

Workplace Bullying in Academia: A Conditional Process Model

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Abstract

Guided by the job demand-control-support model of workplace strain, this study tested a theoretical model of academic work environments to explain workplace bullying in academia. College professors ($N = 503$) completed a questionnaire about working in academia and experiencing bullying at work. Results of a conditional process analysis revealed that psychological job demands affected workplace bullying incidents directly, and indirectly through increased occupational stress; however, the mediated effect depended on how supportive the supervisor was and how much control professors had over their job duties (moderated moderated mediation). In departments where supervisors provided low to average social support to faculty, the indirect effect on bullying was weakened when professors had more decision authority over how they completed their job demands (moderated mediation). However, in departments where supervisors were highly supportive, there was no indirect effect of demands on workplace bullying through stress, despite how much or little decision authority professors had in doing their jobs (no moderated mediation). These findings speak to the importance of appointing a chairperson who will encourage professors' autonomy in completing their work, and, more crucially, provide social support to discourage faculty bullying in response to job stressors.

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Although it is unfortunate, academia provides a culture with opportunities for workplace bullying among organizational members. Workplace bullying refers to “repeated actions and practices that are directed against one or more workers, that are unwanted by the target, that may be carried out deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offense and distress, and that may interfere with work performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment” (Einarsen et al., 2020, p. 10). Keashly (2019) noted that around 25% of academic faculty have been bullied within the past 12 months and 50%–75% of faculty have been exposed to and/or witnessed bullying. Academic bullying includes incidents similar to those found in other workplaces including excessive monitoring, humiliation, unfair criticism, spreading rumors, yelling, withholding information, and isolating (Dereshiwsky, 2020; Giorgi, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2013; Lester, 2009; Meriläinen & Kõiv, 2019; Raineri et al., 2011; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). However, Eddington and Buzzanell (2018) added that bullying in academia (often out of jealousy for academic accomplishments) includes attacks on professional identity with terse conversations, harsh feedback, awkward looks, and avoidance and/or exclusion. These incidents make it more difficult to be a productive faculty member. Prevost and Hunt (2018) reported that bullying directed toward professional identity includes undermining professional competence, increasing administrative and teaching duties, reducing research and teaching resources, and excluding faculty from conversations or activities, among other forms. Keashly and Neuman (2010) noted that bullying in academia most commonly involves threats to professional status and obstruction of job duties. Likewise, Meriläinen et al. (2016) found that academics bully through professional undermining by demeaning academic achievements and purposefully making academic work more difficult.

Although workplace bullying occurs in any organizational context, it is perhaps academia’s distinctive culture and work environment that shapes opportunities for faculty-to-faculty mistreatment. Pelletier et al. (2019) noted that, within academia, a paradox often arises from contradictory imperatives embedded in the cultural norms. For example, there is a prevailing belief in and commitment to academic freedom with an emphasis on earning tenure which comes at a cost to faculty. Moosa (2018) argued that the cost is to publish in prestigious journals (that may value particular research topics or methods, for example) rather than pursuing topics of social or personal value. The university culture often requires scholars to produce or jeopardize their

route to tenure, which conflicts with the demands of heavy teaching and service loads (Pelletier et al., 2019). Even after earning tenure, Taylor (2013) discussed that some faculty believe tenure protects them from disciplinary action when bullying colleagues, and found that tenured faculty were more likely to stay in a department after being targeted. Thus, despite reassurance from the academy of academic freedom and tenure, Smith and Fredricks-Lowman (2020) pointed out that academic culture is highly adversarial and competitive among faculty given limited resources. Moreover, in further explaining the uniqueness of academic culture, Keashly (2019) added that community members (who often have different ideological perspectives than professors) are critical of professors' public work and their academic freedom, and, as a result, may belittle academics online (e.g., make hostile social media posts; cyberbullying).

Further elaborating on the cultural paradoxes in university life, Keashly (2019) discussed that faculty members are different than employees in other organizations because they may have academic freedom and thought (to say controversial things), are evaluated by their peers (who hold power over each other during peer review), and have more self-regulated job duties (that are not always structured in terms how teaching, research, and service requirements are met). All of these factors change the potential power dynamics involved in workplace bullying. As Keashly (2019, p. 9) explained:

The faculty's unique organizational citizen status as free-thinking, autonomous actors with leadership of knowledge production as well as the research and education mission of the university, their power as evaluators, and their positioning and training as critics shapes faculty expression, what is considered *by* faculty (but perhaps not others!) as appropriate (normative or "reasonable") conduct (and thus, what is not) and also the management of faculty conduct.

Akella (2020) echoed this point in relation to workplace bullying, noting that academia is different because it is typically comprised of highly qualified employees with terminal degrees who act independently as organizational members in a more loosely defined organizational structure under a chairperson or dean. Thus, academia represents a unique and important, but understudied, organizational context to examine work environments and management communication that might accelerate workplace bullying among its members (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Therefore, the purpose of our study is to theoretically model how academic work environments, including job demands and stressors, might provide an increased frequency of workplace bullying acts among professors, but also how supervisors, who hold the power to provide social support at work and offer autonomy in completing job duties, might function to offset bullying.

Work Environments and Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying is an abusive communication problem that causes serious harm to employees' identities and their physical and psychological well-being, among other dire consequences detailed in the organizational communication literature (see [Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008](#); [Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012](#); [Tracy et al., 2006](#)). Bullying at work has many etiological explanations (e.g., discrimination, disputes, power) for its unfortunate enactment, including the role that work environments play in cultivating bullying ([Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2009](#)). The predominant explanation for workplace bullying has been the work environment hypothesis, which posits that "bullying is a consequence of the prevailing job design and social environment within organizations" ([Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018](#), p. 74). It is well-established that high-strain working environments characterized by job stressors and pressures provide an increased risk for workplace bullying, especially when employees have restricted control over how to complete their job duties and requirements ([Salin & Hoel, 2020](#)). This work environment hypothesis of workplace bullying can be specified via the job demands-control-support (JDACS) model of workplace strain ([Karasek & Theorell, 1990](#)) which has informed much workplace bullying scholarship ([Baillien et al., 2011](#); [Balducci et al., 2011](#); [van den Broeck et al., 2011](#)).

The JDACS model provides a theoretical framework for studying the psychosocial work environment and employees' adverse reactions to occupational strain. The JDACS model predicts that employees experience considerable occupational stress in a strained working environment when there are high job demands (substantial psychological demands of work), low control (restricted decision-making authority to complete work autonomously), and low provision of social support (there are not helpful others at work who regularly communicate support). Although the JDACS model was originally designed to explain strain-related outcomes from demanding work such as health, stress, and well-being ([van der Doef & Maes, 1999](#)), it has been applied to the bullying literature, as increased job demands are positively associated with workplace bullying ([Finstad et al., 2019](#); [Goodboy et al., 2017](#); [Janssens et al., 2016](#); [Li et al., 2019](#); [Nel & Coetzee, 2020](#); [Steele et al., 2020](#)).

In line with the JDACS model, the literature has demonstrated that employees who have more control (or decision authority) over how job duties are completed, and those who receive social support at work, report less workplace bullying due to demanding high-strain workplaces ([Goodboy et al., 2017](#); [Notelaers et al., 2012](#); [Trépanier et al., 2016](#); [Tuckey et al., 2009](#)). Theoretically speaking, these encouraging findings are explained by the JDACS model's predictive utility in providing empirical evidence for a buffering effect, under which higher employee control and social support tend to offset,

to some degree, the aversive effects of job demands on job strain and stressors (see [van der Doef & Maes, 1999](#)). Statistically speaking, this buffering effect on job stress can be tested as a multiplicative model among JDCS variables (see [Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2021](#)).

If this buffering (multiplicative interaction) effect posited by the JDCS is confirmed in an academic workplace context and can be extended to explain workplace bullying, it might reveal that, for professors, job demands create stress at work, and stress in turn encourages faculty to bully each other, but that stressors have less of an effect on workplace bullying when faculty can complete their work how they want to and when their supervisor (chairperson) is socially supportive of the faculty. There is evidence for this possibility from the organizational literature, allowing us to test this possibility by specifying a conditional process model based on the JDCS model.

Theoretical Job Demands-Control-Support Model of Workplace Bullying

Using model-building guidelines provided by [Jaccard and Jacoby \(2020\)](#), we consulted the JDCS literature to (a) develop a theoretical path model, that (b) specified the mediated and moderated portions of model, to (c) explain the prevalence of workplace bullying and victimization of professors. The final path model we specified is displayed in [Figure 1](#). Below we offer the theoretical logic from extant research that led to this specification of a conditional process model (second stage moderated moderated mediation). The paths estimating unconditional and conditional effects in our model are displayed below in [Figure 1](#), and the scholarship informing these hypothesized paths are discussed in turn.

Our theoretical path model starts with a core prediction from the JDCS model ([Karasek & Theorell, 1990](#)); that psychological job demands create job stress (path a), while also holding constant PhD granting status of the academic department and years worked in the organization (to control for them as covariates because professors have different types of university and work experiences). Previous scholarship has demonstrated that psychological job demands are positively associated with occupational stress among professors ([Goodboy et al., 2018](#)). Our next specification (path b_1) is that job stress leads to workplace bullying among professors controlling for job demands. As [Salin and Hoel \(2020\)](#) explained, “bullying has frequently been associated with a negative and stressful working environment. To account for such a relationship, it has been argued that work stressors may both elicit frustration and thereby increase the enactment of bullying” (p. 307). From these two joint paths (a, b_1), we then hypothesized mediation, that the effect of job demands on workplace bullying is direct (c') and indirect through increased job stress (ab_1). This hypothesis of mediation is informed by research revealing that, among university employees,

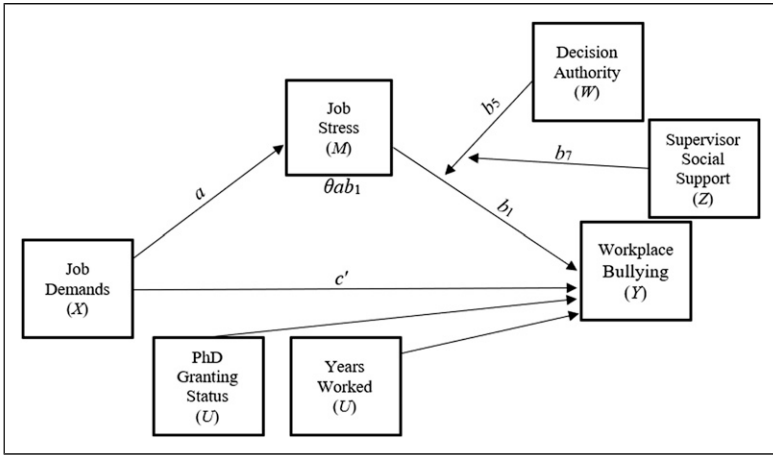


Figure 1. Conditional process model for workplace bullying. Note: PhD granting status is indicator coded (0 = Not PhD granting, 1 = PhD granting). This is a conceptual path model depicting second-stage moderated moderated mediation. The full statistical model is reported in Table 2 to correspond with the path labels presented here. In this statistical model (Table 2), b_4 - b_6 (not displayed here) are 3 two-way interactions and b_7 is the three-way interaction required to test for second-stage moderated moderation (i.e., the effect of job stress on workplace bullying is moderated by decision authority, which is then moderated by supervisor social support).

increases to a workload directly affect workplace bullying, but also indirectly affect it by increasing psychological stressors, which in turn, also increases workplace bullying (Spagnoli et al., 2017).

These established relationships among job demands, job stress, and workplace bullying are further informed by the buffering potential of two variables—control and social support—which are also theorized by the JDSC model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). As Salin and Hoel (2020) explained, “the problem of bullying comes to the fore when a high degree of pressure is present in a work environment which offers individuals little control over their own work” (p. 308). Einarsen et al. (2020) noted that a lack of job control or social support at work makes it difficult for employees to cope with job stressors, which contributes to more workplace bullying incidents. Supporting a JDSC explanation, Goodboy et al. (2018) found that professors who work in academic departments characterized by higher job demands, lower control over job duties, and lower supervisor social support, experience more workplace bullying. However, Goodboy et al. (2018) argued that the associations between JDSC variables, stress, and workplace bullying should be modeled theoretically and statistically as a conditional process by including tests of multiplicative effects as is done in the wealth of JDSC studies examining other job strain outcomes (de Lange et al.,

2003; Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2021; Häusser et al., 2010). Goodboy et al. (2018) recommended “specifically, scholars should determine if professors’ control over job tasks and supervisor/chair social support buffer against high job demands, and resulting job stress, which can encourage professors to bully each other in a strained working environment” (p. 162). Thus, in line with the documented buffering effects of the JDCS model (van der Doef & Maes, 1999), we added moderation specifications to the model and predicted that professor control over how job duties are completed (decision authority) buffers against the impact of job stress on workplace bullying. Moreover, we predicted that supervisor (chairperson) social support moderates the moderated (buffering) effect of professor job control on workplace bullying (moderated moderation; tested as a multiplicative three-way interaction). We predicted moderated moderation based on research suggesting that job control lessens the effects of job demands on workplace bullying when a supervisor is not socially supportive (Goodboy et al., 2017).

Thus, our final model incorporates both mediation and moderation into a conditional process model with theoretical predictions informed by the JDCS model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). This conditional process model also meets a recent call by Nielsen and Einarsen (2018) to study workplace bullying using statistical mediation and moderation (i.e., moderated mediation) to evaluate the underlying reasons that encourage bullying and the boundary conditions that might better delineate among the processes behind victimization. In its entirety as a conditional process model, we hypothesized that increased psychological job demands for professors have a positive effect on job stress, which in turn, encourages bullying at work (mediation); however, having higher control over how professors complete their academic duties buffers against stress-induced bullying (moderation), especially when supervisor (chair) social support is lacking (moderated moderation). Thus, our model is designed to estimate conditional indirect effects (job demands → job stress → workplace bullying) that are dependent upon two moderators: how much job control and supervisor social support is afforded to professors in their departments (moderated moderated mediation).

Method

Participants

Participants were 504 faculty members working in higher education, with job titles including adjunct professor ($n = 38$, 7.6%), instructor ($n = 26$, 5.2%), lecturer ($n = 37$, 7.4%) assistant professor ($n = 188$, 37.8%), associate professor ($n = 119$, 23.9%), full professor ($n = 86$, 17.3%), and administrative roles such as department chair ($n = 3$, 0.6%), among other job titles. Participants were employed in over 80 different academic disciplines, spanning

from English, Business, and History, to Biology, Engineering, Genetics, Pharmacy, and Veterinary Medicine. One hundred 63 participants identified as men (32.4%), 336 identified as women (66.8%), and four participants reported nonbinary gender identities (0.8%), with one unreported participant sex.

The average participant was 41.60 years old ($SD = 9.77$), had worked as a professor for 10.46 years ($SD = 8.96$), had an average salary of \$80,367 ($SD = US\$62,114$), and was White/Caucasian ($n = 448, 89.4\%$), with other ethnicities (three unreported) represented including Asian American ($n = 17, 3.4\%$), Hispanic ($n = 13, 2.6\%$), African American ($n = 5, 1.0\%$), Native American ($n = 2, 0.4\%$), Pacific Islander ($n = 1, 0.2\%$), and 15 individuals who reported “other” (3.0%). The majority of participants held doctoral degrees ($n = 416, 83.5\%$), 16.3% of participants held Master’s degrees ($n = 81$), and one participant held a bachelor’s degree (0.2%), with six participants electing not to report their degree. Two hundred and 24 participants’ departments offered doctoral degrees (44.9%), 126 worked for Master’s-granting departments (25.3%), 114 worked for departments who offered Bachelor’s degrees only (22.8%), and 35 worked for departments that offered Associate’s degrees (7.0%), with five unreported department degree offerings.

Procedures

Faculty participants were recruited for the present study, which utilized an online Qualtrics questionnaire, through various network sampling techniques. The research team posted the IRB-approved study advertisement on their personal social media profiles to recruit colleagues. Additionally, the advertisement was posted on academic-related online forums, such as ones hosted by Reddit (e.g., including subreddits such as *r/professors*, *r/highereducation*, and *r/askacademia*), and was sent to multiple interdisciplinary research-based listservs (e.g., The Association of Internet Researchers, the Social Psychology Network). These techniques were used to obtain a more diverse sample of professors and instructors representing numerous disciplines, rather than those only in the researchers’ networks. Participants responded to a variety of demographic and screening questions to ensure data quality given the online recruiting techniques used.

Measures

For all measures, composite reliability was assessed using Hayes and Coutts’s (2020) OMEGA macro to calculate coefficient omega (ω) using Hancock and An’s (2020) formula with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals. Coefficient omega is preferred over coefficient alpha for unidimensional measures (Goodboy & Martin, 2020).

Job Demands-Control-Support. Karasek et al.'s (1998) subscales of the Job Content Questionnaire were used to measure perceived job demands, control, and support. *Job demands* were measured using eight items from the psychological demands subscale, including items such as "I am not asked to do excessive work" (reverse coded). *Control* was evaluated using three items from the decision authority subscale, including items such as "My job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own." Finally, five items from the supervisor social support subscale measured *social support* from a chair/director, such as "My supervisor pays attention to what I am saying." All items were set using 5-point Likert responses, ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. All measures of the JDCS variables demonstrated acceptable reliability: psychological job demands ($\omega = 0.786$ [0.748, 0.814]; $M = 3.422$, $SD = 0.791$), employee control ($\omega = 0.745$ [0.685, 0.796]; $M = 4.139$, $SD = 0.717$), and supervisor social support ($\omega = 0.901$ [0.882, 0.916]; $M = 3.827$, $SD = 0.934$).

Job Stress. Stress-induced symptoms of employee health were measured using Netemeyer et al.'s (2005) Job Stress Measure, which asked participants to rate stress-related indicators such as "My job tends to directly affect my health." The four items from this measure were set using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. This measure demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\omega = 0.816$ [0.787, 0.842]; $M = 3.329$, $SD = 0.922$).

Workplace Bullying. To measure target-directed bullying behaviors over the course of the last 6 months, the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (Einarsen et al., 2009) was used as it has been applied to academic bullying (Meriläinen et al., 2016). The NAQ-R is a 22-item instrument that assesses the frequency of bullying behaviors experienced in the workplace over the last 6 months with items such as being "humiliated or ridiculed in your connection with work" or "ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach." Responses were set on a 5-point Likert-type scale with options ranging from (1) *never* to (5) *daily*. This measure demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\omega = 0.932$ [0.914, 0.946]; $M = 1.504$, $SD = 0.513$).

Data Analysis

To test the theoretical hypotheses in a single conditional process model (secondstage moderated moderated mediation), we estimated a conditional process analysis using PROCESS 3.4 (Hayes, 2018a) using ordinary least squares path analysis. The conceptual model we tested, specifying secondstage moderated moderated mediation, is displayed in Figure 1. Within path analysis, the contemporary statistical test for detecting moderated mediation is the index of moderated mediation and its accompanying bootstrap confidence

interval (Hayes, 2015); “if the confidence interval does not include zero, this leads to the inference that the relationship between the indirect effect and the moderator is not zero – moderated mediation” (p. 8) and “any two conditional indirect effects defined by different values of the moderator are statistically significant” (p. 14). However, Hayes’s (2015) index of moderated mediation is limited to a model with one moderator to detect the moderation of mediation. Until recently, there was no statistical test to accommodate mediation models with two moderators for inferences about conditional indirect effects that are moderated (i.e., moderation of moderated mediation). Hayes (2018b) published three statistical tests for conditional process models with two moderators: the index of partial moderated mediation, the index of conditional moderated mediation, and the index of moderated moderated mediation. Because these are newer indices, we briefly discuss two that are relevant to the conditional process model we specified.

The index of moderated moderated mediation (abbreviated as IMMM hereafter) and its accompanying confidence interval is appropriate for mediation models with a three-way interaction involving two moderators; it serves as “an inference about whether the moderation of the indirect effect of X on Y by W is moderated by Z” (Hayes, 2018b, p. 20). In other words, the IMMM quantifies how quickly the slope of a conditional indirect effect changes at values of the second moderator and is a formal test for moderation of moderated mediation. If the confidence interval (CI) for the IMMM excludes zero, it is then recommended to probe the moderation of moderated mediation at chosen values of the second moderator (Z) to determine when an indirect effect is moderated by the first moderator (W) and when it is not moderated (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). With evidence of moderation of moderated mediation, values of the second moderator (Z) are then selected using a “pick-a-point” approach ($-1 SD, M, +1 SD$) to determine at what values there is and is not moderated mediation by the first moderator (W). The index of conditional moderated mediation (referred to as the index of ICMM hereafter) is the follow-up statistical test to the IMMM; if its CI excludes zero, then the primary moderator (W) moderates the size of the indirect effect at that given value of the secondary moderator (Z), but if the CI includes zero, there is no moderated mediation and any two indirect effects are not statistically different at any value of the primary moderator. More details about the mathematics, implementation, and interpretation of these analyses are found in the documentation of Hayes (2018b) and Hayes and Rockwood (2020). Bootstrap CIs for the IMMM and ICMM, as well as conditional indirect effects, were generated using 100,000 percentile bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2018a).

Results

Correlations between all study variables are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Zero-Order Correlations with Confidence Intervals.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Psych job demands	—	—	—	—	—
2. Decision authority	-0.165 [-0.260, -0.063]	—	—	—	—
3. Supervisor social support	-0.296 [-0.374, -0.213]	0.419 [0.328, 0.528]	—	—	—
4. Job stress	0.552 [0.480, 0.618]	-0.246 [-0.335, -0.151]	-0.327 [-0.401, -0.250]	—	—
5. Workplace bullying	0.494 [0.411, 0.562]	-0.461 [-0.560, -0.354]	-0.606 [-0.666, -0.536]	0.492 [0.435, 0.546]	—

Note: 95% confidence intervals are in brackets using 5000 bootstrap samples (percentile).

Unstandardized path coefficients (including two-way interactions and a three-way interaction), standard errors, and CIs are reported in Table 2. Independent of the mediation reported below, job demands had a direct effect on workplace bullying ($c' = .174, p < .001$).

First, evidence of moderated moderated mediation was obtained (IMMM = .046, SE = .018, 95% CI [.006 to .080]). Because the CI excluded zero, we can conclude that the moderation (by professor's decision authority) of the indirect effect (the effect of job demands on workplace bullying mediated by job stress) varies systematically as a function of the second moderator (supervisor social support). In other words, the moderation of the indirect effect by professor's decision authority depends on how much social support a supervisor provides to a professor. With affirmative evidence, we then probed this moderation of moderated mediation at a relatively low value of supervisor social support ($-1 SD = 2.880$), average level of supervisor social support ($M = 3.820$), and relatively high level of supervisor social support ($+1 SD = 4.761$).

When supervisors provide low social support

At low levels of supervisor social support, there was evidence of moderated mediation by decision authority (ICMM = -0.082 , SE = 0.025, 95% CI [$-0.128, -0.027$]). When low supervisor social support is provided, the indirect effect of job demands on workplace bullying through job stress is strongest with professors who have low ($W = 3.414$) decision authority ($\theta_{ab} = 0.156$;

Table 2. Conditional Process Analysis.

Model	Coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Job stress (mediator)						
$F(1, 467) = 210.158, p < .001, R^2 = 0.310$						
Constant	1.091	0.158	6.896	<.001	0.780	1.402
(a) job demands	0.653	0.045	14.497	<.001	0.565	0.742
Workplace bullying (outcome)						
$F(10, 458) = 72.903, p < .001, R^2 = .614$						
Constant	-3.822	1.468	-2.604	0.010	-6.707	-0.937
(b ₁) job stress (JS)	1.684	0.330	5.099	<0.001	1.035	2.334
(c) job demands (JD)	.174	0.023	0.7594	<0.001	0.129	0.219
(b ₂) decision authority (DA)	1.013	0.357	2.837	0.005	0.311	1.715
(b ₃) supervisor social support (SSS)	1.030	0.369	2.789	0.006	0.304	1.755
(b ₄) DA × SSS	-0.237	0.088	-2.686	0.008	-0.410	-0.064
(b ₅) JS × DA	-0.326	0.082	-4.001	<0.001	-0.487	-0.166
(b ₆) JS × SSS	-0.353	0.086	-4.125	<0.001	-0.521	-0.185
(b ₇) JS × DA × SSS	0.070	0.021	3.371	0.001	0.029	0.110
(b ₈) PhD granting institution	-0.051	0.030	-1.677	0.094	-0.110	0.009
(b ₉) years worked as professor	0.004	0.002	2.689	0.007	0.001	0.008
Moderated mediation (via job stress)					95% bootstrap CI	
	IE	SE			LLCI	ULCI
$\theta(ab_1)$ Low DA = 3.414; Low SSS = 2.880	0.156	0.025			0.107	0.208
$\theta(ab_1)$ Low DA = 3.414; Avg SSS = 3.820	0.086	0.018			0.049	0.119
$\theta(ab_1)$ Low DA = 3.414; High SSS = 4.761	0.015	0.024			-0.037	0.056
$\theta(ab_1)$ Avg DA = 4.141; Low SSS = 2.880	0.096	0.022			0.055	0.143
$\theta(ab_1)$ Avg DA = 4.141; Avg SSS = 3.820	0.057	0.013			0.031	0.084
$\theta(ab_1)$ Avg DA = 4.141; High SSS = 4.761	0.017	0.014			-0.012	0.043
$\theta(ab_1)$ High DA = 4.869; Low SSS = 2.880	0.037	0.032			-0.021	0.105
$\theta(ab_1)$ High DA = 4.869; Avg SSS = 3.820	0.028	0.017			-0.003	0.062
$\theta(ab_1)$ High DA = 4.869; High SSS = 4.761	0.020	0.016			-0.011	0.050

Note: Path coefficients and conditional indirect effects are unstandardized. Conditional indirect effects are estimated at values of the moderators (decision authority and supervisor social support) using the pick-a-point approach (+/- 1 SD and Mean). IE = indirect effect.

95% CI [0.107, 0.208]); the indirect effect becomes weaker when professors have average ($W = 4.141$) decision authority ($\theta_{ab} = 0.096$; 95% CI [0.055, 0.143]); and there is no evidence of an indirect effect when professors have high ($W = 4.869$) decision authority ($\theta_{ab} = 0.037$; 95% CI [-0.021, 0.105]).

In the workplace, this looks like a department where the chairperson is not particularly concerned about the welfare of the faculty, but when faculty members are in a position to have more control about their own organizational responsibilities, bullying becomes less likely to occur from job demands that induce workplace stress. For those faculty members who have an unsupportive and controlling chairperson, stress-induced bullying from job demands occurs more frequently.

When supervisors provide some social support

At average levels of supervisor social support, there was evidence of moderated mediation by decision authority (ICMM = -0.039, SE = 0.015, 95% CI [-0.067, -0.008]). When average supervisor social support is provided, the indirect effect of job demands on workplace bullying through job stress is stronger when professors have low decision authority ($\theta_{ab} = 0.086$; 95% CI [0.049, 0.119]); the indirect effect becomes weaker when professors have average decision authority ($\theta_{ab} = 0.057$; 95% CI [0.031, 0.084]), and there is no indirect effect when professors have high decision authority ($\theta_{ab} = 0.028$; 95% CI [-0.003, 0.062]).

In the workplace, this looks like a department where the chairperson is somewhat concerned about the welfare of the faculty, but as faculty members gain more control over how they complete their job duties, bullying occurs less frequently from job demands that create workplace stress. For those faculty who have a somewhat supportive chair, but felt restricted in performing job duties, stress-induced bullying from job demands occurs more frequently, but less so than working under an unsupportive chairperson.

When supervisors provide high social support

At high levels of supervisor social support, there was no evidence of moderated mediation by decision authority (ICMM = 0.003, SE = 0.020, 95% CI [-0.032, 0.046]). Because the CI for ICMM includes zero, when professors have highly supportive supervisors, none of the indirect effects at any value of decision authority are significantly different from each other. When high supervisor social support is provided, the indirect effects of job demands on workplace bullying through job stress were not different from zero for low decision authority ($\theta_{ab} = 0.015$; 95% CI [-0.037, 0.056]); average decision authority ($\theta_{ab} = 0.017$; 95% CI [-0.012, 0.043]), and high decision authority ($\theta_{ab} = 0.020$; 95% CI [-0.011, 0.052]). Simply put, with a highly supportive

supervisor, decision control did not buffer the indirect effects; in fact, there was no evidence of mediation at all.

In the workplace, this looks like a department where the chairperson is very concerned about the welfare of the faculty, and job control is not needed to offset bullying from work demands and subsequent stress. In fact, a highly supportive chairperson disrupts the strained work environment process that results in bullying altogether.

To summarize, the JDCS conditional process model received support as psychological job demands had a direct and indirect (through occupational stress) effect on workplace bullying, but supervisor social support and decision authority exerted a multiplicative effect (three-way interaction) in the model that buffered against the theorized process. Chairs who were highly supportive of their faculty disrupted the work environment process behind bullying, and decision authority was not needed to offset victimization. In departments with less supportive chairs, stress from work demands increased bullying, but having more decision authority diminished bullying and, with enough job control, offset processes of bullying as well.

Discussion

This study tested a theoretical conditional process model of workplace bullying informed by the JDCS model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Our conditional process model confirmed the importance of the work environment in explaining variation in workplace bullying and highlighted the importance of the buffering effect afforded to faculty by a supportive chairperson. Although job demands (directly), and the resulting job stress from those demands (indirectly), contributed to workplace bullying in academic departments, having a chairperson who communicated ample social support to faculty (i.e., listens to faculty, helps faculty work together successfully, supports faculty with their tasks) nullified the stress-induced indirect effect on bullying. Thus, the discussion of our model's findings centers around the necessity of appointing a competent and responsive chair to mitigate professor bullying and how a chair might help reduce strain-related bullying by delegating manageable job demands, alleviating stress, allowing for job control, and, most important, providing social support to faculty when needed. As Colligan and Higgins (2005) pointed out, "managers play a critical role in the identification and intervention of chronic workplace stress" and "by removing obstacles such as work overload, environmental annoyances, isolation, and lack of autonomy, an environment is created in which an employee will be able to flourish" (p. 95). Thus, the issue of academic bullying can be offset to some degree by a chairperson's managerial decisions and communication practices with faculty. However, we recognize that chairpersons and other academic leaders are frequently cited by faculty as the sources of bullying themselves (Hollis, 2012, 2015; Keashly & Neuman, 2013).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Our results indicated that professors who have higher job demands report more workplace bullying directly, and also indirectly because of occupational stress. Although the resulting stress from considerable job demands is inevitable in academia (especially during peak times of the semester with fixed deadlines), the stress does not have to cultivate bullying if the chairperson communicates caring for the welfare of the faculty. That is, with a highly supportive chairperson, there were no indirect effects on bullying, even when professors had low decision authority in their jobs. This finding speaks to the importance of a chairperson exhibiting leadership qualities that promote support for faculty members; such qualities that communicate leaders' care and concern are recommended in the spiritual leadership literature (Fry, 2003; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013; Fry et al., 2005). Spiritual leadership includes values, attitudes, and behaviors that leaders use to intrinsically motivate employees (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013) including *vision* (a chair describes the future of the department and why the collective organizational journey is important in defining what an academic unit is and will do), *hope* (a chair assures the faculty that goals will be met with success due to their future work and contributions), and, most relevant to our findings, *altruistic love* (a chair demonstrates care, concern, and appreciation for faculty by communicating with honesty, courage, integrity, and kindness). By adopting a spiritual leadership style and motivating faculty to work for intrinsic reasons, employees' needs of calling (faculty have a sense that they make a real difference in the department) and membership (faculty feel they are understood and appreciated by their chair) are then met (Fry, 2003). Thus, chairpersons might consider the degree to which they enact spiritual leadership, and especially if they foster a sense of support, care, and harmony to faculty by communicating values including "patience, kindness, lack of envy, forgiveness, humility, selflessness, self-control, trust, loyalty, and truthfulness" (Fry, 2003, p. 712).

However, independent of a conditional indirect effect, there remained a direct effect of psychological job demands on workplace bullying, thus offering another way a chairperson might help faculty manage the multitude of job demands. Even in the best of times, faculty members are often overburdened.² Twale (2018) argued that it is a chair's responsibility to promote faculty members' physical and psychological health and well-being along with work-life balance. One way chairs can assist their faculty members is by minimizing and eliminating additional and peripheral job demands. Although we recognize that, due to organizational pressures and budget constraints, chairs may not have the legitimate authority to reduce certain demands of the job (nor should they attempt to reduce legitimate contractual demands), chairs might consider reducing extra and additional work burdens so faculty can better accomplish their main job duties. This might include a

chair: (1) having faculty teach their contracted and regular teaching loads instead of adding additional courses or new class preparations, (2) limiting the number and length of emails and requests that they send their faculty, (3) respecting faculty members' time away from the office (e.g., no late evening or weekend meetings or emails unless an issue is legitimately urgent), (4) empowering faculty members to conduct their job duties without micro-managing, (5) eliminating unnecessary and redundant paperwork and forms, (6) providing ample time in assigning duties or requesting feedback, and (7) being realistic with productivity expectations given the department resources available (or lack thereof). Every faculty member has legitimate job demands and we are not suggesting that chairs have low expectations for their faculty members. Instead, we argue that chairs need to provide an environment where faculty members can focus on their legitimate and primary job demands.

Moreover, our results indicated that for professors in departments where a chairperson provides less social support to faculty, having autonomous control over how job duties were completed also buffered against workplace bullying because of stress. It is important to note that even with low social support from a chair, as long as professors had high decision authority in completing their job duties, there were no indirect effects of job demands on bullying due to stress. But it is also important to note that for faculty with restricted decision authority and low supervisor social support, the indirect effect on bullying was present and strongest. Although we would argue that supervisor social support is paramount, some chairs might not have the interpersonal disposition to be highly supportive. Others chairs might face legitimate time restrictions that prevent them from offering each individual faculty member the necessary immediate social support. No matter why the chair might be unable to provide the needed support, chairs likely could improve faculty members' well-being by allowing them to be more autonomous in their work. There may be limited options of times and courses to teach in a given semester, but chairs should give the faculty members whatever choice is possible instead of deciding without consultation. While chairs should ensure that faculty members follow college and university guidelines, chairs should not create arbitrary course regulations, restrictions, and assignments that force a faculty member to comply with no input. Faculty members should be able to make day-to-day decisions involving their professional responsibilities (e.g., selecting a textbook, creating a syllabus, teaching with pedagogical preferences, inviting a guest speaker, sponsoring a workshop) without receiving official permission from their chair. After all, authoritarian and controlling leadership from a chair is associated with the bully culture in academia (Hollis, 2012; Twale, 2018).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are limitations to the current study, including that faculty members completed all of the measures in a cross-sectional questionnaire. Although it is common for researchers to propose conducting a longitudinal study as a future direction, we believe there is an additional reason for making this suggestion. Harlos and Holmvall (2018) argued that longitudinal designs are needed to better understand the reciprocal linkages between stress and workplace bullying, stating that “cross-sectional designs are not well suited to test intermediary cognitive processes in observing and perceiving workplace bullying” (p. 5). Another limitation is that we invited faculty from any university level and department to participate in our study. While our sample represented individuals from different ranks and disciplines, there is also value in focusing on a more specific population. For instance, Zabrodska and Kveton (2013) observed that more bullying takes place among natural science faculty, possibly due to discipline-specific pressures. Hollis (2018) asserted that classifying all faculty members together ignores the reality that women, people of color, and those in gender and sexual minorities are more likely to be bullied. Relatedly, there may be value in using the JDCS model of workplace strain to study microaggressions (vs. bullying). Long et al. (2016) explained that microaggressions are a subtle form of discrimination that is often less direct and not necessarily intentional. However, this type of communication is harmful in that “microaggressions are offensive and denigrating to the victim” (p. 113). Possibly autonomy and social support would play similar roles in moderating the relationship between job stress and microaggressions.

Another limitation is that we asked faculty members to report on the bullying they received as targets, but we did not provide any specific prompts regarding the perpetrator(s) of the victimizing messages. We did this in part because we were interested in modeling direct and indirect effects of JDCS variables as theorized by Karasek and Theorell (1990). Yet, there is also value in investigating whether the perpetrator(s) of bullying were either supervisors, administrators, colleagues, or peers; this is not captured by the NAQ-R as it measures specific negative acts without reporting a source. A final limitation is that we measured general social support from a supervisor, without considering how specific forms of supervisor social support (e.g., instrumental support vs. informational support) might discourage faculty from bullying and without considering how colleagues might provide social support to each other as targets. Thus, more nuanced approaches to modeling social support deserve future empirical attention.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when professors have enough decision authority to do their job the way they want, it mitigates stress-induced workplace bullying from faculty who face psychosocial job demands from chairperson who is not as supportive

as they should be. When professors work in a department with a highly supportive supervisor, decision authority is not needed to remove the stress-induced indirect effect on bullying, as the process behind bullying breaks down despite how much control is afforded in the job. Thus, the role of a chairperson and their decision-making and managerial communication is vital in fostering a better work environment for professors, which leads us to this simple empirical advice. Chairs should encourage autonomy at work and offer social support to faculty who need it. By doing so, professors might not take their job-related stressors out on each other by bullying.

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Notes

1. Two of the coauthors on this manuscript have experience being a chairperson. Although our practical implications and chairperson recommendations are informed by social science scholarship, our discussions were also informed by their experiences and managerial communication practices.
2. At the time of our writing in 2022, faculty members are facing (and have been facing) additional challenges and stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic itself may be responsible for an increase in academic bullying because there may be less institutional monitoring and investigating of abusive behaviors and less support available for targets due to a shift in administrative responsibilities in dealing with COVID-19 issues (Mahmoudi & Keashly, 2020).

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