

Incivility in Algerian schools: a challenge to students' self-esteem

سلوكات المشاغبة في المدارس الجزائرية وتقدير الذات لدى التلاميذ

Dr. ABDI Samira

University of Bejaïa

Mental Health and Neuroscience Laboratory

samira.abdi@univ-bejaia.dz

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3539-9559>

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Abstract

This study aims to examine and explore the self-esteem of school-going adolescents involved in **uncivil behaviors**-a relatively recent concept that encompasses a range of disruptive actions that challenge established order and has become widespread in school settings. The research was conducted at **YAICI Abdelkader High School** (formerly Technicum) in Ihedadden, Béjaïa, with **150 students** aged **15 to 20 years** enrolled during the **2024/2025** academic year. A **descriptive method** was adopted, using two instruments: **Pierre Coslin's Incivility Scale** (1997) and the **Toulouse Self-Esteem Scale** (adolescent version). Findings show: (1) gender differences in uncivil behaviors; (2) variability in self-esteem levels across its domains depending on gender; and (3) **no significant relationship** between adolescents' involvement in uncivil behaviors and their self-esteem-suggesting that students engaged in such behaviors do not necessarily experience reduced self-esteem as a result of their actions.

Keywords

incivility; self-esteem; adolescence; school environment.

المخلص

هذا المستند الإلكتروني هو قالب "تفاعلي" تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص واستكشاف تقدير الذات لدى المراهقين المتمدرسين المنخرطين في السلوكات المشاغبة، وهو مفهوم حديث نسبياً يشمل مجموعة من التصرفات المزعجة التي تتحدى النظام العام وأصبحت واسعة الانتشار في الوسط المدرسي. أنجزت الدراسة في ثانوية ياسيني عبد القادر (سابقاً تكنيكم) بحي الإخوة الحدادين، بجاية، وشملت 150 تلميذاً تتراوح أعمارهم بين 15 و20 سنة،

¹Corresponding author)

خلال السنة الدراسية 2024/2025 واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي، باستعمال أداتين : مقياس السلوكيات (1997) (ومقياس تقدير الذات النسخة الخاصة بالمراهقين). وأظهرت النتائج ما يلي:

1. وجود فروق بين الجنسين في السلوكيات المشاغبة.
2. وجود تباين في مستويات تقدير الذات عبر أبعاده المختلفة تبعاً للجنس.
3. عدم وجود علاقة دالة إحصائية بين انخراط المراهقين في السلوكيات المشاغبة وتقديرهم لذاتهم، مما يشير إلى أن التلاميذ المنخرطين في هذه السلوكيات لا بالضرورة يعانون من انخفاض تقدير الذات نتيجة أفعالهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية

السلوك المشاغب ؛ تقدير الذات؛ المراقبة؛ البيئة المدرسية

1. Introduction (Heading 1)

This template, created in **MS Word 2019**, provides authors with most of the formatting specifications needed for preparing electronic versions of their papers. All standard paper components have been specified for three reasons: 1) ease of use when formatting individual papers, 2) automatic compliance to electronic requirements that facilitate the concurrent or later production of electronic products, and 3) conformity of style throughout a journal paper. Margins, column widths, line spacing, and type styles are built-in; examples of the type styles are provided throughout this document and are identified in italic type, within parentheses, following the example. Some components, such as multi-leveled equations, graphics, and tables are not prescribed, although the various table text styles are provided. The formatter will need to create these components, incorporating the applicable criteria that follow. The educational system faces numerous challenges, among which **school incivility** stands out due to its continuously increasing prevalence. Incivility is a relatively new concept and is often understood within broader definitions of violence; in the school context, this “expression of violence” includes behaviors categorized as incivilities. According to Blaya, “incivility is not necessarily illegal behavior in the legal sense, but rather an infringement of the expected order encountered in everyday life. School incivility refers to minor disorders, noisy disruptions, refusal to cooperate, insolence, rudeness, hurtful remarks” (Blaya, 2006). When these uncivil behaviors occur repeatedly, they negatively affect the institution’s internal regulations and the **school climate**, which is recognized as a factor influencing students’ self-esteem.

Historically, multiple orientations have shaped approaches to self-esteem, reflecting the conceptual richness and scientific interest surrounding this construct. Self-esteem—one of the most fundamental dimensions of personality and a key factor in well-being and psychological balance—reflects self-acceptance and recognition. Walker defines self-esteem as a favorable or unfavorable attitude an individual hold toward themselves; this

attitude is communicated to others verbally or behaviorally (Walker, 1991, p. 6).

Within the scope of this research, we sought to explore and understand the relationship between school incivility and self-esteem, and specifically the effect of uncivil behaviors on self-esteem among school-going adolescents. We adopted the **cognitive-behavioral framework** as the most appropriate theoretical background, since it addresses both the behavioral dimension (uncivil conduct in school) and the cognitive dimension (emotions, thoughts, and understanding of mental processes). This framework is also consistent with the research instruments selected for this study.

I. Research Problem and Hypotheses

Adolescence is more difficult to define than it may initially appear. It is a complex notion: a social phenomenon, a process of biological maturation, and a period of psychological transformation. Psychoanalyst Raymond Cahn highlights this complexity by describing adolescence as “the time when the conjunction of the biological, the psychological, and the social completes the evolution of the little human being” (Brusset, 2017, p. 174).

By nature, adolescents question their identity, personality, and self-image, and experience a growing need for independence and autonomy. They are often characterized by boredom and reduced interest in school, which can generate discomfort in school life and challenge their ability to adapt. As school pressures increase, behavioral changes may emerge, including uncivil behaviors.

Sébastien Roché, in *La société incivile*, associates adolescents with the phenomenon of incivility and explains: “In general, adolescents are led to commit a large number of incivilities. The young person naturally explores their field of action, their room for maneuver, their place in the world and the order within it. In short, they experiment with their freedom, the respect owed to them and that they owe others, what is considered good or bad, normal or abnormal, their rights-through the reactions of their human environment” (Roché, 1996, pp. 58–59).

According to statistics presented by an advisor to the Algerian Minister of National Education during a talk on “the sector’s strategy to combat and prevent violence in schools,” violence between students represents 80%, violence by students toward teachers 13%, violence inflicted on students by teachers 5%, and violence between teachers 2% (Algerian Radio, 08-03-2017).

This climate of indiscipline—specifically these uncivil behaviors—affects adolescents not only in their academic trajectory but also in their development, including personality construction, sense of self, and particularly self-esteem. The relationship between self-esteem and the school context is highly complex: school’s impact on an adolescent’s self-esteem varies across individuals and depends on multiple variables, notably the nature

of school experiences, which can generate success and positive experiences, or failures that may undermine self-esteem (Farida Nouadri, 2022, p 475).

Self-esteem is considered a crucial factor for personal happiness and effective functioning. Individuals want and need high self-esteem to cope effectively with problems, feel better, and achieve personal goals. For these reasons, it has been viewed as a central concept in psychology (Behamdouni, 1993, p. 73).

Based on the assumption that the school environment impacts students' self-esteem, and that students who are victims of incivility and school violence may have low self-esteem, our research problem is summarized as follows:

Research question:

Does uncivil behavior exhibited by school-going adolescents affect their self-esteem?

Main hypothesis:

Uncivil behavior displayed by school-going adolescents is associated with self-esteem level; specifically, the more an adolescent exhibits uncivil behavior, the lower their self-esteem.

Operational hypotheses:

To explore the two variables separately before testing the main hypothesis, we proposed the following operational hypotheses:

- The degree of uncivil behavior differs by gender.
- There is a gender difference in the type of uncivil behavior (physical, verbal, symbolic).
- There is a gender difference in self-esteem level across domains (global, emotional, social, academic, physical, and future self).

II. Theoretical Background

1. Incivility

The term *incivility* emerged in North America, and its current usage reflects Anglo-Saxon importation. The sociologist **Erving Goffman**—known for analyses of interpersonal relations—was likely among the first to identify, during the 1960s and 1970s, the significance of this phenomenon in modern urban life (Dumont, 2000, p. 836).

Derived from Latin, the term appeared in French in the 17th century. It was first used in criminology and later became established in sociology. Incivility refers to behaviors and acts that do not respect the rules of civic life (Biedermann, Prêtre & Rossel, 2009, p. 18).

After consulting nearly all French prefectures, Bonnemain observed what authors in North America and Europe also note: incivilities are difficult to clearly and commonly identify or classify. Rather than a single definition, there are multiple definitions referring to both social and penal registers. Incivility may refer to disrespect for others, incivism, a minor

offense, a misdemeanor, or any act harmful to society. Being uncivil may mean being rude, loitering in stairwells, vandalizing mailboxes, stealing, threatening, fare evasion, or begging. Incivility either presupposes delinquency or constitutes delinquency; it violates social law and/or penal law. It blurs the boundary between the two: what is formally repressed by texts may not be sanctioned in practice and thus shifts from the penal to the social domain (Bonnemain, 2000, p. 65).

2. Self-Esteem

Historically, two theorists have made major contributions to the concept of self-esteem and are frequently cited in scientific literature.

One of the earliest influential authors was **William James (1892)**. Viewing self-esteem as awareness of the self's value, he emphasized intrapersonal and intrapsychic dynamics. In this view, the relationship between the actual self and aspirations plays a central role: the greater the distance between the real self and the ideal self (i.e., when success does not match ambitions), the more likely an individual is to experience diminished self-esteem (Jendoubi, 2002, p. 9).

In 1920, **Cooley** introduced a social perspective, proposing that feelings of self-worth are socially constructed through interactions with others starting in childhood. He described the “looking-glass self”: others' perceptions provide cues that shape how individuals believe they are seen, and this is incorporated into self-perception—thus depending on how one is perceived or thinks one is perceived. This relates to identity-for-self and identity-for-others (Dubar, 2000).

These two approaches highlight key aspects of self-esteem development but assign different weight: James emphasizes internal processes, while Cooley focuses more on intersubjective and social interaction processes (Jendoubi, 2002, p. 9).

III. Methodology

Scientific research relies on systematic methods and procedures to obtain information and reveal relationships between variables. To objectify our topic, we adopted a **quantitative approach**, judged appropriate for the research problem.

To study the relationship between uncivil behavior and self-esteem, we used a **descriptive method**, whose purpose is to provide precise, complete, and accurate information. Description contributes to knowledge building and may involve stages ranging from basic familiarization to hypothesis formulation and verification of relationships between phenomena, problem inventory, or conceptual clarification.

Study setting

The study was conducted at **YAICI Abdelkader High School** (formerly Technicum) in Ihedadden, located in the center of the Béjaïa

province. The school offers five streams: exact sciences, experimental sciences, arts, technical sciences, and management sciences.

Sample

The sample included **150 adolescents (73 boys and 77 girls)**. Selection criteria were:

- Enrollment at YAICI Abdelkader High School
- Attendance during the 2024–2025 academic year
- Age ≥ 15 years

Educational level/grade, stream, and sex were not used as selection constraints.

Measures

1. Pierre Coslin’s Incivility Scale (1997)

Designed to reveal differences between teachers’ and students’ perceptions of school incivility, and students’ judgments about behaviors occurring in classrooms according to perceived severity. It contains **43 items** across three dimensions:

- Physical incivility
- Verbal incivility
- Symbolic incivility

2. Toulouse Self-Esteem Scale (ETES), adolescent version

Developed by Oubrayrie, Safont & Tap (1991), and Oubrayrie, de Leonardis & Safont (1994); we used the final version validated by Bardou (2011). It is based on a multidimensional theory of self-esteem and assesses global self-esteem across five domains:

- **Emotional self:** emotion control and impulse regulation supporting planning and organization
- **Social self:** interpersonal interactions, perceived social recognition, relationships with family and peers
- **Academic self:** perceived academic abilities, performance, and school behaviors
- **Physical self:** body image, athletic abilities, desire to be physically appealing
- **Future self:** capacity to project oneself, anticipate adulthood, and evaluate future self-perceptions

Statistical analysis

Analyses were conducted using **SPSS**, employing **means, standard deviations, independent-samples t-tests, and Pearson correlations**.

IV. Results and Discussion

1) Degree of incivility by gender

Table 1. Gender difference in the overall degree of uncivil behavior

Variable measured	Gender	Number of participants	Mean score	Standard deviation	t-test value	Degrees of freedom	Statistical significance
Uncivil behavior	Male	73	57.04	11.06	4.41	148	0,000
Uncivil behavior	Female	77	50.82	5.44	4.41	148	0,000

Results show a **significant gender difference** in the degree of uncivil behavior: boys reported higher levels than girls. This may be explained by (a) physiological and developmental factors-sex-related differences in brain development (anatomical, chemical, hormonal, and functional), with differences in the maturation pace of certain abilities such as spatial perception, language, verbal skills, and emotional regulation; and (b) sociocultural factors-socialization patterns differ for boys and girls in our cultural context, including social expectations regarding anger expression and self-control. Society often grants boys greater freedom than girls to express emotions in various ways.

Another social factor concerns differential reactions to uncivil behaviors: the notion of girls being uncivil is less readily accepted by many people. Research also suggests girls may show more empathy, whereas boys may exhibit more incivility. Finally, boys may be more exposed to risky contexts due to greater contact with the external environment compared with girls, who are often more protected by families.

2) Dimensions of incivility by gender

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of incivility dimensions by gender

Dimension	Gender	N (Number of participants)	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
Physical incivility	Boys	73	25.23	5.26
	Girls	77	21.23	3.30
Verbal incivility	Boys	73	14.25	3.51
	Girls	77	13.82	4.43
Symbolic incivility	Boys	73	17.42	3.51
	Girls	77	16.00	1.55

Table 3. t-test for equality of means across incivility dimensions

	Physical	Verbal	Symbolic
T	5.61	0.65	3.25
Degrees of freedom	148	143.55	148
Statistical significance	0,000	.512	0.001

Boys reported significantly higher **physical** and **symbolic** incivility than girls. For **verbal incivility**, no significant difference was found despite a slight increase among girls, which remained non-significant.

These findings may reflect gendered social learning patterns. Among boys, social learning often occurs through physically engaging play (rough-and-tumble games, pushing, chasing), which can function as a developmental strategy to explore solidarity and cooperation among peers. Incivility among boys may also occur more often toward acquaintances rather than close friends, reflecting a broader and more distant social network

3) Self-esteem domains by gender

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of self-esteem domains by gender

Domain	Gender	Number of participants	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
Physical self-esteem	Boys	73	47.62	3.83
	Girls	77	41.66	4.90

Social self-esteem	Boys	73	39.40	4.57
	Girls	77	40.99	4.66
Academic self-esteem	Boys	73	37.68	5.47
	Girls	77	39.53	6.67
Future self-esteem	Boys	73	37.77	5.22
	Girls	77	50.66	3.79
Emotional self-esteem	Boys	73	42.05	6.15
	Girls	77	39.91	6.58

Table 5. t-test for equality of means across self-esteem domains

Statistical indicator	Physical self-esteem	Social self-esteem	Academic self-esteem	Future self-esteem	Emotional self-esteem
T	8.26	-2.109	-1.86	-17.371	2.063
Degrees of freedom (df)	148	147.84	145.041	148	147.971
Significance level	0,000	0,037	0,065	0,000	0,041

Significant gender differences emerged across several domains:

- Boys reported higher **physical** and **emotional** self-esteem than girls.
- Girls reported higher **future** self-esteem than boys.
- **Academic** self-esteem showed no significant difference ($p = .065$), suggesting a trend toward convergence between groups.

4) Relationship between incivility and self-esteem

Table 6. Pearson correlation between uncivil behavior and self-esteem

		Total incivility	Total self-esteem
Total incivility	Pearson correlation	1	-0.041
	Significance		0.621
Total self-esteem	Pearson correlation	-0.041	1
	Significance	0.621	

The correlation between total incivility and total self-esteem was **non-significant** ($r = -0.041$, $p = .621$). Thus, adolescents who engage in uncivil behavior do not show self-esteem levels that are significantly lower due to these behaviors.

One interpretation is that adolescence is, by nature, a period of turbulence and intense energy that can be difficult to regulate, making uncivil acts more likely and potentially reflecting a developmentally typical phase. Peer support in school may also play a buffering role: uncivil incidents often occur not between close friends but toward acquaintances, which may reduce negative consequences for self-esteem.

Conclusion

This study provided an opportunity to characterize school incivility among adolescents. Results indicate not only a gender difference in the **degree** of uncivil behavior, but also differences in the **types** of incivility: boys exhibit higher **physical** and **symbolic** incivility than girls.

We also examined adolescence as a period of profound change involving fundamental needs such as self-esteem. Findings suggest that self-esteem levels across domains differ by gender: boys display higher **physical** and **emotional** self-esteem, whereas girls display higher **social** and especially **future** self-esteem. No significant gender difference was found for **academic** self-esteem, indicating a tendency toward similarity across groups.

A particularly noteworthy finding is that **no relationship** was observed between uncivil behavior and self-esteem among school adolescents. In other words, adolescents involved in uncivil behaviors do not appear to have self-esteem that is reduced or affected by these behaviors.

Finally, this work represents a first step in a broader effort to address school incivility, which contributes to feelings of insecurity and deteriorates the school environment—an environment that constitutes an important developmental source of self-esteem. Future directions include

designing a **school-based awareness and prevention program** to improve school climate.

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