 5

Theme Five: Summary of Classroom Influences

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<td>Classroom influences</td>
<td>Personal technology affects the perception of student interaction and presence within the classroom. Faculty members see the overuse of personal technology as the biggest disruption they face. Its creep within the classroom continues influencing how students interact with faculty, with each other, and with understanding how it affects their future professional selves. Generationally, differences go beyond mere age, but also how students today differ from previous traditional students with their new needs and beliefs affecting the classroom environment leading to disruptive behavior.</td>
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Theme Five: Classroom Influences

The participants each discuss their experiences with evolving classroom norms.

The major frustration described by faculty in this study, is the amount of personal technology use within the classroom. The faculty members emphasize this is the main disruptive student issue they contend with in the classroom (see Table 5). For those who have taught several years, they note changes in student preparation. Additionally, they depict attitudinal changes that also create concerns.

Every faculty member mentioned personal technology. Some approached it is the bane of their existence, others meet it with a shrug and a “what are you going to do about it” attitude, David is the only one who uses personal technology in the classroom as part of his lesson plan. He expressed concern that an outright ban will negatively affect how students are able to look up the information they need for their lessons.
Jane Doe, Doug, Stacey, and Cody contend the overuse of personal technology creates a discernible “lack of presence” in the classroom because there is no student engagement when they are “checked out” on their laptops. Since there is not time to monitor all student behavior, faculty members resort to using logical consequences for students who show up to class and opt out of being present (e.g., Facebook, texting, IMing, surfing, games) by looking at their exam and final grades. Doug said he did not want to take his time with technology

I don’t want to be a police officer here. I don’t want to point you out in a group of 90 or 50 students and say hey…stop texting. Because that wastes my time and that wastes everybody else’s time in class. I’m just not going to do it. If you choose to do it, that’s your prerogative. And I do have some students who choose to text….or they’ll be on their laptop on Facebook. And if I walk around, I’ll see them and they’re supposed to be doing activities…but, I look at the exam grades from the students who do that and they just don’t do as well. They might be present in class, but they’re not present cognitively and it shows. So, I let them know if you’re going to do that it’s going to impact you’re grade…because it does for students who do those certain things.

Cody and Jane Doe each share stories of their colleagues who ban laptops from their classrooms. Both express hope they will not make that type of policy change. Jane Doe stated that “a few faculty members do that here [not allow laptops in the classroom] and I was hoping I would never have to do that, but it has become disruptive.” She hopes she can also avoid an outright prohibition, but believes personal technology is so disruptive in her classroom that she needs to redefine the policy in her syllabus to
counteract it by banning it. Cody already includes a policy statement in his syllabus regarding the use of personal technology, but he has not reached the point of banning it. He stated, “I wish that our classrooms were not wireless, because it would take away the opportunity to do that [use personal technology] and not, it still wouldn’t with their phones…but that is such a problem.”

Cody believes students checking their cell phones or their computers do not perceive themselves as being distracting, even though he and the other students think it is an issue. He observes many students cannot put their cell phones aside during the time it takes to be in a regular class session. Stacey emphasizes she believes students know texting is inappropriate, but continue to do it anyway because they lack the attention span to attend. Cody agrees, stating, “I think, they think it’s totally harmless. And…ah…I don’t. I don’t think they’re being intentionally disrespectful.”

Jane Doe expresses concern noticing that during the past few years, her criminal justice students are not developing the interpersonal skills necessary for successful career or life pursuits. Instead, they rely on personal technology to “hide behind” rather than to “communicate with” each other. She notices her students are

…distracted more… and ah…and…yeah…distracted more and one of the things that does concern me is that they don’t…um…talk to each other. So you can walk into the class and virtually every…everybody is on their device. And they don’t interface with each other…at all. And so you walk into a class and they’re aren’t talking …you know…it’s not like loud when you come into a class. And I think that’s really unfortunate because you can’t establish relationships, so I think…you… are you talking…where are you making friends, if you’re never
talking to people. So …um…it’s a very interesting…and I mean it’s a …I’ve noticed that more in the past couple of years then I’ve ever noticed before.

While Cody does not agree with her assessment, he does have colleagues who do. The two of them differed in this area. While they each are concerned about the overuse of personal technology in the classroom, Cody contends the students will outgrow their dependency on it and be okay in the professional criminal justice sphere. Jane Doe does not; she continues to assert the students of today will be stunted in their ability to interact successfully with others. As Cody has stated before, it is also a concern of many of his colleagues.

These faculty members are concerned there is going to be an entire generation of students who cannot interact face-to-face with others because they only interact with their personal technological devices. This is one reason why Julie the Cruise Director expects her students to adopt a professional tone when texting her. She want them to become accustomed to interacting with a supervisor because, “I am not your buddy. I am your faculty member.”

Julie the Cruise Director sees one head of the coin where the student’s need for personal technological immediacy creates an entirely new expectation for time and attention. Students email or text faculty members and expect an immediate response to their inquiry. When that does not occur, students become disruptive and bombard the faculty member repeatedly with emails and texts. On the other side of the coin, Jane Doe sees students advancing new cultural mores surrounding the improper usage of personal technological devices in inappropriate places by bringing their beliefs about the use of personal technology into the classroom. She notes
I’ve gone home to talk to my husband about it, he’ll say, “yeah, people text through meetings” and I’ll be at church and people will text through church…and I’m thinking this is …kinda… just the culture. You know…inappropriate technological use. Um…and so …it’s the culture that’s been adopted that’s just being carried out in social settings or academic settings. So… but, it is very disruptive.

Faculty members describe their understanding of what is happening in the lives of this group of students to explain some of the disruptive behavior they are seeing. For many of the participants, it goes beyond the overuse of personal technology into something that says more about the student and her or his experience and attitude. The two are interrelated and interwoven. They have noted that along with the overuse of personal technology, there seems to be a gradual shift in students themselves. What drives the change is difficult to say, is it the personal technology driving the changing student or the changing student driving the overuse of personal technology? For these participants, why the behavior occurred did not matter as much as the observation there was something different that was causing the disruption within the classroom.

Julie the Cruise Director notes, “students lives are not simply attending class and earning grades, but rather the students are living complicated lives that are intersecting with the classroom.” This can be particularly true for nontraditional students and veteran students. She observes when a veteran student is reacting to emotional contexts occurring within the classroom, it is because of a genuine belief there is a need to defend her or his own rights because “the self” was under attack. Awareness of this increased
risk that military veterans pose to the general student population intensifies her focus on safety when those students become disruptive

So, I kinda bring that kinda like more of an awareness again of like…strong risk assessments and even security level assessments for in…for in my case [military branch omitted] who are presenting risk related to their psychiatric or substance use symptoms. Or …you know… some other symptoms unrelated to that …that…in terms of security or military response. In keeping the rest of the community safe from people who are not safe and who are armed and trained.

So… which is not a great combination (laughs).

Stacey contends students are less prepared academically, resiliently, and interpersonally, to be in college than previous generations of university students. While this is not something Cody agrees with, it is something his colleagues are discussing.

The lack of interpersonal connectedness is also a concern of Jane Doe.

During our interview, Doug explained the reasons why students are behaving disruptively are resulting from (a) disability status, (b) gender (most females talk more, while males challenge more because they are usually bright students, not poor performers), and (c) minority status. He clarifies his reasoning for “tolerating” disruptive behavior from these students … it was disruptive. Ah…but…I’m going to sound horribly un-PC [politically correct] here …but they were two African American female students. And my…my belief at that point…in time was that it was a cultural thing. That they came from a situation, where in the learning environment… where they felt
impassioned or engagement on something, they would comment about that...that content right there. So, that was my assumption right there.

When it comes to the issue of students with disabilities, both Julie the Cruise Director and Stacey describe their expectations for student self-advocacy. Julie the Cruise Director says she expects a student to be a good self-advocate and those who do not engage in it will not receive services, even though she suspects the student requires them. Stacey discusses the importance of self-advocacy, but also says many students do not know how to be good self-advocates. When she meets a student who does so, she is impressed and believes the student must have a strong support system in place to learn those skills. She attempts to explain why faculty members may perceive students with disabilities as disruptive. Stacey explains that hostile reactions on the part of the student with disabilities may be one way of expressing frustration with a task. The student becomes upset, the person backs off rather than face a confrontation, and then the faculty member leaves the student alone. She hypothesizes this same sort of frustration sequencing is happening even with students who do not have disabilities because they have such a low tolerance for failure.

During Stacey’s many years of teaching, she has noticed an “aura of entitlement” and a “consumer expectation” from students who assume by purchasing credits, they are purchasing grades without content mastery. Believing that paying for the seat, equals earning a successful grade, without additional work, means faculty members will “catch the student up” on any material missed if absent. She believes this is a result from an increase of online education. This focus on “students are customers,” “reading and testing equals learning,” and “higher education is just another certificate” is concerning
…one of the things I’ve noticed and I started noticing it …I’m gonna say around 2000 or so that’s when I was at [institution omitted] was when I really first noticed this and it’s just gotten worse ever since. I thought it was [state omitted] (laughter), but I was wrong. Um… there’s much more of an entitlement attitude among students then there used to be. So, I made a joke once, I also taught in [state omitted], and I said “when I lived in [state omitted] there was an attitude of the students of “I put my butt in the seat, I should get an A.” When I moved to [state omitted] after being there for a while that’s now evolved into “I paid for this class, I shouldn’t have to put my butt in the seat and I should be able to get an A.”

Stacey expresses concern this attitude may stem from new forms of education and it has trickled down into the classroom with the belief the student is in charge of the classroom and not the faculty member

…and maybe part of that is the online instruction. I don’t know what… you know. “I don’t even feel like I have to come to class, if I can read the readings. I should just be able to show up and take the test and not and to do all of that. Not really do all of those other things you expect me to do.”

This consumer mentality has replaced content mastery. She reports students feeling emboldened enough to state they expect certain benefits because of the high cost of tuition. She explains this as one reason why she sees an increase in disruptive student behavior

…and so, there’s certainly an attitude issue among many students and maybe that’s related to some of these behaviors (points to Benign Incivilities: Appendix O). I actually had students who’ve said to me… you know “I’ve paid for this class, I
should get an A” and I’m like… why should paying for this class mean you
should get an A. You didn’t master the concept, but “I paid for the class,” it’s
like… okay, it doesn’t work that way (laughter).

For Stacey, many of these are the same students who assume it is the faculty
member’s responsibility for their learning, rather than their own, “so they’ll sometimes
try to lay it on you when they miss, instead of taking their own responsibility.” Just like
for Julie the Cruise Director, some students assume they already know how the field
experience should unfold, but when it fails to meet their expectations, they may not make
the connection between their attitude and their behavior. When the issue becomes more
significant, students assume that everyone else needs to change. She describes instances
where she has received multiple reports of a student’s disruptive behavior and yet, the
student continues having the expectation that everyone else will change

… I think that every once in a while, there are students who kinda think they have
it figured out and you’re like, I don’t think that you do. And those are hard. I
mean…like…students who are having problems and acknowledge that are much
easier to assist than students who say, “I’m doing everything right and the
universe is somehow set against me,” or “people are picking on me.” I think…
like… okay…you do seem to be the common denominator that everyone seems to
be saying ….like…”they’re not doing it the way we want’em to,” or “expect them
to,” or “the right way.” So, I just want you to be aware …that…that…from
several different data points we’re getting the impression that we would like you
to do things a little bit differently. Which doesn’t mean you’re a bad person, but
does mean you need to adjust your behaviors.
### Theme Six: Summary of Emotional Costs

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<th>Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional costs</td>
<td>There is an emotional cost to disruptive behavior. Faculty members are hard at work attempting to prepare students for their future professions. They are hoping students will see the connection between their current behavior and their future professional life. They are growing increasingly frustrated that so much time and energy is spent managing disruptive student behavior that they run the emotional gamut from anxious, to mad, to despair.</td>
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### Theme Six: Emotional Costs

Participants share concerns whether disruptive students make connections between their behaviors in class and future professional behaviors. For some, it is a matter of “kicking the can” down the road. The faculty member can only do so much. They hope the students make the connections between current behavior and professional behavior, but they cannot force it to happen. What occurs is a growing frustration with the behavior of students while they are in their classrooms (see Table 6). While participants are future-oriented for the students, they are also dealing with the here-and-now. The faculty members in this study are frustrated that so much time and energy goes into managing classroom behaviors they believe they should not have to be managing.

According to Stacey, when a student is moving directly into a profession (e.g., teaching), there is a greater likelihood faculty members are monitoring the student’s disruptive behavior, then if the student is moving into a graduate program (e.g., psychology)

…it gives a lot of context too, because being in an education program where people following their undergraduate degree are going to be a professional… are
going to be a teacher and adhere to professional standards. We would keep a very close eye on those professional behaviors or unprofessional behaviors and in psychology; people are probably going to go to graduate school.

She assumes students moving to graduate programs will mature and be mentored by their graduate faculty so more disruptive behavior may be overlooked … if they’re going to enter the profession and so they have a lot more time to develop those skills and so at least I am not as vigilant with the undergrads as maybe I should be. I am with the graduate students the ones who are working in my lab, my graduate students. I mean I know them better and I’m on them more about that stuff.

Cody wants students to understand that it is important to make connections between the requirements for classroom decorum and expectations regarding professional conduct. He explains it is important that students understand that following the rules for the classroom exhibits their understanding of the code of professionalism for which they are stepping, but he understands that students will likely exhibit the same behaviors on the job they exhibit in the classroom. This attitude is something he says differs from his colleagues. He observes he is less stringent then they are

I mean that’s part of what I was trying to communicate to him without saying “hey, this isn’t just a half–hazard [sic] show up when you want type…type of thing.” I mean that’s part of what I think I hear my colleagues talk about enough. I mean …you know…part of what we’re doing is preparing them for the next step and you won’t be able to get away with that. You’ll never be able to get away with behavior like that…and so it’s part of our job to …to…ahh…prepare them
for that. Not only academically, but also yeah, there’s a professionalism side of all of this. And there is a you know…you know you can’t just kinda show up whenever you want type of thing. Um… so… what my colleagues are obviously more strict about that sorta thing and I’m less strict about it, but I don’t know that it ever…I don’t know if that ever clicked…

Working in the same field, both Jane Doe and Cody describe the importance for their students to be able to communicate effectively. Jane Doe is concerned the students in criminal justice are not developing the interpersonal skills necessary for successful career or life pursuits, but instead are relying on personal technology to hide behind rather than communicate with each other. This is an idea with which many of their colleagues agree. Cody acknowledges his colleagues express concerns about criminal justice students who seem unable to manage daily living, interpersonal, and conflict issues that arise in a face-to-face manner. Because their jobs require the ability to communicate successfully in this realm, he contends they will cope and adapt to the challenge.

Julie the Cruise Director sees students required to follow the stated rules, while “intuiting” the unstated expectations at their field placements settings in order to be successful. She observes that a student can excel academically, but when it comes time to put the learning into practice, this is when they have the most issues. She assumes students may not have the resiliency to manage an unsuccessful field placement, especially, when they have always been successful academically

…and…we…we…just don’t. So sometimes…and I don’t know if we have great indicators in classroom settings. Sometimes it’s not until people hit the field
experience that they really fall apart. And…and…their classroom work…it might not be stellar…but it’s certainly acceptable…and it’s a very different skill set…Of being in an internship, of being in a field of practice, or of being in some sort of learning setting in the community working with other professionals that is different…than you know…classroom papers.

David is preparing his students for a field in dietetics. He seems optimistic because many of his students are new to the experience. Many of his students have never cooked before. They are taking his course as a foundational course in order to learn how to have a relationship with food. He finds it necessary to give his students personal meaning in order to have an understanding of the material and reduce the likelihood for disruptive behavior.

They’re…they’re a blank slate. They don’t know who I am or what I have to offer, but I think… um… as we start getting into the material… um… I try and at least make it a little more interesting and paralleling examples… um… and getting some of my personal life examples. Something they can at least latch onto…

Each participant expresses frustration with the disruptive undergraduate students in her or his classroom. Their frustration manifests itself behaviorally into an action or a nonaction. Even when a faculty member is frustrated with the student’s behavior, he or she often frames it in a manner that allows effective management of her or his reactions to the student’s behavior. When asked why they chose to manage it in such a way, their responses indicated that much is dependent upon the faculty member’s personality and personal life experiences.
While the overall gestalt is frustration, there is a broad spectrum of individual reactions from the faculty members. Stacey reported being the least likely to take offense at disruptive behaviors, to have an overt emotional reaction, or take anything that happens to her personally. She also has the most experience teaching and she believes working in K-12 with a special education population inures her from overreacting to personal slights. From her perspective, when the student is acting out, she underreacts, because

They don’t know you well enough for it to be personal against you. You’re a professional doing your job. This is not a personal thing and I felt the same way when I teach little kids. It’s like they want to say “f-you” and “go blow and take your mother with you” and all of that and its okay, I’m the professional and they’re the kid, so if I let that push my buttons and get all angry I’m no better than that.

The other faculty members could not say the same. They struggle to maintain the same level of calm achieved by Stacey. The person most affected is Doug. Because his male students tend to be the most disruptive, he continually scans for contemptuous nonverbal mannerisms and remains on guard for potential slights. He contends male-challenging equates to male-posturing and the hierarchal nature of the situation influences the increase of disruptive behavior. He stated multiple times his lack of an earned terminal degree will always put him at the bottom of the ladder, even with students. He remains hypervigilant and hyperaware, always on edge and looking for a nonverbal threat
…if the comments are aggressive, then I’m assuming they are more of a threat or if their nonverbals… if they are… you know… they are boxy and they box me into the corner or if they have this long stare with a furrowed eyebrows, then I consider them more… more of just plain threatening behavior. So, if I see that, if they don’t smile very often, I get a little concerned, as well. I do try to tell jokes in my lectures and my classes and… uh… not all of them go over really well.

Cody uses self-talk to try to control his reactions because he finds disruptions distracting, but eventually he acts

There are some ways in which I can’t not let it get to me. Again, when they do it and I find myself distracted by it that’s just the way that I am. If I get distracted by it then unfortunately there’s no way I can control it. and it…and it happens…you know where it …I’ll look and see where a student is doing something and again my head starts thinking about …and again it makes it hard for me to concentrate and deliver the lecture but …um…you know…I don’t know…you know…what exactly again…you more than anything I look at it and think this isn’t that serious , this isn’t really that big of a deal and while its disruptive if in my head I’ve gotten to a point where I need to say something…um ...(pause)...

Cody says he is typically in good humor when he teaches and states that he does not get mad when a phone goes off “accidently”; it is when it is a routine that he becomes bothered. Cody has a sense of the routine. If it occurs one time, and it is not egregious, then there is no issue. If it occurs more than once, and it turns into a pattern, then he becomes “mad on the inside” and has to use self-talk to calm himself down because the
behavior of the student is distracting to him. He does not want to make a mountain out of a molehill; however, he is tired of dealing with the lower level disrespectful behaviors.

David is the newest to teaching and admits to feeling frustrated when his students do not pay attention to what he is teaching. He expresses irritation when the students talk in class while he is teaching, because this tends to delay the flow of the lesson. He minimizes things that embarrass him, especially students who show him unwanted personal attention

I’ve never experienced the threatening behavior piece of it…distressed signaling, only a couple of times with a couple of students in the past where…um…ah… (pause)… maybe inappropriate demands of time, maybe just more focused on me, when we’re supposed to be focused on the whole class.

Julie the Cruise Director is interesting. She has the most clinical experience and she admits to feeling threatened by a student, “I mean I did feel threatened, but not because they made specific threats. I felt like it was a threatening situation,” but is quick to contextualize it to the situation, to explain why she did not act upon it. She went on to say, “but they did not make …they did not make specific and credible threats to where I felt like I could say and then they said if you don’t such and such then I’m going to such and such…” She takes a very similar philosophy as Stacey, when it comes to being the leader in the class, you cannot take an assault to your ego personally.

Jane Doe seems to be in the most despair. While Doug appears disempowered and anxious, Jane Doe seems defeated. She has two very different sections, with distinct personalities that challenge her and cause her to doubt herself and her teaching. She describes needing to hide what she is feeling, because Jane Doe reports resigning herself
to it “just not stopping” until the semester is over. This also happened the previous semester. She perceived a negative experience with students and was surprised when the evaluations did not meet her expectations. She stated, “[I thought] I’m probably going to get terrible teaching evaluations. And when I got my evaluations back they were really good and I thought what is going on here…and it is just the dynamic that you have here.” She describes reading the reports of disengagement in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* was helping to ease her feelings of self-doubt and self-blame, because it is not just her classes, but everyone’s classes

…you can’t engage them when they’re completely checked out. And…and…now I get that. I can’t…I can’t…they’re in class and I can’t even engage them because they’re doing something completely different. And so, when I read something like the *Chronicle for Higher Education* [sic] and there’s… like…article upon article upon article about…like…students playing games while professors are lecturing…so I know it’s not just my class.

Table 7

*Theme Seven: Summary of Perceptions of Disruptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of disruptions</td>
<td>For faculty members, dealing with “regular” classroom disruptions are easier than dealing with the disruptions aimed at them. When disruptive behavior is “passive” and not targeted at the faculty members, it seems easily identifiable and faculty members perceive the ability to control it or manage it as possible. When the disruptive behavior is more “active” and directed towards her or him, they are more likely to minimize, not recognize, or poorly define it. The faculty member grapples with ways to manage the behavior and the situation.</td>
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</table>
Theme Seven: Perceptions of Disruptions

Participants in this study describe both lower level and higher-level disruptive behaviors (see Table 7). The lower level disruptive behaviors are concrete, with an accompanying classroom management technique or strategy. The lower level “regular” classroom disruptions seem to have no direct or intended target. They are passive (e.g., texting, sleeping, tardiness, attendance). The higher-level disruptive behaviors are difficult to identify and are often minimized, unresolved, or tentatively acted upon by the participants. The students target the higher-level disruptive behaviors at the faculty members (e.g., challenges to authority, shouting, unwanted attention, contemptuous nonverbal behavior, aggressive behavior). While they may choose not to control the disruptive behavior at the lower levels, the faculty members express more confidence in their ability to manage those behaviors, if they decide to do so.

Each of the faculty members clearly describe the concrete lower level disruptive behaviors identified as benign incivility (Appendix O). Whether a faculty member considers the behavior representative of disruptive behavior in her or his classroom depends upon each one’s personal definition of that type of behavior. Stacey, qualifies her definition when describing what she considers disruptive, “I’ve had the typical…I think it depends on how you define it….how you define disruptive. I’ve had the student who sat in the front row of class clipping her fingernails…um which I consider disruptive,” because there may be the slim possibility someone else may not find that disruptive.

All of the faculty members spontaneously gave examples of lower level disruptive behaviors (e.g., talking in class, texting, inappropriate personal technology use, tardiness,
absences, etc.) prior to seeing the disruptive behavior continuum (Appendix O), and then expressed agreement and confirmation of the lowest level as benign incivilities when shown the model. They have multiple explanations for why students act in disruptive manners at those levels. Stacey asserts it has to do with a lack of student awareness and attention span. Cody adds it has to do with the student’s low self-control. Doug, Jane Doe, and David contend the student’s age, maturity level, and gender as reasons for disruption. Julie the Cruise Director and Doug utilize classroom context clues (e.g., exam grades, classroom discussions) as reasons for disruptions.

Faculty members have their own ways of dealing with disruptive student behavior. While Jane Doe expresses the most defeat at the end of the semester, she is the most proactive faculty member when tackling the issue of disruptive student behavior. Even though she expresses hiding what she is feeling, “I don’t want to say that I have gave up [sic] on the class… but I was kind of like… I’m through. But I don’t let it show,” she still perseveres. She still directly confronts students’ texting in her classrooms. She chooses to ignore sleeping students or poorly attending students because, “I have strong views as it relates to attendance …like I don’t take attendance because…they’re adults and they have to attend in order to get a good grade. And if they choose not to… (shrugs).” She says she is making changes to her classroom policy, even though she conveys a lack of enthusiasm about it. She professes it is her only option to combat the behavior.

Stacey and Doug consider texting to be a nonissue for them. They both stated the behavior is disruptive, but Stacey saw it from an empathy standpoint, it could be her in that situation and Doug saw it from a lenient policy standpoint. Stacey often uses body
positioning to make a student uncomfortable and she will directly confront a student when she sees a disruptive incident.

Doug believes texting and tardiness are chronic issues within his classes. He typically overlooks both and asks the student offenders not to cause an even greater disruption with their actions. Because his male students are the ones who tend to be the most disruptive, he continually scans for contemptuous nonverbal mannerisms and remains on guard for potential slights. After engaging in faculty training on student threats, he became hypersensitive to the potentially threatening nature of emails and requested additional security when he believed he had just-cause after the mother of a nontraditional student sent a blistering tirade to the president regarding his teaching. I’m scrambling at the last minute saying there’s this person who I believe is mentally unstable and I need…I need a security guard to monitor classroom tonight …Because I felt that scared. Um…about… about… the behavior… because it …this email was so out of left field … that I didn’t know…that I didn’t know …plus, it didn’t help that we had just had a professional development day of security in our classrooms. I was trying to think that way, as well. And that was probably my most distressing.

David finds himself reaching the point where he finally has to say something to the students. He does not want his students to see him in a negative light. He prefers his approach be one where he is, “kinda turning it into a positive, versus the old school marm that cracks them on the knuckles (gesture) and says “shut-up.” He eventually reaches the point where he tells his students “okay come on guys.”
Julie the Cruise Director says she works to maintain control of her classroom. When a student is acting in a disruptive manner, she separates that student from the rest of the class by having her or him step out. She makes sure she takes appropriate steps to protect herself when meeting students who concern her.

I had a student last summer and I …I mean I told the support staff across the hall…I am meeting with this student this time and I am leaving the door open. And I’m being clear that I’m…and he said what …what don’t you feel safe with me? And I said no. To be perfectly honest …like…I feel safe with you, with the door open.

Cody struggles with his reactions to students. On the one hand, he believes he remains neutral and evenhanded while responding to disruptive student behavior. He discusses needing to see routine behavior before acting. He says, “I’ll say something. But, um…it’s rare that I do, I have to get pretty fed up with and they have to be pretty routinely late and …or otherwise it’s just something I’ll tolerate until a certain level (laughter).” Once the student reaches a certain level, Cody reacts in a variety of ways …so you know at some point …you know…it sticks in my head…you know…okay..this pattern is getting beyond acceptable and that’s the point at which I…I…say something… Not always in front of the class, but sometimes …sometimes just at that point they just walk in and I look and just go, okay this is it, and I’ll say something in front of the entire class. Other times…you know…I’ll grab ‘em after class...and say…you know I have a policy about being here on time and I… um… it seems like you have a real hard time getting here on time. Maybe even asking a question …you know…where are you coming
from…why is it…do you have some sort of an explanation that you’ve never bothered to share with me? Um…but, more often than not with those students there isn’t anything and then it’s…and then it’s…a… here’s my message, you need to …you need to be here on time. Then…um…so that’s a routine…I consider that disruptive…um… it’s…it’s…definitely disruptive and distractive not only to me, but to…but to students as well.

Even though students may be breaking class norms, Cody reports not wanting to deal with the behavior, even if students in the class are responding negatively to the student who they perceive as disruptive or different. This happened to a student who continually asks questions, when the rest of the students appear to have understood the material. Both Cody and Julie the Cruise Director relate experiences of contemptuous behavior on the part of the class, when a student would raise her or his hand to ask a question. Neither, Julie the Cruise Director nor Cody directly addresses it in the class. As Cody described the situation, he said

…and it’s funny too, because other students recognize it. It’s at the very end of the semester, but I noticed…ah…I noticed …I probably noticed this a couple of weeks ago that…he… um…that he …that when he starts talking that you see other students who visibly, with one of these (eye roll) or with all sorts of things like this (mimes contemptuous nonverbal), their facial expressions, their body mannerisms, all sorts of stuff. It’s like…oh boy, here we go again. What’s this…going to say now. Um…and those cases are hard to deal with. Where are those students coming from (laughs). I just think it’s part of their…part of their personality.
Julie the Cruise Director raises a similar issue, but views the student who was asking the questions as being disruptive, rather than the class’s reaction to the student as being disruptive

…she asks them, because she wants to know the answer and she really doesn’t understand the concept. But, you can see the entire rest of the class…you can see that they are…the really traditional …there are no stupid questions…but, the questions she asks are really…kinda…stupid. I mean…you know…everyone else is at least three or four steps past that and she’s the only one who has confusion about these very concrete concepts. And you have to like backup. But, because …I mean…she is so sweet and dear…and she really is asking…and she is not intending to be disruptive. She is asking because she doesn’t know. And then…she…you know…she writes it down quite diligently and all of that. I mean those are the kind of things that I’ll think…like…(facial expression)…ooof. I mean I can see that everyone else that has been in umpty-ump classes with her is like…ahh (facial expression)…when she raises her hand. It’s like …you know…it’s like we’re social workers, learn to be accepting. Such is life, everyone is different.

Sometimes finding the words to describe the experience is difficult. For Stacey, it seemed easier to be directive about students who plagiarize, because those conditions are clear-cut, than it was for students who engage in other sorts of disruptive behaviors. Stacey differentiates between the two by saying, “we just had a student who plagiarized on a paper and I was fairly directive on that one because that’s a student conduct issue…”
academic dishonesty issue… that’s a little different, a little bit different than just disruption.”

This is something Jane Doe struggles with during the interview process. When she attempts to capture what is occurring within her class, she states, “…and they’re just not present. And I don’t want to say rude…because they’re not rude to me…they’re not rude to each other….they just have an air about them …that’s just…that’s just that class.”

She mentions how frustrating this class is for her and makes her long for the end of the semester, so she can begin anew the following term.

Stacey’s latest incidence with disruptive behavior is as an observer in one of her mentee’s classes. As she observes the contemptuous nonverbal behavior of the disruptive student, she contends the student’s behavior is not well defined enough where the graduate student teaching the class, or she as a member of department leadership, can ask the student to leave the class. As a result, they believe they are stuck and the student continues this behavior

…but, I don’t think in this case the student’s ever risen to that level. She sits in the back of class…so like… what I observed is …ah… the GA was asking students to participate in a discussion. And, this student would sit in the back corner going like… (rolls eyes, shrugs and sighs, changes body posture to show disparagement), “oh, come on” like this you know (laughter), not really loud, but loud enough people right around her could hear it. Um …(pause)… certainly not appropriate, but I was in agreement with the student, it’s certainly not something I would say you need to leave. But, it’s real borderline (laughter).
Cody states he has never dealt with any higher-level disruptive behavior (disruptive behavior continuum: Appendix O), yet he gives examples of inappropriate demands of time and attention that he considers borderline inappropriate. He claims that since the student is also acting this way towards his colleagues, it is okay for the student to interact this way with him. He also notes the student noticed things that Cody said he mentioned he found interesting, once, as a way to make a connection. For Cody, this continues to border on it. It does not tip into his perception of “actual” disruptive behavior, even though it is negatively affecting him.

So again, he borders on inappropriate demand of time. I’ve never responded to him in any sort of a way because he’s different in that way. I don’t know how inappropriate that necessarily is, but it certainly borders on it because of the number of emails. Because again, he’s not in any of my classes this semester, but he’s been in my office at least three times this semester. And when he comes in …he’s …he’s camping out… And …and…it’s gonna be an hour and a half, two hours worth of (laughs)…

Julie the Cruise Director minimizes the effect of student disruptive behavior in the classroom, “I have had students…like I said …who have been visibly upset, loud and pacing, showing all of those nonverbal anger signs, but never to the point where they were physically threatening or where they lashed out in any way.” She labels the student’s behaviors and verbal communication as aggressive without labeling the student as engaging in threatening behavior, “…but …behaviorally…or at least verbally they were aggressive. And I think they were …there was some…you know…this could go …like…this could go to a physically aggressive scenario pretty quickly if we don’t do
something about it,” even when the behavior is such that others might perceive it as threatening

…really strongly behaviorally indicated. So… um…some of the things I’ve seen with students in my office or during class…is you know…a real profuse…like…sweating, shaking, you can tell they’re angry because their jaw is really clenched (points to jaw) and they’re clenching and unclenching their fists (mimes)

She is quick to point out that while she felt threatened, they were not threatening, because they did not state they were a threat to themselves or to others. For Julie the Cruise Director, any threat that occurs to her, another faculty member, or to students within her classroom must be a tangible threat. You do not give students who attempt to make a faculty member feel bad, scare them, or do anything other than engage in what she considers an actual “threat-threat” too much power of sway, because it is more “showing-off” on the student’s part. She believes, “…but I think that…that…faculty members… that sometimes their thresholds get really low about that stuff,” because the faculty member is made to feel “small” by the student.

When Stacey comes across a higher-level issue, she approaches the situation as a teachable moment and therefore waits until the student is calm before engaging in “the quiet talk in the office.” She believes waiting allows the student to hear the discussion. She utilizes email to reach out to students to begin difficult conversations, giving them an opportunity to open up and discuss the issues that are of concern. If her discussions do not work out, or if the student does not want to take advantage of the opportunity, she refers the student elsewhere on campus. Jane Doe also uses email to keep the discussion
informal and to maintain a positive climate of understanding. This is also a tool that Doug uses to reach out to students, instead of face-to-face communication.

For Julie the Cruise Director, when students enjoy the power and fear they are creating to dominate others in the classroom, the best course of action is to separate those students from the class. She does this because she sees the student “becoming physically activated” and she wants to reduce the emotional temperature in the room.

I’ve…kinda…gone into a crisis intervention mode of …you know…I see that you’re really upset …and…and…I’d like you to take a deep breath…and if we need to…you and I we can certainly step out. And because I’ll notice that other students are … particularly younger, newer students to the field get so dysregulated and I don’t want that to feed into one student’s …um…like…disruptiveness…or…or…dysregulation. Every once in a while I’ll see students who get disruptive kind of enjoy the sense of fear that they’re creating in their fellow students. So that’s usually when I go…let’s separate. We’re still going into a hallway that’s very visible and accessible.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provide the results of my research findings and analysis of six interviews with current faculty members with disruptive undergraduate students in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings. I introduce the participants and the findings from the thematic breakdown of the data, while exploring the faculty members’ experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories.
The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the lived experiences of faculty members at four-year public postsecondary institutions who have encountered undergraduate students’ disruptive behaviors in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories. I am conceptualizing “disruptive” and “threatening” behaviors as being on a continuum with disruptive and threatening anchoring each end. I am utilizing the following definition for disruptive behavior as (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), and (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members ego, expertise and/or authority) (Amada, 1999; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Seidman, 2005; Sharkin, 2006). This definition also forms the foundation for further inquiry and discussion with my participants.

The themes I describe in this chapter represent the participants’ lived experiences, as they perceived them. The seven emergent themes I developed from the individual interviews are:

1. Pervasiveness of disruptive behavior,
2. Faculty feeling of powerlessness,
3. Fatalistic thinking of faculty members,
4. Collegial support,
5. Classroom influences,
6. Emotional costs, and
7. Perceptions of disruptions.
In Chapter Five, I provide a summary of my major insights. I continue my discussion of the themes as they relate to the larger research questions. I examine the relationship of my results to existing studies by describing how they support the current literature. I describe the theoretical influences of attribution theory and symbolic interaction on each. I also identify implications for future research, including a discussion of the limitations of this study. I also discuss implications for both policy and practice.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of my six interviews with current faculty members with disruptive undergraduate students in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings. Using the dual lenses of attribution theory and symbolic interaction theory, I developed themes to describe and interpret the faculty members lived experiences by using inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006), in a deductive manner (Groenewald, 2004). I first created themes in an organic fashion (e.g., clustering, grouping) by allowing them to emerge from multiple contacts with the data (Creswell, 2008). I then applied the two theoretical constructs of attribution theory and symbolic interaction as a means of interpreting and analyzing each theme after it emerged.

I used purposive sampling to enroll participants. I audiotaped the six participants while individually interviewing each one in a face-to-face setting. Responding to interview questions, the participants each described their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students. Each of the participants are employed at a four-year public, postsecondary institution in central or west Michigan that has a behavioral review team and faculty training for students of concern since the crisis at Virginia Tech (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007).

For this qualitative study, I am sought an understanding of the participants’ experiences with disruptive students. There was interplay between what I thought I might find and what I actually uncovered from the interviews. I initially assumed faculty members might have one experience that sets the tone for all other experiences; instead, I find that several small experiences are woven together to form a tapestry that is their
personal narrative of professionally working with disruptive students. I allow the rich data gleaned from the experiences of these faculty members to lead me towards answering the research questions for this study.

The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the experiences of faculty members at four-year public postsecondary institutions who have encountered undergraduate students’ disruptive behaviors in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories. I conceptualize “disruptive” and “threatening” behaviors as being on a continuum with disruptive and threatening anchoring each end. I am utilizing the following definition for disruptive behavior (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, attendance, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), and (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members ego, expertise and/or authority) (Amada, 1999; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Seidman, 2005; Sharkin, 2006). This also forms the foundation for further inquiry.

I answer the following research questions in my study:

**Research Questions**

1. How do faculty members’ describe and interpret their experiences with undergraduate students who behave in disruptive manners in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?
a. How do faculty members differentiate between normative, disruptive, and threatening undergraduate student behaviors within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?

b. How do faculty members attribute why disruptive undergraduate students do what they do?

2. How do faculty members’ previous life experiences help them to make meaning of why they regard an undergraduate student’s behavior as disruptive?

   a. What previous life experiences do faculty members incorporate to make meaning regarding their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?

   b. If, and how, has this experience with disruptive undergraduate student behavior affected faculty members and their teaching

Guided by my research questions and my theoretical frameworks of attribution theory and symbolic interaction, seven themes emerged:

(1) Pervasiveness of disruptive behavior,

(2) Faculty feeling of powerlessness,

(3) Fatalistic thinking of faculty members,

(4) Collegial support,

(5) Classroom influences,

(6) Emotional costs, and
(7) Perceptions of disruptions. I have given an overview of the themes and the theoretical underpinnings in Table 8. I designed this summary to show the integration of their ideas and influences. I applied the theoretical influences to the themes after each theme emerged in an inductive manner.

Table 8  
*Theoretical and Thematic Outline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories and Themes</th>
<th>Insights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical Framework</strong></td>
<td>Insights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attribution Theory</strong></td>
<td>I use attribution theory (AT) in order to describe the faculty members’ understanding of why students do what they do. This helps to explain participants’ perceptions of why the students behave in a disruptive manner.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Symbolic Interaction Theory</strong></td>
<td>I use symbolic interaction theory (SIT) to describe the faculty members’ meaning they assign to the experience surrounding the students’ disruptive behavior. This helps to explain participants’ descriptions of disruptive student behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
<td>This research study identified the following emergent themes that sprang from a pattern of “plugging away.” Faculty members’ experiences with students can be identified as a perpetual understanding of what needs to be done, doing it, but also understanding that something more could be done to make things better.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pervasiveness of disruptive behavior</strong></td>
<td>Using AT, most faculty members attribute disruptive behavior as being endemic to the profession of university teaching. Applying SIT suggests no matter where or how long a faculty member teaches, this is a shared experience of disruptive behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty feeling of powerlessness</strong></td>
<td>Using AT, faculty members need to believe their colleagues and their institution will “back” their actions in managing disruptive student behavior. Applying SIT, faculty members believe in the support of their colleagues, but are cynical or even doubtful of the support of their institution.</td>
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### Table 8 – Continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories and Themes</th>
<th>Insights</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fatalistic thinking of faculty</td>
<td>Using AT, most faculty members expect to see mostly “good” students in their classrooms, some “bad” students, and will always have “those” students who are disruptive. Applying SIT suggests fatalistic thinking when it comes to their expectation that it is “just the way it is” and the student behavior will continue unabated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collegial support</td>
<td>Using AT, most faculty members recognize that a student who is disruptive in one class is likely to be disruptive in another class therefore keeping it secret is an illusion. Faculty members co-construct attributions about disruptive students. Using the informal grapevine allows for social comparison and social bonding between faculty members. Applying SIT suggests some faculty members recognize they are not in it alone, and see the informal grapevine as becoming the “truth teller” for the department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom influences</td>
<td>Using AT, faculty members attribute disruptive student behavior as the combination of faculty, student, and context that accounts for individual differences in the experience. There also tends to be generational differences with respect to attributions of acceptable classroom behavior such as use of personal technology and grades. Applying SIT suggests disruptive students are a result of this changing institutional landscape.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional costs</td>
<td>Using AT, faculty members’ emotional reactions to disruptive student behavior is linked to how students act in class and the personal qualities the faculty member brings to the situation. In addition, many faculty members attribute the disruptive behavior of students in direct service majors to the students not being ready for fieldwork or to not having “connected the dots” to how their classroom behavior may be perceived professionally. Applying SIT suggests faculty members recognize these issues, but also realize they have to facilitate the process of guiding these students towards making these connections. Helping students to internalize their professional identity is one way to do so. In addition, effectively responding to disruptive behavior is based on how well faculty members manage the classroom and their emotions, as well as whether they understand and use their own personal strengths while continuously evolving.</td>
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Table 8 – Continued

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<th>Theories and Themes</th>
<th>Insights</th>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions of disruptions</td>
<td>At the lowest levels of definition (i.e., benign incivility), AT would suggest students are acting in a disruptive manner because of entitlement or a lack of understanding. At the middle or upper levels (i.e., distressed signaling, threatening behavior) of the disruptive behavior continuum, students act in a disruptive manner because of skill deficits or a potential disabling condition. Applying SIT suggests meaning arises from the interaction between the actors (i.e., faculty members and students) and is personalized as a result.</td>
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The overall pattern to surface from my discussion with participants is one of “plugging away.” This chapter provides a summary of major insights, relationship of results to relevant literature, implications for further research, and implications for institutional policy and practice.

**Summary of Major Insights**

Because of my varied roles as a professional in higher education (e.g., associate professor, administrator, counselor, and behavioral review team member), the participants’ assumptions and acceptance that disruptive student behavior continues to be a natural part of the experience of being a faculty member is both disconcerting and disheartening. I was prepared to hear multiple descriptions of students who are behaviorally disruptive, uncivil, rude, or even entitled. I even expected faculty members to describe feeling threatened by their experiences and encounters with students. However, since the influx of resources, training dollars, and programming that has gone into most college and university campuses since Virginia Tech, I expected to see something different. I thought faculty members might feel empowered to act or have a
greater repertoire of classroom management tools to use. Instead, the faculty members’ passivity and acceptance of the situation, thereby “normalizing” these behaviors, brings to mind the concept of Miller and Seligman’s (1978) learned helplessness. In its most basic sense, learned helplessness is a sense of powerlessness and lack of control over the environment and the outcome of any action an individual may take. For the participants in my study, the assumption they must “put up” with this type of disruptive student behavior and “expect it” in their classrooms is certainly discouraging.

I discovered the faculty members’ experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings are multifaceted interactions and negotiations for civility and control. Overall, they report the majority of their students do “just fine,” but there are those “rotten few” who “spoil it” for them and everyone else.

Responses to Research Questions

In answering the research questions, I use the developed themes and the participants’ narratives to develop each response.

**Question one.** *How do faculty members’ describe and interpret their experiences with undergraduate students who behave in disruptive manners in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?* Prior to showing the participants, the disruptive behavior continuum (Appendix O), each gave multiple examples found in the area of benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, texting, and acting-out). Once they had the opportunity to see the continuum, they continued adding additional instances throughout our interviews. The handout acted as a memory peg or conversation starter. Because they each had so many illustrations, it did not appear necessary to use it. Using previous research, I categorized like ideas that fit
each of the categories on the continuum. Their shared experiences support much of the previously conducted research on disruptive student behavior.

Theme one: pervasiveness of disruptive behavior supports this question. It gives a full and holistic view of a faculty member’s experience. Beginning with the faculty members’ first teaching experiences and continuing throughout her or his teaching career, each describe students who are memorable because of their disruptive behavior. Most worrisome is the continual belief that it is an “expectation” for the profession. Because something is happening, does not mean it is acceptable. The participants in my study describe instances that had previously occurred, that are currently occurring, and frighteningly enough ones they expect to continue or start occurring. They each express a desire for students who are present and engaged in the educational process without disruptions. Unfortunately, they paint this as a pipedream, rather than a potential reality.

Overwhelmingly, each faculty member stated the overuse of personal technology (e.g., laptops, cell phones) in the classroom causes the greatest amount of disturbance for her or him. Participants also note the changing student in the classroom. They cite their own experiences and observations, as well as their colleagues’, regarding these noticeable demographic trends. Theme five: classroom influences supports this question. It indicates how intertwined these experiences are for the faculty members. It is difficult to ascertain whether it is the “new generation” of student driving the perception of disruption, or whether it is their use of personal technology itself, driving it. These two concerns of improperly using personal technology (e.g., cell phones, laptops, texting, IMing, Facebook, etc.) and changing student mores (e.g., complicated lives, aura of
entitlement, consumer mentality, changing demographics) create more problems in the classroom, than any other description of experiences combined. It is also worth noting that when I first made contact with the participants, each was apologetic for not having something “bigger” or more “catastrophic” to discuss. There is an assumed belief that we should only discuss something “important” or “threatening.” There is an “air of expectancy” surrounding the asking of this question. Theme three: fatalistic thinking of faculty members supports this question. For some participants, the belief is that, so far, they have just been “lucky” and soon their luck may just run out. They remain in “watchful anticipation” that a catastrophic event “might occur” and prepare for such an eventuality, both cognitively and emotionally.

As previously noted, the participants seem apologetic they are discussing something that so obviously bothered them. They feel a pressured expectation of conformity “by unnamed others” to minimize the acknowledgement of disruptive student behaviors in the classroom. Faculty members perceive there are actual costs to acting on disruptive student behavior. Doug believes he might lose his job, Jane Doe believes her administration plays the “blame game,” Cody fears he could turn into a “jerk,” and Stacey expresses her frustration at perceived nonaction by her institution. The framing by the participants that they are constrained from acting upon the disruptive behaviors is apparent from our discussions. Theme two: faculty feeling of powerlessness supports this question. This results in disempowering the participants and preventing them from actively managing their classrooms. As my interviews with the participants shifted to discussing the higher levels on the disruptive behavior continuum (Appendix O), it becomes more difficult for them to
explain those disruptive behaviors aimed at them (e.g., challenging their authority, unwanted attention, threatening behavior). Theme seven: perceptions of disruptions supports this question. The faculty members describe the higher levels (i.e., distressed signaling, threatening behavior) of the continuum as rare, though each gave an example from their own or their colleagues’ experiences. They have a difficult time recognizing when students aimed their disruptive behavior towards them. Doug is the only one to recognize threats, though he is hypersensitive and tends to overgeneralize many things as threatening to him. Julie the Cruise Director describes feeling threatened, but makes excuses for why a student is not making a threat, even when holding the classroom “emotionally hostage” with his anger. David is very uncomfortable with the unwanted attention paid by his students, though he “brushes” it off as unimportant. I find it interesting that Cody and Jane Doe both experience students challenging their authority, but do not see it as a threat to their ego, yet each describe the situation as disruptive and are bothered by it. One reason for the participants’ reactions may be concern about how it appears to others. Julie the Cruise Director and Stacey both deride other faculty members who feel some type of threat to their ego when confronted by students. They believe that you should not take such challenges personally because you are the professional and need to act like one. If “someone” implies that you need to “suck it up,” a faculty member might be less able to recognize when a threatening situation is occurring, or even willing to talk about it when it does happen because he or she does not want “anyone” to think it is an overreaction.

For many of the faculty members, even when they are in a threatening situation, they may not define it as such because the students do not say “the words” that threaten
self or others. Participants wait for some type of verbal sign the student is a threat, even when they actually feel threatened. This is a conundrum I have noticed in my counseling and administrative experience. Faculty members feel threatened and yet, they minimize or downplay the reaction. They do not believe they are facing a threat because the student has not said “the words” they have been trained to look for in this type of situation (e.g., I am going to hurt myself, I am going to hurt you, I am suicidal). They misunderstand how, or whether, they should start the process to instigate a formal or informal threat assessment because they do not understand “the rules” for deviations. They also do not want to get in trouble by making a false accusation or appear to be wrong by “making something” out of nothing.

This is why it is easiest for faculty members to intercede on the lowest levels (i.e., benign incivility) of the disruptive behavior continuum (Appendix O). They have an idea of what behaviors and responses are acceptable because they are familiar with “the rules” for decorum. The participants can easily define and manage the behaviors at the lower levels. The tools and techniques they describe for quieting students (e.g., blocking their view, calling attention to the act, standing by them) to manage their class are similar. This occurs even if a faculty member has never had any type of classroom management training. The faculty members learn these techniques early during their professional careers and continually refine them throughout until they become second nature.

This does not mean they always address the disruptive behavior. Faculty members choose to ignore lower level disruptive behaviors because if they do not, they are addressing them “all of the time,” so they will often let things slide. When disruptive behaviors move up the continuum, it becomes more complicated. If the participants
minimize a student’s disruptive behavior, they do not have to figure out how to define the higher-level behavior. When a behavior is specifically targeted at them, (e.g., challenge to authority, unwanted time and attention), it is easier to minimize because it is not addressed. It allows the faculty member to save face and to keep from dealing with the messy business of recognizing their personal safety is threatened. They also do not have to explain to “others” why the behavior aimed at them merited some form of intercession when they do not perceive it as a “real threat.”

Faculty members eventually reach a point where they become irritated with the disruptive behavior. Participants respond in a variety of ways. They (a) “snap” at the class, (b) lack concentration while lecturing, (c) call the student out in class, (d) “give up,” or (e) develop hypersensitivity to verbal and nonverbal cues. Theme six: emotional costs support this question. These affective factors influence each faculty member differently. One important note is that each of them reaches the point where “enough is enough” and address the disruptive behavior of their undergraduate students. They may address it early, and then it stops, for a while. They may ignore it, until they blow up. They may wait until they have class buy-in. They may just go along with it, treating it like a game and calmly address it as it occurs. Nevertheless, they all do something or at least they try to do something about the behavior. They may not be effective in managing the classroom behavior, but for that brief instance, they did believe they have the power to do so.

**Question one-a.** How do faculty members differentiate between normative, disruptive and threatening undergraduate student behaviors within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting? This is a difficult question for faculty members to
answer. When I asked the question directly, the faculty members did not answer it directly. I found approaching the question “sideways” so they could have the chance to “talk around” it while formulating their ideas worked best.

Theme seven: perceptions of disruptions supports this question. It suggests how difficult it is to name and identify the higher-level disruptive behaviors (i.e., distressed signaling, threatening behavior, Appendix O), let alone manage them. When discussing the lower-level behaviors (i.e., benign incivility, Appendix O), the faculty members can crisply and decisively describe the behavior and why it is disruptive. They can explain the student is “doing this behavior” and “this is the action I took.” The faculty members base their responses on policy in the syllabus. If they did not previously mention the disruptive behavior in the syllabus that semester, there is a strong likelihood, they are going to mention it the following semester. Generally, it reaches the point where the faculty member feels he or she needs to address it.

The participants typically follow an informal process before determining “it” warrants inclusion into their classroom policy. The faculty members wait until there is a pattern of disruptive behavior before acting. Even when “committed” to making policy changes in their syllabus, they still loathe doing so. It is a line in the sand for many of them. This especially holds true when it comes to policy concerning personal technology. This is the Rubicon they do not want to cross.

Prior to making any major changes to their syllabi, they confer with colleagues. Many are already aware of the classroom policies and standards held by the members of their department. They relate experiences described by other faculty members in their unit regarding these issues. Theme four: collegial support affirms this question. It gives
insight regarding how faculty gather information concerning how to “act” in the classroom and how to “engage” with their students. The participants still hope they are making a “big deal” out of the disruptive student behavior. In listening to them, they appear worried others will see them as growing “old” if they start adding some of these policies. It seems as if there is a generational divide (e.g., older colleagues have anti-personal technology policies, I am young and therefore I do not).

Theme seven: perceptions of disruptions supports this question. It explains the process whereby as disruptive student behaviors escalate the definitions of the act became more personal. For some faculty members, the differentiation has to do with the number of times something happens, for others it has to do with contemptuous nonverbal communication, and still others it has to do with professional experience. The tipping point is different for each of the participants. There is no consistent moment when they will say, “this is the moment when I am worried or concerned.” Instead, they phrase it as, “I think,” or “I am not sure.”

The inherent beliefs surround theme seven: perceptions of disruptions are troubling. I find it concerning that faculty members are waiting for the major disruptions that are “life changing.” The faculty members know the “easy” behaviors, but when they start moving up the continuum (i.e., distressed signaling, threatening behaviors); they add their own individual interpretation of what each behavior or situation means to them. I believe this is when it becomes dangerous, because if they do not see a threat, is it actually being managed in an appropriate way? This could result in the catastrophic situation, they are fearful will occur.
**Question one-b.** *How do faculty members attribute why disruptive undergraduate students do what they do?* The participants describe changes they see institutionally, demographically, and attitudinally.

Concomitant with one another, are themes four: collegial support and five: classroom influences with both supporting this question. Each faculty member gives an example of a “group” or “types” of students they find to be disruptive within their classroom. Faculty members teaching the longest refer to multiple observations regarding changing student attitudes. This was something relayed via the participants own experiences, as well as colleagues interpretations regarding their experiences with disruptive students. In the participants’ experiences, they see a change from when they started teaching to now. They also describe colleagues’ experiences with changing students and the changing professional landscape.

Participants see a difference in student expectations involving (a) grading, (b) use of personal technology in the classroom, (c) “presence,” (d) “required” immediacy of faculty member response, and (e) belief in how faculty members “should” treat them in class. For many of the faculty members, they see a generational change in expectations between the millennial and generation X students they have previously taught.

Faculty members identify various student “types” who have been problematic for them in the classroom. Many are stereotypical assumptions (e.g., gender, race), but others suggest the need for increased services and training (e.g., veteran students, students with disabilities, students with mental illness). There is no consistent “smoking gun” as to who is the most disruptive in the classroom, other than undergraduate students in face-to-face classrooms and laboratories.
The only consistent issue about disruption is the improper use of personal technology within the classroom. While student “types” varied according to faculty member, the personal technology issue did not. Each faculty member is able to give an instance when personal technology (e.g., laptop, cell phone) interfered with (a) classroom ambience, (b) student “presence,” (c) student exam grades, and (d) interrupted faculty concentration and empowerment. This issue creates the most passionate responses. They realize personal technology is here to stay, but they do not know how to contain it successfully in the classroom.

**Question two.** *How do faculty members’ previous life experiences help them to make meaning of why they regard an undergraduate student’s behavior as disruptive?*

Faculty members deal with their first disruptive student experience during their initial teaching position. Participants shared this throughout the narratives. All, but one faculty member described at least one experience when they began teaching where they had to deal with a disruptive student.

Theme four: collegial support affirms this question. The faculty members share their disruptive student experiences with their colleagues. Sharing these stories helps the faculty members discover they are not alone. Each one learns someone else is experiencing similar student behaviors in her or his classroom, or finds out someone else is sharing the same student and having a similar experience with the student. Because it is a closed community, faculty members tell stories. It becomes an opportunity for mutual aid and support. It is also a chance for faculty members to see things from one another’s perspectives and to develop insight into what they believe to be true about their own abilities as professionals.
Theme one: pervasiveness of disruptive behavior supports this question. The faculty members also bring in their previous life experiences to use as a frame when working with students. Their backgrounds, whether it is personal (e.g., father influence, mother influence, collegiate experience) or professional (e.g., previous occupation, current ancillary occupation, additional specialized roles), each affects their interactions with students. The participants draw upon these skills and self-identified personality traits as a key to understanding their reactions to the students’ disruptive behavior. They use their backgrounds to understand why the students do what they do, but also to understand why they respond how they do towards the student.

**Question two-a.** What previous life experiences do faculty members incorporate to make meaning regarding their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting? Faculty members integrate a wide range of experiences into their repertoire for managing disruptive students.

Essential to understanding the faculty members’ experiences is recognizing the process behind their meaning making. Theme six: emotional costs supports this question. For many of these faculty members, what drives them is their sense of professional integrity. They have a job to do and they are not leaving until they complete the job. They believe in what they are doing. They take pride in their profession. They work very diligently to make sure these students have a sense of what it means to be a professional in their chosen field, as well as a successful student at their institution. These faculty members care and they want the best for their students, even if it may be a frustrating, anxiety provoking, or disheartening experience for them personally.
The faculty members also work to ensure they keep up with the latest techniques in the classroom and to stay current with the times. One thing I heard consistently from the participants is they continue evolving. The faculty members are constantly learning how to be better teachers and can articulate that knowledge. For some, they separate pedagogical knowledge from classroom management knowledge. There is an acknowledged progression of classroom management techniques and connecting with their students.

The faculty members bring in multiple experiences (e.g., childhood, clinical, collegiate, mentor relationship, military, previous work), but they connected-the-dots on their own. Theme one: pervasiveness of disruptive behavior supports this question. The faculty members who previously experienced disruptive students continue to have expectations for disruption at their current institution.

Still others use the life experiences of their colleagues to make meaning of their own experiences with disruptive students. Theme four: collegial support affirms this question. By staying up-to-date on what is happening in their departments, the faculty members take the opportunity to learn from one another. While I was aware of this on a meta-level, I am surprised at how important this is to the support and the health of the faculty members in managing disruptive student behaviors.

**Question two-b.** *If, and how, has this experience with disruptive undergraduate student behavior affected faculty members and their teaching?* The participants involved in this study are committed to their field and to the profession of teaching. They find mentors to aid them and, in turn, mentor others. These faculty members continually work on a trajectory of continual growth and self-improvement. They each express
commitment to their institution, their colleagues, and their programs. However, some are unsure if their institution is as committed to them and to their issues with disruptive students. These faculty members are the front lines. Even so, these faculty members have hope.

Theme two: faculty feeling of powerlessness supports this question. I think this is worrying. Doug expresses concern that if he manages the disruptive students, he might lose his position as an adjunct faculty member. Stacey believes if she, or one of her faculty members, files a concern, no one will respond to it. Jane Doe feels if she, or any colleagues, “makes a fuss,” the institution will blame the faculty members for what is happening within the classroom. If they want any help, they need to lean on the supportive arms of their colleagues, but really, they need to hunker down, lay low, and let things blow over. This discourages me. Things really have not changed from when I first started teaching at the university level many years ago. If the message is still that you need to find your own way out of this, then something is very wrong.

New Conceptual Framework

I initially created a conceptual framework to identify relationships between ideas. Even though I modified my understanding and linkages of ideas, I believe it helps to present my new understanding in a visual way (Creswell, 2008; Jabareen, 2009). In Figure 2, I make some slight adjustments to my conceptual map based upon the interviews of my participants and the subsequent data analysis and emergence of themes.
Figure 2. Updated: Conceptual Map of Faculty Experiences with Disruptive Undergraduate Students in Face-to-Face Classrooms or Laboratories.

The primary difference between this conceptual map and my first is I initially posited that a faculty member’s previous experience with a student with mental illness, with disabilities, and/or who was an international “other” influences how the faculty member experiences the behavior of the student. In my study, while a few faculty members mention concerns about mental illness, disabilities, and American racial minority status, Doug is the only one to use them as descriptive terms for why he perceives the students as disruptive. Julie the Cruise Director and Stacey describe the need for certain students (i.e., students with disabilities, students with mental illness, veteran students) to self-advocate and to utilize campus services. They also describe the importance of referring students that are concerning to faculty members to appropriate campus resources. Stacey is the only one making actual referrals to her institution’s team, Julie the Cruise Director does not.
What I discovered is that these faculty members filter student behavior through what is happening “in the moment.” By using previous life experiences (e.g., own, colleagues), they make attributions and interact with both the student and the context. From there, the faculty member describes the student behavior as disruptive, or very rarely as threatening, and then makes a choice of how he or she acts in the situation.

**Relationship of Results to Existing Studies**

I am using both attribution theory and symbolic interaction theory to describe the interaction between faculty members’ experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classrooms and laboratories. These theories provide a framework for examining how faculty members understand and assign meaning to their experiences. The themes I identify are newly developed. No other research has identified these themes as aspects of the faculty experience.

Prior research primarily focused on the behavioral review or threat assessment process (Cornell et al., 2004; O’Toole, 2000; Vossekuil et al, 2002), institutional responses to the shootings at Virginia Tech (National Campus Safety and Security Project, 2008; Randazzo & Cameron, 2012; Rasmussen & Johnson, 2008; Suthers & Lynch, 2008; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007), training protocols (Borum et al., 2010; Deisinger et al., 2008; Fein et al., 2002; Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008; O’Toole, 2000; Sokolow et al., 2009; Storeyet al., 2011), incivility effects on faculty members (Luparell, 2007), and identification of students of concern (Cornell et al., 2004; Dunkle et al., 2008; Jablonski et al., 2008; Vossekuil et al., 2002).

The literature does not indicate the tipping point whereby a faculty member determines whether a student’s behavior is disruptive enough to warrant a referral to the
behavioral review (BRT) or threat assessment team (TAT). Although these ongoing efforts provide us with information about the threat assessment process itself and the assessed individuals, we know little about the breadth and depth of the faculty members who actually initiate these referrals.

This research uses attribution theory and symbolic interaction theory to analyze the data as applied to the themes. This research adds new knowledge to the literature by identifying emergent themes affecting and influencing faculty experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classrooms and laboratories. I am including a summary of top findings of the study and comparison to previous research findings in Table 9.

Table 9
Findings of the Study and Comparison to Previous Research Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings (Gillespie, 2014)</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme One: Pervasiveness of disruptive behavior – occurrences of disruptive behavior within classroom</td>
<td>Supports Ausbrooks et al., 2011; Black et al., 2011; Clark, 2009; Lampman et al., 2009 that disruptive student behavior is occurring multiple times, increasing, and faculty members have at least one experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme One: Pervasiveness of disruptive behavior – occurrences of disruptive behavior throughout academic career</td>
<td>Supports MacLeans (2008) frame of normalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Two: Faculty feeling of powerlessness – disempowerment resulting in a variety of concerns and fears</td>
<td>Supports Amada, 1999; Deering, 2011; Lampman et al., 2009 in that faculty express concerns regarding lack of institutional support and hesitate to make reports because of beliefs regarding potential negative outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Two: Faculty feeling of powerlessness – managing disruptive situation as a local rather than an institutional issue</td>
<td>No previous research found, thus Gillespie (2014) is a new finding.</td>
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Table 9 – Continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings (Gillespie, 2014)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Theme Three: Fatalistic thinking of faculty – use of worst case scenario as rule rather than exception</td>
<td>Contrads Starbuck, 2009; Viscusi and Zeckhauser, 2006 people’s underestimation of risk probabilities, thus Gillespie (2014) is a new finding.</td>
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<td>Theme Three: Fatalistic thinking of faculty – tendency to minimize the micro disruptions, because they do not meet the threshold of a Virginia Tech threat.</td>
<td>Extends Smith, 2011; previous research on normalization ritual and willful disattention, thus Gillespie (2014) is a new finding.</td>
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<td>Theme Four: Collegial support – confirmation from peers</td>
<td>Supports Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Swann and Brooks, 2012 that faculty members will seek affirmation from peers when dealing with disruptive students</td>
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<td>Theme Four: Collegial support – assumed knowledge and public stage</td>
<td>No previous research found, thus Gillespie (2014) is a new finding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Five: Classroom influences – overuse of personal technology</td>
<td>Supports Foral et al., 2010; Keup, 2008; McKinne and Martin, 2010 findings regarding undergraduate student use of personal technology in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Five: Classroom influences – changing student attitude</td>
<td>Supports Cain et al., 2012; Clark and Springer, 2007; Kopp and Finney, 2013; Lippmann et al., 2009; Nordstrom et al., 2009; Twenge, 2013; Westerman et al., 2012 regarding consumer mentality and narcissistic traits of millennial students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Five: Classroom influences – intertwining of changing student attitudes and overuse of personal technology creating a perceived lack of student “presence” within the classroom</td>
<td>No previous research found, thus Gillespie (2014) is a new finding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Six: Emotional costs – emotional reactance to disruptive behavior</td>
<td>Supports Luparell (2007) findings on physical, cognitive, and ancillary affects of incivility on faculty members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Six: Emotional costs – connection between investing in prepping students for future careers, continuation of disruptive behavior, and resulting negative affect</td>
<td>No previous research found, thus Gillespie (2014) is a new finding.</td>
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Table 9 – Continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings (Gillespie, 2014)</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
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<tr>
<td>Theme Seven: Perceptions of disruptions – personal definitions of disruptive behavior</td>
<td>Supports Dixon &amp; Dougherty, 2010; Drory &amp; Zaidman, 2006; Hollander &amp; Gordon, 2006; Luparell, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Swann &amp; Brooks, 2012 exploring how faculty members conceptualize their own personal definitions of disruptive behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Seven: Perceptions of disruptions – regular classrooms disruptions are easier to manage and identify, then disruptions “aimed” at the faculty member</td>
<td>Extension on Samnanai, 2013; thus Gillespie (2014) is a new finding.</td>
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Below, I discuss the integration of previously reviewed literature, application of theory to the seven themes that emerged in this study.

I emphasize how each relates to higher education and to the participants experiences with disruptive students.

**Theme One: Pervasiveness of Disruptive Behavior**

The pervasiveness of disruptive behavior explains the experiences the faculty members encountered with disruptive student behavior beginning with their first teaching position, and then continuing throughout their teaching careers. Previous studies suggest disruptive student behavior has been increasing over time, with faculty members across the nation reporting an increasing trend towards disruptive and uncivil behavior (Alexander-Snow, 2004; AlKandari, 2011; Amada, 1999; Ausbrooks et al., 2011; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Clark, 2009; Clark & Springer, 2007; Gilroy, 2008).

According to the participants, each semester, faculty members assume, or “know,” they will have students who will be disruptive. The majority of students are well-behaved, but every semester, there is always a small percentage of students “acting out” and drawing
the faculty member’s attention to the disruptive behavior. It is something everyone experiences.

Supporting this construct, I turn to multiple studies discussed in my previous review of the literature. Research by Black et al. (2011) found 47% of the faculty members studied reported disruptive student behavior occurring multiple times a week to multiple times a semester. Lampman et al. (2009) reported that 96% of female faculty members and 99% of male faculty members experienced at least one incident of student incivility. Luparell (2004, 2007) described the continual issues associated with incivility towards nursing faculty. Previous studies suggest disruptive student behavior in classrooms has been increasing over time (Ausbrooks et al., 2011; Clark, 2009). The participants in my study each spoke of some type of disruptive student behavior in her or his classroom. Stacy, who has been teaching the longest, has noted increases overtime. Cody cited colleagues who have taught for many years who have also noted this trend.

Attribution theory may suggest that faculty members make attributions regarding the prevalence of disruptive behavior within the profession of university teaching. Many in academe assume incivility is widespread in all levels, at all institutions (Williams et al., 2013). Felps et al., (2006) argues there is often one individual in a group or a team that negatively affects its functioning or undermines its smooth running. One negative effect of their disruptive influence is learning in the classroom. Each of the participants in Felps et al., experienced situations with “bad apples” who negatively impacted the smooth operation of their surroundings, just as the faculty members in this study report they expect to see “bad” students within their classrooms who will be counterproductive to its functioning. The participants in my study expect that about 5% of their students
will be disruptive, and that this small percentage of their students will take up the majority of their time.

Symbolic interaction proposes no matter where or how long a faculty member teaches; they share similar experiences. MacLean (2008) suggests multiple cognitive frames govern how professionals interpret their environments. This results in a joint construct that is unique to each particular context. Since the faculty members all share the framework of postsecondary teaching, this similarity of experiences gives them the “frame of normalization” across institutions. It helps explain why it appears ubiquitous throughout the profession and why there was such similarity between the experiences of the participants. The participants in my study who have taught across institution types (i.e., university, community college) have the expectation they will encounter disruptive students as part of the institutional landscape.

**Theme Two: Faculty Feeling of Powerlessness**

Faculty feeling of powerlessness derives itself from the faculty members’ descriptions indicating their lack of legitimacy in controlling disruptive student behavior. The participants believe they have limited options for managing these issues. They determine policies regarding acceptable classroom behavior in their syllabi. They also choose to refer disruptive students elsewhere on campus. The faculty members do not believe these actions will influence whether the student changes her or his disruptive behavior. It gives the participants a sense they are “managing” the situation in name only. Because the faculty members do not see a cause-and-effect relationship to these actions, there is disempowerment within the classroom. Faculty members’ feeling of powerlessness results in (a) feelings of blame and responsibility, (b) concerns about job
security, (c) conviction of their inability to act, (d) belief in an institutional black hole for student of concern referrals, and (e) low utilization of available resources.

Early on, Amada (1999) indicated faculty concerns regarding lack of institutional and administrative support. He described faculty members as being fearful of disempowerment, blame, punishment, and shame. Deering (2011) suggests this is a continuing concern of faculty members. She explains that many avoid discussing disruptive student behavior because they fear the institutional response will be to support the student, rather than the faculty member. This results in blaming them for creating the disruptive behavior situation. Lampman et al., (2009) suggests faculty members may hesitate to report issues with disruptive students because they are (a) concerned about tenure, (b) worried regarding future employment, (c) ignorant of the process, and (d) disempowered. These concerns are similar to the ones expressed by my participants.

Attribution theory may suggest that faculty members need to believe their colleagues and their institution “back” their actions in managing disruptive student behavior (Keashly & Newman, 2010). In my study, the participants turn to their colleagues for support, developing mentorship relationships, or mentoring others (Suplee & Gardner, 2009). By using their colleagues as a support structure, they build trust interdepartmentally, rather than institutionally. They manage their disruptive situations at a local, rather than an institutional level. As reasons for discussing matters with their colleagues or within their departments, rather than with “administration,” they describe (a) distrust of the “institution,” (b) lack of institutional support for faculty members, (c) professional instability, or (d) use of the reporting mechanism as a means to reduce institutional liability, rather than help for faculty members.
McCormick and Barnett (2010) suggest stress and burnout from issues such as disruptive student behavior result in faculty members exiting the profession. Faculty members who are unable to manage disruptive behavior attribute it to personal failure. This creates a cycle of (a) withdrawal and depersonalization, (b) frustration, (c) negative emotions, and (d) inability to achieve professional goals. It ultimately results in burnout.

For the faculty members in my study, while speaking of their own frustrations, they do not describe themselves as burned-out or appear to indicate signs of burnout (e.g., physical and emotional exhaustion). They admit to stress when dealing with the disruptive student behavior. Most of the participants are still new to the profession. Cody describes a colleague who acknowledged he had reached the point of burnout and was exiting the profession because he no longer wanted to deal with the disruptive behavior of the students. Jane Doe describes “giving up” at the end of each semester. This could be indicative of burnout. I am curious whether she remains in this profession, or at this institution.

Symbolic interaction theory would suggest that faculty members rely on the support of their colleagues and, regardless of the number of training sessions held, are cynical or even doubtful of the support of their institution (Gawley, 2007). Gawley argues that trust arises from interaction between participants. We trust by willingly interacting with an individual based on how he or she “defines” her or himself. Gawley (2007, 2008) goes on to say, faculty members develop trust of university administrators when they are transparent, authentic, present, and fostering stability within the institution. Gawley (2008) says that transparency allows administrators to make decisions about what actions to take about information given to them. It also has the ethical burden and
responsibility of disclosing knowledge, without concealment, even if it gives the institution a proverbial “black eye.” Some faculty members in my study feel alone. The members of the “administration” are described as concerned with (a) covering themselves in case of potential litigation, (b) focusing on the student as consumer by making classroom disruptions a failing of the faculty member, and (c) remaining an anonymous depersonalized threat who will not rehire faculty members who make too many waves by having a disruptive student. The feeling they cannot trust their institutions to look out for them frustrates many of them.

**Theme Three: Fatalistic Thinking of Faculty**

Fatalistic thinking of faculty describes the participants’ tendency to minimize the micro-disruptions occurring within their own classrooms as not being “bad enough” because they do not meet the threshold of a Virginia Tech threat. There is a tendency to use the worst-case scenario as the rule, rather than the exception. For many of the faculty members within my study, they are waiting for the “big event” to occur and believe they are lucky that it has not already happened.

Fortunately, the potential for a school shooting the magnitude of a Virginia Tech is infinitesimal. Colleges and universities are still generally safe from this type of action (Flynn & Heitzmann, 2008; Fox & Savage, 2009). Yet, there is growing concern that it could happen “here.” Starbuck (2009) suggests that such rare events influence individual responses including biased probabilities about whether something is going to occur. In agreement, Viscusi and Zeckhauser (2006) report the tendency for individuals to underestimate the possibility of such an event. This does not explain why it was foremost in two of the six faculty members’ awareness, though all recognized it as a possibility.
There was a tendency of the participants to use the worst-case scenario as the rule rather than the exception, with each one assuming that was the potential outcome for all such disruptive student behavior events. Kimhi and Zysberg (2009) think it is because there is a belief these types of events lack randomness and, as a result, are controllable. Keinan and Tal (2005) argue the more “Type A” traits a person has (e.g., ambitiousness, competitiveness, impatience, hostility), the greater the need to maintain control within their environment. In addition, in order to prepare for the event that has yet to occur, Willis et al., (2011) suggests the driving motivator is a faculty member’s concern regarding her or his own mortality that increases the desire to find ways to maintain the perception of control. Therefore, a faculty member would be more apt to prepare for, or expect, such an eventuality. Hart (2014) would concur that a preparation of this sort allows faculty members to gain a semblance of control they are not currently feeling. Both Jane Doe and Julie the Cruise Director discussed planning and needing to control their environments. They are also the two most vocal about their expectations that the worst is yet to come.

Attribution theory may suggest that the faculty members who agreed, expected to see mostly “good” students in their classrooms, some “bad” students, and “those” students who will always be disruptive. Hammer (2005) posits faculty members are in a continual cycle of meaning-making regarding student behavior. These attributions tend to be very simplistic (e.g., student promoting and positive or student distancing and negative). If the faculty member perceives the student in a positive light, he or she extrapolates that to mean the student’s “good” qualities are innate, while any “bad” qualities or behaviors are due to environmental causes. The converse also holds true. If a
faculty member perceives the student in a negative light, he or she interprets that to mean the student’s “bad” qualities are innate, while any “good” qualities are due to environmental factors. This explanatory reasoning is evident in the participants’ assumptions they will have those “bad” students who will be disruptive in their classrooms every semester. These “bad” students set the stage for the “worse” one to come.

In its most basic terms in symbolic interaction, the interaction determines the meaning. One paradox worth noting is that within each interaction there is a “normalization ritual” where actors utilize “willful disattention” in order to maintain the equilibrium of the social relationship (Smith, 2011). For the participants in my study, there is a suggestion of fatalism on the part of the faculty members when it comes to their expectation that students’ engagement in disruptive behavior is “just the way it is” and they can expect it to continue. Their willful disattention and normalization ritual occurs in the small classroom corrections that occur regarding the disruptive behavior. However, they also “pick their battles” or “overlook” many of the behaviors until it reaches a point where they “must” respond to the student’s disruptive behavior. Because the faculty members have an expectation they will find students “like this” in every classroom, they develop the belief there is very little they can do to counteract this behavior. Since they cannot stop the students from acting in this manner, this normalizes the actions within the classroom. As disruptive behavior increases, it becomes a slippery slope (Ausbrooks et al., 2011; Clark, 2009). Because it has become a “normal” part of the classroom backdrop, when the “big event” occurs, the faculty members “know” there is little they could do to stop it. As an extension of Smith, the participants in my study
minimized the micro-disruptions because they did not meet the threshold of the Virginia Tech threat.

**Theme Four: Collegial Support**

Collegial support identifies the connection my participants have to their colleagues. Faculty members talk to each other, about each other, about themselves, and their students, a lot. Faculty members play their professional lives out on a public stage. “Everyone” knows “everything” that is happening within the classroom. When a faculty member has a disruptive student in the classroom, he or she has colleagues to depend on, who already know the score about the situation, the faculty member, and the student.

MacDonald (2013) suggests that as part of the acclimation process, faculty members attempt to develop an identity allowing them to know who they are and what their place is within the institution. It gives them the opportunity to understand their similarities and differences within this sphere. Gazza (2009) agrees the support of colleagues is critical to success, especially as a new faculty member. Suplee and Gardner (2009) offer transitional processes giving faculty members the opportunity to become a part of the unified “whole” so they know who to call upon when issues arise. Because faculty prefer interacting with those who are known and a part of their social and occupational realm, Gomez et al. (2009) see this mechanism as a way for them to verify their ingroup status. Faculty members seek confirmation from their peers when they feel threatened by a disruptive student within the classroom (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Swann & Brooks, 2012). The faculty members in my study have mentors, discuss various strategies, and confirm solutions with their peers for their dealings with disruptive students.
Attribution theory may suggest that faculty members recognize students who are disruptive in one class, are likely to be disruptive in another class. Even if they wanted to keep student disruption a secret, it is impossible to do so. When examining how faculty members share information between one another about disruptive students, deHaan and Wissink (2013) suggest these attributions are a co-construction between conversational partners. Sharing these attributions of student behavior creates a “reaction of inferences” between each individual’s frame of the situation. Therefore, when you have a student who is behaving in a disruptive manner in one class, the telling of your experience to your colleagues shapes their experiences with the student in their classes. They become part of the shared narrative surrounding this student. Jane Doe discusses her colleague’s relief in having a student who was disruptive in class be acknowledged as disruptive in another faculty members class, adding credence to her attribution of the behavior. Whether the next faculty member in the “chain” would have seen the student’s behavior as disruptive is difficult to determine, as the faculty member has already co-constructed the attribution of “the disruptive student” with her colleague. However, describing the issue as the “student’s behavior” and not “her” was a relief, as it often is for many faculty members. This level of validation gives support of the attributional processes that frame the understanding of what makes a student disruptive.

Attribution theory may also suggest that many faculty members share their opinions via the informal grapevine as a way to benefit both personally and socially (Alexandrov et al., 2013). When a faculty member shares positive information (e.g., story of the disruptive student behavior told with empathy and concern), he or she works to enhance her or his own identity by utilizing social comparison (i.e., my instance is
similar) and social bonding (i.e., binding us together with a shared commonality or link). When a faculty member shares negative information (e.g., “helping” behavior, “humble” brags, “sharing” strategies to manage behavior), he or she affirms her or his identity by utilizing social comparison (i.e., it is her or him, not me). Alexandrov et al. reminds us this form of social interaction is inherent in any organization. For faculty members, it becomes a part of the fabric of their interactions with one another. It draws faculty members together into a community of peers. Through the telling of their colleagues’ experiences, Cody and Jane Doe utilized each as a type of reflexive mirror. In every story, they would engage in social comparison, framing their own self-image by editorializing on the events as reported (e.g., it seems like a lot of work, I hope I get out before I get like that). This gave them the opportunity to not only look at what they were doing in their classrooms, but also to compare it to what others were doing in their classes.

Symbolic interaction theory may suggest that faculty members recognize they are part of something bigger, with the informal grapevine serving as the “truth teller” for the department. Salo (2008) describes the unique paradox of a faculty member enjoying the autonomy of the classroom, filled with thousands of daily individual faculty-student interactions, in comparison to the spontaneous and informal interactions occurring with colleagues on a daily basis. An inherent interdependence exists. While faculty members maintain the independence for what occurs within the classroom, they have a dependent relationship with their colleagues, department, and institution. Salo goes on to say that organizationally, colleagues have the most impact on the construction of a faculty member’s decision-making and teaching. The three female faculty members in my study
rely on colleagues and mentors to help them problem-solve issues with disruptive students. This may be a result of personality, leadership style, or gendered expectations. Swapping cautionary tales of others’ experiences, participants also learn vicariously about what to do about disruptive students. Doug made the decision to address a situation occurring in his classroom because the student was talking about it in another faculty member’s class. There is a feeling of being in a “looking glass” because “so many” people know what is happening; they are “forced” to reach out for the support of one another. This “assumed knowledge,” or the belief that others “know” what is occurring within the classroom or with disruptive students without firsthand experience, amongst the faculty and their colleagues may lead to some erroneous beliefs and actions. The assumption the disruptive behavior is playing out on a perceived public stage (i.e., belief that “everyone” knows what everyone else is doing) often results in faculty choosing to engage in preemptive perception checks with one another so as to share their side of the story. On the upside, this allows faculty members to gain much needed perspective and mentorship. On the downside, faculty are not taking the next step of talking to behavioral review and threat assessment teams. Instead, it stops at the collegial level and continues to circulate in-house.

**Theme Five: Classroom Influences**

Classroom influences describes the effect both personal technology and students classroom demeanor have on the educational process and participants. There is an intertwining of personal technology in how the students interact and are perceived as “being present” within the classroom. Faculty members see the overuse of personal technology (e.g., laptops, cell phones) as the biggest disruption they face. Its creep
within the classroom continually influences how students relate with the faculty members, with each other, and with understanding how it affects their probable future professional selves. Generationally, the differences go beyond mere age, but looks at how the students of today are different from the undergraduate students of yesterday. Their different needs and beliefs dramatically influence and change the classroom environment leading to the perception of disruptive behavior.

Students believing they are entitled to receiving high grades, independent of mastery of content is not new to this profession (Kopp & Finney, 2013). Cain et al. (2012) identified the increasing “aura of entitlement” as stemming from an increasing consumer mentality and narcissistic traits of many students now in school. Additional researchers (Clark & Springer, 2007; Nordstrom et al., 2009) have supported this notion. Westerman et al. (2012) argue it is associated with the changing personality characteristics (e.g., narcissistic, self-involved) of millennial students. Twenge (2013) concurs, arguing there has been an increase in narcissistic tendencies and mental health issues of students born in this generation. This profound shift, almost a seismic increase in these traits for this generation of undergraduate students, is concerning. Lippman et al. (2009) suggests it creates the consumer mentality experienced by the participants in my study. It also results in the objectionable belief that it is acceptable to use personal technology whenever, and however, “the student” deems necessary (Foral et al., 2010; Keup, 2008; McKinne & Martin, 2010). Stork and Hartley (2009) also identified how students believe their faculty members should treat them (e.g., be considerate of “their” time, understanding of “their” issues). It is obvious the participants in my study missed this memo.
Attribution theory may also suggest why each of the faculty members in this study attributes disruptive student behavior to a predominant issue of improper use of personal technology in the classroom. There are additional supplemental reasons for student’s disruptive behaviors, such as a host of different student “types” (e.g., disability, veteran status, gender, maturity, and race) or situation (e.g., lack of teaching experience, behavior after a difficult exam, failing the class) used by individual participants. However, the number one frustration repeatedly described, was the use of personal technology (Foral et al., 2010; Keup, 2008; McKinne & Martin, 2010). Faculty members also describe associated traits (e.g., low impulse control, lack of awareness, cultural norms) as attributions to explain her or his understanding of why the students are behaving in a disruptive manner.

Gailey and Lee (2005) suggest the process for determining responsibility for actions has three components. Key to understanding how we “blame,” is examining the actor characteristics (e.g., disruptive student), the respondent characteristics (e.g., faculty member), and the social organizational context (e.g., postsecondary institution, department, major). Faculty member’s take into account their attributions about the disruptive students and the context. Based on their mental calculation, they determine both a response to the action and to the individual. Since each combination of faculty member, student, and institution is unique, this frame helps to account for both the differences and the similarities in how each faculty member in my study describes her or his experience.

Symbolic interaction theory may also support the evidence of an increasing number of instances of disruptive students in the changing institutional landscape. When
attempting to understand incivility from this perspective, Phillips (2006) suggests many of the issues of incivility stem from (a) generational differences between faculty and students, (b) individual student narcissism, (c) an “aura of entitlement” on the part of the students, and (d) a lack of empathy and concern for others. These findings echo many of the examples given by the faculty members in this study. The faculty members teaching the longest, or who discuss issues with experienced colleagues, notice generational differences. Moore (2012) argues that it is not just the students who have changed, but also the institutional “system” that has changed. She questions whether we are using shorthand to interact with our reality. Both Jane Doe and Stacey alluded to this during their interviews. They observe how students are acting in the classroom and while Jane Doe questions the changing cultural mores influencing how students are behaving; Stacey wonders how much is resulting from a change in her perceptions.

Neither attribution theory nor symbolic interaction theory take into account the faculty members’ description of presence. Jane Doe attempted to explain it, as “an air” about the students. An indefinable behavior is occurring and noticeable in the classroom that she could not define. Other participants mentioned it as well, none of whom attempted a definition. It appears connected to both the overuse of personal technology and the changing student in the classroom. It causes disruption when noticed and the faculty members attempt to compensate for it when it does occur.

**Theme Six: Emotional Costs**

Emotional costs describe what the participants face because they encounter this behavior. Faculty members are attempting to prepare students for their future professions. They express hope students see the connection between their current
behavior and their future professional life. In my study, they discussed growing increasingly frustrated they are spending time and energy managing disruptive student behavior. Their responses run the emotional gamut from “anxious,” to “mad,” to “despair,” and other emotions in-between.

Luparell (2007) describes the impact of student incivility on faculty members as having a deleterious effect. It affects faculty members physically (e.g., sleep deprivation, insomnia), cognitively (e.g., self-doubt, self-blame, lack of self-efficacy), emotionally (e.g., rumination, triggering, posttraumatic-stress), and ancillary (e.g., time, money, disempowerment, motivationally, professionally). Reybold (2005) suggests prolonged conflict leads to disillusionment and dissatisfaction. It increases the potential for exiting the profession. While there are no faculty members at that point in my study, Cody tells the tale of his colleague who left for that reason. I am also concerned about Jane Doe. Her demeanor and her description of ending her semesters by “giving up” and just “wanting them to be over” are concerning. It is not what she says, but rather the nonverbal way in which she describes her experiences that give me pause.

Attribution theory may also support the participants that attribute the disruptive behavior of students in direct service majors to not being ready for fieldwork or not having “connected-the-dots” regarding how their classroom behavior is perceived professionally. Halpern and Desrochers (2005) suggest this may be due to a student’s own self-handicapping attributions. Students who go into an experience underprepared, then fail, self-determine it is not because of a “lack of ability” or “low intelligence,” but rather because of a “lack of effort” as a way to save face. If a field supervisor removes the student from a field placement because of “disruptive” behavior, the student focuses
on the excuse that it was because of “them.” There is not a connection between behavior and consequences. The student protects her or himself from any attempt to be successful or any possibility of failure. As Julie the Cruise Director describes the response of students in her field placements, the disruptive behavior may be a result of a student self-handicapping rather than acting in a disruptive manner due to a threat.

Attribution theory may also suggest that each faculty member’s emotional reaction to disruptive student behavior and the personal qualities they bring to the situation influences the outcome. Halpern and Desrochers (2005) suggest the faculty members who clearly outline student expectations, who hold students accountable, and who aid them in understanding how their behavior is affecting others can often successfully manage their classrooms. Many of the faculty members in my study are successful in classroom management for behaviors on the lowest levels (i.e., benign incivility) of the disruptive behavior continuum (Appendix O). They directly confront disruptive students. They do not confront them each time it occurs. They wait until there is a recurrent pattern of disruptive behavior or until they can no longer tolerate the behaviors and then address the students or the class as a whole.

Symbolic interaction theory may suggest that faculty members recognize these issues, but also realize they have to facilitate the process of guiding these students towards making these connections on their own. Owens et al., (2010) argues key to this process is helping students to internalize how others see them. This process involves helping the student to look holistically (e.g., self, role identities, surrounding cultural and situational factors, collective identity). For many of these faculty members, they are attempting to help students master these multiple identities. They understand that some
of the disruptions are a result of the conflict between learning how to master the full sense of “who” the student “is becoming” coming in to play within the classroom. It still does not explain the process by which faculty members invest in preparing students for their future careers and experience negative affect resulting from a continuation of disruptive student behavior, when the student does not generalize current behaviors to future professional actions and attitudes. Jane Doe presents this negatively, expressing concern about students’ lack of ability to connect interpersonally. Cody describes colleagues who agree with Jane Doe’s assessment, but laughs good-naturedly and says they will “probably be okay.” Stacy describes a mentorship process for graduate students, but not undergraduates, and Julie the Cruise Director identifies the need for students to internalize the professional ethics quickly. Each expresses frustration at working with students who continue to be disruptive.

Symbolic interaction theory may also suggest that the effective response to disruptive behavior is dependent on how well faculty members manage the classroom and their emotions, as well as whether they understand and use their own personal strengths while continuously evolving. Hartel et al., (2008) suggest the emotional climate occurring within the situation influences the interactions between actors (e.g., faculty member and student behaving in a disruptive manner). The individual who is able to sustain key emotional management skills (e.g., optimism, low frustration, positive affect, low anger, low worry, high enthusiasm, solution-focused orientation) is better able to manage the interaction, her or his impression of the other, and satisfaction with the situation. Most of the faculty members I interviewed maintain successful emotional management skills, allowing for the development of a positive communication climate
within their classrooms. A few faculty members report reaching the point of becoming angry or upset. Each addresses their classes regarding the disruptive behavior when they are irritated or frustrated with the student behavior. Doug is the only one who sent anonymous surveys asking the class if it is acceptable to manage the classroom. When the response is positive, it buoys his confidence and increases his satisfaction. Only Jane Doe reports a decrease in satisfaction or a decrease in the effective functioning of her classroom.

**Theme Seven: Perceptions of Disruptions**

Perceptions of disruptions describes the idea that dealing with “regular” classroom disruptions are easier than dealing with disruptions “aimed” at the faculty member. “Passive” disruptive behavior (e.g., not targeted at the faculty members: texting, sleeping, tardiness), are easily identifiable. Faculty members perceive the ability to control or manage it, as possible. When the disruptive behavior is more “active” (e.g., directed towards the faculty member: challenging authority, threatening, unwanted attention), it is minimized, not recognized, or ill defined. They then, grapple with ways to manage both the behavior and the situation.

Faculty members are the first line of defense for noticing a student who needs a referral. Conversely, the faculty member often finds making that determination of when to do so difficult (Harwood, 2011; McBain, 2008). Faculty members personally define disruptive or uncivil student behavior (Luparell, 2007). As they develop their personal definitions, they also reevaluate beliefs about self and how they portray their “face” to students, colleagues, and administrators (Dixon & Dougherty, 2010; Drory & Zaidman, 2006; Hollander & Gordon, 2006). This construction of the disruptive student event
requires outside validation by their colleagues (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Swann & Brooks, 2012). Until that occurs, faculty members engage in classroom management techniques and strategies designed to deescalate their own discomfort (Murphy, 2010; Wingert & Molitor, 2009). As in previous studies, the faculty members in my study comfortably use classroom management techniques on well-defined lower level behaviors. The higher-level behaviors that are more open to definition are easier for the faculty members to minimize, ignore, or avoid.

Attribution theory may explain why the research participants’ experiences support the findings of both Lagnado and Channon (2008) and Rosset (2008). They posit individuals make attributions of causality and intentionality based on whether they believe the other person is responsible for her or his behavior. The more the person was held responsible, the more blameworthy the verdict. The research participants’ suggest students are acting in a disruptive manner because of an “aura of entitlement” or a “lack of ability to make connections.” The faculty members judge the students acting in an “entitled manner” more severely than the students acting in a “just not getting it” manner.

Continuing with an attribution theory perspective, the research of Crandall et al. (2007) supports the idea that observers blame the victim for her or his behaviors. Participants who describe student behavior at the middle or upper levels (i.e., distressed signaling, threatening behavior) of the disruptive behavior continuum (Appendix O) suggest the students act in this manner because of (a) skill deficits, (b) disabling conditions (e.g., mental illness, learning disability, attention deficit), or (c) military or veteran status. Focusing on conditions over which the student has limited control increases misunderstandings with faculty members (Denhart 2008; Rao, 2004). Julie the
Cruise Director and Stacy expect students with disabilities to advocate for themselves and only to receive the allowed accommodations through the disability office on campus. Faculty members (e.g., Doug, Julie the Cruise Director) perceive the students who (a) did not take advantage of services, (b) expect services they did not self-advocate for, or (c) who were unable to self-manage their behaviors or emotions as disruptive.

One reason why it is difficult to articulate how the disruptive behavior affects the faculty member is that many of the behaviors are low-level nonverbal and verbal signs of disrespect and contempt (e.g., name-calling, derogatory comments, eye rolling) and have ambiguous intentionality. It is difficult to ascertain if the student means to behave in a disruptive manner (Lim et al., 2008). When this occurs, the participants question whether they have the right to act or if it is bad enough to do anything about it. It is because of the nuanced nature of the behavior that they struggle to define and act upon it.

Attribution research by Samnanai (2013) suggests subtle behaviors are easily misinterpreted and attributed to environmental causes. As a result, she indicates some are unaware they were subjected to bullying behavior. A number of the participants described incidences of disruptive behavior that are a form of “bullying” by students (e.g., continued contemptuous nonverbal behavior). Samnanai indicates it becomes increasingly difficult to stop this type of behavior because the witnesses are unable to distinguish it as an issue unless they have their attention drawn to it. The insidious nature of this type of behavior is one possibility why it continues throughout a faculty member’s semester or professional career. The participants notice the behavior, but believe it is not severe enough for them to take any action.
From a symbolic interaction perspective, defining and giving meaning to a situation may give the individual power and control over it (Hallett, 2007). For the behaviors identified as benign incivility on the disruptive behavior continuum (Appendix O), the participants develop more strategies for dealing with each situation and evidence a greater comfort level when discussing the occurrences. The behaviors identified as distressed signaling or threatening are more difficult to define. As a result, the meanings are more personalized and the faculty members “talk around the idea of” the behaviors rather than describing the behaviors themselves. They give examples and situations. They do not take emotional ownership of the occurrence.

At the lowest levels (i.e., benign incivility) of the disruptive behavior continuum (Appendix O), there is consensus regarding the descriptions, definitions, and examples of disruptive undergraduate student (e.g., use of personal technology, sleeping, tardiness) that follow the examples used within my definition. As the disruptive student behavior moved up the continuum (i.e., distressed signaling, threatening behavior), the definitions became more personal and diverged according to the faculty members life experiences and professional points of views. Symbolic interaction reminds us that multiple meanings emerge based on multiple perspectives and each influences meaning making (Dixon & Dougherty, 2010). From this perspective, the personalization at the upper levels is understandable because they form through the interaction between the two actors (i.e., faculty member and student) and it is only through this interaction that each creates a meaning and a definition (Wagner, 2007). As the participants engaged in describing their experiences, the need for cocreating the operationalized definitions for our interview
became apparent. My conceptualization of disruptive undergraduate student behavior is not their conceptualization of the experience.

Additionally, symbolic interaction may explain the participants’ experiences supporting research conducted by Innes (2004). He suggests individuals construct their own unique signal of risk surrounding an interaction with another. When someone is not “tuning into a signal,” it fades into “background noise” that each person retrieves when needed. According to Innes, each individual personalizes the recognition and interpretation of these. As the faculty members in my study interact with their students, they do not tune into, all risk, all of the time. Their focus on disruptive behavior ebbs and flows, depending upon their focus of attention, context, and other variables occurring within the interaction. It is when they reach their personal limit, they “tune in” and react to the student’s disruptive behavior.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study focuses on understanding how faculty members experience disruptive undergraduate student behavior in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory. While the findings of this study are helpful in understanding these faculty members’ experiences of undergraduate student behavior, there needs to be more research to understand this complex topic. It was not my intent to study the system or the culture, but through my interviews with the participants, I did learn about the culture in each of the institutions.

The topic of disruptive student undergraduate behavior in face-to-face classrooms and laboratories is an important area for further research. While there are some studies on this topic, recent studies have focused on disruptive student behavior, student incivility, and/or faculty incivility, but not the faculty members’ experiences with the
incivility. From the classroom and laboratory, to the practicum or field setting, direct service programs (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work) need to understand the impact of disruptive behavior on the educational process and on their professions as a whole. The following suggestions for research will increase the knowledge and level of understanding regarding these important issues.

This study includes only faculty members’ perceptions on disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom and laboratories. There needs to be further research understanding disruptive behavior from various perspectives, including perceptions from faculty, students, and observers of the same event. Research needs to continue in the areas of disruptive and/or uncivil faculty-to-student, disruptive and/or uncivil students-to-faculty, disruptive and/or uncivil student-to-student, and disruptive and/or uncivil faculty-to-faculty. It also needs to continue with graduate students and in an online environment. This is necessary for (a) understanding the dynamics of disruptive behavior/incivility, (b) determining effective ways to prevent it from occurring, (c) deterring its impediment of the learning process, and (d) preventing it from snowballing into a greater institutional issue. There needs to be further study to understand how disruptive behavior in direct service majors (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work) manifests, and how it affects the people involved, as well as its continued impact on the teaching-learning environment. While the participants in my study touch on the majors and their step into the professional realm, they remain focused on the here-and-now, rather than the future.
More extensive research needs to examine the role gender, ethnicity, role identity, and regional differences plays in disruptive behavior and/or incivility. Research focusing on non-direct service majors may also be enlightening.

**Limitations**

There were a few limitations in this study. The first limitation I find is the size and selection of my sample and the relationships between faculty member experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting with (a) behavioral review or threat assessment teams, (b) faculty training in disruptive, distressed, or students of concern, or (c) direct service majors (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work). Of the six faculty members interviewed, only one received training, and only three are familiar with resources available at their institution. Yet, all of the faculty members experience disruptive students and all manage the students in similar ways. I believe, even if my sample had been larger, I would find this to be true. Many of the faculty members practice classroom management techniques traditionally found in K-12 classrooms for managing disruptive behaviors. They use what they know and what they experienced as students.

While my choice of participants is consistent with phenomenological guidelines (Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2010), the process ultimately affects transferability to other institutions. Currently, there is no definitive relationship between faculty member experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting and having a behavioral or threat assessment team on a postsecondary campus. This is something I find interesting. All of the schools have a behavioral review
team. One school does not advertise its behavioral review team. I was able to find out about its existence in four different ways. The first was by finding an old news release buried on their website. The second was because my institution based our behavioral review team on theirs. The third and fourth is through speaking to people from their counseling center or attending training through them. Yet, the faculty members do not know it exists as a resource. In addition, one faculty member perceives this institution as “blaming” faculty members should they have any disruptive students in their classrooms. Whether there is a connection between the hidden nature of its team and faculty perception is one for further investigation.

There is also a limited relationship between a faculty members experience and access to faculty training in distressed, disruptive, or students of concern. All of the faculty members had access to training, but just one faculty member mentions having attended training. Two of the faculty members, on a campus with a robust training program, are unfamiliar with the name of the campus referral resource and pertinent institutional policies. Again, while they are managing the disruptive behavior in similar ways, they are not doing so because of campus training.

Finally, there is a limited relationship between faculty member experiences and direct service majors (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work). One of my faculty members taught at a local community college. The courses he taught are general education courses. Two of my other participants also taught out-of-major general education courses, along with their major’s courses. All of my faculty members reported disruptive behavior in their courses, regardless of student’s specific majors. The concerns about preparing students to step
into their professional role as direct service majors are valid, but I can make the argument that we are preparing all students who are not going into professional or graduate school for direct entry into the world of work.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

This study contributes to the literature in that it is useful to faculty, staff, service providers, behavioral review and/or threat assessment team members, and policy makers in postsecondary education. As stated by McBain (2008), “the institutional goal should be to balance both the needs of a troubled student and the common good of the community to accommodate both as much as is reasonable and appropriate” (p. 17). In order to develop effective procedures for postsecondary behavioral review or threat assessment teams it requires an understanding of faculty experiences with disruptive undergraduate student behavior in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting.

After an analysis of the themes, I believe understanding these faculty members’ experiences with disruptive behavior can increase our knowledge of what potential actions a faculty member may take when such behaviors occur, and whether he or she makes a referral to the behavioral review or threat assessment team.

The faculty members in my study typically manage the issues within their classrooms themselves or by using the collective wisdom of their colleagues and mentors. Even when training is available, the faculty members do not avail themselves of it. Only one of my participants actively utilized the training resources. Three of my six participants actively used mentors, with a fourth participant acutely knowledgeable about the activities of his colleagues’ classrooms. Institutions may need to develop a mentoring system with a “master” teacher, who coaches and advocates for her or his mentees. Even
for those faculty members who do use the institutional systems in place, they do not understand them, have unrealistic expectations as to their scope, or distrust their intent to protect the faculty member. The faculty member who thought her university mishandled a case by blaming a colleague for the disruptive student behavior was comparing it to a previous institution. Institutions may be unaware of how they are perceived by the faculty members they are there to help. Using naturally occurring mentors may allow for discussions on classroom management, as well as other pertinent issues, to occur in a safer venue, rather than hearing from someone higher in the institutional authority line.

The faculty members also do not make automatic referrals to their behavioral review teams. The one who did is dissatisfied. She also reports her colleagues and her graduate students are dissatisfied as well. Institutional assumptions that faculty members refer may need to be re-envisioned. The participants in my study develop and maintain relationships within the department. Their primary allegiance and wisdom seeking is departmental, rather than institutional. Behavioral review teams and institutional trainers may need to take advantage of these natural groups to target their trainings to be specific to the group. Instead of assuming faculty members will break from their natural comfort zone, the creation of a college or department triage team may utilize the natural alliances that already exist. This is also an opportunity to bring more stakeholders to the table. If faculty members are aware there is someone to contact within their own area or college, it may increase reporting. This could also be the opportunity for increased mentorship on the part of the area or the department prior to referring it to the final official channel. There will always be those behaviors that will need to be referred, but empowering faculty members, department leadership, and college leadership to make decisions may
be an opportunity to give control and authority back to the faculty member and the college.

I believe understanding the types of experiences these faculty members have with disruptive undergraduate students and learning what leads these faculty members to experience those behaviors as disruptive may aid in the development of new strategies and training for faculty members. Examining the shared experiences of these faculty members may lead to a shared institutional language that aids in the development of a commonality of terms and actions. Faculty members in my study did not have a difficult time articulating issues at the lowest levels of the disruptive behaviors continuum (Appendix O). They can clearly explain, describe, and mimic sleeping students, late students, or texting students. They have the greatest difficulty when it comes to articulating those behaviors that are not clear-cut or those behaviors that are out-of-the norm. I feel frustration when a faculty member describes a threatening situation, tells me that she “felt” threatened, and yet does not define it as a threat. Institutionally, the training may need to focus on creating a clear and definitive set of what disruptive behaviors “look like” in all forms, in a simple and operational language. I also believe it may be important to empower faculty members to “tattle” and to empower them to make a mistake of “crying wolf” if they feel uncomfortable. I do not believe we should set the bar for what construes threatening behavior so high, that a faculty member feels that he or she must have a “burden of proof” prior to reporting. For one of my participants to say, “while she felt threatened, it was not a threatening situation because the student did not use the words, I am going to…” is concerning. A faculty member’s insights, instincts,
and experiences should be enough to begin the discussion. For these faculty members, it gets to the heart of whether they can trust their institution.

I believe that by understanding the mechanisms by which these faculty members experience disruptive undergraduate student behavior, it may also work to boost the number of appropriate referrals for undergraduate students in need. It may aid the behavioral review and threat assessment teams in targeting their marketing and communication to increase accessibility for faculty referrals. Faculty members (e.g., Stacey, her graduate students, colleagues) must understand the follow-through procedure because we cannot leave them in the dark. Institutions may need to look at their processes about transparency and allowing teams to update faculty members about the complaint he or she initiated. Exploring the nuances of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, when the faculty member has already been the person to instigate the report, may make them someone with a legitimate educational interest as to the disposition of the findings. To have a faculty member at an institution report she and her colleagues believe the university process designed the system to protect itself from liability in a “CYA” manner, is concerning. It may require a “both/and” solution. We can maintain confidentiality, it does not have to be circumvented, and we can increase our reporting to the faculty member because the human element does require us to respond to faculty members in an appropriate and collegial fashion so they know we have heard their voices.

Chapter Summary

I am able to answer my research questions in my current study. The first research question I answer is “how do faculty members’ describe and interpret their experiences
with undergraduate students who behave in disruptive manners in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?” Data findings show the lived experience of the faculty members is an important issue. Participants begin experiencing disruptive student behavior during their first position and it continues throughout their professional career. The overall sentiment is that personal technology is overtaking the classroom. Faculty members attribute disruptive behavior resulting from generational or mismatched cultural expectations. For many of the participants, there is an expectation that “something” is going to happen, it just has not happened yet. Aligned with this belief is an acceptance of perceived disempowerment and a willingness to remain concrete in their definitions of disruptive behaviors.

I also answer, “how do faculty members differentiate between normative, disruptive and threatening undergraduate student behaviors within a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?” To this end, I discover that faculty members have the easiest time describing behaviors at the lowest levels of the disruptive behavior continuum (Appendix O). However, what makes something “more” disruptive or “more” threatening is not something easily articulated. It is a matter of degree or personalization. The participants use the support of their colleagues to determine the best of course of action and as a tool for social comparison.

I also answer, “how do faculty members attribute why disruptive undergraduate students do what they do?” Participants have an easier time answering this question. They are able to give examples of why they think students behave disruptively. Faculty members explain students act in this manner due to either situational or personal characteristics of the student.
I answer this question for my study “how do faculty members’ previous life experiences help them to make meaning of why they regard an undergraduate student’s behavior as disruptive?” The faculty members draw upon previous life experiences for their meaning making. They each use these background experiences to connect with the present disruptive behaviors. They integrate the experiences from their first teaching positions and they utilize their colleagues’ experiences to form the basis for why they regard a student’s behavior as disruptive.

I also answer, “what previous life experiences do faculty members incorporate to make meaning regarding their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting?” Each of the faculty members have experiences with disruptive students at other institutions where they had taught. They also bring in additional professional or personal experiences. The faculty members also bring in their emotional connections and reactions to the experiences as a way to make meaning.

I also answer, “if, and how, has this experience with disruptive undergraduate student behavior affected faculty members and their teaching.” Each faculty member is on a road of continual evolution because of the influence of her or his experiences with disruptive students. They each report some form of emotional impact from their encounter with these students. I also find the lack of trust between the faculty members and the institution concerning.

Guided by my research questions and my theoretical frameworks of attribution theory and symbolic interaction, seven themes emerged:

(1) Pervasiveness of disruptive behaviors,
(2) Faculty feeling of powerlessness,
(3) Fatalistic thinking of faculty members,
(4) Collegial support,
(5) Classroom influences,
(6) Emotional costs, and
(7) Perceptions of disruptions. The study is significant, in that the findings give insight into the lived experience of these faculty members, thereby giving me a springboard to suggest implications for policy and practice.

Closing Thoughts

I know that qualitative research cannot be objective. That is both the beauty of it and the profound ethical responsibility inherent in its undertaking. Despite my inability to be totally objective, I continued in my efforts to bracket my feelings, my preconceived ideas, and my attitudes throughout my study. Using a reflective journal allowed me the opportunity to bracket my thoughts and ideas apart from my participants. I made every effort to accurately describe and honor their lived experience to the best of my ability. I find the narrative of my participants’ experiences compelling. I often asked them additional questions because their story is so fascinating.

Each time I encounter their story, I also think of my own experiences with disruptive students and I recognize kindred spirits. As I listened, I realize that we are all part of one amazing community. I continually bracketed, even as I was self-reflexive, because I believe it is important to tell my participants stories. I am aware of the potential for researcher bias and I worked to minimize it throughout the process. I am
humbled and extremely grateful for the faculty members who are willing to share their life experiences with me and I believe I represented these as accurately as possible.

I also believe this is an important issue requiring continued study. I began my study on faculty experiences and I discovered much about the culture in which these faculty members operate. The system does not create the problem; they spring from an interaction of multiple parts and pieces. The solution is one that we can resolve by changing how we approach things as an academic culture. Faculty members deserve a safe and civil working environment. Students deserve a safe and civil educational experience. Institutionally, we all have that responsibility to provide a well-supported environment for both faculty and students.
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Appendix A

Email: Request for Assistance in Reaching Participants
Date: ________________

Dear ________________

My name is Anne Marie Gillespie. I could use your help in finding participants in an HSIRB approved qualitative research study that I am conducting for partial completion of my dissertation requirements in the Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology at Western Michigan University. I am asking you to help me find faculty members willing to describe their experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. I am contacting you, because I believe that you are best positioned to share this attachment with faculty members who may have been exposed to such situations.

I need faculty participants who teach in programs related to direct service providers (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work).

Your faculty member’s responses to this study are very important as they may be used in potentially helping to develop future trainings on disruptive or threatening students, classroom management issues, and identification of students of concern to aid in referrals to behavioral review and threat assessment teams.

Please forward the attached pdf to any to any faculty member who you think may be a successful participant for this study.

Feel free to contact me at anne.m.gillespie@wmich.edu or (231) 735-6595 if you have questions.

Many Thanks,

Anne Marie Gillespie
Appendix B

Email .pdf Attachment: Invitation to Participate in Research
Date: __________________

Dear ________________

My name is Anne Marie Gillespie as part of dissertation requirements; I need faculty members like you who are willing to describe your experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in your face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. I am writing to ask for your participation in an HSIRB approved qualitative research study that I am conducting for partial completion of my dissertation requirements in the Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology at Western Michigan University.

If you are chosen for this study, I will ask you to complete an interview, which should take approximately 60-90 minutes, scheduled for your convenience. This interview asks to describe your experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in your face-to-face classroom or laboratory.

If you are interested in becoming a potential participant in this research project, please click here, to fill out a brief two-to-three minute demographic questionnaire. Your responses will be confidential.

Many Thanks,

Anne Marie Gillespie
Appendix C

Survey: Demographic Questionnaire
Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the experience of faculty members with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings.

You may be invited to participate in this research project depending upon whether you meet the criteria I have set for inclusion in this study.

For the purposes of this study, at this time, I conceptualize “disruptive” and “threatening” behaviors as being on a continuum and am utilizing the following definition for disruptive behavior (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), and (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members ego, expertise and/or authority).

This participant information questionnaire should only take about two-to-three minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary, and responses will be kept confidential to the degree permitted by the technology being used.

You have the option to not respond to any questions that you choose. Submission of this questionnaire will be interpreted as your assent to participate.

Should you be chosen for my study you will be asked to sign an informed consent form that outlines your rights as a participant in this study.

* I have read the above information and agree to be considered for participation in this research project.

_____ Enter survey
Name: 

Contact Office Address: 

Contact Phone: 

Contact Email: 

Have you had contact with a disruptive undergraduate student in your face-to-face classroom or laboratory since April 16, 2007?
- Yes
- No
- I don’t know

What is your home institution?
- Central Michigan University
- Ferris State University
- Grand Valley State University
- Western Michigan University
- Other ___________________

At which institution did this incident (these incidences) occur?
- Central Michigan University
- Ferris State University
- Grand Valley State University
- Western Michigan University
- Other ___________________

For which of the following undergraduate majors do you teach?
- Criminal justice (i.e., corrections, generalists, law enforcement, etc.)
- Education (i.e., elementary, secondary, etc.)
- Health professions (i.e., radiography, medical lab science, sonography, etc.)
- Nursing
- Psychology
- Social work
- Other __________________
What is your gender?
  o Male
  o Female
  o Transgender
  o No Response

What is your faculty rank?
  o Assistant Professor
  o Associate Professor
  o Professor
  o Lecturer
  o Instructor
  o Adjunct
  o Other__________________

How many years have you been teaching at the postsecondary level?
  o Less than 1
  o 1 to 5
  o 6 to 10
  o 11 to 15
  o 16 or more

Does your institution have a behavioral review and/or threat assessment team?
  o Yes
  o No
  o I don’t know

Does your institution offer training for faculty on distressed, disruptive and/or students of concern?
  o Yes
  o No
  o I don’t know
Appendix D

Email: Does Not Meet Participation Criteria
Dear _______________

Date _______________

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on faculty experience of disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. I value your willingness to volunteer as a participant.

The purpose of this email is to inform you that you currently do not meet the strict criteria protocols designed for participation for my study.

I will keep the information you have completed as part of my demographic questionnaire in a locked file and destroyed after three years as mandated by HSIRB.

I do want to thank you for your time, energy, and effort that you have already expended on the participant questionnaire.

Many Thanks,

Anne Marie Gillespie
Appendix E

Email: Thank You: Expressed Interest in Participation
Date: ______________

Dear ______________

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on your experience with disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings. I value the unique contributions that you will make to my study and I am excited about your participation. The purpose of this email is to identify a time to meet, or call to set up an interview, and to send you a copy of the informed consent form.

I know your time is valuable, so I plan to limit our conversation to no longer than 60-90 minutes. I am available [DAY OF THE WEEK] and [DAY OF THE WEEK] from [TIME] to [TIME]. Please let me know if any of these time blocks work for you. If you are not free during these times, I am able to make alternative arrangements for times that would meet your schedule.

I plan to schedule a room in [PLACE NAME, I.E., LIBRARY, FACULTY CENTER] to afford us a quiet area for confidential discussion and taping. If you would prefer an alternative site, we could also consider that as well.

Please complete the attached consent form, and then, scan and email to anne.m.gillespie@wmich.edu, fax (231) 591-2618, or mail to: Anne Marie Gillespie, ASC 3052, Big Rapids, Michigan, 49307. If this is not possible, you can also return the completed consent form when we meet face-to-face. I must have this returned in order to continue with your participation in this study.

If you have any further questions prior to our next discussion or signing the consent form, or if there is a problem with the date and time of the meeting, I can be reached at anne.m.gillespie@wmich.edu or (231) 735-6595.

Many Thanks,

Anne Marie Gillespie
Appendix F

Attachment: Informed Consent
Western Michigan University  
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Donna Talbot  
**Student Investigator:** Anne Marie Gillespie  
**Title of Study:** A Phenomenological Study of University Faculty Experiences with Disruptive Undergraduate Students in a Face-to-Face Classroom or Laboratory Setting

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “A Phenomenological Study of University Faculty Experiences with Disruptive Undergraduate Students in a Face-to-Face Classroom or Laboratory Setting.” This project will serve as Anne Marie Gillespie’s dissertation for the partial requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**

The purpose of this study is to describe college and university faculty members’ experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in their face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings. My research is designed to increase the understanding of such experiences in order to use the information that I collect to help develop potential future trainings on disruptive students, classroom management issues, and identification of students of concern to aid in referrals to behavioral review and threat assessment teams.

**Who can participate in this study?**

Criteria for inclusion in this study are twofold. The first filter for criteria are identified as setting and program specifications and include (a) faculty members who teach at public postsecondary institutions in western or central Michigan considered very high or high undergraduate by Carnegie classifications, and (b) faculty members who teach in programs related to direct service majors (e.g., criminal justice, education, health professions, nursing, psychology, social work). The second filter for criteria are related to the faculty member experience and include (a) faculty members who have experience with undergraduate students who have been repeatedly disruptive within the face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting since the shootings at Virginia Tech (i.e., April 16, 2007), (b) faculty members on campuses that have access to behavioral review and/or threat assessment teams, (c) faculty members that have access to training sessions on disruptive students, distressed students and/or students of concern through their institution (e.g., faculty center, student affairs, counseling center, student conduct, public safety).
For the purposes of this study, at this time, I conceptualize “disruptive” and “threatening” behaviors as being on a continuum and I am utilizing the following definition for disruptive behavior (a) benign incivility (e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, texting, acting-out), (b) distressed signaling (e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use), and (c) threatening behavior (e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members ego, expertise and/or authority).

Where will this study take place?
This interview will take place at a location and time convenient for both the investigator and for you. It will also allow for confidentiality while maintaining a safe place for meeting, and allow quiet for recording. It will be at a location close to or at your home institution.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
Following the completion of a brief participant demographic questionnaire, you will participate in a 60-90 minute interview that I will audiotape. After I have transcribed the interview, you will receive a copy of the transcription and have the opportunity to complete an email follow-up for additional comment and reflection. The additional comment and reflection is strictly voluntary. Your time commitment for this study ends, when the interview is complete.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
As a participant, you will be asked to engage in a discussion stimulated by some open questions facilitated by your experiences with disruptive and/or potentially disruptive undergraduate students. You will be asked to recall specific episodes, situations, or events that you experienced with the disruptive student. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what the experience was like for you: your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience.

What information is being measured during the study?
The information I am gathering is a description of your experience with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
I understand that some questions may cause stress and/or psychological discomfort. You may take a break or discontinue the interview at any time. If necessary, I will provide you with referrals for psychotherapy, the cost of which will be your own responsibility.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
This study is of a research nature and may offer no direct benefit to you. The descriptions of your experiences that I will gather in this study will be used to help researchers and practitioners at postsecondary institutions understand faculty member experiences working with disruptive
undergraduate students in face-to-face classrooms or laboratories. In order to potentially develop effective procedures for postsecondary behavioral review or threat assessment teams it requires an understanding of faculty experiences with disruptive undergraduate student behavior in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. By understanding a faculty member’s experience with disruptive behavior, it will increase understanding of what potential actions a faculty member may take when such behaviors may occur and whether he or she makes a referral to the behavioral review or threat assessment team. By understanding the types of experiences faculty members have with disruptive undergraduate students and learning what led these faculty members to experience those behaviors as disruptive and/or threatening, it may aid in the development of new strategies and potential training for faculty members. Having the opportunity to examine the shared experiences of the faculty member’s may lead to a shared institutional language that can aid in the development of a commonality of terms and actions. It might also work to increase the amount of appropriate referrals for undergraduate students in need, by understanding the mechanisms by which faculty experience disruptive behavior. It may also aid the behavioral review and threat assessment teams in targeting their marketing and communication to increase accessibility for faculty referrals. This in turn may indirectly benefit you, as well as others who may benefit from your experience.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no costs to you, other than your time, for participating in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
You do not receive any monetary compensation for being a part of this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
All interview materials will remain confidential in either an encrypted flash drive and/or locked file cabinet accessible only by the investigator. You will not be identified by name in the final product, though direct quotes may be used without being ascribed by name. You may choose a pseudonym or one will be provided to insure you confidentiality. All records will be kept confidential in the secure possession of the investigator. You understand this material will be submitted and presented upon in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Western Michigan University.

You also understand the person conducting this study is a licensed professional counselor. As a result, she has limits to her ability to maintain confidentiality. As such, she has a duty to report if she believes you intend to harm yourself, harm someone else, if you are involved in child abuse/neglect, or elder abuse/neglect. You also understand that she may make a referral to your employee assistance program (EAP) or community mental health, or other appropriate referral, should it be necessary.
What if you want to stop participating in this study?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to enter the study or to refuse to answer any questions. You may also withdraw at any time without adverse consequence to yourself. You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. You understand that the investigator may decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Dr. Donna Talbot at (269) 387-3891 or donna.talbot@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant’s signature  Date
Appendix G

Interview Guide
Share a story about your experience with an undergraduate student who was disruptive.

1. If you were to look at the continuum from disruptive to threatening, where would you label the student’s behavior and why?
   a. What would they have to have done to be considered disruptive/threatening behavior (use opposite term located on continuum)?

2. How did you handle the behavior?
   a. Did you do anything once class was over? Was there any follow-up?
   b. How did you know to do that? What informed you about how to handle it?

3. As you think about this about the situation with student, why do you think he or she did what he or she did?
   a. What do you attribute that type of behavior to?

4. What are some of your personal life experiences you have had that have prepared you to respond to this experience?
   a. What are some of the life experiences you have had that have prepared you to identify this student as disruptive (term used from the continuum)?

5. Has anything changed for you in terms of your teaching since this incident? Please share an example.

6. Do you have any words of wisdom for someone who might face a similar situation? Would you do things any differently?

7. Who else do you think I should talk to who has a similar experience with a disruptive student?
Appendix H

Email: .pdf Attachment: Snowball Invitation to Participate in Research
Date: ________________

Dear__________________

My name is Anne Marie Gillespie as part of dissertation requirements; I need faculty members like you who are willing to describe your experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in your face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting. I am writing to ask for your participation in an HSIRB approved qualitative research study that I am conducting for partial completion of my dissertation requirements in the Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology at Western Michigan University.

You name was suggested to me by [NAME] as someone who may have an experience with disruptive undergraduate students in your face-to-face classroom or laboratory.

If you are chosen for this study, I will ask you to complete an interview, which should take approximately 60-90 minutes, scheduled for your convenience. This interview asks to describe your experiences with disruptive undergraduate students in your face-to-face classroom or laboratory.

If you are interested in becoming a potential participant in this research project, please click here, to fill out a brief two-to-three minute demographic questionnaire. Your responses will be confidential.

Many Thanks,

Anne Marie Gillespie
Appendix I

Field Notes
### Emotion Adapters: Manipulation of the person or an object | Lexical Movements: Conversational Gestures that accompany speech | Symbolic Gestures: Meaning known separately
---|---|---
Happiness |  |  |
Sadness |  |  |
Anger |  |  |
Fear |  |  |
Disgust |  |  |
Surprise |  |  |
Others |  |  |

### Description | Observation (inferences)
---|---
---|---
---|---
---|---
---|---
Appendix J

Email: Member Check Thank You
Date: __________

Dear: __________

Thank you for meeting with me for in an extended interview and sharing your experiences with disruptive students. I appreciate your willingness to share your unique and personal thoughts, feelings, events, and situations.

I have enclosed a transcript of your interview. In order to ensure that this interview has fully captured your experience with your disruptive students, would you please review the entire document for accuracy. After reviewing the transcript of the interview, you may realize that an important experience(s) was neglected. Please feel free to add comments that would further elaborate your experiences. Please do not edit for grammatical corrections. The way you told your story is what is critical.

When you have reviewed the verbatim transcript and have had an opportunity to make changes and additions, please save and send your corrected transcript as a word document or into a .pdf form and send to anne.m.gillespie@wmich.edu. You are also welcome to write a narrative response to the transcript and send it to me via email.

This is voluntary on your part. As a reminder, if you refer to the consent document that you signed when you agreed to participate, you are free to exit at any time. At that time, I indicated that you do not have to participate in any follow-up if you chose not to do so and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I have greatly valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your experience. Again, thank you for your participation. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at anne.m.gillespie@wmich.edu or (231) 735-6595.

Best,

Anne Marie Gillespie
Appendix K

Email: Follow-Up Thank You upon Receipt of Transcript
Date: __________

Dear: __________

Thank you for taking the time to review and send me your transcript. I appreciate your willingness to contribute to this study by sharing your experience with disruptive undergraduate students in your face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting.

We have concluded our relationship as co-researchers. At the conclusion of my study, I will send you a summary of my results.

Again, thank you for your participation. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at anne.m.gillespie@wmich.edu or (231) 735-6595.

Best,

Anne Marie Gillespie
Appendix L

Email: Final Summary of Results of Study
Date: ______________

Dear ______________

Thank you again, for your interest in my dissertation research on the experience of disruptive undergraduate students in face-to-face classroom or laboratory settings.

The purpose of this email is to send you a summary of my results.

Through your knowledge as a co-researcher, I was able to understand the essence of your experience with disruptive undergraduate students in a face-to-face classroom or laboratory setting.

I value your participation and thank you for your commitment of time, energy, and effort. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at anne.m.gillespie@wmich.edu or (231) 735-6595.

Warm Regards,

Anne Marie Gillespie
Appendix M

CITI Completion Report
CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Human Research Curriculum Completion Report
Printed on 4/10/2013

Learner: Anne Marie Gillespie (username: ppy9032)
Institution: Western Michigan University
Contact Information/Department: Educational Leadership
Phone: 231-591-3660
Email: anne.m.gillespie@wmich.edu

Group 1 Social & Behavioral Sciences Researchers: Complete all required modules and those Optional Modules that are pertinent to your work. For example:

- International Research
- Internet Research
- HIPAA and Human Subject Research
- Human Subjects Research at the VA
- Research with Children
- Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools
- Research Involving Minors
- Research with Prisons and Vulnerable Subjects
- Research with Prisoners

Stage 2. Refresher Course Passed on 03/20/13 (Ref # 8759749)

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For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsefilled information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator

Return
Appendix N

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: November 6, 2013

To: Donna Talbot, Principal Investigator
Anne Marie Gillespie, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-10-39

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “A Phenomenological Study of University Faculty Experiences with Disruptive Undergraduate Students in a Face-to-Face Classroom or Laboratory Setting” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 6, 2014
Appendix O

Disruptive Behavior Continuum
Disruptive Behavior Continuum

- Benign Incivility
  - e.g., showing off, dominating class discussions, sleeping, tardiness, attendance, texting, acting-out

- Distressed Signalling
  - e.g., poor personal hygiene, inappropriate demands of time and attention, atypical or unusual behavior, suspicion of substance use

- Threatening Behavior
  - e.g., verbal threats, physical threats, stalking behavior, threats to faculty members ego, expertise and/or authority

Amada, 1999; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Black, et al., 2011; Clark, 2008; Dohmeier & Moran, 2008; Saidman, 2005; Sharkin, 2006
Appendix P

Respondent and Participant Demographics
### Respondent and Participant Demographics

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Appendix Q

Summary of Study for Participants
Summary of Study

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<th>Themes</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<td>Pervasiveness of disruptive behavior</td>
<td>Disruptive student behavior goes with the job. Disruptive student behavior begins when a faculty member first starts teaching, and continues throughout her or his teaching career. Each semester, faculty members assume, or “know,” they will have students who will be disruptive. The majority of students do well, but every semester there is always a small percentage acting out and drawing the faculty member’s attention to the behavior. It is something everyone will experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty feeling of powerlessness</td>
<td>Faculty members believe they have limited control of student behavior. They combat this by determining the policies they put in their syllabus. They also have the option of referring the student elsewhere on campus. Neither of these necessarily influence whether the student changes her or his disruptive behavior. Faculty members’ feelings of powerlessness result (a) feelings of blame and responsibility, (b) concerns about job security, (c) conviction of their inability to act, (d) belief in an institutional black hole for student of concern referrals, and (e) how faculty members utilize available resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fatalistic thinking of faculty members</td>
<td>Faculty members tend to minimize the “micro” disruptions occurring within their own classrooms as not being “bad enough” because they did not meet the threshold of a “Virginia Tech threat.” There is a tendency to use the worst-case scenario as the rule, rather than the exception. They are just waiting for the “big event” to occur and find they are lucky that it has not already happened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial support</td>
<td>Faculty members talk to each other, about each other, about themselves, and their students, a lot. A faculty member’s professional life is played out on a public stage and it seems that “everyone” knows “everything” that is happening within the classroom. When faculty member have a disruptive student, he or she has colleagues to depend on who already know about the situation, the faculty member, and the student.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom influences</td>
<td>Personal technology has affected the perception of student interaction and presence within the classroom. Faculty members see the overuse of personal technology as the biggest disruption they face and its creep within the classroom continues influencing how the students interact with the faculty member, with each other, and with understanding how it will affect their future professional selves. Generationally the differences go beyond mere age, but also how the students of today are different from the traditional students of yesterday and their new needs and beliefs affect the classroom environment leading to disruptive behavior.</td>
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Emotional costs

There is an emotional cost to disruptive behavior. Faculty members are hard at work attempting to prepare students for their future professions. They are hoping students will see the connection between their current behavior and their future professional life. They are growing increasingly frustrated that so much time and energy is spent managing disruptive student behavior that they run the emotional gamut from anxious, to mad, to despair.

Perceptions of disruptions

Dealing with “regular” classroom disruptions are easier than dealing with disruptions aimed at the faculty member. When disruptive behavior is “passive” and not targeted at the faculty members, it seems easily identifiable and faculty members perceive the ability to control it or manage it as possible. When the disruptive behavior is more “active” and directed towards her or him, they are more likely to minimize, not recognize, or poorly define it. The faculty member grapples with ways to manage the behavior and the situation.

Implications for policy and practice

- Faculty members typically manage issues within their classrooms or by using the collective wisdom of their colleagues and mentors. Even when training is available, faculty members do not avail themselves of it.
  - Institutions need to develop a mentoring system with a “master” teacher, coaching and advocating for her or his mentees. Even for faculty members who do use the institutional systems in place, they do not understand them, have unrealistic expectations as to their scope, or distrust their intent to protect the faculty member.
- Faculty members do not make automatic referrals to their behavioral review teams.
  - Institutional assumptions that faculty members refer to teams need to be re-envisioned. Behavioral review teams and institutional trainers need to take advantage of natural groups (e.g., departments, collegial, peer,
mentors) to target their trainings to be specific to the group. Instead of assuming, faculty members will break from their natural comfort zone, creating cohort models, college or department triage teams, will utilize the natural alliances that already exist. This is an opportunity to bring more stakeholders to the table.

- Faculty members do not have a difficult time articulating issues at the lowest levels of the disruptive behaviors continuum (Appendix O). They clearly explain, describe, and mimic sleeping students, late students, or texting students. They have the greatest difficulty when it comes to articulating those behaviors that are not clear-cut or those behaviors that are out-of-the norm.
  - Institutionally, training needs to focus on creating a clear and definitive set of what disruptive behaviors “look like” in all forms, in a simple and operational language. It is important to empower faculty members to “tattle” and to empower them to make a mistake of “crying wolf” if they feel uncomfortable.
  - Institutions must have some type of follow-through procedure. There has to be a transparency about the process allowing teams to update faculty members about the complaint he or she initiated. Hiding behind the shield of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, when a faculty member has already been the person to instigate the report, should make them someone with a legitimate educational interest as to the disposition of the findings.