

“I Love the Work, but I Hate My Job”: A Critical Narrative Inquiry on Academic Bullying  
Among Faculty at Four-Year Institutions

By

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## **Abstract**

Hostile work environments in the U.S. have been long examined, beginning with the pioneering work of Carroll Brodsky (1976), which produced the idea of workplace bullying. Academic bullying, a term that derived from the concept of broader workplace bullying, is situated specifically within the academic work environment. While academic bullying has gained attention over the last two decades, there is still a paucity of research that investigates bullying within the ivory tower, and the effects it has on faculty. Furthermore, researchers have found that bullying is almost three times as likely to occur in educational spaces as compared with other professional settings (Gupta et al., 2017). This study sought to understand the lived experiences of faculty who have encountered academic bullying at four-year institutions, how these experiences impact their work and personal lives, and how power dynamics and institutional failure contribute to these experiences. Guided by the theory of social closure and engaging critical narrative inquiry, findings reveal that faculty of color are often targets of bullying based on their minoritized identities, and that academic bullying often stems from an abuse of power from those with social privileges and positional power. The results are of critical importance to university leadership, including provosts and academic deans, as well as department chairs and faculty in an effort to retain exceptional talent and reduce workplace violence.

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**Chapter 1: Introduction**

The term “bully” may conjure up images of a kid, perhaps at school, who inflicts anguish, pain, or discomfort onto another kid. Scholars (e.g., Roberts, 2000) have asserted, however, that bullying extends into adulthood. So, what happens when a bully grows up and continues to torment others, or when someone develops bullying behaviors as an adult? Though, instead of school, these behaviors now occur within the workplace—an environment that impacts one’s career mobility, livelihood, and overall happiness. What impact does bullying behavior have on those who are targeted because of perceived vulnerability? Studies have concluded that victims of workplace bullying can experience psychological, physiological, and psychosocial consequences (Einarsen, 1999; Twale, 2017) that ultimately affect employees’ confidence, well-being, and overall retention. Consequently, there is much to be explored on the impact of violence at work within academic and higher education spaces.

The number of empirical studies that specifically examine the workplace bullying phenomenon within a U.S. academic work context<sup>1</sup> (hereafter referred to as, “academic bullying”) is sparse. Because of this dearth of literature, it is unclear whether academic bullying is uncommon or simply masked, tolerated, and normalized. While Internet blogs, forums, and other anecdotal data exists, it was not until the early 2000s that workplace bullying in higher education, specifically related to faculty, has been empirically investigated (Hollis, 2015; Lester, 2013; Tepper & White, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this study, the terms workplace bullying and academic bullying will be used. Workplace bullying is used to describe general work environments, whereas academic bullying is contextualized specifically in academia.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the experiences of faculty who have experienced workplace bullying and other hostile behaviors within academia. First, I provide context and rationale that supports this research, followed by relevant literature to better understand the phenomenon of academic bullying. I use Social Closure Theory as a theoretical framework to explain how dominant groups exclude others from resources. I also describe the research design and procedures. Next, I share the findings in two chapters, featuring selected narratives and discussing themes across all participants. Lastly, I discuss take aways and implications for theory, research, and practice.

### **Background of the Problem**

Experiencing a hostile work climate not only affects staff morale, but can also result in personal challenges such as depression, anxiety, high blood pressure, fatigue, loss of confidence, and emotional disorders for individuals (Saunders et al., 2007; Fiabane et al., 2012; Leymann, 1990; Misawa, 2015; Peters, 2014; Saunders et al., 2007; Tepper & White, 2011). Academic bullying, in particular, is a pervasive issue that has direct adverse impact on faculty's emotional, somatic, and psychological well-being, ability to obtain tenure, absenteeism, decreased productivity, and overall job retention (e.g., Einarsen, 1999; Lester, 2013). The environment of the academy is unique, in that faculty do not report to the leader of the department (i.e., department chair) in the same way that workers are supervised by managers in most work environments. The hierarchical structure within departments and the broader academic system, including the protections of tenure, can hinder accountability. As a result, faculty may experience adverse behaviors among their peers—including faculty who hold additional administrative roles.

According to previous studies, faculty can be targets of hostile behavior because of their race and sex (Johnson-Bailey, 2015), gender and sexual orientation (Misawa, 2015), age (Dentith

et al., 2015), and academic rank (Ahmad et al., 2017). As a result, these faculty have experienced trauma, left the professoriate, and filed lawsuits. Despite the knowledge of *who* tends to be victims of bullying in academia, there is limited empirical research that documents *how* academic bullying manifests, the lived experiences of those enduring bullying, and the impacts and consequences that they negotiate. Below, I describe in detail a notable example of bullying that gained national media attention, as a way to bring more saliency to this pivotal research gap.

Dr. Princess Dennar, a Black, woman assistant professor of medicine and practicing physician at Tulane University, filed a claim in October of 2020 against The Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund (“Tulane University”) under the basis of 42 U.S.C. § 2000(e), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Dennar v. “Tulane University,” 2020). More specifically, she claims that the Senior Vice President and Dean for the School of Medicine, Dr. Lee Hamm, and the Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education, Dr. Jeffrey Weise, both orchestrated and demonstrated discrimination, harassment, the creation of a hostile work environment, as well as retaliation against her; both being in direct violation of the state of Louisiana’s antidiscrimination laws and federal statutes. As the first and only Black female residency program director at Tulane University, Dr. Dennar has not been able to maintain authority of her residency program without the direct interference of Drs. Hamm and Weise, unlike other program directors at the institution. She was surveilled more than all her peers. Furthermore, Dr. Dennar has been omitted from mass communications regarding the medical school, as well as alerts that two gunmen were on campus and in the parking lot in which she parked her car. Since joining the university in 2008, she has also been stuck at the assistant professor rank for 12 years. Though at the normal rate, she would have been promoted within five to seven years.

According to the complaint filed with the Eastern District of Louisiana–U.S. District Court, Dr. Dennar witnessed and personally encountered many acts of race and gender-based discrimination and ongoing conduct that created a hostile work environment. As a result, she asserts that the environment has negatively affected her employment, authority, medical program, pay, trainees<sup>2</sup>, and overall ability to fulfill the duties of her leadership roles. After several complaints from Black resident physicians regarding Dean Hamm’s interference with allowing them to complete required training for graduation, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), the accrediting body for graduate medical education, conducted an unplanned site visit. After a full investigation, the ACGME consequently found the residents’ claims to be true, and that Dr. Dennar’s authority over the Med-Peds program had been violated (Dennar v. “Tulane University,” 2020).

From Dr. Dennar’s perspective, she experienced discrimination and bullying from Hamm from the time she interviewed for the program director role until the filing of her lawsuit in 2020. In 2008, Dennar was originally offered the role of co-program director rather than the sole director, and Hamm allegedly stated, “I’m afraid that white medical students wouldn’t follow or rank favorably a program with a black program director; [however] we’ll be comfortable with you sharing a position as co-director with the previous [white male Med-Peds] program director” (Dennar v. “Tulane University,” 2020). Dr. Dennar has filed claims with the institutional equity office and two additional claims with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). She subsequently received a Right to Sue letter from the EEOC, which signifies that the agency has done all it can and permits the plaintiff to file a lawsuit in federal court. Since filing the

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<sup>2</sup> Trainees are medical practitioners in an approved graduate medical education (GME) program to include interns, resident physicians (or “residents”), and fellows.

lawsuit, Dr. Dennar has been suspended from her administrative leadership position as residency program director and believes this removal is in retaliation to her allegations (Kiefer, 2021).

The case of Dr. Princess Dennar is, ostensibly, one of the numerous lawsuits that have been brought before the courts, as well as the many cases which are not lawfully tried. Though some scholars opt out of pursuing legal action, many have turned to the Internet to tell their stories. For instance, the blog, *Bullying of Academic in Higher Education*, has over 1000 anecdotes of academic bullying over the last 15 years. Furthermore, while the existence of tenure can create conditions that allow or even encourage bullying in academe—due to the hypercritical review of work, gatekeepers, and social closure (Jackson & Leon, 2012)—being tenured does not necessarily protect faculty members from being targeted (Westhues, 2002).

In a word, Dr. Dennar's case and countless other incidences shared in public domains described above suggests that bullying is a systemic issue in academia and there is a dire need to address the root causes of academic bullying and its impact on faculty. These narratives also suggest that academic bullying is a complex and nuanced phenomenon that is shaped by individual and systemic factors.

### **Research Questions**

From these incidences, reported through either media sources or other domains, it is clear that being a target of bullying has psychological and other consequences, which includes professors' beliefs in themselves and their ability to accomplish their tasks and goals. Experiencing a hostile work environment has direct implications on the tenure process and the overall state academia, including teaching future generations and the production and dissemination of new knowledge. The phenomenon of academic bullying is widespread and deserving of further investigation. Especially, empirical research that rigorously and thoughtfully

delves into how bullying manifests in academia, how it shapes the experiences of faculty, and the consequences that ensue, is vital for institutions to take seriously the ramifications of these toxic behaviors that can result in lawsuits, decreased productivity, faculty turnover, and increased expenses for recruiting and onboarding new talent (Lester, 2013).

As a step toward filling this pivotal gap in the literature, my dissertation pursues the following research questions: First, what are the lived experiences of faculty who have encountered academic bullying at four-year institutions? Second, how do these experiences impact their work and personal lives? Third, how do power dynamics and social closure contribute to these experiences?

## Chapter II: Review of Literature

In this chapter, I provide a review of the literature on workplace bullying, as to where bullying originated and later contextualized within academia. The first section focuses on the history and scope of workplace bullying to understand its conceptualization in scholarship and practice. I also discuss workplace bullying and its proximity to U.S. laws and statutes, along with anti-bullying policies in higher education. Following that, I present a description of the small body of research, dominated by quantitative approaches, that measures perceptions and experiences of academic bullying among faculty. I also include a review of the consequences of workplace bullying on faculty, as it helps explain why exploring these precarious and persistent acts of violence is crucial for the academy's vitality.

Hostile work environments in the U.S. have been long examined, beginning with a pioneering analysis from Carroll Brodsky (1976) on worker compensation cases of ill-treated employees in his book *Harassed Worker*; a relatively new concept in higher education. England scholar, Andrea Adams, is believed to have coined the term *workplace bullying* and defines it as “persistent criticism and personal abuse in public or private, which humiliates and demeans the person” (Adams & Crawford, 1992, p.1). While harassment in the workplace has been studied for over 40 years, there are many skeptics as to whether bullies actually exist beyond K-12 school yards. A variety of euphemisms and characteristics associated with workplace bullying also exist, which possibly makes the phenomenon more obscure or easy to discount.

### Understanding Workplace Bullying

As discussed in the previous chapter, workplace bullying is complex. Nevertheless, it is not too far-fetched to say that bullying has likely occurred for as long as people have worked together. Yet researchers have only begun to name and study bullying over the past few decades.

Because of its short research history, scholars have begun to associate workplace bullying with other labels and euphemisms such as harassment, incivility, workplace violence, workplace aggression, workplace trauma, interpersonal conflict, workplace abuse, etc. (Einarsen, 2000; Fox & Spector, 2005; Greenberg, 2010). While there are connections and overlaps among these terms due to similar behaviors present at the individual- and group-levels, these forms of aggression and hostility can vary depending on context and author. For example, Einarsen's (1999) definition of workplace bullying is behaviors directed at one or multiple employees that create an irregular experience for the victim(s) (Westhues, 2008). Yet, Heinz Leymann (1990) reformed and developed our understanding of the construct and employed *psychological terror* and *mobbing*, which may intensify the description and perceptions of maltreatment at work. Some scholars use these two labels and other related terms interchangeably; while others conceptualize them as distinct behaviors and experiences. Because of the lack of a consistent definition and language on workplace bullying, in part due to its emergence across disciplines, it is important that the behaviors and actions, duration, and antecedents are outlined when describing workplace bullying.

Although there are differences in what we call workplace bullying, the pattern of behaviors is more precise. Bullying manifests itself in many different ways. However, before delineating specific acts of bullying, perhaps it will be helpful to understand what workplace bullying is *not*. Bullying is not when a supervisor, manager, or someone in a position of authority provides justifiable and thoughtful feedback on a subordinate's performance. Additionally, bullying is not an isolated incident of a boss having a bad day or being terse towards an employee. Instead, bullying, as Namie and Namie (2009) propose, can be verbal abuse, threatening and intimidating behaviors, abuse of authority, interference with work performance,

and destruction of workplace relationships. According to a study from the Workplace Bullying Institute, starting or failing to stop gossip is also a frequently used tactic by bullies (Namie and Namie, 2011a). Similarly, Field (1996) notes behaviors that are indicative of bullying also include non-specific and constant criticism, exclusion and social isolation, demeaning and diminishing the target's ideas, shouting, physical behavior like slamming one's hand on a desk, and slander.

One act that has not been emphasized in the literature as a symptom of bullying is gaslighting. *Gaslighting*—“a type of psychological abuse aimed at making victims seem or feel “crazy,” creating a “surreal” interpersonal environment (Sweet, 2019, p. 851)—can very well be a type of bullying. Statements such as, “You’re crazy,” “Don’t be so sensitive,” “You’re overreacting,” “You’re being dramatic,” “Just kidding!” and “You’re imagining things” are all possible gaslighting responses. This type of social influence seeks to change the behavior or perception of others through deceptive and exploitative schemes. This behavior is, as Wozolek (2018) puts, a type of “emotional manipulation in which the gaslighter tries (consciously or not) to induce in someone the sense that her reactions, perceptions, memories and/or beliefs are not just mistaken, but utterly without grounds—paradigmatically, so unfounded as to qualify as crazy” (p. 2). Victims of gaslighting begin to question their own reality and truth. Similar to components of bullying, gaslighting encompasses multiple incidents over time (Wozolek, 2018). But why are certain people targeted for gaslighting and other forms of bullying? Understanding how bullies select their target and how work environments allow it to occur will be discussed next.

### *Antecedents of Bullying*

There are numerous reasons why an individual may choose to bully a specific person, as well as multiple organizational conditions that allow that behavior to occur and continue. First, let's turn to the target. Researchers that focus on antecedents of bullying have predominantly explored dispositional and emotional factors such as personality (Glaso et al., 2007) and demographic variables such as age, gender, and ethnicity (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Lewis & Gunn, 2007). One study (Persson et al., 2009) found that victims have higher levels of neuroticism and lower levels of extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Employees who are passive and unlikely to react to adverse behaviors are more likely seen as weak and vulnerable by potential actors (Samnani & Singh, 2012). Furthermore, those with low levels of conscientiousness may not notice or recognize when bullying is transpiring.

Targets have also been known to have higher levels of negative affect (Glaso et al., 2007). Negative affect can be described as a likelihood to experience emotions such as anxiety, fear, sadness, and anger. Low self-esteem is also more likely seen among employee targets (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001). Those who lack self-esteem may be more susceptible due to their lack of confidence, which may make them hesitant to retaliate or report. Components of one's temperament and demeanor are antecedents of bullying, but there are other factors for aiming aggression such as discrimination of gender, age, race and ethnicity, and sexual identity.

While some researchers (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Leymann, 1996) have reported little to no differences across gender, others (Attell et al., 2017; Lewis & Gunn, 2007) have found that women are more likely to be bullied than men. Additionally, studies have found that when men are the victims, they are typically only targeted by other men (Hoel et al., 1999). Older employees have also been found to be bullied at higher rates than younger workers.

However, as with gender, there is variance in the findings reported with respect to age. In regards to racial and ethnic minorities perceptions of workplace bullying, Fox and Stallworth (2005) found that Hispanics/Latinos experience workplace bullying at significantly higher rates than any other group due to racial and ethnic discrimination. However, they found no significant variations in bullying frequency between Blacks, Asians, and Whites.

Conversely, Lewis and Gunn (2007) conducted a study of workplace bullying and found that racial and ethnic minorities were nearly four times more likely to experience workplace bullying than White employees. Their study found that minorities were almost fourteen times more likely to be disregarded while at work by their manager, almost seven times more likely to face continued criticism of their work by peers, and over nine times more likely to be told to quit their job by colleagues of equal rank when compared to their White counterparts. Attell et al. (2017) found in a study of over 2000 respondents that when compared to White employees, all non-White employees reported higher levels of facing workplace bullying, as well as lower levels of social support from coworkers—despite social supporting being negatively associated with workplace bullying. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) academics and staff have also been known to be bullied on campuses (Rankin et al., 2010). Although further investigation is needed on sexual and gender minorities, as these identities are often hidden and private, it is likely that LGBT employees have already been included in previous bullying data. But what about the actors or perpetrators of bullying?

Much of the research, as previously described, is heavily and sufficiently focused on the target (Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). Therefore, our understanding of the perpetrator is scant. There is a dearth of scholarship that investigates the actor, which presents a challenge to the workplace bullying literature (Baillien et al., 2011; Samanini & Singh, 2012). What we know thus far is that

men are more likely than women to engage in bullying as actors (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). Some have concluded that employees with high workloads and low job autonomy, regardless of gender, are more likely to demonstrate bullying behaviors (Baillien et al., 2011). So, if racial and ethnic minoritized groups are more likely to experience bullying in the workplace (Lewis and Gunn, 2007) and men are typically culprits of this behavior, who is more likely to act as a bully? And, what organizational structures exist that allows for said behavior?

Understanding how bullying manifests within organizations is particularly important. Twale and De Luca (2008) believe that the origins of faculty bullying can be found in three areas of academic departments: competition, dominance, and power. To some, competition may seem almost antithetical to academia where information sharing and advancing scholarship is central. But are academic budgets driving competition among faculty for scarce resources? Such resources may include funding, lab or office space, equipment, teaching assignments, and even awards. Dereshiwsky (2020) suggests that abuse of power is more obvious among faculty ranks, where the “academic haze” exists; likely executed by senior professors towards their tenure-track colleagues. Although, bullying is not exclusive to junior faculty, and while tenured faculty have job protection they are not safeguarded from academic bullying (Taylor, 2013).

Lastly, power exists in all institutions and can be exhibited in the form of serving on tenure and promotion committees. These boards have the ability to shape the trajectory of junior faculty. Creating an inequitable higher standard can be a form of bullying or serving on the committee in general can provide an opportunity for bullies to mask personal grudges (Dereshiwsky, 2020). Senior academic administrators such as department chairs, deans, and provosts can exert their power for bullying purposes. Acts such as denying requested teaching loads, public and private humiliation, or disregard of targets during faculty meetings or through

other methods of communication can all be acts of bullying through power structures. Again, while these behaviors can constitute academic bullying, it is important to remember that the frequency these acts must occur repeatedly over time. Though, how long should one endure these attacks to be considered a legitimate victim or target?

### ***Duration and Frequency***

While there is some dissonance to how we label the construct, there is some agreement on the notion that workplace bullying must be a pattern of ongoing abuse and mistreatment in work environments. However, the methods for measuring bullying and the extent to which bullying persists continues to vary and requires more exploration. In the 1990s, Björkqvist and colleagues (1994) surveyed 338 university employees inquiring about work experiences within the previous six months. While Price Spratlen (1995) examined his 800 respondents' mistreatment within the 18 months of receiving the instrument. It was not until this century that researchers began to examine longer timeframes. McKay and colleagues (2008) investigated bullying behavior among teaching staff and librarians at one university and found that people experienced bullying for at least five years. Similarly, Fox (2010) sampled faculty by using a checklist for behavioral items observed within a five-year timeframe.

Bullying is likely more prevalent than reported due to habitual mistreatment, as well as employees' failure to report and risk being labeled a "victim" (Naime & Naime, 2009). Despite the fact that repetition is typically used to characterize bullying, there is no true consensus on the extent of the frequency to define it. For example, Adams (1992) espouses the belief that an employee can bully their coworker through one threatening act, rather than consistent behavior. While, Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) conceptualizes bullying as behaviors that have taken place 'now and then' or 'weekly' for six months. Perhaps more rigidly, in a widely used study on

workplace terror, Leymann (1990) implies that it is when bullying and hostile acts occur at least once a week for six months can it be characterized as bullying and socially stressful. However, not all bullying behavior is purely episodic in nature, and this criterion may be difficult to apply. Leymann (1990) also asserts that it could become easier to ignore, dismiss, and invalidate workers who have been targeted due to contrasting research guidelines and methodological practices that determine the extent to which violent behaviors are experienced. Moreover, the proximity between bullying and harassment is often blurry. An employee can be “harassed” only once but, as previously mentioned, many scholars believe that hostile behaviors must persist at least half of a calendar year in order to qualify and quantify as bullying. Thus, it is imperative to delineate harassment from bullying, particularly from a legal standpoint.

### ***Harassment, Employment Law, and Bullying***

Employment laws and regulations exist for several reasons. First, the power dynamic between an employer and a worker is such that the institution has more power. It decides the structure and principles that guide pay, promotions, and various facets of the employee life cycle. These guidelines, enforced by the U.S. EEOC, help limit the employer’s power, prohibit unlawful discrimination, and provide equitable employment opportunities. However, bullying is not covered under the EEOC. So, what is the distinction, if any, between harassment and workplace bullying?

Harassment, a well-known term, is defined as “unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information” (*Harassment*, 2020). The legal implications are clear in that harassment is a variation of employment discrimination that directly violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, and the Americans with Disabilities

Act of 1990. Sexual harassment, a more commonly known violation in the workplace, is defined as “unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment based on gender by managers, supervisors, or coworkers” (Department of Justice, 1998). While harassment and sexual harassment are covered under U.S. statutes, bullying is not inherently unlawful. However, depending on the details of one’s conduct, and how they are described, a bully’s actions can constitute as a basis for federal and state violation claims and even termination (Stone, 2013).

To be clear, employment is at-will across all U.S. states. This means a person may be hired or fired for any reason or no reason at all. This does not, however, apply to tenured or term appointed faculty, who can only be terminated with *just cause* (Association of American University Professors (AAUP), 2004). Just cause or adequate cause is a standard of reasonable justification for which a tenured or term appointed faculty member may be dismissed. This is particularly true when there is evidence of incompetence or dishonesty in primary responsibilities, gross negligence of one’s duties, and personal conduct that adversely affects the faculty member’s performance of their institutional responsibilities (AAUP, 2004). Termination of a tenured or term appointed faculty is still a delicate matter. A professor who believes they have been unfairly terminated may not see themselves as a bully, but rather the victim of targeted discrimination or retribution. Therefore, attempting to terminate an alleged faculty bully could lead to unfavorable outcomes for the institution, such as a protected-class lawsuit.

Several employment statutes exist that seek to combat and correct class-based discrimination, particularly for businesses with 15 or more employees—a) Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, which includes the Pregnancy Discrimination Act and protections for those who identify

as LGBT); b) The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (prohibits different wages between men and women if they perform equal work in the same workplace); c) Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (prohibits discrimination of age and protects those 40 and older; and d) Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (prohibits workplace and other discrimination of people with disabilities). While these laws are not designed to encourage compassion, civility, and decorum in the workplace, they do provide an important baseline for acceptable workplace conduct. Therefore, certain “bullying” behavior that overlap with one of the aforementioned protected classes could be interpreted as illegal.

Dereshiwsky (2020) mentions the need to differentiate bullying from discriminatory actions related to protected classes. Namie and Namie (2011) even referred to bullying as “status-blind harassment.” A distinction is certainly needed to cover all incidents of bullying, though it may be one-dimensional to think workers are not bullied based on race/ethnicity, color, gender, ability, age, and sexual identity. A professor of English (Dardello, 2019), who is also a Black woman, recounts knowing the severe consequences that come about from speaking her truth. According to her, there’s a perception that racism through bullying must be overt and violent, and often conducted by men. Dardello’s (2019) experiences with workplace bullying, however, were quite the opposite; covert and by a woman. Moreover, the marginalization of certain identity groups is one of explanations for an increase in microaggressions and bullying rates (Sallee & Diaz, 2013; Twale & DeLuca, 2008). Although it is important to distinguish bullying from class-based harassment, it is certainly possible for bullying to be a guise for oppression and systemic isms that are protected by law. Again, this leaves room for possible litigation.

## Sources of Employment Lawsuits

There are several causes of employment lawsuits - disparate treatment, disparate impact, fraudulent recruitment, negligent hiring, negligent referral, trade secret litigation, and supervisory harassment (Phillips & Gully, 2015; Stone, 2013). For the purpose of this study, disparate treatment, disparate impact, and supervisory harassment will be described because they impact current employee experiences, and the other sources are relevant to recruitment and disclosing information.

Disparate treatment refers to intentional discrimination based on a protected-class characteristic with respect to the terms and conditions of employment (e.g., pay, title, work assignments). If any employment decision, workplace environment, or duty is based on an employee's race, sex, religion, national origin, disability, or age, there has been disparate treatment. In an effort to strengthen the revolutionary 1964 Act, amendments were made to produce the Civil Rights of 1991 that places greater liability and burden of proof on the employer. Thus, in court, when the plaintiff (e.g., a faculty employee) alleges discrimination and being adversely affected due to a protected-class, the defendant (e.g., institution) must provide a legal, unbiased reason for their actions. Additionally, plaintiffs have a right to a jury trial for employment discrimination cases as a result of the amendment, and it could be argued that juries are more sympathetic towards the employee allegations than judges.

Regardless of the trial type, if an employee can show persuasive evidence that the employer had both lawful and unlawful reasons for their actions, an institution can still be held liable. By showing that one's protected-class was the motivating factor in an employment decision, even if other legitimate reasons are presented, an employee can satisfy the burden of proof and the institution will be found liable. This is described as a mixed-motive case of

disparate treatment. What has been described further supports the claim that bullying can be a conduit for protected-class discrimination, and that bullying is not exclusively status blind. Bullying that even suggests inequity based on a protected-class, can be framed as the foundation for statutory disparate treatment. Institutions should know that any definite or perceived tangible effects of bullying can be persuasively argued that the adverse action was “because of” one or more protected-class statuses (Stone, 2013).

A second reason for an employment lawsuit is due to disparate impact, which is when employment action has a “disproportionate effect on a protected group, regardless of its intent” (Phillip & Gully, 2015, p. 68). Institutional employment practices and policies that appear neutral in the treatment of different groups have potential to have significant adverse effects on a protected class. For example, Stone (2013) gave an example of a company that will consider employees for promotion solely on the basis of their participation in newly established Sunday meetings. While the intent may not be to exclude anyone, the promotion process will exclude Christians who observe on Sundays, and disproportionality screen out this group on the basis of their protected class—religion. The new promotional strategy may have been created with the intention of being fair, disparate repercussions exist and can be claimed (*Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 1971).

When this type of case reaches the courts, the accused defendant (institution) is given the opportunity to show how this practice or policy is a necessity to the success of the organization. Using the aforementioned example on Sunday meetings, despite the company’s reasoning for holding Sunday meetings to determine promotions, the plaintiff (employee) is given the opportunity to provide a less-discriminatory alternative to the practice or policy being disputed (Civil Rights Act of 1991, §2000e-2; Stone, 2013). For instance, the employee could argue that

meetings at night would be a viable option. Although these practices may be perceived or actually be deliberate, alleged neutral practices like this are not typically viewed as intentional, demeaning behavior. Thus, making it a challenge to connect disparate impact with workplace bullying (Stone, 2013).

The third potential claim that is most likely to be confounded with complaints of bullying behavior is supervisory harassment that is centered on a protected-class status (Stone, 2013). Harassment can be highly intimidating when perpetrated by a boss, manager or supervisor. Supervisors can use their power to subject workers to discriminatory behavior, leaving employees feeling cornered and defenseless. Claims of harassment in the workplace are prioritized when the unwanted conduct is committed by the employee's supervisor. Much like disparate treatment and disparate impact, the Supreme Court has ruled the employer accountable or vicariously liable for a hostile work environment created by a supervisor (*Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth*, 118 S. Ct. 2257, 1998; *Faragher v. City of Boca Raton*, 118 S. Ct. 2275, 1998; Stone, 2013). Furthermore, the Court held that an employer is always liable for a supervisor's harassment if it ends with a tangible employment action, as previously described. However, if only harassment is present with no subsequent employment action, the employer may be able to avoid liability or limit damages. Assigning employees to supervisory roles and other positions of power should be carefully considered, as organizations are liable for the acts of its supervisors (*Enforcement guidance*, 2020).

Although not protected by federal law, it is possible that bullying can be concealed or serve as a medium for disparate treatment and supervisory harassment. While disparate impact may not be linked to bullying because organizational practices are viewed as unintentional, such an "oversight" should not be taken lightly as it is still a possible antecedent of premeditated

bullying behavior—perhaps from those who create organization policies. In a related manner, one may ask, where are the federal and institutional policies for bullying, specifically? Grassroots activists have been working for legislative change on bullying, but there has not been much traction.

### **Legislation**

The Healthy Workplace Bill was first introduced in 2001 by David Yamada, a professor of law and founder of the New Workplace Institute at Suffolk University. Yamada and a network of advocates, including two founders of the Workplace Bullying Institute Dr. Ruth Namie and Dr. Gary Namie, drafted this bill within the intent to eradicate and rectify abusive workplace environments in the U.S. The Healthy Workplace Bill was also written with the intent of it being introduced at the state legislative level, though recognized to be applicable at any legislative level (Yamada, 2013). As of now, the Bill has been proposed and passed in 29 U.S. states. The first state to introduce the assembly bill was California, in 2003, named Abusive Workplace Environments. However, the Bill was archived a year later due to the timing of when it was introduced and not being a “carry-over bill,” per Article IV, Section 10(c) of the Constitution.

In August of 2020, Puerto Rico became the first jurisdiction to actually enact a workplace bullying law called, “Act to Prohibit and Prevent Workplace Harassment in Puerto Rico” (Casillas et al., 2020). This new law, also referred to as Puerto Rico Act 90-2020, prohibits and seeks to prevent abusive conduct against employees in the workplace that affects worker performance, alters workplace peace, and threatens the dignity of employees (CST Law, 2020). The bill faced constant opposition from the private sector and took three years to be moved through the legislation process. Act 90-2020 defines workplace harassment or bullying as,

Repeated and unwanted actions, conduct or behavior that are malicious, abusive, arbitrary, unreasonable and/or capricious. Said actions, conduct or behavior can be verbal, written, and/or physical, are repeated in nature and perpetrated by the employer, agents, supervisors or employees, and are unrelated to the employer's legitimate business interests. This conduct creates an environment that is intimidating, humiliating, hostile, and offensive and not conducive for a reasonable person to perform their duties in a normal manner. (CST Law, 2020, para 2)

On a case by case basis, this Act provides room for interpretation on the determination of certain behaviors constituting workplace bullying. However, it explicitly identifies conduct that is a direct violation of the law, including (a) injuries, defamatory, or damaging expressing about a person that are filled with profanity; (b) hostile and humiliating comments about an individual's professional incompetence that are made in the presence of others; (c) unjustified termination threats made in the presence of co-workers; (d) comments or jokes made in public directed at an employee's physical appearance or choice of clothing; and (e) the imposition of functions or duties patently foreign to the employee's regular duties, requirements that are openly disproportionate with regards to the work assigned and the drastic change of place or scope of work without any objective reason concerning the employer's service or business (CST Law, 2020).

In addition to the Healthy Workplace Bill and other related legislation, employers such as universities should also care about addressing workplace bullying. A preemptive option for administrators is to create and enforce a distinct anti-bullying policy within their institution (Dereshiwsky, 2020). Moreover, an institution's finances and reputation could be at stake if

workplace bullying is left unaddressed. Next, the rise of anti-workplace bullying at institutions will be discussed.

### **Anti-bullying Policies**

There are two primary levels of action for bullying—(a) addressing incidents of bullying that have already occurred, and (b) implementing preventative measures to minimize the likelihood of future bullying incidents (Hollis, 2018). Human Resources (HR) units are typically the hub for all employee relations, which encompasses mediation and training and development. Though these methods to resolve conflict may not be the most effective when addressing bullying behavior. Below, I further discuss common options for addressing workplace bullying and elaborate more on how policy may be effective. Moreover, specific steps towards creating anti-bullying policies will be highlighted, as well as specific institutional examples.

Bullying can be debilitating and violent towards the target (Crookston, 2012), whether intention or not. Yet, one of the most common corrective measures for interpersonal workplace disputes is mediation and conflict resolution, which can often cause more harm and discouragement by forcing the target to face their alleged bully. Forcing a target to meet with the perpetrator and source of violence perpetuates a dangerous atmosphere. In fact, Namie and Namie (2011) also identify bullying as an “assault”; going further to state that psychological and emotional attacks are just as damaging as physical assaults. When conducting mediation and conflict resolution, requiring the victim to meet the perceived aggressor can add further injury for the target. So, why does HR use mediation and conflict resolution?

Many organizations believe HR is the ideal group to handle issues of workplace bullying, as this bullying would likely be a function of employee relations. However, is HR always operating in the best interest of their employees? Namie and Namie (2011b) reveals that the

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has vehemently contested the passage of the Healthy Workplace Bill in several state legislatures where it has been proposed. Interestingly enough, the purpose of SHRM is to enhance the HR profession. Its mission is to “empower people and workplaces by advancing HR practices and by maximizing human potential,” and its vision is to “to build a world of work that works for all” (SHRM, 2020). Why would an association that lobbies Congress on the law and practices pertinent to labor management oppose a bill for safer work environments?

At the same time, the Healthy Workplace Bill makes it possible that every displeased employee to become a possible plaintiff. “Critics argue that such legislation would encourage frivolous litigation,” says Roy Maurer (2013), an online editor and manager at SHRM. Another option is needed to protect employees from bullying, while also limiting copious amounts of inconsequential claims. While Namie and Namie (2011) believe that HR’s first and only priority is protecting the employer at all costs, SHRM and the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) indeed promote the implementation of local anti-bullying policies at the organizational level (Kline, 2016; Maurer, 2013).

Policies have been viewed more effective in changing behavior at work, and several sources call for organized and intentional anti-bullying policy formation (Crookston, 2012; Dereshiwsky, 2020). Namie and Namie (2011) proposed a series of steps as institutions design and implement such a policy to ensure their continued success. The first step is managing faculty expectations. Once a commitment is made to creating change and optimizing the organizational culture, faculty who have been victimized may feel a sense of relief and finally feel heard. Consequently, academic staff may anticipate that the bullying problem can be immediately

eradicated. It's important to ensure the policy has been crafted thoughtfully and vetted by the appropriate leaders and stakeholders for accuracy.

A climate survey that measures the prevalence of workplace bullying should also be created and disseminated (Namie & Namie, 2011) to all faculty, administrators, and staff. The results should also be sent to senior leaders—president, provost, deans, dept chairs—providing an opportunity for them to digest the data, ask questions, and share perspectives. The final step is drafting the policy (Dereshiwsky, 2020). Institutions should be cautious of conflating institutional mission, vision, and goals with an impartial, enforceable anti-bullying policy for action with explicit descriptions of key terms, expectations, and consequences for violations. Creating and enforcing such policies is standard in all other areas of the university. Therefore, a similar effective policy can be developed when it comes to anti-bullying expectations (Dereshiwsky, 2020).

Not until recently have institutions begun the process to create anti-bullying policies to prevent and proactively address this prevalent issue. In 2014, the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) implemented a policy, “Defining Language Describing Hostile and/or Intimidating Behavior,” specifically for faculty legislation. Instead of being housed and created exclusively by HR—likely attributed to the shared governance<sup>3</sup> of the university—the UW-Madison (n.d.) policy was led by the faculty senate through the Office of the Secretary of the Faculty. The implementation of this policy has two processes—informal and formal—that includes intervention with a mediator and filing a written complaint to the department chair or dean. Oregon State University (OSU, n.d.) has employed their “Bullying Policy” out of the Equal Opportunity and Access office, which is also responsible for compliance of Civil Rights and

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<sup>3</sup> See University of Wisconsin (n.d.) for more information on shared governance.

related regulations and policies. There, grievances must be made in writing and include specifics of the behavior, persons involved, effects on the victim.

The UW-Madison and OSU anti-bullying policies can be used as models for a few reasons. First, each policy clearly defines bullying and goes further to explain what actions exactly constitute bullying behavior. The language used ensures staff that the policy is not to enforce a civility code, counter academic freedom, or violate one's freedom of speech. But rather, it is "indeed to address patterns of hostility or intimidation that impede persons from carrying out their duties to the University, ensuring that all, regardless of rank or status, may pursue their work and speak as they see fit" (UW-Madison, n.d.). Implementation processes are included with clear directions on how to submit complaints. Finally, other units at the institution formulate and enforce these policies—demonstrating that HR need not be the sole enforcer or point of refuge. UW-Madison also provides a unique example of addressing this phenomenon among faculty.

Adopting a no tolerance policy for bullying behavior sends a bold, yet clear message to employees. Despite other techniques for changing workplace behavior, like interventions, policy becomes the law of the land for an institution. In addition to UW-Madison and OSU being examples for bullying policies, national networks such as SHRM also provide templates for such policies. Because policy formation for hostile environments is relatively new in higher education, perhaps there is a need for deeper examinations of bullying in academia. In the next section, three studies of workplace bullying among faculty will be reviewed.

### **Academic Bullying Among Faculty**

DelliFraine et al. (2014) conducted a study that explores the extent to which bullying occurs among health administration program faculty, as well as overall common bullying

behaviors, shared attributes of the perpetrators, targets, and environment in which bullying occurs, and the consequences of bullying on faculty. The 34 items survey tool used to gather data was constructed by the researchers, and overall received 134 respondents from faculty of all ranks (instructor; assistant, association and full professors). Using a wave analysis, logistic regressions tests, and an examination of qualitative data that supplemented the descriptive findings, the range of results allowed the authors to synthesize the data into five categories—(a) sample demographic information, (b) bullying in academia, (c) bullying behaviors, (d) targets, witnesses, perpetrators, and environmental characteristics; and (e) consequences.

Demographic information received shows that the majority (83%) of the respondents identified as White, with even distributed representation across the academic ranks of assistant professor (28%), association professor (32%), and full professors (31%). When asked about perceptions and experiences in academia, more than half of the faculty sampled expressed being targets of academic bullying, and 249 experiences of bullying were captured in the data as a whole; including experiencing gossip and malicious rumors, belittling comments, being ignored or overlooked, and receiving unwarranted and unprofessional remarks. While some scholars have found gender (Leymann, 1996) and race/ethnicity (Fox & Stallworth, 2005) influences bullying, DelliFraine et al. (2014) conducted a logistic regression that indicated gender, race/ethnicity, age, institutional type, rank, and salary support were not predictors of being bullied in their study. And although age is not a predictor of bullying, there is a significant association with age and the frequency of bullying—in that older faculty (44-64 years old) experience more instances of being the victims of bullying than younger faculty.

What was clear from this study is that the non-tenured faculty group was most targeted for bullying, with half assistant professor respondents experiencing bullying and nearly two-

thirds of the sample having experienced bullying while untenured. Also evident, is that untenured faculty targets perceive tenured and, especially, full professors as the greatest sources of bullying behavior. This is aligned with the hierarchical nature of organizational bullying (Moreno-Jimenez et al., 2008), where tenured associate- and full professors hold a superior status than their faculty peers in academia.

When asked about reasons why faculty may experience bullying, most targets believed it was due to the aggressor's personal issues (e.g., personality, psychological issues, egotism, and lack of confidence), or work-related. Although there is a dearth of literature focused on actors of bullying (Samnani & Singh, 2012), the perceptions are clear. Nearly half of respondents in the DellFraine et al. (2012) study perceived their bullying incidents were intended to cause emotional hurt and described these experiences as disruptive and distracting. Collectively, respondents noted anger, stress, frustration, irritability, exhaustion, and anxiety as the top consequences for targets of bullying. Other effects reported include changes in the quality and quantity of work completed.

The data presented by DellFraine et al. (2012) highlights the significance of acknowledging and identifying an alarming challenge that higher education institutions must confront to manage other harmful consequences of this behavior such as reduced productivity, turnover, and self-efficacy (McKay et al., 2008). Although most of the findings are descriptive in nature, the research suggests that future scholarship should utilize methods that examine the causal relationship between power and status imbalance and bullying. The current study seeks to fill this gap.

Many studies on workplace in higher education or academic bullying utilize one site to gather data. And while previous studies, like DellFraine et al. (2012), demonstrate that

workplace bullying exists and there are consequences among faculty, there is a need to understand how one's job performance and commitment can be influenced. In north Europe, Meriläinen et al. (2019) examined relationships between workplace bullying, work engagement and work performance among 864 academics across nine public institutions in Estonia. Utilizing the 22 item Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revisited (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al., 2009), along with added survey items on sexual harassment, cyberbullying, work-related malpractices, and work engagement, the researchers sought to understand the nature of bullying among academics through an exploratory factor analysis. In addition, the relationship between bullying, work engagement and work performance, and the correlation between engagement and performance were analyzed using structural equation modeling; more complex analyses than DellFraine et al. (2012).

Meriläinen et al. (2019) characterize work engagement as a positive sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, as portrayed by strong dedication to work, passion and gratification from work, and work success. Engage employees possess high levels of energy, enthusiasm, and mental toughness. They are present and attentive to their work responsibilities. Yet, bullying diminishes commitment when an employee's needs are unmet, specifically as they relate to autonomy, competence, and relatedness—three basic psychological needs that Meriläinen et al. (2019) describe as deriving from self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2010).

The authors also describe individual work performance as a “multidimensional and dynamic concept” (p. 1208) that consists of both a process feature and an outcome feature. The process element refers to work actions and goal-oriented behavior, while the outcome aspect refers to the result of the employee's behavior, like productivity, for example. Meriläinen et al. illustrated how performance can be viewed from both a task-specific and context-specific

viewpoint, respectively, in that task performance is considered what is related directly to the job—as established by one’s ability, the behaviors necessary to complete assigned work, and the responsibilities of the job. Conversely, context performance is comparable for almost all jobs, demonstrated by personal character and motivation. Conscientiousness, for example, is context-specific (Wang et al., 2012). This trait, along with emotional intelligence and other similar attributes, are considered additional and discretionary behaviors that are not required for the job nor considered in the formal reward process.

The inferential analyses, coupled with qualitative data revealed five categories for which Meriläinen et al. (2019) describe their data—(a) personal related insults, (b) work-related blaming, (c) “professional understanding,” (d) unreasonable work-related tasks, and (r) work-related malpractices. In more detail, results indicated a negative relationship between perceptions of “professional understanding” and work engagement—meaning that work engagement is affected when academics are assigned work below their skill level and having core responsibilities taken away or replaced for inconsequential and unappealing tasks. This negative relationship ruins trust between employees, their peers, and the employer. A positive relationship was discovered between perceived work performance and work engagement among Estonian academics, and the authors argue that bullying has nearly instantaneous effects on faculty performance.

Most recently, Johnson (2020) explores whether gender, race, and academic rank have an influence on the extent to which faculty are bullied in the counselor education profession. More specifically, this study seeks to understand these relationships with tenured faculty as the main actors of bullying. This quantitative study sought tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenured-track faculty, also utilizing the NAQ-R, like Meriläinen et al. (2019) and many others. The NAQ-R consists of 22 items that examine three broad issues—personal bullying, work-related bullying,

and physically intimidating forms of bullying. For the direction of Johnson's (2020) investigation a 23<sup>rd</sup> item was added, explicitly on being targeted by tenured faculty.

Congruent with previous research mentioned, workplace bullying is pervasive, and results from Johnson (2020) reveal that participants from all academic ranks reported being targets of bullying. Her data also indicates that White faculty and men, respectively, on the tenure-track were mostly likely to experience bullying (more than non-White and women faculty). It is important to note that this study comprises 83% White faculty participation, thus indicating a need for a more heterogeneous sample if the aim is to explore the relationship between race and bullying. Data results show that while Latino and Hispanic faculty report more instances of academic bullying than their White counterparts, White faculty were more likely than Black or African American and Bi/Multiracial faculty to be targeted for bullying, which is incongruent with previous findings (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Lewis & Gunn, 2007). One explanation for this particular finding is the larger proportion of White faculty compared to non-White faculty groups.

Faculty that belong to marginalized groups, whether holding one or more of these identities, are more likely to be targeted regardless of faculty rank, and faculty that hold majority and privileged identities tend to be agents of bullying (Johnson-Bailey, 2015). However, perhaps the contrasting data from Johnson's (2020) study is a result of a larger pool of women in the counselor education workforce. Furthermore, while majority and privileged groups (e.g., White male faculty) might bully racial and ethnic minorities, one can assume they also perform inter-group bullying; even for White women in some disciplines (Dentith et al., 2015). This, perhaps, emphasizes the notion that academia breeds and reinforces ideologies of Whiteness (Dar et al., 2020) and invalidates the cultural perspectives and innate characteristics of people of color. The

author also suggests that in cultures that center masculinity, bullying may be considered conventional to managerial practice (Escartin et al., 2009), thus, providing a rationale for why men may experience workplace bullying just as much as women—despite men still having male privilege in cultures that value masculinity.

Johnson's (2020) study contributes to the growing body of literature on academic bullying, though it has several limitations. First, the use of a convenience sample based on a singular identified counselor education email list restricts the researcher's ability to attain a broader audience that fits the criteria of the study, and ultimately yields a limited sample. Secondly, the low response rate and lack of diversity among respondents weakens Johnson's ability to conduct comparative analyses, which also limits the generalizability of the results. Lastly, the author mentions that the NAQ-R may be culturally biased, in that "some negative acts may be more frequent or perceived as more severe in some cultures than in others" (Johnson, 2020, p. 16). Therefore, the NAQ-R tool can perhaps be adapted to account for cultural differences. Two opportunities have been identified to further this research—a) collect data on the impact of social media usage in bullying behavior, and b) conduct comparative analyses between counselor educators and other helping fields (Johnson, 2020). The current proposed study seeks to fulfill both suggestions.

Much of the literature on workplace-bullying emphasizes the effects experienced by the target and/or organization. The conclusion from scholars is that workplace bullying has damaging effects for the organization and, arguably most important, its employees. Some scholars (Zapf et al., 2003) even assert that bullying occurrences are the most devastating experiences possible for employees.

## **Consequences of Bullying**

Another topic to consider, and one that could further undermine the experiences of faculty targets, is the emphasis on the consequences of workplace aggression. Does the target need to experience psychological, emotional, or physiological consequences for the actors' behaviors to be considered bullying? Einarsen (1999) calls the need for a target to be disparaged, distressed (to be anxious or worrisome), or debilitated (infirm or having difficulty completing typical work or personal activities). However, the focus should be directed to the intentions of the actor and their adverse behaviors rather than the effects on the target, so that the onus is rightfully placed on the aggressor. Rather than victim-blaming, targets should be adequately supported to mitigate or treat harmful implications (Keashly & Neuman, 2013). For the current study, consequences at the individual level will be the focus, and it is evident that outcomes can be severe and detrimental to one's emotional, psychological, and physiological well-being, as well as one's professional trajectory.

One of the more prevailing costs at the individual level is the emotional and social outcome. Ostracism, for example, best portrayed as being ignored, overlooked or not looked at, or being omitted from social interactions is a common social experience among targets of workplace bullying (Ferris et al., 2008). Victims who are ignored and excluded may eventually feel as if they do not exist around their colleagues—perhaps conveying to the victims that they are not worth acknowledgment, they are viewed as meaningless, and even “dead“ to the perpetrator. The motivations behind exclusion, as previously mentioned, could range from unintentional to very deliberate. Hence, ostracism can be hard to name and seem highly ambiguous to the target. Whomever is on the receiving end may not know they are being bullied, or when that bullying occurs. Social isolation can have negative effects on one's emotions and contribute to the decline

of self-perception. Negative emotions (Vie et al., 2012), overt anger (Aquino et al., 2004), feelings of burnout and emotional exhaustion (Wu & Hu, 2009), and feelings of hopelessness (Attell et al., 2017) can also be present.

Consequences also include psychological distress, including anxiety (Attell et al., 2017; Hauge et al., 2011). Adverse behavior like bullying can have negative effects on the physical and mental wellbeing of faculty, including depression (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002) sleep problems and mood swings (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007), and suicide. Further, physiological outcomes can emerge as a result of workplace bullying, such as insomnia and other sleep disorders (Niedhammer et al., 2009) and musculoskeletal conditions (Vie et al., 2012). According to research, victims of bullying can even present symptoms similar to those associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Hershcovis et al., 2015; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004). Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004) found that victims of bullying exhibited higher levels of PTSD than a series of non-bullied high trauma control groups (e.g., recently divorced persons, war zone personnel).

Taken together, the literature I reviewed and described in this chapter indicates that academic bullying is deeply ingrained in academic culture and normalized within institutional and broader academic systems and structures, as well as lack proper measures to ensure responsibility and regulate behavior. Although prior literature has offered valuable insight into this phenomenon, most studies are quantitative in nature (e.g., DelliFraine et al., 2014; Johnson, 2020; Meriläinen et al., 2019), and very limited empirical research unpacks the phenomenon through qualitative approaches that interrogate how bullying occurs and its consequences by centering and highlighting the experiences of those who are targets of bullying. My dissertation

seeks to fill this important void by bringing to light the experiences, voices, and perspectives of faculty experiencing academic bullying.

### Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

The theory that guides my dissertation research is social closure theory. Drawing from several theoretical perspectives (Murphy, 1986), social closure is a sociological framework that describes the process by which dominant groups in a society exert their power to restrict subordinate groups from access to resources and opportunities (Jackson & Leon, 2010; Roscigno et al., 2007). Murphy (1988) described it best as, “the process of subordination whereby one group monopolizes advantages by closing off opportunities to another group of outsiders beneath it” (p. 8). Weber (1978) extended the concept of social closure, arguing that it involves the use of techniques and tools that promote and facilitate exclusionary practices, such as discrimination and the creation of barriers to enter and participate as part the dominant group. Furthermore, dominant groups may employ social closure for a number of reasons, including one’s class, race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. This is to maintain the privileged position within a social group through institutional exclusion and dominant group positioning by way of limiting access to resources to those only deemed “desirable” or “worthy” (Roscigno et al., 2007).

Researchers who examine social stratification frequently employ social closure theory because it emphasizes the process of how social inequities are created and maintained, rather than simply examining the extent of inequities (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1999). Social closure is about safeguarding opportunities and positions for the majority, as much as it is about limiting opportunities for others (Roscigno et al., 2007). Such practices may be intentional in order to provide more advantages and perpetuate dominance. But who stands to gain the most?

Weeden (2002) posits one implication of exclusionary practices is that white males often benefit the most from social closure. According to the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES; 2021), white males earned 45% of doctorates earned in 2021,

and white males held 39% of the full-time faculty roles in 2020 (NCSES, 2021). Worth highlighting though, is that exclusionary practices do not benefit all white males equally. Factors such as social class, sexuality, education level, or individual circumstances can also play a role in determining an individual's access to opportunities. Though, what exclusion looks and feels like for white men pales in comparison to the experiences of women of color (Allen et al., 2000; Pittman, 2010; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001).

Stratification and social closure are closely related concepts. In many cases, stratification is the result of social closure. Stratification refers to the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and power in a social group, whereas social closure refers to *how* groups and people seek to maintain borders that restricts others to maintain power and position. Within academia, social closure can contribute to faculty stratification by limiting access to tenure-track positions, research funding, access to administrative leadership positions, and opportunities for networking and mentorship, as well as barriers towards tenure. Tenure provides job security, ensuring faculty members' ability to conduct meaningful research and take intellectual risks. While the goal of the tenure process is to protect academic freedom, allowing faculty to pursue scholarly works and teach without fear of retribution. Currently, tenure is one process that is weaponized—or perhaps it has always been—to fuel bullying and stratification among faculty.

Social closure theory is an appropriate lens to critically examine academic bullying for the following reasons. First, social closure emphasizes the role of status and power in perpetuating social inequities, particularly exercised by supervisors, institutional and departmental leaders, and other faculty of influence within in the context of academic workplace encounters (Light et al., 2011). Faculty with high status may likely hold positions of power within an institution or academic society at large. These are often faculty with status-based

power, but also positional power. Status-based power refers to the power that individuals hold based on their social status or characteristics, such as their race, gender, age, tenure-status, faculty rank, or academic clout. This type of power stems from the social norms and values attached to certain social positions (Roscigno et al., 2007). For example, in many societies, cis-gender men may hold status-based power over women, potentially resulting in bullying and harassing behaviors.

In academia, white men (Weeden, 2002) often hold status-based power over everyone else. Renowned scholars often hold status-based power over lesser-known faculty, especially non-tenured and non-tenure-track faculty. Positional power, on the other hand, refers to the power that individuals hold based on their position or role within an organization or hierarchy. This might include a chair, program director, or national association leader within a field who holds positional power over faculty with no experience in a position of leadership. Faculty rank may also be considered as positional power, as faculty with higher ranks occupy positions of greater authority, influence, and responsibility. When a person holds both status-based power and positional-based power (e.g., a white male, renowned full professor), they may have a greater degree of influence and authority within an institution, department, or another space created by the larger social group (academia). Taken together, the status and power inherent in social closure are likely to act as key conditions underlying academic bullying (Roscigno et al., 2007).

The second reason for utilizing this theory is because, much like stratification, academic bullying can be understood as a *form* of social closure, where faculty use their power to exclude and intimidate others to maintain or exhibit their power. For example, a department chair or senior faculty member who bullies a promising, new junior faculty member may be seeking to

proclaim or reaffirm their authority within the department, while also overloading the junior member with service that prevents them from focusing on research, obtaining grants and, ultimately, achieving tenure. By applying social closure theory to the current study, a deeper understanding is gained of the social dynamics that lead to academic bullying and create solutions for preventing it.

One possible approach towards creating a solution is to assess and fully understand the institutional culture, which may also contribute to social closure through normalizing, reinforcing, and rewarding boundaries between different groups. If an institution's culture is one that values conformity and loyalty to the school, it may be more difficult for external job candidates to enter and advance within the university. The term institutional (or organizational) culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, assumptions, and behavior that define how people and groups interact within the institution (Schein, 2004). Culture is the norms and expectations that govern how faculty and staff communicate, collaborate, interact, and make decisions. Organizational culture may also be influenced by a range of variables, including the institution's history and mission, leadership and governing body, discipline or field of study, and the faculty and staff values and attitudes (Tierney, 1988).

Overall, social closure theory has important implications for understanding workplace dynamics and addressing issues like academic bullying. Social closure theory suggests that groups within an institution can use cultural norms and practices to protect their dominance and exclude outsiders, which further highlights the importance of organizational culture in defining behavior and attitudes within academe. The utility of social closure theory for this study is clear for exploring bullying, social power, and workplace inequities among faculty.

In addition to serving as a theoretical framing, social closure theory also informed the research design and methodology for this study. It was important to sample faculty from various identities and academic backgrounds to provide a nuanced understanding of how bullying, a form of social closure, operates within academia. To explore how academic bullying and social boundaries are created and maintained within the academy, interviews provided deep insight into faculty experiences and institutional practices. One-on-one interviews allowed for open-ended questions, confidentiality, and details of specific instances of bullying. Furthermore, social closure theory was used as a framework for analyzing and interpreting the narratives by highlighting the themes among faculty experiences at the interpersonal and organizational levels.

## **Chapter IV: Research Design**

This chapter provides an overview of the research design and associated procedures. I chose to adopt a critical qualitative approach to my dissertation study, more specifically critical narrative inquiry. I first describe the rationale for using this approach and discuss its suitability as a methodology for my study. I also provide details of my sample, data collection, and analytical procedures. To conclude the chapter, I address ethical considerations, including my positionality and reflexivity as the researcher, along with trustworthiness and limitations or caveats for my dissertation research.

### **Critical Qualitative Approach**

For my study, I adopted a critical research approach that centers academic bullying from the perspectives of tenured and tenure-track faculty at four-year institutions within the U.S. While there are many similarities between academic bullying and workplace bullying, the power differentials, institutional protections, unique context of academic spaces, impact on one's career, and academic culture made exploring and addressing bullying a complex matter. Previous research (Twale & De Luca, 2008) notes that the roots of faculty bullying are connected to three areas in academic departments: competition, dominance, and power. To explore these areas, social closure, and the ways in which they interplay with and produce academic bullying, I employed a critical qualitative inquiry method.

Critical qualitative research is a suitable methodological approach for my study on academic bullying for several reasons. First, it allowed me to gather rich data for a nuanced understanding of individual experiences of academic bullying. To achieve this, I used interviews as a method helps to obtain detailed accounts of a) the ways in which academic bullying manifests, b) its impact on individuals and organizations, and c) the ways in which it is

perpetuated or challenged within academia (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Secondly, critical qualitative inquiry allows for exploration of power dynamics, social structures, and subjective experiences from targets of academic bullying. By centering on the experiences of excluded and marginalized groups, specifically, critical qualitative inquiry amplifies the voices of those who are often ostracized or silenced in the dominant discourses and research methods.

Participants are also viewed as partners in the co-construction of data and the constructing of meaning about their lives and environments (Winkle-Wagner et al. 2018). Through re-telling their stories, participants are able to reinterpret their experiences and gain new insights and perspectives that may not have been previously apparent. Finally, I, as a researcher and collaborator with my participants, am encouraged to reflect on and acknowledge my positionality as a co-constructor of the research experience and meaning making (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Critical qualitative inquiry aligns with social closure theory by investigating how power is used to construct and maintain social barriers to exclude particular groups. Both approaches recognize the need for understanding how institutions, in general, and academic structures (e.g., tenure, governance, administrative roles, etc.), in particular, create and reproduce disparities. Overall, critical qualitative research and social closure theory have a similar focus on power relations and social inequities.

This study was driven by three central questions and guided by a critical qualitative approach: a) What are the lived experiences of faculty who have encountered academic bullying at four-year institutions; b) How do these experiences impact their work and personal lives; and c) How do power dynamics and social closure contribute to these experiences? By adopting a critical lens, I was able to explore how bullying is shaped by structures and power dynamics

within departments and academe at large. Building on this critical approach, in the next section I describe the functionality of narrative inquiry in diving deeper into personal stories of academic bullying.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry has a rich intellectual history within and outside of the field of education. Through narratives, we can seek clarity and “study of the ways humans experience the world,” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2). Narrative inquiry allowed for deep exploration of faculty who have been subjected to academic bullying, exploring the complexities and nuances of the faculty experience through interviews and storytelling. It was a valuable approach that provided insight into the academic bullying phenomenon and perspectives of faculty participants, as well as produce data that is rich, detailed, and contextually grounded. There are several rationales for employing narrative inquiry for this qualitative study on academic bullying.

The fundamental rationale for employing narrative inquiry in education research in general, and this study specifically, is that people are inherently storytellers, and that we have “storied lives,” individually and socially. Storied lives refer to the idea that human experience is shaped by the stories we tell ourselves and others about our lives, making narrative inquiry appropriate across social sciences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These narratives provided detailed accounts of bullying experiences, and considered the social, individual, political, and cultural factors that contribute to these experiences.

To explore faculty encounters with bullying, narrative inquiry illuminated participants’ feelings, thoughts, reactions, and perceptions (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Narrative inquiry also allowed the researcher to explore the broader faculty context and academic culture in which bullying occurs. Patterns and themes that emerged from participants’ stories were identified and

helped further inform my understanding of bullying among faculty. Furthermore, the epistemology of narrative inquiry emphasizes the importance of subjectivity and the power of personal studies in knowledge construction. Utilizing narrative inquiry aided in the examination of how faculty discuss social stories within academic social conditions. This includes sociality, temporality, and place as core elements of narratives.

Sociality refers to the social relationships and interactions among faculty and others within academia, including power dynamics and social structures (Dewart et al., 2019; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). This plays a role in understanding who is more likely to be bullied and who is more likely to engage in bullying behavior, as well as understanding how faculty construct stories that reflect and reinforce social hierarchies within academic institutions. Temporality is the term used to describe how time affects and forms experiences. Through critical narrative inquiry, the researcher was able to explore how faculty navigate and negotiate temporal constraints and pressures associated with academic life. Furthermore, temporality stresses that events, people, and spaces are always in a state of flux between past, present, and future considerations (Dewart et al., 2019; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Place refers to the physical and social contexts in which bullying unfolds (Dewart et al., 2019). This might include examining how the physical (e.g., classrooms and offices) and social (e.g., academic departments and professional associations) environments across academia help to shape bullying experiences.

Temporality and place are particularly important in narrative inquiry. More specifically, time and place are the two frames of reference through which a narrative fully grasps experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) astutely asserts, “This is no less true for the writing of empirical narratives. Time and place become written constructions in the form of plot and scene, respectively. Time and place, plot and scene, work together to create the experiential quality

narrative,” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p.8). Narratives are constructed based on temporal, place, and social context elements and, by adding a critical lens to this approach, we can more deeply examine the influences that shape participants’ perspectives.

### **Critical Narrative Inquiry**

As an extension of narrative inquiry, critical narrative inquiry was a valuable tool for studying academic bullying as it facilitates a thorough understanding of how faculty experience, interpret, and make sense of their bullying encounters within the specific social and cultural contexts of academia. Investigating the context in which narratives are constructed is a crucial consideration of this method (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Critical narrative inquiry recognizes the importance of context and the need to understand the specific social and cultural variables that contribute to the occurrence of bullying in academia. Furthermore, this approach validated the voices of faculty members who may feel marginalized and powerless in a culture that normalizes hostile behaviors. Stories from a critical framework prompted the researcher to identify problems, imbalances, and contradictions in the narratives to explore underlying dilemmas and issues (Yamagata-Lynch et al., 2017).

### **Sample and Data Collection**

I used interviews to explore faculty stories and experiences with academic bullying, engaging two sampling approaches. First, convenience sampling helped gather participants who were easily available for the study and who were accessible to the researcher. Second, purposive sampling was used to select participants based on specific requirements. Combining these two sampling techniques were useful in providing a diverse range of participants, as well as a population (i.e., targets of bullying) that can be difficult to access (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

I recruited participants through social media and professional networks. Specific criteria to participant in this study included the following: a) be a current tenured, tenure-track, or non-tenure-track faculty, b) be employed at a four-year, non-for-profit institution, and c) have experience with hostile behavior within academia. A total of 18 participants were interviewed for this study, and each of them provided informed consent. Table 1, on the following page, lists the faculty who participated, using pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. This table also includes demographic information for each participant, including faculty rank, tenure status, years as a faculty member, institutional type and control, discipline, race/ethnicity, and gender. The sample consisted of 11 men, seven women, and one person who identifies as non-binary, as well as faculty ranks ranging from assistant professor to full professor. Of the 18 participants, 10 identified as Black, four as White, one as Asian, one as Hispanic/Latine, and one as Multi-ethnic. Furthermore, 10 participants are currently tenured and eight are on the tenure-track, and most were employed at public institutions, except for three.

Qualitative inquiry is not about generalizability, yet the sample size of 18 participants allowed for a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, while lending richness in both unique narratives and the cross-participant themes I was able to develop. For data collection, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant via video conference, except one in-person interview. All interviews conducted were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis, with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes.

Table 1

*Descriptive Summary of Study Participants*

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Discipline	Faculty Rank	Tenure Status	Institutional Control
Abdul	Man	Black	Public Health	Associate	Tenured	Public; HBCU
Alma	Woman	White	Social Work	Full	Tenured	Private
Bohdi	Man	Multi-ethnic	Ethnic Studies	Full	Tenured	Public
Cedric	Man	Black	Education	Full	Tenured	Public
Charles	Man	White/Hispanic	Business	Assistant	Tenure-track	Public
Fred	Man	White	Human Resources	Associate	Tenured	Public
Jasmine	Woman	Southeast Asian	Social Sciences	Full	Tenured	Public
John	Man	White	Business	Assistant	Tenured	Public
Katherine	Woman	Black	Public Policy	Assistant	Tenure-track	Public
Maria	Woman	Latina	Medicine	Full	Tenure-track	Public
Marques	Man	Black	Education	Assistant	Tenure-track	Private
Myrna	Woman	White	Business	Associate	Tenured	Public
Nila	Woman	Black	Education	Associate	Tenured	Public
O'Neil	Man	Black	Education	Assistant	Tenure-track	Public
PianoPhD	Man	Black	Counseling	Associate	Tenure	Public
Sandra	Woman	Black	Education	Assistant	Tenure-track	Public
Shawn	Man	Black	Sociology	Associate	Tenure-track	Private
Vee	Non-binary	Black	Education	Assistant	Tenure-track	Public

## **Data Analysis**

Across disciplines, narrative inquiry researchers adopt a wide range of approaches to analyzing narrative data, and there is no consensus as to what constitutes the most “rigorous” narrative analysis, as storying and restorying can occur in varying forms across different contexts and settings (Nasheeda et al., 2019). The analytical versatility afforded by narrative inquiry compels me to stay grounded within my research questions, theoretical framework, while being able to engage a set of methods and techniques to best honor my participants when restorying their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### ***Transcribing Interviews and Familiarizing with Transcripts***

Upon completion of data collection, I used Otter, a text transcription application to assist with the transcription of the 18 interviews. This approach offers greater efficiency and equal accuracy as compared to manual transcription (Stolcke & Droppo, 2017), while still allowing me to start with preliminary steps toward data analysis in a naturalistic way. Specifically, I carefully checked the transcripts against the audio recordings to ensure accuracy and note important verbal cues and words that signify salient incidences and emotions. To protect the anonymity of my participants, I also used this opportunity to edit the transcripts to remove all identifiable information about the participants and their experiences, which was crucial for a topic such as bullying. I repeated this process multiple times--reviewing the transcribed data by listening to audio files and reading each transcript. Overall, this first step was a pivotal reflective practice that helped me develop a sense of the overall tone of each interview and the totality of each participants’ story.

### *Developing Narratives*

To develop individual participants' narratives, I approached data analysis as follows. I separated transcripts into narrative blocks and compared them to develop core narrative blocks (Riessman, 2008). This technique required an in-depth evaluation of participants' use of language when describing their experiences and reactions, tone and volume of their voices, and the emotions expressed to identify patterns and connections across their experiences. Moreover, it was important to consider the fear some participants had of being exposed by sharing their stories, and I had to approach the interview and analysis with sensitivity. Accordingly, when developing the narratives, I anonymized not only their names, but most if not all settings and contexts relative to their institutional, departmental, and disciplinary affiliations without minimizing the prominence and saliency of their stories.

In constructing the featured five narratives, I used several narrative inquiry techniques, including broadening, burrowing, as well as storying and restorying (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). With broadening, I situated faculty participants' experiences within the broader context of the academy that shapes their personal narratives in light of my research questions. Using interview data, I was able to develop a comprehensive profile of five participants who shared the most severe and captivating experiences. To achieve broadening, I anchored faculty experiences within the literature in pursuit of a deeper understanding of larger contexts and perspectives. Additionally, I engaged in a deep examination of the interview data by reviewing transcripts and listening to interviews multiple times, paying close attention to emotions, use of language, people, and moments of adversity. Throughout the process, I consistently explored the impact of bullying occurrences on the faculty participants' well-being, job profile, and trajectory in the professoriate. Finally, I engaged in storying and restorying, by retelling and reinterpreting faculty

narratives with them to add new meaning and framing of their experiences. While there are multiple ways to interpret and portray a faculty member's narrative, my aim was to remain loyal to the details and perspectives provided.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

In addition to developing narratives for each of the profiled participants, I also engaged in a cross-participants analysis to identify common themes underlying their experiences. Essentially, I conducted a thematic analysis to identify “common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take” (Riessman, 2008, p. 74) in the context of academic bullying. More specifically, I used open inductive, focused, and theoretical coding based on participants' narratives, using a critical lens situated within social closure theory. With my open, inductive approach, I focused on how my participants described their experiences with bullying through codes that honor salient moments or factors based on their recounts, their apparent emotions and sense-making during the interview, and some factual information regarding their settings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To illustrate, some of my open, inductive codes included “race/ethnicity,” or “being Black,” “as a woman of color,” “from [country of origin],” which captured instances when my participants described their racial and ethnic identity as a salient aspect of their bullying experiences. As another example, “disbelief,” “stressed,” “helpful,” “nowhere to go,” represent codes that captured participants' emotional stress they described when being bullied.

Through focused coding, I revisited the initial coding toward emerging specific themes, and started to arrive at larger patterns across participants' narratives. As examples of focused codes included “adverse outcomes of bullying”, which was used to identify the effects that bullying had on participants, connecting the range of detrimental impacts such as emotional

distress or lower job satisfaction. “Coping mechanisms” was used to capture the various strategies participants employed, such as seeking counseling or developing resilience. “Positional power and hierarchy” were used to capture the role that power dynamics played in the bullying, with a focus on seniority and leadership positions. “Witness of bullying” was used to capture instances where participants discussed one or more witnesses who observed the participants experiencing bullying. Lastly, “Next steps” were used to mark how faculty saw their future in academia post-bullying experiences.

Finally, I engaged in theoretical coding by comparing my codes to key elements and propositions in social closure—my theoretical framework. This process was also iterative, with both my theoretical framework and inductively emerging codes and patterns from the interviews guiding one another. Through this generative process, I reevaluated the data to determine the significance of the themes in relation to the research questions and broad context. Ultimately, I engaged these codes, in light of my theory, to produce the six themes that helped arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of academic bullying among participants in the study.

### **Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity**

Clandinin et al. (2007) emphasizes the significance of justifying the personal, practical, and social significance of a research endeavor through the design of narrative research. To achieve this, reflexivity allows for authenticity with oneself, the research, and audience. Reflexivity is a time-consuming process that includes rigorous self-examination of why the study was carried out (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Through this process, reflexivity helps the researcher to become more conscious of how their own values and beliefs influence their research, which in turn affects how they view themselves and the research process (Hickson, 2016; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

As a Black man navigating life in the U.S., a scholar who studies higher education, an experienced practitioner who regularly works with faculty, a former adjunct faculty member who taught about equity and inclusion in the workplace, and a researcher who investigates academic bullying, hostile behavior and organizational sciences within higher education contexts, my positionality and reflexivity shape my understanding of power dynamics and hierarchies within academia. I recognize the emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical toll that bullying, intimidation, and hostile behavior can have on individuals and organizations. With various work experiences in and outside of higher education across my life, I have firsthand knowledge of different work environments, including those that are positive and nurturing, and those that are toxic and hostile or simply cold. Furthermore, amid my doctoral studies while considering the professoriate, I also experienced forms of academic bullying, including being plagiarized. While these encounters eventually increased my interest in the topic, it piqued far before my first realization of academic bullying.

Studying academia while working in it provides unique insights into the inner workings of academic culture. It has enabled me to observe and analyze structures, hierarchies, and power dynamics, and understand how these elements directly and indirectly impact faculty experiences. Furthermore, due to an expansive network, I knew a few of the study participants, some more closely than others. These prior interactions could have influenced my perceptions of their experiences. While pre-existing acquaintances can potentially bias the researcher's perceptions, they also provide familiarity and trust, allowing for deeper insights that may not be accessible with other researchers. Familiarity with the person and academic context enabled the researcher to have a more nuanced understanding of the cultural and social dynamics, as well as to be better equipped to interpret and contextualize participant's experiences. Nonetheless, it was critical to

recognize my biases and engage through reflexivity during the research process. This includes being aware of my own assumptions, biases, and personal experiences, and how they influence my understanding of power and control within academic environments.

Fully aware that personal experiences and emotions may have impacted my interpretations of the data and findings, I strove to maintain a critical perspective and acknowledge my biases through the research process. Self-awareness has an impact on how we perceive ourselves, and values have an impact on how we do research (Hickson, 2016). As such, I engaged in reflexivity by continuously reflecting on my positionality and how it could affect the study, as well as being open and honest about my experiences and potential biases. This helped to ensure the research process and findings remain objective, ethical, and reliable.

The use of individual faculty stories, the researcher's involvement in the research process, and the focus on subjectivity are strong characteristics of narrative inquiry. By employing this approach, I was able to integrate a critical lens into my process, enabling me to analyze and challenge the social and culture perspectives embedded within the stories of tenured and tenured-track faculty (Usher, 1996). By evaluating faculty stories of academic bullying, I was about to identify themes, patterns, and overarching issues related to the bullying phenomenon. Next, I will discuss that process.

### **Trustworthiness**

I employed several strategies to ensure trustworthiness of my data, analytical approaches, and interpretation. First, during the interview process, I actively engaged with participants by paraphrasing their words and asking follow-up questions to clarify my understanding of their perspectives and encouraged participants to describe their experiences from multiple perspectives. Second, I shared transcripts and narratives with participants, inviting them to

clarify, edit, or co-construct interpretations. One participant chose to provide in-depth feedback and co-constructed some of the interpretations of their findings. Third, throughout the research process, I employed reflective journaling that allowed me to reflect on my own reactions, biases, and experiences in relation to those of the participants. Finally, throughout the research process including data collection, analysis, and interpretation, I regularly participated in debriefing sessions with my advisor, where we discussed my analytical approaches, emerging codes, potential biases I might have brought into the analysis and interpretation, among other topics. This facilitated multiple researcher perspectives to help uncover inaccuracies in my coding, identify my assumptions and biases—and the role that they might play, and improve my interpretations' quality. While my advisor has a vested interest in my success, she and I were more committed to the quality of my dissertation research that is aimed at contributing to the overall body of academic bullying research. Combining these approaches allowed me to render my best efforts toward accurately sharing the vulnerable perspectives of participants and honoring their stories in a way that was respectful, ethical, and meaningful.

### **Limitations and Caveats**

This study has a few caveats that should be acknowledged. First, the data were collected based on a convenience sample, which may have introduced bias into the study. My positionality as a higher education administrator and member of the academic community may have influenced the way participants shared their experiences. Second, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, it was difficult to capture the richness and precise details of participants' identities and stories while keeping their anonymity. Despite these caveats, this study's valuable insights help to further illuminate and complicate the phenomenon of academic bullying and can serve as a contribution for future research in this field.

## Chapter V: Findings—Select Participant Narratives

I organize and present my findings in two chapters. In the current chapter, I present the narratives of five select participants. To identify the most compelling examples of academic bullying, I selected these participants based on the severity and frequency of their experiences, as well as diversity of social identities, academic ranks, and disciplines among the sample. For each participant, I provide details of their experiences and perceptions when they encountered bullying behaviors at their current and/or most recent institution, and the impact of bullying on their academic and personal lives. In the chapter that follows, I build on all 18 narratives to identify common themes that emerged across all participants, providing additional instances of participant narratives to ensure each participant is equally honored and valued in the findings.

### **Katherine**

*“Oh, it happened immediately because that was just the beginning of what has become consistent harassment. That’s the only language I can use.”*

For those entering academia, the hiring and onboarding process should be welcoming and supportive. Unfortunately, this was not the case for Katherine at her current and previous institutions. It was quite surprising that she remained in academia after such cold and unorganized “welcomes.” However, Katherine remained grounded in who she is and what she can do.

Katherine is an assistant professor in the field of public policy. As a Black woman scholar, she possesses a unique skillset and perspective as a policy researcher. This was appealing to her soon-to-be colleagues at her first institution, but Katherine faced challenges well before she stepped foot on campus. Coming from the policy world, the path towards the professoriate was not originally on her radar, and she was unfamiliar with how to secure a

faculty role. Katherine was figuring it out as she applied and interviewed for jobs. At one of the institutions on her interview path, a large R1 school called “First University,” she applied to two similar positions. One was a full-time faculty role within an academic department, and the other was a joint appointment that would allow her to split her time between a campus policy center and her home department. While she received an interview for the joint appointment, she was not offered an invitation to interview for the 100% full-time faculty role. Coming from a policy background with a PhD, she knew that entering the professoriate would be a competitive field.

Weeks following the interview, Katherine received an offer from First University, but it was for the 100% faculty role. She was a bit confused by the offer, so she contacted the dean to get clarity because she had not interviewed for the position she was offered, although she was interested. Katherine recalled that the dean had made a comment,

After looking at your dossier and information, I thought this [100% faculty position] would be a better fit for you. Of course, you’re free to have affiliations as a faculty member with any entity on campus, if you want to. But this [100% faculty line] would be the better fit.

Both faculty roles came with an appointment within the academic department—one was 100% and the other was a joint appointment in the policy center. The director of the campus policy center, “Tom,” who led the search, was also a professor within the department. Little did Katherine know there was a shared membership among the search committees for both open positions. It became quite confusing for her. Upon accepting the offer, Tom sent her emails that requested information to introduce her to the center and wider community, implying that she was already part of the policy center. Still confused at the misunderstanding, Katherine contacted the

department chair and program coordinator to confirm again if she should respond to Tom and if she was affiliated with the center or not. She said the chair responded,

No. You're not affiliated. I don't know why that person is reaching out to you. We've been very clear with him that this is not his hire... you have been hired for the other line that was available. I'm sorry you're having this experience, but you don't have to respond to him.

It was clear that miscommunication had plagued the department, or perhaps Tom did not follow directions. Despite the chair's message, Tom continued to email Katherine incessantly, requesting her biographical information and headshot. Katherine contacted the dean once more to confirm her appointment and notify the dean of requests from Tom. The dean had finally told her that "you don't have to respond to him... we've explained to him that you're not coming on campus for his position." All of these interactions had transpired prior to her arrival on campus. Once she had received clarity about her role from the dean, for the second time, she began to pack her belongings in anticipation of relocating to her new city over 700 miles away. The new city was a complete contrast to her previous location when she was in her policy role. "Totally different places, in different ways—culturally, geographically, demographically."

Upon her arrival at First University's campus, Katherine realized that she would have to acquaint herself with the new environment and learn how to navigate around the institution that would soon become her "home." She later recalled,

I didn't really know where my [office] building was. Nobody said, "Come to the office on this day, at this time to get your keys. Meet me here and we can show you around." I just showed up and tried to figure out where I was supposed to be.

Unbeknownst to Katherine, the administrative offices on campus had closed for the lunch hour. She had to wait for about 45 minutes until someone was available. Later, Katherine introduced herself to the staff, after waiting alone in the department. The staff member directed Katherine downstairs to obtain her office keys, and Katherine recalled,

I went to the room, and they gave me my office key. And then they said, ‘We don’t know what keys go to your desk. So, here’s a box of keys. Just take them upstairs, try all of them, and whichever ones don’t work, bring them back to us.

While Katherine could laugh about it now, it was clear that she felt unwelcome and disappointed. No one wants to feel merely tolerated and unvalued, particularly when joining a new environment. Shortly after the keys were resolved, she bumped into Tom, the center director, on campus.

He literally pulls me to the side while I’m walking to my car and says, “I have been emailing you and you have not been responding to me. You need to give me your CV and your bio and your headshot, as soon as possible. Because I don’t know if you’re aware of this or not, but I am responsible for 50% of your evaluation. So, you need to get this information to me as soon as possible. And you need to come to my office so we can have a conversation about what projects you’re working on.” This is me walking to my car. And we crossed paths on the sidewalk near the parking deck area, and he said that. I had so many things I wanted to say. But I’m trying to restrain a little bit.

Katherine had enough of the harassment, but still struggled to find the most appropriate response as a new, Black woman, assistant professor towards a senior, highly esteemed, White male faculty member.

I'm trying to keep my composure. I'm trying to respond professionally. Because at this point where I feel like you're cornering me on the sidewalk... that's a different level of assertion and aggression. I can match you there, but that's probably not the best thing to do as a new person here. So, when he said that, I'm working through all those emotions internally and trying to come up with a professional response, And I said, "Just hold that thought."

Unsure of how to handle the constant emails and physical approaches, Katherine turned to the dean again for support, who mentioned that they would talk to the center director yet again.

Throughout these exchanges with her new colleagues, Katherine learned a lesson about academia and how certain people were treated as sovereign and too powerful.

It taught me that people can create spaces of... I don't know if the language is untouchable-ness or just out of control. And nobody holds him accountable. There's no recourse; nothing that was apparent to me. And nothing was in place to really protect me from that level of harassment, quite honestly, because that's what it felt like... But that was where I first learned that I needed to create my own space. And that's also where I learned that you can create a space of being untouchable.

What Katherine described is unfortunately all too common in academia, where whiteness is deeply ingrained and pervasive. The hierarchy and positional power structures within academia often perpetuate these toxic behaviors, allowing those in positions of power (who are often white male faculty because of social closure, Weeden, 2002) to act with impunity. Instances of faculty members engaging in hostile or bullying behavior are often ignored or dismissed because of certain privileges or cachet. Katherine believed the dean and the department continually excused Tom's behavior because, first, he was a full professor with

tenure, second, he had his own center on campus that afforded him some autonomy and, of no less importance, he was a white man. Due to Tom's white male privilege, it seemed that he received more social privileges (e.g., less scrutiny, unquestioned authority, and greater freedom) that were not afforded to everyone across the department. Regardless, Katherine was a bit unfazed by Tom's behavior, as she knew of her capabilities and skills to succeed outside of the professoriate. She said,

I think the power dynamic between full professor and a [first semester] new assistant professor play out too, but in a lot of ways that dynamic doesn't work for someone who will just leave. Although I value tenure, I think that's an awesome thing. I also recognize the other awesome things I could do with my life. I'm not beholden to it in the same way. So that power dynamic, it doesn't play out the same way if both parties aren't bought into the value or benefits of tenure in the same way. I think it's great, but I haven't drunk the Kool-Aid. So, if I don't get [tenure], that's okay too, because I see other careers for myself that are equally satisfying.

After the last conversation with the dean, the center director stopped contacting Katherine. All of this occurred less than one month after Katherine joined the First University campus as an assistant professor. Despite a confusing and unorganized welcome to campus, Katherine stayed at the institution for 4 years. Katherine encountered comparable pre-arrival harassment before setting foot at her second institution. She was sought out to apply and hired for an assistant professor role, off the typical faculty hiring timeline. Not only was Katherine an "off-cycle" hire but her entire hiring process was also a bit unorthodox. Just prior to the offer, the department leader wanted to call references that were not on Katherine's list, potentially violating the discretion of her candidacy. This one leader, "Barb," also consistently badgered

Katherine about when she would be moving to the city. A move across states would be no easy transition for Katherine. So instead of rushing her move and using the semester to transition, as originally agreed upon, Katherine opted to drive 300 miles each month for faculty and student meetings. But even after arriving on campus and settling in, Barb attempted multiple times to regulate and surveil Katherine, like sitting in on her class unannounced and questioning her teaching.

Katherine was taken aback by Barb's behavior, who seemed to be fixated on controlling her by exerting her power as a leader in the department and the institution. Katherine's new school, Second University, was like her first institution in terms of rank, prestige, and predominantly white. It was shocking to Katherine because she was asked to apply for the position. Why, especially in the midst of a pandemic, would an institution seek out Katherine, hire her, and then treat her like an unwelcome second-class citizen? Thinking back to her experiences at the previous institution, Katherine had the realization, "I should've trusted my gut about it."

While considering Katherine's job offer, Barb wanted to contact her references; a typical process. Though, apparently there were some challenges with reaching one or two people. Katherine stated that Barb asked, "Can I just talk to the people I know? I know 'this' person on your faculty. I want to talk to her. Can I just talk to her?" To which Katherine replied with no because she wanted to maintain collegial relationships with her current colleagues. Barb's abrasive side showed itself, from the start. She wanted to breach confidentiality during the interview process, willingly or unknowingly, for the sake of speeding up an already rushed hiring process.

It became apparent that Barb did not respect Katherine. During negotiations, Katherine offered one counter and Barb initially said what seems standard and appropriate, “I think I can do something in this area. And I’ll consider some other things.” But things immediately changed. She came back to Katherine and said, “I changed my mind... you can either sign [the offer letter] or not. I think I gave you the best offer that I’m going to give you.” Despite Barb’s direct and uncompromising offer, Katherine took the leap of faith and accepted. However, starting a position in the middle of the academic year while in residing state brought on a sequence of issues that Katherine did not expect. It is also a lesson learned for academia, as we typically rush candidates into their roles.

Katherine described her monthly interactions with Barb to be cold, transactional, and unwelcoming. Despite being a senior member of the department, Barb seemed determined to make Katherine’s life difficult, constantly interrogating and harassing her about her move. Barb would attempt to schedule meetings with her during the days when Katherine was not on campus or even just as she left campus on her four-hour drive back to her residence. At one point Katherine thought it was “ironic” since Barb knew she did not live in the area yet, although she began to believe Barb’s requests were intentional.

Uprooting one’s life and moving just 200 miles away is a significant change that requires much coordination. Katherine needed to sell her house and find a new home in her new town. A warm welcome from a department might include an opportunity to tour the city and offer recommendations on the area. Instead, Katherine had to give herself a tour of the local area, search for apartments on the select days she was in town, and even sleep in her office for a night because she had no place else to go. Katherine struggled to find her footing and was given no assistance by the department, all the while teaching graduate students during the first week of

classes. As she pieced together her personal life and most basic needs in her new city, she also had to suppress her feelings and be present for her students and faculty.

Overwhelmed, pressured, worried, neglected, and concerned are words to describe how she felt in the moment. Katherine went on to confess,

I felt concerned that perhaps I was starting off on the wrong foot. Because... you don't want to start somewhere feeling like people have problems with your performance or anything about you being added to the faculty. I started to wonder if this was a good fit, in general.

She also expressed significant regret.

And quite honestly, I started thinking about what I should be doing to plan to leave. Let me start planning for the next thing because it's not clear to me that this is going to work out. It's very interesting to start somewhere, planning for the next thing.

The environment of Katherine's department was described as having a hierarchical structure and "top-heavy," often with pressures from leadership. Though when senior colleagues no longer held leadership roles, their influence could still be palpable, often dominating discussions and decision-making. Katherine further noted that while Barb was no longer in a leadership role, "she asserted herself in ways as though she was."

Although Katherine had committed herself to a career in the professoriate, as stated before, she realized the faculty role was not her only option and she understood her value as a scholar. This grounded mentality coupled with her personality, Katherine refused to believe she could be intimidated, particularly by Barb. Another instance of Barb's behavior towards Katherine was when Barb sat in on Katherine's three-hour class—uninvited and unannounced—and did not interact with anyone, almost like a statue or a guard. Assuming Barb had infiltrated

Katherine's class under the guise of an administrative role (that she no longer had), Katherine found this unexpected visit to be unprofessional, discourteous, and disruptive to the learning environment.

After that course session, Barb returned to Katherine to state that students had complained about an assignment, and that Katherine should reconsider it and be more active in her course management. Once again responding gracefully, Katherine thanked Barb for sharing and informed her that the feedback was significantly misaligned with what Katherine was hearing directly from her students. Here's what Katherine had to say about Barb's behavior:

That stuff becomes a distraction from the real work. It was her attempt to surveil. That's how it felt. It felt like an attempt to insert herself in unsolicited ways that were disruptive... But I was able to produce some counter documents and, interesting enough, once I did that, she never responded to me. It creates an uncomfortable environment when people drop in your class like that.

Katherine appeared to have been targeted by Barb, a senior white woman scholar and institutional leader. Barb monitored Katherine closely and created opportunities for students to use her to police Katherine. This behavior was inappropriate and the antithesis of collegiality. Like her experiences at First University, Katherine became overwhelmed with how quickly she began experiencing bullying and harassment within months of her start date. "I wasn't even unpacked. I wasn't sure that I was going to unpack. I hadn't even hung my diplomas up in my office. It was a lot for a small period of time," Katherine commented.

During our conversation, Katherine seemed confident and somewhat fearless. As we reflected on how Barb's behavior might have impacted Katherine's job performance, she replied,

I didn't avoid anyone... because I was going to be where I needed to be. But I got really good at creating my own space. And as long as I was in my space (metaphorically), and you weren't bothering me, I wasn't going to be in your space bothering you.

Katherine spoke about boundaries and made it clear that she did not avoid Barb. Instead, she discovered ways to create boundaries to maintain her peace. While her perspective on the situation was empowering, it would be remiss to believe that Barb's behavior had absolutely no effect on Katherine. Katherine disclosed, "Sometimes I reconsidered whether I even wanted to be a faculty member, to be completely transparent." While Katherine was able to manage her emotions, cumulative harassment and hostile behavior still had an influence, and it can be unbearable, and eventually lead to attrition.

Recognizing that this behavior was not unique to her institution, Katherine was unsure if academia was in her future.

A part of me recognizes that some of this may be par for the course. So going to another institution may not alleviate these challenges... Do I need to be on a campus to do the work that I think is important?

## **Vee**

*"It doesn't matter... I [am] one experience away from them creating a narrative about me, and I can't really defend myself. Because if I'm not for them, I'm [perceived as] against them."*

As a Black, queer non-binary person, Vee (they/them) has faced many obstacles, within and external from academia. Coming into the assistant professor role just two years ago, they were excited yet anticipated the challenges that they might face due to their identities, particularly at a predominantly white institution. Vee realized that they would have to work twice as hard as their colleagues to be taken seriously and gain the respect that they deserved.

But as we will soon learn, Vee never imagined that the person who would inflict the greatest harm upon them would share one of Vee's identities. This caught Vee off guard, and served as a reminder that power dynamics can often play a greater role in how individuals interact with one another than shared identity. Although shared identities may foster a sense of unity and belonging, it does not eliminate the possibility for power imbalances and abuse.

Vee is a new faculty member in an education program, housed within a department that also includes a social work program. They are known for their big smile and lighthearted personality, and quickly formed positive relationships with most of their colleagues. Currently, Vee described the departmental climate as "collaborative" and "really good colleagues." Vee noted this was the case for everyone, except the department chair, Grace. Things took a turn when Vee began experiencing harsh criticism and microaggressions from Grace, who apparently identifies as queer, just like Vee.

From Vee's perspective, Grace is the source of departmental drama, in addition to not being transparent with information that affects all of the faculty. In fact, Vee implied that Grace was an instigator, constantly making sly remarks and degrading comments. This was the norm, apparently, and no one would ever speak up to Grace, according to Vee.

I think the biggest thing is when our department isn't transparent, and she starts creating rifts in between... not necessarily between [social work and education] but there's rifts that she does do. Like, weird digs and it creates problems where there never was any. What Vee shared was that Grace had a way of pitting people against each other and causing conflict. While it was not necessarily the only factor, Grace's actions had contributed to the department's negative and unhealthy reputation across campus. Vee described Grace as a white,

passive-aggressive woman who has held her role for over seven years. She had begun to seemingly target Vee, and her actions towards them became increasingly fraught.

This is a pattern with me and my department chair. One of the first things that happened to me, when I met my department chair [Grace], we had to do this productivity form. It was simply to demonstrate what projects you're working on, how are things going? That kind of thing. And [Grace] looked at some of the work I was doing in-press. The first thing [Grace] said to me was, "Oh, your interest is in Black queer work. I love POSE<sup>1</sup>. I think POSE is such a great show."

As a very junior faculty member and self-described overthinker, Vee is impressionable. And because a Chair can have influence on one's career advancement, workload, and job security, Vee cares deeply about Grace's perception of them. Therefore, Vee expanded their research to include topics that are more closely related to social work, the other program within the joint department, as well as the program where Grace holds her faculty appointment.

From that moment on, [I] was trying to figure out how do I share my research in a way that doesn't [make] her feel like my work is only limited to a particular population. I told her my research isn't just based off of social media or media outlets. It's people's real-life experiences [Similar to] how people don't see whiteness as monolithic. White has always been seen as whatever the fuck they want. But *my* [emphasis added] research seems like it's limiting or [I'm] just doing 'me-search'... and from that moment on, I felt like I was being [policed].

As a result of Vee's deep consideration of Grace's criticism, Vee began overcorrecting and overcompensating in their work to establish and prove capable of pursuing research out of their typical agenda. While Vee recognized that Grace likely had good intentions in her attempt

to make a connection with Vee, it may have been more beneficial for Grace to inquire about Vee's work rather than assume and then later criticize. To help facilitate Vee's new research interests, Grace assigned a master's-level student to be Vee's research assistant (RA), without any notice or Vee's approval. The pairing was successful for both Vee and the RA, but Vee was confused as to why Grace would assign a master's-level, cis-gender, straight, white male RA who is from another program and has no similar research interests with Vee. Luckily, the working relationship with the RA worked out because Vee did not seem to have a choice but to say, "yes." Research is a major component of the faculty profile and, for Vee, their thinking on their research agenda had shifted within their first year of navigating the professoriate.

Vee recalled another instance where they worked with their RA on a research project and distributed the study flier to the department via a listserv. They remember Grace saying very directly,

I just want to let you know that you need to change the flier. If you're gonna have the department's name on there, it needs to be approved by me first. That was the first of many, as I called, "taps on the hand," that I was getting. I [said], 'What? I didn't know. It went through IRB approval. IRB didn't tell me that I had to take [the department] off.'

Gatekeeping was one of Grace's bullying tactics, in addition to micromanaging Vee. She insisted that having the department on their study flier gave off "certain messaging" that would make others perceive it was a department led study. Social closure theory suggests that gatekeepers in the workplace have considerable discretion and autonomy, allowing them to shape the work environment based on their own preferences without much oversight. This discretion includes hiring and career advancement decisions, and extends to daily monitoring,

with minoritized groups often being subjected to closure scrutiny and policing (Jackson & Leon, 2010).

One important piece of information is that Vee was also hired amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Naturally, students (and faculty) were concerned about their well-being and those who lived within their households. As such, Vee provided a virtual option for their students, particularly for a class that consisted of parents. Vee wanted to show compassion and empathy during a challenging time and help ensure everyone's safety. This is how he remembers a follow up conversation with Grace during this time,

I was called in by [Grace] and she said, "I wanted to check in with you about your teaching modalities. I think it's great that you're doing this work for your students, but we really want the students to be in-person." I was already teaching in multiple modalities already. What was really challenging was that [I] felt like what I was doing was wrong. Like I shouldn't be doing these things. I remember one time, [actually] she said this multiple times, "I feel like you care too much for your students."

It was apparently common knowledge around the department that Vee is considerate and empathetic towards his students, and the students speak very highly of Vee. However, colleagues were somehow concerned with students taking advantage of Vee. Their colleagues expressed concern that students should perceive them as the authority figure in the front of classroom. To which Vee responded,

I *am* in front of the room. I'm a faculty member, they know my name and the letters behind my name. They know I'm in a position of authority. But I don't look at the classroom as a hierarchical space. I look at it as a very horizontal space. Students are co-

learners. We're co-educators and co-collaborators. We're called learners in this space, and I very much create my classroom in that way.

The comments by Vee's colleagues can be seen as considerate or an act of paternalism and infantilization, assuming responsibility for Vee's well-being and treating Vee like they cannot handle themselves and require protection. Sentiments from the faculty colleagues also undermined Vee's autonomy, authority, and made them feel disempowered. While Vee was able to articulate how they view their classroom environment, it was yet another opportunity to second guess their abilities. "To have my colleague, and particularly my department chair, seem in this light was hard. I [kept wondering], 'Am I doing too much?' I was to the point where I was already second guessing myself," said Vee.

Later that semester, Grace asked Vee an implied question about a rumor that a faculty member was teaching at home via Zoom, while the students were on campus in the classroom. Having commuted for most of their education, Vee quickly shut down that conversation and vehemently confirmed that they would never do such an act. Vee noticed Grace's patterns, including scolding Vee under the guise of "check-in" emails. One of these emails was during a conference and holiday break. Vee decided to have a virtual class because they were out of town at a conference, and several students would be traveling for the holiday.

[Grace] said, 'I'm just checking in on how you're doing. I went through your syllabus and noticed that you didn't have class for three weeks. I noticed that you didn't have class Tuesday before [the holiday], per department policy. If you're looking to have a guest speaker, you need to have that approved by me [too].

Grace's passive-aggressiveness further upset Vee because she never approached him with a question; only accusations. Vee informed her that they did have class and that the syllabus had

been revised earlier in the semester to reflect the changes. Despite Grace being Vee's senior by many years, Vee was ready to stand up to her.

[Grace emailed], "I wanted to check in with you about your messaging in the email. I feel like this has been a pattern with us [where] you have policed me and scolded me for doing things in the classroom." She started getting nervous and [retracting her words]. I said, "You're emailing me all these accusations and you didn't give me the space to even say anything. This email is literally a public record. You're making assumptions and saying I'm not having class for multiple weeks. If you looked at an old syllabus that was not revised, you didn't even ask me if this was the current syllabus."

Vee mentioned that Grace appeared to get defensive, but Vee was tired of being overly accommodating, and they got more assertive with Grace and let her know, "*You* created this type of experience for me." Vee later caught COVID-19 but was too intimidated to cancel class after multiple conversations with Grace about class time and format. So, Vee taught the class session, virtually, while ill with COVID.

The effects of Grace's behavior had implications for Vee's work and personal life. She went as far as to mock Vee, in front of others, for getting the illness while at an education conference and even made comments about the relationship between Vee and their significant other. Vee's facial expression and eyebrows raised to the top of their forehead conveyed our shared disbelief towards Grace's comments.

The fact that this person has said certain comments to me... saying that, 'I guess you married rich', because my partner is an engineer. Yes, my department chair said that I married rich... There's been weird comments that have been said to me. I see it as this

person doesn't have a filter. But their filter often haunts people. You can't really say anything, either. You can't confront it.

Vee is hinting that Grace is untouchable or has protection (i.e., power and privilege), and while everyone notices her toxic forms of bullying, no one dares to confront her. Vee shared a few comments from their peers, "My colleague [said], 'I'm just so sick of [Grace].' And other people said, 'Oh, this is so disgusting. This wasn't right.' I didn't want to deal with it."

Grace has policed, surveilled, and micromanaged Vee. She has made discriminatory comments and inappropriate assumptions about Vee and his partner, and she has diminished his scholarship, which is centered around Blackness and queerness (as well as others who study LGBTQ issues). The most stunning aspect of this narrative, though, is that Grace is allegedly queer. This is a reminder that power dynamics and hierarchical structures can play a significant role in interactions between faculty, even within marginalized communities. Despite the shared identity of being queer, there are still significant differences in the experiences of a Black queer, non-binary person like Vee and a queer (allegedly), white woman like Grace. Her behavior towards Vee highlights the complexity of power dynamics and the potential abuse within marginalized groups.

Junior faculty and other non-tenured faculty are extremely vulnerable in bullying situations. Vee spoke on a few critical points.

Everyone [says] this is why academia has this kind of culture. And everyone's saying, "It doesn't matter because we're all productive"... I had four publications come out last year. I think that's the part [that] hurts. It doesn't matter... I [am] one experience away from them creating a narrative about me, and I can't really defend myself. Because if I'm not for them, I'm [perceived as] against them. It's very hard for me as a Black faculty

member. I can literally say one thing in that room, and it completely changes everything... We already know that they don't value diversity journals, as top tier spaces. But those are spaces that [will] read and publish my work. Ya'll say you care about DEI stuff and it's an institutional goal and part of the institution's mission, then why be penalized for it? Why am I being seen as [someone who] cares too much for students... as opposed to, "We value the fact that you care about the students in the classroom. It's not what you say, it's how you say it."

It was difficult to know that the academic veil had been lifted above Vee's eyes this early into their professoriate career. Vee was an administrator for a decade, prior to the faculty role. So, they were familiar with some level of higher education culture. Though, faculty life was different. Vee remains confident in their ability to remain steadfast on the tenure-track and not leave their role.

I'm not going to let these folks wear me out. I'm just mad. I refuse to let whiteness and white supremacy win the way it has done to so many people. I will continue to [be] a faculty member, because my record speaks for itself... I'm not going to let academia make me become a statistic [and leave the academy]. I knew [what I] signed up for. It doesn't make it any better, but I also know that this is the game that I [must] play.

Furthermore, Vee continues to have high aspirations for academia, despite their own wounds. For their department, specifically, they hope for accountability and disrupting the hegemonic structures of academia, such as Eurocentric and Westernized course content, tenure and promotion systems, and bias in leadership roles.

I want our department chair's [behavior] to be acknowledged and held accountable for the shit that she's doing. But we live in an academic environment where white people

will not be held accountable. It doesn't matter how many things we change, in academia. This stuff will always be the same. And I know there are studies that expose all those things, but unless institutions start firing people who are full [tenured] professors and [those] who have rank and status... if we redistribute the power, it'll change. But it still doesn't negate the fact that we are on the receiving end of all of that.

Vee's experience highlights the harsh reality of how academe can treat faculty, especially those just entering the professoriate. It can lead to faculty feeling discouraged and undervalued, causing them to either leave the profession or endure bullying to conform to a system that does not prioritize or value their well-being and success.

### **Jasmine**

*"It completely changed how I, actually to this day, think about collaboration."*

Gaining a new faculty appointment, especially for a doctoral candidate, is an exhilarating time. But if the path to academic success is fraught with painful experiences, embarking on a new faculty journey can be quite discouraging and challenging. There has been much time and healing since one of Jasmine's most traumatic academic bullying encounters. As she recounted her story, Jasmine's tone became increasingly agitated, peppered with profanity and detailed accounts of her mistreatment. She has accomplished so much since her first couple of years on the tenure-track line, yet retelling her story continues to evoke feelings of anger, betrayal, and embarrassment, rightfully so.

Jasmine is an established, prolific, and revered scholar in the social sciences. For over 18 years, she has worked her way up the faculty ranks at two institutions, from a non-tenure-track faculty to a tenured, Full Professor. An immigrant from southeast Asia, she was shocked to find out that she had been awarded her dream job over a decade ago—a tenure-track (TT) faculty role

at a highly ranked, R1 institution. While Jasmine was in disbelief about being a top, TT faculty recruit at a prestigious university, the existing faculty knew of her potential and work caliber. Once Jasmine began her faculty role, her colleagues were not shy about their admiration of her. They were continually impressed by Jasmine, praising her research productivity and growing funding record; clearly the front-runner for her role.

While Jasmine describes the current climate of her department as collegial, diverse across identities, and overall “good,” this was not always the case. Shortly after her arrival, Jasmine was invited by a senior scholar (“Tom”), an older, white, tenured faculty member in her department, to apply for an NIH grant. As Co-PI Jasmine wrote the bulk of the proposal, with Tom being the main PI. The application was a success, and Jasmine felt overjoyed and thankful: this was her first major grant application and her first success. This was also Tom’s first NIH success over his entire career. However, Jasmine soon faced quite a conundrum.

One on hand, she was thrilled to be a new faculty member in a highly ranked program, receiving warm welcomes and praises for being an early “academic rock star,” only to be eventually blind-sided shortly after her arrival. She excitedly started this new collaboration, viewing Tom as a supportive colleague and mentor, except that he wasn’t. Soon after they launched the project, Tom started to email her with concerns about her salary FTE percentages on the grant, implying that she had not put in her due efforts. Jasmine shared that her grant salary percentage was an appropriate amount for NIH standards, and that she had dedicated *more* [emphasis added] time to the grant, despite Tom’s discontent. Jasmine struggled to make sense of the situation, grappling with conflicting emotions and contradictory messages. She knew that she needed to defend herself, but she also had to do so in a graceful and professional manner:

I had to write, initially, very politely. Just being the respectful person [that] I am, but also [considering] the power differentials and trying to explain to him– “Well, I actually have spent way over 50% of my time, and I’m totally fine with that [because] I’m a researcher. But this [salary FTE] is really aligned with the proposal.” So, I just constantly had to defend what is a given... what I thought was a given. That was very, very draining.”

Despite her being new to her institution and this collaboration, Jasmine knew “something felt off” with the consistent emails from Tom about her efforts on the project. She then realized this might have come from the fact that, during weekly project meetings, she had to constantly push back on Tom’s ideas about doing research in certain ways “that just don’t make any sense by any standards.” From a much older generation, Tom was not trained the same rigorous way as Jasmine, who does experimental designs. “He would come up with this crazy idea of surveying the two Latinas in the community health program and run statistical analyses to ‘generalize.’” Jasmine approached these disagreements “with diplomacy” but she had to “operate with integrity or we’d mess up this high-stakes NIH project.” But it got to a point when she realized Tom’s emails had “escalated to a different level.” He then began to provide feedback on Jasmine’s work, outside of the scope of their NIH collaboration. While Tom’s emails appeared to be seemingly cordial at first, Jasmine stated they gradually read to be accusatory, diminishing, and interrogating. Academics take their work personally because it is often a reflection of their original ideas and personal and professional integrity. Despite being at the highest University faculty rank, as Jasmine thinks back on Tom’s behavior, it’s clear that it still angers her:

He would write me emails with subject lines about my other projects or publications totally unrelated to the NIH grant, and I thought, “Oh, this is a congratulatory email” because he would have my awards or articles [attached]. But then no, it was not. It’s like,

“I suspect part of your efforts [doing these other things] is supported by *our* NIH project.” Which was completely untrue because I had multiple projects and worked 200% and over on each of them. But even speaking of the NIH project, that is still my fucking project. I wrote the whole damn [NIH grant] proposal!

Junior faculty are more likely than tenured faculty to experience persistent incivility, coercion, and stress (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). As a result of the stress and harassing behavior by Tom during one of the first collaborations of her faculty career, Jasmine made up her mind that she would never collaborate with any of senior faculty that look and think like Tom ever again; only students. Jasmine, acutely self-aware, believes this traumatizing experience is the source of her reluctance to collaborate. She went on to state, “And then it is just like, it completely changed how I, actually to this day, think about collaboration. And it wasn’t a true collaboration to begin with.”

Bullying behavior is not always displayed through overt aggression or physical violence. Jasmine talked about how Tom’s insistent emails that questioned her integrity and “lack of efforts” were subtle, yet impactful and harmful to her psyche. Not only was Jasmine checking these emails on campus but, like many academics, she had her email synched with phone and checked her email in her home office. Now, Tom had imposed himself somewhat into Jasmine’s personal and home space. And she allowed him to do so because of her junior status:

I would be constantly on the phone, seeing what message was coming from him. I was compelled to react right away. And some of those situations were sort of defending myself. And then, [I was] filled with anger. But I’m also known to be a very respectful and diplomatic person. So, you have to kind of defend yourself with anger, but you have to navigate diplomacy; almost like humoring him. It makes me sick thinking about it

now... But the nervousness and the trepidation of something accusing or like accusing [in] nature, will come after me yet again. But I couldn't resist the urge to keep an eye on my inbox all day, all the time.

Sadly, for Jasmine, others, such as Tom's administrative assistant, began to imitate Tom's actions. Jasmine recalled the assistant, a white woman, yelling at her many times in front of Tom; seemingly emboldened by him. Regardless of the perceived power dynamics between an administrative assistant and a full-time faculty member, the assistant was not shy to berate and confront Jasmine. One example provided was when Jasmine messaged the assistant for support with an administrative task. More information was needed, so at the directive of the assistant, Jasmine contacted another support staff member by forwarding the assistant's email to the other person to provide context for the request for more information. Shortly after, the assistant accused Jasmine of "getting her in trouble" by forwarding the email. This reaction seemed very confusing and exaggerated from Jasmine's perspective considering the task was very routine. The assistant's behavior persisted. Jasmine recounted another situation where she approached the assistant to manage some paperwork for the NIH project. In a suite full of people, Jasmine remembers being ignored and eventually told loudly "I don't have time for you!" while trying to comprehend what had occurred:

Leaving that experience, I was like, "what happened to me"? I was yelled at, in front of my students, in front of my colleagues, in front of her supervisor, and nobody said a thing. And I apologized profusely.

In addition to apologizing, Jasmine had even gone so far as to buy flowers for the assistant to help remedy both encounters. From these accounts, it is clear that vicarious bullying can be infectious, in that some witnesses of hostile behavior can emulate bullying. Conversely,

some witnesses may experience negative emotions, such as anxiety, fear, or feelings of helplessness. While bystanders may feel compelled to support the target of academic bullying but lack the knowledge or courage to do so, others may simply excuse or normalize bullying conduct. Jasmine attempted to resolve these issues herself and did not seek support. Seeking support was not a strategy in her survival toolbox. She remembered two colleagues that approached her:

One time, I had a fellow colleague reaching out to me, apologizing on [the administrative assistant's] behalf. And the wording was very funny. She was like, "Oh, I'm sorry, I saw [the assistant] kind of treating you that way. That shouldn't have happened." Or, "Oh, she's [the assistant's] just having a bad day."

When I asked if other people of color or, specifically, Asians within Jasmine's department or team had experienced similar mistreatment from the assistant or Tom, she believed that "men were excused." One of Jasmine's students, also Asian but not the same ethnicity as Jasmine, approached her to express his concern with the very visible mistreatment of Jasmine--his own professor. Curious to know if it were blatant racism or xenophobia, Jasmine asked the student if the assistant had acted similar toward him. He informed Jasmine that the assistant had never treated him in that manner and had always been pleasant. Later, a project manager on Jasmine's research team informed her that the assistant ., ".never, never treats me like that. It's always all smiley and, 'Hey, what can I do for you?' So, it's definitely very much targeted."

Despite this bullying experience through personal interactions and emails during the early years, Jasmine continues to have a very high service load. Her colleagues must also trust her work ethic, judgement, and leadership as "one of the most valued" professors in the department.

It is quite a dichotomy. On the one hand, Jasmine is highly sought after and, on the other hand, she feels as though her contributions and time are often diminished and taken for granted.

Unfortunately, she's been silent about her experiences, as she believes her colleagues would be skeptical.

Jasmine faced many consequences due to academic bullying, including her distrust for collaboration with white male senior faculty, as well as vivid and exaggerated dreams of her encounters with Tom, even long after Tom's retirement after their NIH project ended. To make matters worse, Jasmine later developed anxiety, panic disorder, and other mental health conditions. She says,

... it seemed to have no adverse impact on my mental health, until in recent years. It literally, all of a sudden, [surfaced]. The triggers, that were always there, just came out... I think I can honestly say those experiences, plus the tenure grind, the pressure that I experienced those years were, if not all the causes, at least are some of the main causes for why I'm having such a challenging mental health.

It's distressing to learn about how people at work might have such a detrimental impact on one's health. While this may seem like an isolated incident, research reveals that the behavior of academic bullies can frequently have harmful ramifications for one's physical, mental, and somatic health. Jasmine was also triggered in her own home, where she would agonize over Tom's emails.

When questioned if the bullying had any influence on her confidence in her ability to continue her work, Jasmine discusses how it provided an opportunity for deep reflection and, ultimately, growth and clarity. She believes the bullying experiences, "... allowed me to gain so

much clarity about who I am as a thinker, as a scholar, as a teacher, and mentor and a colleague.”

She went on to say,

I think that kind of clarity actually gives me more confidence. I think clarity is a phase, a super important phase. And the phase of gaining clarity is very painful. There’s a lot of reflective moments that are also very painful.

Even as she heals and copes from her traumatic bullying experiences, it still hurts.

Luckily, Jasmine did not leave academia. With support from mental health professionals and an unwavering belief in herself, she persisted through toxic interactions within her work environment. Looking forward, Jasmine is hoping to explore newer and better ways to allow for additional healing, decompression, and reflection. The biggest reflection of this situation for Jasmine is that being an agentic, independent scholar remains her “biggest asset to thrive in the academy that can feel suffocating and cruel at times.”

### **Maria**

*“There was nowhere to go. It was a club that I was never going to get into and should never complain about because the ties were too tight, and I was always the outsider.”*

Academic medicine is a unique branch of higher education that focuses on medical education, medical research, and clinical care. Physicians often spend significant time caring for and thinking of others, including students, patients, and their own families. But who cares for them when they have reached their low points or limits? Worse, what if they are subjected to persistent bullying? Over the course of 25 years, Maria experienced such terrible bullying that she fell into a deep despair and considered taking her own life at one point. Maria prided herself on her resilience and ability to overcome obstacles, but the constant bullying and hostility was wearing her down. She needed an out.

Maria is a full professor of medicine at her current institution, where she's been for the past year. She spent over two decades at her former institution, "Jax School of Medicine" (JSOM), that she once considered home but can no longer face returning. Despite being offered a higher role recently by JSOM, she turned it down because she was unable to work with individuals who had witnessed her being bullied and did little to nothing to intervene. JSOM was where Maria attended medical school, conducted her graduate medical education, and felt like she had established strong relationships. Though, while she was excited to return to Jax and leave her first attending faculty position, it was not without its challenges.

Physicians work long hours, and then there was Maria who was working 12-hour days, five days a week and seeing about 40 patients a day in an urgent care unit within the academic medical center. The woman that hired her, "Barb," informed Maria that it was the job that no one wanted to do. But Maria found enjoyment in it because she grew fond of her patients and medical students. After several years as a clinical instructor, Maria was diligently creating her promotion packet for an assistant professor position. Students had flocked to her in the hospital. She enjoyed advising them, and the medical school leadership noticed her interest. However, life had different plans for her, and she received a promotion to the role of mother before a promotion at work. Maria reflected on her boss' words during maternity leave,

When I went on maternity leave, two things happened. The first thing was [Barb] said, "I'm not going to submit your paperwork for promotion, because you're probably going to come back part-time, and all of my effort will have gone to waste." The second thing that happened is that she [allegedly] forgot to submit my paperwork for maternity leave! And she said to me, "You're earning so little, I can't imagine it would make a difference to not have an income for six weeks." So, I had no income for six weeks of my 12-week

maternity leave. The other six weeks of my maternity leave was my vacation time and continuing education time. I had none of that when I came back. I had no vacation left for the rest of the year. So, she stalled my career, because she forgot about me.”

Maria felt that Barb’s negligence was deliberate and harmful, and she found it challenging to confront her. It didn’t help that Barb had close friendships with the section head and department chair. Although social closure is not always an intentionally organized effort, Maria practically was excluded by what she perceived to be a larger group with power that she would never be a part of. She stated, in a defeated tone,

There was nowhere to go. It was a club that I was never going to get into and should never complain about because the ties were too tight, and I was always the outsider. In fact, myself and one Black woman were the only minority people in the entire group.

A proud Latina and Mexican American woman, Maria was convinced that Barb, her White colleague, did not like her because of her race. “I think that she saw someone that was not worthy because of my race and/or the way I conducted myself,” Maria said. Despite Barb’s carelessness, Maria loved seeing patients and students because she felt valued by them. She had no interest in academia, but she eventually found herself more active in the medical school, first as an admissions interviewer and committee member, and eventually as interim Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) several years later. Finally, she was out of Barb’s reach, until Barb also got a leadership role within the medical school.

As an Assistant Dean, Maria was able to create an elective on health equity at JSOM. It became quite popular with the students, so they demanded it become a required course. However, required courses needed to be approved by the Associate Dean for Curriculum, who just happened to be Barb. Even at the recommendation of the Dean for JSOM, who was Barb’s

close friend and the department chair, Barb was still reluctant to mandate the health equity course for all medical students. Pressured by students' continued efforts to advocate, the course eventually became a requirement. But Barb did not assign credit to the course for roughly three years, until another professor complained that students seemed distracted by this non-credited course. The course later became a required course with credit, after the Dean stepped in to intervene.

Still true to her interests and role as Assistant Dean for DEI, Maria felt it was her job to protect and closely advise the minoritized students. She created "mentoring circles" at her home, where older students would provide supplemental advising to pre-clerkship students on how to successfully prepare for board exams. These mentoring circles were for students of color, by students of color because there was greater trust among them. It was a wildly successful method that lasted for over 10 years. Then Barb gets word of the extra guidance sessions being hosted at Maria's house and loses her temper.

She found out one day and lost her mind in front of the dean of the school and started ripping me to shreds, as I sat there quietly and listened to her. "Who do you think you are? What do you think you're doing? You have no background. You don't even know how to teach. What's wrong with you?" Just at the top of her lungs, yelling at me.

While trying to undermine Maria, Barb was also harming the students by not providing credit for a required course. Later that day, after the exchange, Maria said Barb came to apologize, likely at the directive of the Dean. "I'm so sorry I spoke to you that way. I'm not sure why I did that," Maria remembered. Before Maria could offer her opinion on why Barb was so hostile towards her, Barb left the office. Again, Maria believes it was due to her race/ethnicity.

It irked her that I was still moving up the chain. I think she did not like my race. Plain and simple. I think it bothered her. It just drove her insane and by that, I mean she acted in a way that she would deem unprofessional. She was neglectful in her duties. She lost her temper. She behaved in a way that would cause her to reprimand anyone else. I clearly pushed her buttons.

Maria described Barb as a “model of comportment,” as she typically exhibited appropriate and, perhaps, admirable behavior in most settings. Barb is a quiet woman, normally, who sits in her office alone and wears a suit daily. “I had never seen her yell at anyone. And now it’s 20 years. I was the only person I’ve ever seen her yell at,” Maria reflected. It was interesting that she would yell at a colleague in front of the Dean. She must have felt protected.

And she clearly was because there was no repercussion. The Dean never followed up to say, “Gosh, Maria. I’m so sorry that she treated you in this way.” There was nothing...

Had I acted that way, it would have been a whole other can of worms.

What Maria meant was there are double standards, in which people of color are often held to different expectations and treated differently based on their race or ethnicity. It also did not help that Barb and the Dean were close friends. Though, no response or intervention from the Dean continued to perpetuate the bullying and potential racism at play.

Several years passed and the Dean leaves the institution. Who better to step into the role than the Associate Dean for Curriculum, Barb. “She’s back above me, and things got really contentious the last couple of years,” Maria begrudgingly noted. But why would Maria stay at that point? She could have easily left now that Barb was back in charge as interim Dean and, shortly after, a permanent incumbent for the role. Maria felt that she needed to protect her students from Barb, until they reached graduation. There were also adjustments that she wanted

to see prior to her departure. One of them being a leadership meeting with all of the deans in the medical school to which she was never invited.

I thought, this has to change before I leave. I got the meeting [Zoom] link, because now we're in COVID [-19], from someone else, and I jumped in the meeting. It was a particularly relevant meeting because they were talking about how poorly our minoritized students were doing during the pandemic.

Thankfully, Maria was able to provide context and some explanation for why students of color were performing poorly. She informed the group that those students were impacted most by the pandemic, likely due to significant deaths in their families. Recognizing the challenges of traveling during the pandemic, Maria provided a supportive space in her backyard for students to honor and remember their loved ones.

They were just astonished that this was going on. "Why didn't you tell us?" And I said, "In what setting would I tell you? I'm not in this meeting. How would you know? I think I deserve to be at this meeting." And everybody but her agreed. So, they agreed to open up the meeting.

Once Maria was in, she pointed out that the only Black woman among the deans was also excluded and that she needed to also be invited to the weekly meeting.

She cried. She didn't even know this was [happening]. I didn't want to tell her, until they had accepted her in, that this was going on without her. So, when she found out and was finally let in, she cried because she was so angry and so frustrated that this had been going on the entire time.

Maria's choice of words was interesting—"finally let in." It was evident that a secret group was operating within the medical school, making crucial decisions without the

involvement or input of the only two Latina and Black women serving as associate deans.

Apparently, this meeting had occurred before Barb took the helm of JSOM. Maria insightfully pointed out,

The fascinating thing was that it was systemic. And people inherit things, but they don't change them, even when they know they're doing wrong. They think this is the way it's always been. This must be what works. And so, they keep doing it until they're challenged.

With the yelling at Maria in front of her boss and excluding Maria and her colleague, it became more apparent to others that Barb did not like Maria. Barb eventually became so careless with her actions that she sent an email about Maria to all of the deans by mistake. "It said, 'I can't deal with [Maria] anymore. I'm supposed to be talking to her about the Black students. Can you meet with her in my [capacity]?' So, it went to everybody, and everybody forwarded it to me." Barb approached Maria, yet again, to apologize. Maria conveyed to Barb that she thought the issue went beyond just having a bad day and provided her with a detailed list of all the negative acts she had experienced at the hands of Barb over the last 20 years. Afterwards, "She never spoke to me again. Even in her role as Dean, we would meet with several people always in a group. And then she decided to retire. That's when I knew I could leave."

Having to endure this type of hostility took a severe toll on Maria's emotional and mental health. She would litter her office with inspirational quotes because she felt at an all-time low. It was clear that Maria had been deeply hurt, burnt out, and potentially depressed at that time. When recounting those moments of profound harm during the interview, Maria continued to speak, her eyes filled with tears and her voice wavering as she struggled to hold back her emotions.

I got really low, like super low. I actually considered suicide that day... I called the Employee Assistance number, and that person saved me and helped me separate out what I was feeling and recognize it was this oppressive culture that I had been living under. That was the day that I said, "I'm done. I'm leaving," and I started packing up my office. I didn't even know where I was going yet. But I started packing up my office because I thought, "I can't leave this world just because a group of people can't see me."

She is grateful for life after JSOM, and it's been a significant mental break for Maria. Despite moving on from that chapter in her life, she still carries a sense of loss. Feelings of resentment, betrayal, and sadness were written on Maria's face.

I left a lot behind. I left my friends. I left my colleagues. I left my collaborators. I basically exiled myself from my home to get away from the constant triggering experiences of being in a setting where I had allowed myself to be oppressed for so long. I don't wish that on anybody.

### **Abdul**

*"... over time, that's what I've kind of understood, is that when people get into these spaces, or dispositions in higher education, and when they feel like they've arrived, they get to control people's narrative. And they want them to be subsumed in that same culture in which they're engrossed in."*

Abdul is a Black male faculty member with 10 years of experience within the professoriate. He is currently a tenured, associate professor of public health at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), and previously worked at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). His current department is uniquely structured, consisting of two master of

public health programs within one department. One program is on the main campus, and the other is on a branch campus, with both reporting to one department chair.

Because the master's program at the branch campus operates under a hybrid-model, Abdul, as one of the three faculty teaching there, rarely physically encounters his fellow faculty colleagues. Aside from departmental meetings, he also only interacts with his department chair, "Deborah" -- a Black woman, via email or the occasional videoconference call. He described the culture as a *lack* of culture, although he gets along with his co-workers. "You're not interacting with each other in person. It's really mostly remote." Despite the absence of an "office culture," Abdul mentioned attempts to keep some level of interaction between him and his colleagues, but these efforts seem to be unsuccessful. He went on to say,

I do understand that we each perform multiple roles, and we can situate ourselves in trying to cultivate that type of relationship that I feel like is needed in these types of spaces. Because we're just honestly overburdened and I get it, you know? I don't take it personally. I just honestly understand, we're overburdened.

With only three program faculty on his campus, Abdul made it clear that they were carrying an unmanageable workload, which does not support a healthy work environment or work-life balance.

The culture and structure of Abdul's program does not allow one to foster close relationships, particularly faculty who are placed on the branch campus, as they have almost no interaction with their colleagues on the main campus. Perhaps this is one of the reasons Abdul's department chair, Deborah, belittled him over time. In fact, when Abdul first arrived, he recalled being reprimanded for being too rigorous in his requirements.

When I first started here, the department chair had a “talking to” me because of the rigor of my class upset the students. Now, this is a graduate program. So in a graduate program, where we’re teaching people to work with vulnerable populations, so you have to instill some type of rigor, because they’re going to be dealing with people who are dependent upon them to understand the soliloquy of mental illness, economics, and all of these things. Basically, social determinants of health determine whether or not these people’s quality of life means anything. And I say all that to say, when I instituted that type of rigor, like annotated bibliographies, making them read articles, holding them accountable for reading the chapters, participating in class, and making sure that papers were structured in ways that are representative of someone who’s going to earn a master’s degree from an institution... that was too rigorous. And it was because that was too rigorous, and students were already getting like C’s and B’s in the class; and some D’s and F’s. Basically, she said, “We don’t handle students like this at this institution. We don’t talk to students this way when we we’re trying to hold them accountable.” And I’m sitting down in front of her, looking at her like she crazy. You mean to tell me, because I’m telling them to make sure their subjects agree with their verbs, and making sure that they know the difference between a fragment, and make sure they represent themselves professionally. That’s rigorous? And that’s talking down to [students]? I said, “Okay.”

Some many perceive a “talking to” as simply an opportunity to provide feedback or guidance. Though, Deborah used her power to remind Abdul that her statement was not a suggestion, in fact, a directive. Here’s what Abdul recalls,

And she basically said, “Do we understand each other?” Basically, that’s what she said to me. And I said, “We understand each other perfectly. They can submit whatever they want to me in crayon, and I bet you they will get a Pulitzer Prize from me.” And I really did mean that. But, *that* was bullying. I’m trying to figure [it] out. I’m not cursing at them. I’m walking alongside them. And I’m saying, “Hey, this is how you make sure your writing is succinct and concise.” I’m talking about like, go to the APA or go to the writing center. And over time, I’ve come to realize that that’s the culture here.”

In any other work context, “Do we understand each other” could merely be a way to ensure that two people understand and agree on something. Though in academia, this can be a loaded question that holds different meaning and interpreted as a warning. Deborah’s question could have also been a threat to Abdul, implying that if he does not comply with Deborah by adjusting his expectations of students that he could face negative consequences. This question and Deborah’s assertion of power undermines the principles of academic freedom for faculty. But according to Abdul, “That’s more on its face than actual practice. Even the current climate shows us that we don’t have academic freedom.”

Abdul was later assigned a mentor by Deborah, which he found off as he had over 10 years of experience in the classroom and is quite experienced in his field. When Abdul met with the assigned mentor, the mentor seemed unsure if Abdul even needed mentoring. “I don’t get why I’m your mentor, it seems like you got it,” Abdul remembered. He went on to share that Deborah had assigned him another mentor to help Abdul with his faculty development. After the second mentor requested to review Abdul’s work, it became clear that this was situation of “toxic mentoring.”

Then the other mentor was to help me with my development on myself. It's now mind you, I have over 10 years of experience teaching in higher education. So, I know how to develop a syllabus and write one. But they went through all my syllabi, to say, "Oh, that's too punitive. Why aren't your classes 100 points?" It could be 800 points; it's still going to equal out to 100%. That doesn't matter. And [they said], "Well, the students may be confused." I said, "Whatever you want to change in the syllabus, please do it and leave me out of it. I promise you I don't care. If you think there's too punitive, change it. I'm not rewriting my syllabus. It's just not gonna happen."

The nitpicking of Abdul's syllabi and grading rubrics and, ultimately, questioning his teaching methods left him frustrated, albeit he could laugh through some of the remarks as we talked. In addition to Deborah's intrusiveness on Abdul's academic freedom, it appeared that she sent a someone to "mentor" Abdul as a way of controlling and monitoring his work. This could have been a way for Deborah to also exert control and continue to hover over Abdul's work, rather than providing genuine support and guidance. In this bullying experience, Deborah sharing Abdul's racial identity does not seem to transpire in support and respect; rather, the positional power that she has seems to have trumped everything else in instigating her bullying behavior. Abdul also experienced infantilization and agist comments from his peers, based on his youthful appearance. He found these comments and behavior disrespectful and hurtful, and it was difficult for him to *feel* respected in his department. When I asked how he felt in those moments encountering Deborah asserting her authority, he said,

Well, it's understandable because a lot of people infantize me, because even though I'm about to be [age mentioned] next year, people treat me like I'm 23 years old, because I guess I looked that way. And I can't help that I look the way that I look. I mean, my

African genes are just what they are. I can't control that. I have grey hair and everything, but I can't control that. But in that infantizing, when you work with people who are seasoned, like her, and who have children that look like me, they treat them a certain way. And I get it, but it also pisses me off, because I vacillate between, "I'm not sure damn child." And two, I don't need for you to be talking to me like this." I just don't. But over time, that's what I've kind of understood, is that when people get into these spaces or dispositions in higher education, and when they feel like they've arrived, they [believe they] get to control people's narrative. And they want them to be subsumed in that same culture in which they're engrossed in. And I don't follow the leader. I have my own mind, and I speak in ways that are truthful and emancipatory. And a lot of people can't handle that, and I get it. But that's a personal problem.

This was not the first time Abdul had experienced this type of treatment. As his previous institution, a PWI, he stated,

I experienced it there too. And I was in my 30s when I was there, early 30s. And even the administrators did not see me as an adult. [My appearance] gave them that mindset that "Oh, he's just like my son. So let me talk to you, like I talked to my son." Even in casual conversation, like, "Hey, Abdul or [rather] Abdulli. Like, that's not my fucking name. And so, I wanted people to see... you want people to see you for the person that you are, not for the role that you play at the institution. And it's hard when they infantize you... Those are the type of microaggressions that are so tumultuous over time, it causes this faculty retention [issue]. Like, people aren't gonna stay there long enough for you to continue to undermine them in these little covert and overt ways when they have other opportunities.

He also experienced similar micromanagement at the PWI, also from the department chair.

When they were seeing the success that I was having, academically, they began to handle me differently... and so the department chair did things that were related to bullying [Saying things] like, “I see that you you’re going to your conference? How are you going to manage your class?” [I replied], “The same way I have been for three years—all teaching online, for that week, it would just be synchronous.” And she said, “Well, the institution frowns upon us moving our classes online too often. I said, “Well, I don’t know what to tell you. My ticket is bought and I’m leaving tomorrow morning. So, you can get someone to cover it, if you don’t want me to teach asynchronously because I’m not gonna get back \$800.

This program was also already hybrid. The overly detailed instructions, excessive monitoring, lack of autonomy, inappropriate interference, and excessive criticism was irritating for Abdul. After working at the PWI for eight years, he was tired. He recalled saying to himself, “If they are going to do that little type of micromanagement and for the pay that I was getting that, I didn’t need to do that anymore. So, I jumped ship.” Sadly, like many others, Abdul believes this type of behavior is pervasive in the academy.

While he believes toxic behaviors exist in most institutions, he does believe that some schools are creating health environments for faculty, and left this to say for aspiring professors, I hope when someone hears my story is that they don’t get dissuaded from pursuing a tenure-track position because they have their benefits, and they have their setbacks. But honestly, the benefits outweigh the setbacks. I love my summer schedule, because I get to travel. I love being able to go to conferences and publish and stuff like that. I think you just have to find the right institution. And that’s hard. But that comes from you

networking. Start early so that you'll know if *this* school is known for bullying their faculty, you know to stay your behind away from them. If *this* school is known for not giving tenure promotion, if you only have a set number of publications, stay your behind away from them. But align yourself with an institution that aligns with your personality and your goals. I think you will prosper in this space.

## **Chapter VI: Findings—Common Themes Across Participants**

While individual narratives provide unique nuanced perspectives, there are common threads that cut across all participants that offer a more holistic window into how academic bullying manifests across academe. Based on thematic analysis, in this chapter, I present the most salient themes throughout participant narratives that lend empirical support and complicate the theory of social closure. Equally important, these themes illuminate the complex interplay of power, identity, and exclusion within the context of academic bullying.

Through analysis of all 18 participant narratives, I identified six common themes across their experiences with academic bullying. To organize these themes, I grouped them into two overarching levels: Individual and Systemic. At the individual-level, themes included personal and interpersonal experiences of academic bullying, including perceived discrimination and bias, impact of bullying, and power dynamics. At the systemic-level, themes included lack of policy and procedures, lack of accountability, and structural power dynamics. These themes highlight the complexity of the academic bullying phenomenon, arguing for thoughtful, intentional, and comprehensive approaches to address factors at both the individual- and systemic-level.

### **Individual-Level Themes**

Individual-level themes provided clarity on the personal and interpersonal factors that contribute to academic bullying. These themes revealed that the bully's behavior is often targeted toward faculty of color, motivated by their desire for control, power, and need to establish or flaunt their dominance over others. Further, individual-level themes pinpoint the adverse impact of bullying on targeted faculty, including emotional distress, exclusion, and overall sense of wellbeing.

***Theme 1: Faculty of Color are often targeted due to aggressor's prejudices based on intersecting minoritized identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, gender)***

The first prominent theme was perceived discrimination and bias. Eleven of the participants, all faculty of color, reported perceptions of race or ethnicity-based discrimination. These participants perceived that they were targeted for bullying due to their race and/or ethnicity, emphasizing the presence of racial bias and prejudice motivations behind bullying behavior. The narratives of this sub-group of faculty participants revealed their experiences with academic bullying manifested in overt and subtle ways, such as exclusion from meetings, microaggressions, surveillance, interrogation, gaslighting, exclusion, public shaming, micromanagement, academic overload, sabotage., and other work-related harassment. The faculty on the receiving end of this discrimination revealed that these behaviors can negatively affect the academic and personal experiences of faculty from minoritized racial and ethnic groups and create a hostile academic environment. You may remember Barb, from Katherine's narrative, who was surveilling her,

So, she came to my class unannounced and sat in on the whole class. And I think she did it under the guise of having some administrative role with that program. But it would have been a nice professional courtesy to let me know you were gonna be there before you came, or at least when you were there, say, "Hey, I'm here because of this..." She sat in the back of the class for five hours, the whole entire class.

Maria, from one of the selected narratives, recounted her first position in an academic medical center where she believed to have lost 10% of her body weight due to the stress. Here's what she said about her experience as a Latina in academia,

There was no reporting mechanism at the time. But when I decided to leave, the president of the hospital came to see me. And he said, “You know, we just were not ready for a woman like you. And that was very clear to me. We never should have hired you based on your race and gender. You just don't fit in.” So, I was the problem.

A particularly troublesome finding that emerged impacting faculty of color is the notion of vertical bullying – meaning students bullying faculty. Students may or may not perceive themselves to hold power, though they may act in ways that contribute to the bullying of faculty. Despite the power dynamics, one Black faculty member, Nila, discussed how her students disrespected and undermined her as the classroom authority due to her age and race.

It definitely is a power differential here, right? Even though I may have been the professor of record for the students, whenever they had issues, they would never come to me. They will either go to the program coordinator or the dean to really paint me in a bad light. So, you can imagine being pre-tenure, and then having these complaints come through the pipeline and not having any knowledge prior to, that there was a problem. And oftentimes, I would hear about it, and I'm like, well, they never talked to me. Or they never brought anything to my attention. And when I was bringing these things to the coordinator at the time, she would say things such as, “Oh, they don't know how to approach you. They don't know what exactly it is to say.” I even had a student go so far... I had just gotten married at the time...And she was like, “Oh, honey, I've Googled you, I found your wedding pictures. You know, they look so nice. But look, you're half my age. It's possibly nothing you can teach me, honey. There's nothing you can teach me.” I mean, literally had the audacity to say that. And this is the ageism piece that came into play, because again, she is older. And so, she felt like “this young woman, Black woman

out of grad school has nothing to teach me. There's nothing she can offer me based on her years of experience.”

This type of vertical bullying imposed by her students was detrimental to Nila’s self-efficacy as a faculty member, which she later realized, “That really began to play on my confidence as I entered into these spaces.” Nila also encountered various other “wild situations” of bullying, all largely based on her race. One time, when she was teaching the topic of anti-racist, anti-Black policies, a white male student publicly disagreed with her without providing a reason. Nila further recalled, “He then storms out of class and then calls the program coordinator who was a white woman, and vents to her like crazy about how I’m just not fit to be here in this space, that he didn’t agree, that I don’t know what I’m talking about and the whole nine.” At the coordinator’s request, Nila ended up meeting with the student to reconcile. “I didn’t want to be the angry Black woman or the unforgiving Black woman or whatever trope you want to present.”

Furthermore, while not always explicit, gender also intersects with race/ethnicity in shaping participants’ bullying experiences. Jasmine particularly commented on how the discrimination coming from the secretary who bullied her was based on both her gender and race and ethnicity. While engaging with an administrative assistant in her department, she recognized aggressive behavior from the assistant, and when I asked if the assistant treated others similarly, she stated, “Men are excused, white people are excused.”

Some may perceive these experiences to be merely microaggressions or small and insignificant instances, where the aggressor is simply being a “jerk.” Though, these experiences, whether at the micro- or macro-level, can accumulate and have significant negative impact on vulnerable groups, such as faculty of color, young faculty, and women.

***Theme 2: Bullying induces emotional stress and drives participants to seek coping mechanisms mostly based on their own agency and resilience.***

A significant number of participants reported experiencing emotional distress as a consequence of academic bullying. This included feelings of anxiety, depression, claustrophobia, regret, stress, and burnout. Or even personal safety. Back to Nila, her bullying experiences made her concerned about her safety. “Now as a Black woman, in a majority white space, I was worried about my safety, I didn't know if this fool [the white male student] was gonna come over here with a gun and try and merk me at the coffee shop or whatever.” I also recall Sandra, a Black Assistant Professor in Education, who experienced various forms of what is described as “subtle” bullying. “This is how I see it; bullying doesn't always have to be in your face, you know? Belligerent. Berating. It could be the little things, right?” She then shared, how multiple bullying experiences, compounded by being overloaded with service, affected her work and health:

It made it miserable. I have an autoimmune disease. And during this time, I was very sick. I was very sick my first two years at [my first institution] and I think it was the stress of academe that really tore my body down. You know, I think for all intents and purposes, I became a machine. I am a mom. I had two daughters that I needed to care for. And I was just like, “Okay, this is what you do – go to work, come home, sleep, wake up. Wash, rinse, repeat. But it stole my love for research; being a teacher. I think it sucked my soul dry.

While Sandra felt depleted and exhausted, with the induced stress exacerbating her preexisting health condition, she continued to cope and push through the system by exercising her agency and conviction as a Black woman scholar, with extensive experience in her field, who has continuously faced aggressions. This is exemplified in her recount of the bullying she

experienced in the form of peer review. She described a time when she “full on fought with an editor” about her practice of not capitalizing “white” in her article. “Well, I was like, pull the paper if you do not want to see a lowercase white. I am not changing that. Because I make it a political statement in my work to capitalize the Black and not white. If you don't like it, suck it, right? I mean, but then I call it bullying because, it's this not letting go of. Yes, it's ‘the paper is perfect minus this one thing, and we're going to hold the paper up in for nine months until you change it.’ And I'm like, I am not changing it. I will pull this paper.” While Sandra was confident in her stance on this matter, with supporting documentation, this exchange with the editors caused additional stress and angst, as a tenure-track professor.

Earlier, Maria shared her powerful story. If you recall, she was the medical faculty member who had experienced 20 years of bullying, off and on, from one of her colleagues. She experienced neglect, exclusion, verbal assaults in front of her peers, and it seemed incessant. Later in her narrative, Maria spoke about suicidal ideation, which left a lasting impression on me,

I got really low, like super low. I actually considered suicide that day. And I pulled up all of the emails that I sent to students saying, “If you feel down, call this number” or the emails that I had composed for faculty saying, “Before you hurt yourself, call this 1-800 number; that employee assistance number. So, *I* called the Employee Assistance number, and that person saved me and helped me separate out what I was feeling and recognize it was this oppressive culture that I had been living under.

Several faculty participants discussed seeking support due to harmful comments and behavior.

Alma, a White tenured faculty member in Social Work shared,

I'm talking to a therapist about this... It's sad. People say all kinds of outlandish shit to you. And you have to sit there and act like it's normal. And then you have to come back and act like it's normal, even though you went home and cried, or you went home and decided you have to get another job or whatever. This sort of sense that, in academia, we take that kind of behavior, and we don't show it. I've wondered about [this]...Like what the fuck? That's not how people act at work. Even in academia, even where you can't get fired. She [Alma's bully] thought that was normal. And... She was trying to re-approach me, but a text message about my dog is not how you reapproach me after you have harmed multiple people, including me.

Like Alma, participants resorted to various coping mechanisms to combat their experiences with academic bullying, including seeking support from peers and mentors, engaging in self-care activities and therapy, and avoidance. In Jasmine's case, for example, avoidance is one of her coping strategies after five years of what she describes as "accumulated micro trauma." That experience led her to avoid collaboration with senior white men. "It started out as a, as a survival mechanism, just like don't ever subject myself to stupid people who don't know their shit and want to control me and abuse my expertise and value. So, it started out as a way to survive and to cope." Jasmine later gained her clarity, "So, the clarity then, actually, is painful, but also liberating. And so, because then with clarity, we can move forward with a lot of things. And we are free in a sense that some of the weight that we have been carrying is, is not completely away, but it's kind of off our chest, because we have gained clarity. So, for me having clarity allows me to just continue to thrive in all the things that I do."

As illustrated in these participants' reflections and insights, developing coping mechanisms can also help faculty feel empowered to take action against bullying behavior, such

as being assertive or setting boundaries. These behaviors and strategies continued to fuel most of my participants' success. However, it is important to point out that these success stories are more of a reflection of the faculty's own agency and resiliency, instead of the normalization and tolerance of bullying.

***Theme 3: Academic bullying often involves an abuse of power bestowed upon individuals who hold social and institutional privilege***

Perhaps one of my most salient themes was the presence of power dynamics. All my participants noted that academic bullying frequently occurred within power hierarchies, in which those in positions of authority and influence had the opportunity to bully others with less power. The abuse of this power often created a culture of fear or intimidation, which made it difficult for targeted faculty to assert their boundaries and expectations, or even challenge the status quo. These situations made it difficult for faculty to advocate for themselves and led to adverse outcomes for faculty decision making and their mental and emotional well-being. One participant, Shawn, a Black associate professor of sociology and associate dean, recounted a situation with his dean, a senior, White man.

I was berated in a meeting with fellow deans...this was over Zoom. I don't remember the specifics of everything said, but I do remember that I was in my home office feeling like someone had come up to my phone and sort of assaulted me. I remember having to turn my camera off to shed a few tears and to gather myself before I could get back on. And I think there were several reasons for the tears. One was the embarrassment of people that I work with, people that I respected who, at least up to that moment, hopes that they had respected me. It was just like, to be on stage essentially with no clothes on.... I think it was all fear of this authority figure that, at the end of the day, kept anyone from speaking

out. I don't think anyone...no one gave a fuck about my agency in that moment. [The other deans] were like, "Shawn, you can take all the smoke. I don't need any of it". I'm not sure anyone said it consciously, but I felt it. No one knew what to say. I think they were just afraid to speak up. But...I actually am happy that no one spoke up because there's nothing that anyone could have done that could have protected me. Certainly, I felt not only eviscerated but emasculated.

A junior faculty member in accounting, Charles, spoke about a collaboration on a paper where he partnered with a colleague, "Bob", at another institution. Although they are both assistant professors, Bob is an "advanced" assistant professor and highly productive. However, when the two met, Charles was a PhD student, and had not advanced into his current tenure-track role. This relationship had been established for a few years at that point. Seeing himself in a position of authority over Charles, Bob began to intrusively assert himself.

So, Bob was just constantly calling. He then like made us join a text group on WhatsApp, which is fine, you know, but the man just works, all the time. Like, 4:30 in the morning he'd be texting. When he knew we were up, it was just like he was always bombarding us with tasks. And I think some of it was productive. There's a reason that he's probably going to get tenure and that he's been very successful. But in my mind, it was very aggressive and excessive. And then the calls and the texting, especially the calls, would just happen multiple times during the day. And it was really distracting because you'd never get into like your flow of working on a task. And the calls would... he's called me as late as like, probably 10:30, 11 o'clock [pm]. And I think the most frustrating calls were like, he called all the time at 8pm on a Sunday, and I'm still in bed with my girlfriend at the time. So that was probably the hardest part was just him was always

calling. Calls at 9:30 on a Saturday pm were totally a thing. And on top of that, he would then say to [another co-author], who's one of my best friends and co-authors in other projects, "Oh, I feel like Charles is letting us down. He's not working as hard as he should on the project." He would talk about the quality of my work. And it was discouraging, because I know Bob's a really smart guy. And there were days where I totally felt like I was the slow person on the project. I really respect [our other co-author], as well. And she works really hard and is really smart. So, it was like, you kind of always had that in the back of your head of like, "I'm trying to work as hard as I can, and this person who is abusive", but you like respect them somehow is saying, "You're not good enough, like your work is not up to standard, like what are you doing?" And then it would come through email as well, where he was just super critical of my work. It was just no matter what you do, it's like it was never good enough.

Such misuse of power, whether acquired through positional power or reputation, was often the source of toxic academic environments, and made it difficult for victims of bullying to speak out or report targeted behavior.

### **Systemic-Level Themes**

On a systemic level, I developed three themes that underline lack of policies and procedures, lack of accountability, and systemic cultural norms in academia that perpetuate academic bullying. These themes highlighted the lack of explicit policies for dealing with workplace bullying and the lack of responsibility placed on those who engage in and witness bullying behavior. Although the data presented below are equally deeply grounded within participants' individual experiences, they serve as a window into the broader patterns and

challenges at institutional levels defining the raw reality of the academy that makes it difficult to confront and address bullying behavior.

***Theme 4: Institutions lack clear policies and procedures for addressing academic bullying***

A common thread across participants was that none of them expressed any policies or turning to institutional procedures within offices like human resources or employee labor relations. Several participants noted feeling like they had no recourse. This often created a perception (and reality) of impunity for the perpetrators.

Katherine, from the previous chapter, noted there were no institutional guidelines in place to which she could turn.

And sometimes I have a hard time gaining clarity around just simple things, like budgets or you know, resources. It seems to be very much we kind of... we don't have a lot of written policies. So, it's whoever is in a leadership role kind of just decides, which ultimately, if they're deciding in one's favor, then that's great. But if they're not, then it's not great. You have nothing written to hold people accountable.

What Katherine described reflects a lack of policy for departmental procedures in general, but for addressing bullying, specifically. Vee, also from the last chapter, noted that his department chair is not clear when it comes to policy. They stated, "I do think that when policies and procedures are being shared, then that's when things get a little weird."

Several faculty spoke about feeling as though they walk on eggshells or operate in a culture of silence or fear, where speaking out against the bully could bring negative consequences for their immediate position and career.

Despite some institutions having support structures to help resolve conflicts and provide resources, some have been proven to be ineffective. John, a business professor, recalled his first

instance of being in academia, which was as a doctoral student. Although this study focuses on faculty, there is something to be said about how academia socializes doctoral students into the professoriate. Charles recalled painful and unnecessary times with his advisor,

So, the adviser took every opportunity that he had to make it clear that I was the student, he was the full professor. Everything from sending emails with no information in the body and the subject was just like, "Come to my office now," to telling me as I was wrapping up my Ph.D. program, "You know, I tried to have you kicked out of here multiple times, but no one else would go for it." When we had a paper accepted at a conference in Hong Kong and I was going to present, he actually contacted the program directors and had them redirect the funds for airfare to him. I had to pay my own airfare, whereas the conference would give, for the presenters, would pick up airfare, hotel accommodations, transfers and stuff. So, he was like, "Well, you know, I'm also a co-author, and I think I might try to go, so I'll take that". You know, this sort of thing. So, I was like, "Okay, I'm a doctoral student, I've got to come up with airfare round trip to Hong Kong. Awesome." Lots of scenarios like that. And I actually met with the ombudsman at my university to talk about it and he basically said that, "Yeah, unfortunately, there's not really anything we can do unless, you know... there's not really much we can do with him in his position."

The way in which doctoral students are socialized can have a significant impact on their attitude, behavior, and experience as a new assistant professor. Toxic behavior, such as taking money from students who are less resourced and attempting to sabotage them, like John described, can be helpful signals for what *not* to do as a professor. However, this also has the potential to create

a cycle where such behavior is internalized by the junior scholar and they replicate these behaviors with future students, intentionally and subconsciously.

O'Neil, an advanced assistant professor in education, spoke about the most senior faculty colleague in his department at one point, an associate professor named "Janet". Below I shared some of his narrative, but towards the end he emphasized his institution did not have a clear point of contact for reporting Janet.

And it really felt it seemed as if the associate professor had the power. And rightfully so I do think that she did, and understanding her position and her role, and then I had these two [brand new faculty] behind me that don't know anything, their opinions "don't matter". And so, it was very difficult to have conversations and dialogue about things we thought should shift, things that should change or how the program couldn't grow. When it is a constant, "This is what we're doing" [from Janet]. There was never a conversation about how we evolve, how we think differently. How do we evolve the program? The process? How do we make things better for students? And when you would voice new issues or new concerns, it was often met on deaf ears. And if there was a moment of reflection or my senior colleague had time to think about it and be like, "Okay, I can see how this was better", it was not your idea. It was *her* idea that she'd re-present with some new pieces, or some new components to make it better. I think the other piece of that, going back to the unhealthiness of the space, it makes you not want to voice opinions and not want to share things. And so, it was kind of this, we'll keep the status quo, and the status quo works, because we're still graduating students, students are still coming here. And ultimately, we're still getting a paycheck. But it was almost as fear, or maybe not

even fear. Maybe it was just this, we have no power, and she's not listening. And there's no way to go to explain, talk about, [or] build up a case for change.

While anti-bullying policies have emerged at some institutions, many do not have clear and comprehensive guidelines that are known across campus and enforced. A lack of policy made it difficult for participants to seek justice, making their experiences feel like a perpetual cycle of bullying. Instead, participants turned to friends, mentors, and therapists for emotional and psychological support.

***Theme 5: Lack of accountability perpetrate a culture of impunity***

Lack of accountability can be an outcome of no clear process for holding individuals or institutions responsible for their actions (or inactions). Although it is also important to recognize that accountability extends beyond formal guidelines and policies. Accountability also falls on those who witness bullying behaviors and choose to do nothing. Remaining silent and complicit also perpetuates a culture of bullying, allowing it to go unchecked. Participants described several instances of their peers witnessing them being bullied.

Myrna, a White associate professor of accounting, recalled a time when she discussed a bully in her department with the chair.

I have been told, once this person started acting out or bullying various other people, he got himself a bit of a reputation. So, then I was told by my then department chair (we have a new one) that I didn't have to worry about this person. That the dean's office was aware of how he was acting. And that.... when my department chair said, “worry about them...”, in the sense that this person somewhat determines my destiny, because someday I want to be a full professor, and he would be one of the people that would vote on that. So... there's things happening behind the scenes. People are aware of this

person. So, am I worried? I mean, mostly no because they've given me their word. But what is that worth? I don't know. We'll see what happens.

Myrna's statement shows that lack of accountability can exacerbate the systemic power dynamics that allow bullying to exist, and academics are not holding their colleagues responsible for their behavior.

Bodhi, a full professor who identifies as multi-ethnic, spoke about experiencing aggressive behavior from his peers, as early as his first semester within the department and no one spoke up for him. In this particular example, Bodhi recalled a townhall meeting where he invited students to speak out on their perceptions of the climate.

But one of the faculty members didn't like that too much. [They] felt that I had undermined them in the process. And pretty quickly after that started being very confrontational in meetings, and making false accusations, raising voice, just sort of challenging everything when I would say [something]. And then when I started to sort of have conversations with other people who are witnessing this, that's when I learned that this wasn't anything specific to me or wasn't anything new. It was sort of like a historical trend that the department really had no ideas about how to deal with. So, it just persisted.

Perhaps one of the most frustrating and disappointing parts of bullying is that everyone seems to know it happens, but no one acts or works to correct it. It's as if bullying is the elephant in the room that no one wants to address. Likely on many campuses, people and departments have reputations. Here's what Vee, from the earlier chapter, said when he meets with faculty around campus from other departments,

When I tell people I work in [my program] or when I work at my department, they always say, “Wow”. They're like, “how are you doing?” That's the first thing they asked me. They asked me how I'm doing, or they say, “How is it working over there?” That's the first thing I get when I tell people I work in the department. And... I've met with folks, you know, in our Ethnic Studies department, they were like, “Oh....how are you doing?”

What Vee shared suggests that the program’s reputation is not only known but acknowledged by faculty across the campus. However, instead of actively offering resources and support for those affected by toxic environments, faculty colleagues only offer inquisitions and curiosities, with no concrete action. This lack of action exacerbates and further normalizes a culture of silence and oppression.

Many of the bystanders within participants’ experiences possessed greater social privileges or higher academic rank (e.g., male, white, and/or tenured). Despite their positionality, these witnesses failed to speak up, intervene or hold the bully accountable for their behavior and actions, signaling that such behavior is not only tolerated and accepted, but normalized.

***Theme 6: Structural power dynamics and systems contribute to and can be weaponized to perpetuate harmful behaviors***

This theme of structural power dynamics and systems refers to the underlining cultural, social, economic, and political norms that influence and reinforce patterns of bullying behavior within institutions and across the academy as a whole. Norms and structures such as the tenure system, disproportionate power, funding of research, and erasure of diverse perspectives within academic journals. Cedric, a tenured Black professor in Higher Education, had this to say,

I was put in a situation where it was hard for me to maneuver. Then they offered me to...take another year [on the tenure clock] so my [dossier] would be stronger. And so,

there was some critiques around...placement of journals and all those kinds of things. And I remember sitting in the office with my dean, and my dean saying, “You know, [Cedric]...Have you have you talked to others, you know, journal editors about how you can get into those journals?” And I said, I *am* a journal editor, I talked to them as *peers*. But there was this perspective, like I'm inadequate, and that my work was inadequate. And we had a situation where, and you'll probably hear this across the board, where there was critiques of placement of my work. So, let's say, I would do the top journal in Black Studies [or] Africana Studies is the Journal of Black Studies. I had articles related to HBCUs in the Western Journal of Black Studies... Journal of Negro Education. Those kinds of things, right? So, they're like, “What is *that*?” And so, I had to push back on that. It was another way to do it. What I've learned is that the bullying is rarely straight up. If ever, straight up. They use the mechanisms that the institution's allows them to use, which is the tenure and promotion process to engage in the bullying tactics.

Several participants, including Cedric and Sandra, noted that when academic journals receive submissions that feature Black or other minoritized identities and topics, it is met with resistance. The academic elitism and exclusionary practices overlook and undervalue minoritized faculty and their work and creates a narrow view of what counts as scholarship.

One of the origins of faculty bullying is competition. The publish or perish culture can lead to a sense of competition among faculty. The pressure to constantly produce can also lead to animosity among colleagues or view each other as rivals than rather as colleagues or potential collaborators. Marques, a Black, junior faculty member recalled the following moment with his colleague at a PWI,

But first week there I was at this social with colleagues and this person, white male, says to me something like... “I'm not gonna be as smart as this guy [Marques]”, or “This guy [Marques] is gonna be way smarter than me”, or something like that. And I mean, I am still trying to put [together] names and faces, as my colleagues, together. I'm *that* new. I don't know anything about this man. It's our first-time meeting. And I know that he might have perceived himself to be joking, but it was so such a weird interaction, him making this comment. And he was kind of... pointing his thumb at me in a way, like, “I know, *this* guy is smarter than I am.” And I'm like, what is that? He was an assistant professor, second year assistant professor. So, he's a faculty colleague... And I think it though started a space of competition. Like, every time I was seeing this colleague in hallways passing by, they had to let me know of things they were working on, particularly like, I feel like, I knew every freakin' project this person was working on because they made sure let me know of those things. Whether I asked or not, and often didn't. “Oh, I don't know if I told you this, I'm a PI on this new study with such and such, and I'm working at this school.” And I'm like, okay, that's awesome. You know, just this weird sort of play off of productivity that I found to be mildly unhealthy and unnecessary. And that started almost day one with meeting this person and that carried on until I got my offer at my current appointment.

It is no question that being on the receiving end of hostile or toxic behaviors can lead to low satisfaction or self-efficacy. Though, several of the participants believe this is the normal course for a professor. Faculty are “supposed” to endure and engrain themselves in this culture. Fred, a White man, who serves as an associate professor, shared how he felt about his job and the culture of the academy when I asked why he remains in the professoriate,

I've heard this phrase a number of times. I love my work, but I hate my job. What that means is... you like doing the work. I like teaching. I like my students. I love when I see them become successes. That's like, awesome. That's why you teach. I like doing research. And to a certain extent, the service is not bad. But the *job*, like all of the bureaucracy, all of the headaches, all of that kind of stuff, you know that, that is not really pleasurable. So, I like what I do. This other stuff? just tolerated it. I deal with the bureaucracy. I deal with the headaches. We deal with the people.

It is clear that academic bullying is deeply rooted in the structure of academia. However, it is important to remember that change is possible. Academic bullying can create a culture of fear and mistrust, and faculty may feel as though they must hide their true selves and conform to the dominant culture. PianoPhD, a Black tenured professor in counseling, shared his perspective on how to navigate the faculty job market in a culture that often overlooks hostility and bullying behavior:

It was the fact that by me not speaking up... I felt like I was being inauthentic. And I wasn't being my authentic self. And... I don't want to have that kind of existence... But I'm trying to break this generational curse. I'm trying to break that shit. I tell folks look here, "Not everyone deserves access to your authentic self." And if you're at a place where you can't be authentic, it's not the place for you. So, you have to be very intentional and deliberate when you're doing your job search. Don't be afraid to ask the hard questions. That's easy for me to say, as someone who already has a job and has tenure. That's my privilege. But more and more people are realizing the power of courage they have as job seekers. And they say, "don't take any wooden nickels. Well, a lot of these folks aren't taking any wooden nickels".

In summary, this chapter highlights several common themes underlying the experiences of faculty participants at four-year institutions who have been victims of academic bullying. The themes suggest that academic bullying is often rooted in prejudice and the abuse of power, and it is exacerbated by the lack of institutional policies and accountability mechanisms. In order to create more equitable and supportive academic environments, my findings suggest a critical examination of power dynamics in academia and the implementation of clear policies to address bullying. In the following chapter, I discuss implications for future scholarship and interventions that can be implemented to prevent and address academic bullying.

## **Chapter VII: Discussion and Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice**

My dissertation's findings shed light on the complicated and pervasive issue of academic bullying among faculty. Critical narrative inquiry coupled with thematic analysis illustrate how power dynamics, social closure, and individual actions contribute to a culture of silence and inaction. These findings fuel the need for a broader discussion and plan of action regarding necessary changes across academia to address not only individual experiences of bullying, but also the larger structural issues within academia that allow bullying to persist.

The findings within and cutting across my participants' stories pinpoint the critical need to avoid oversimplifying the bullying problem and diminishing it to a matter of aggressors versus targets. Instead, a more nuanced understanding of the multiple and converging factors that contribute to academic bullying is needed to effectively address the issue. Furthermore, the culture of silence that comes with bullying can also make it difficult for faculty to speak out and challenge the status quo.

Despite these challenges, it is hopeful to see that some institutions and people across academia are aware of the harmful nature of bullying and are making efforts to address it—through institutional policies, individual actions, or broader academic shifts. These initiatives and actions give hope for healthier and equitable academic spaces. In the following sections, I discuss my findings in greater detail in the context of theoretical implications, contributions to extant research and directions for future inquiry, as well as implications for policy and practice.

### **Theoretical Implications: Social Closure in Academia**

Social closure theory adds to our understanding of how bullying functions within academia. The framework posits that academia works to create and maintain boundaries that distinguish the “insiders” from the “outsiders,” which results in hierarchies of power and status

(Jackson & Leon, 2010). This is especially relevant to the context of academic bullying, as it implies that bullying can be used by insiders to demonstrate and maintain their power and position over those deemed as underserving.

My study's findings confirm the role of social closure in the perpetuation of academic bullying. Participants' narratives revealed how power dynamics and hierarchies within academia contribute to angst, silence, and complicity. The findings also help nuance our understanding of social closure by revealing the subtle, yet insidious forms of academic bullying. For example, participants described several examples of aggressors seeking to limit their academic freedom, particularly for those who are minoritized or hold critical views. This demonstrates how social closure can be achieved through latent cultural norms and expectations rather than only explicit exclusionary acts.

Throughout the findings, it was also clear that while many faculty suffer severe consequences of bullying, they remain in the professoriate. Some stay due to their passion for teaching and research, but could also be attributed to cognitive dissonance caused by being victims of bullying and persistent social closure. That is, despite experiencing the harmful impacts of bullying, some faculty may struggle with cognitive dissonance, as their experiences conflict with their beliefs and the actions of their colleagues across the academy. For example, faculty victims who view academia as a meritocracy may feel cognitive dissonance because their adverse experiences contradict their perceptions of the academy. This may lead them to leave the institution or to explain and defend the hostile behavior of those in authority. Furthermore, it may be worth exploring cognitive dissonance for the bully. Some faculty who engage in bullying behavior may be operating inconsistently with their personal values and leaning on their group for social privileges, rather than acting with integrity. This can result in the continuation of

bullying and an abuse of power by those who allegedly want to make changes within academic spaces. Therefore, further investigation is needed to complicate social closure theory with cognitive dissonance of faculty victims of bullying and perceived aggressors.

Lastly, social closure theory might be well paired with assimilation theory when examining how academic bullying operates. Findings of this study suggest that faculty, particularly those of color, experience pressures to assimilate to the dominant culture. These pressures might stem from a desire to belong, be accepted, or advance in one's careers. Social closure theory explains how dominant groups maintain power and control by excluding others, while assimilation theory emphasizes how marginalized faculty navigate and adapt to the dominant culture. Both theories underscore the need to address power inequities, create inclusive and support environments, and challenge the norms and practices that encourage bullying. Building an understanding of the relationship between these two theories may shed light on the experiences of faculty who feel compelled to assimilate and conform to dominant cultures in academia.

### **Implications for Research**

The current study contributes to the literature by focusing on academic bullying experiences and their impact on the personal and professional lives of faculty at four-year institutions, across disciplines and ranks. My findings highlight several implications for future research on academic bullying. First, there is a need for additional research to further explore the nuanced role of identities in the context of bullying. Importantly, this study found that racial and ethnic minoritized groups, younger faculty, women, and those who identify as queer were more likely to experience prejudice based on their identities. Further research will benefit from continued exploration of the role of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and sexuality in the experiences

of academic bullying. One reoccurring theme revealed that faculty of color have different experiences with bullying (i.e., how they are targeted and impacted by it) based on their racial identity. More specifically, Black faculty experienced anti-Blackness in the forms of hyper-surveillance, exclusion, public embarrassment, interrogation of work and questioning its quality, as well as a moving goal post for academic pursuits, such as the tenure process. The *gendered* model minority myth also appeared among one of the Asian women's narratives. This exerts that Asian faculty are overachieving and compliant, and perhaps exempt from experiencing bullying or bias. It also assumes a homogenous experience for Asian and other minoritized women, failing to recognize the complexities and nuances of their lived realities. For these reasons, it will be beneficial to examine how race and gender intersect to shape academic bullying, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of faculty from different racial groups and genders.

A related area to consider is the concept of collateral bullying—referring to the type of bullying that impacts those who are not the primary target but who are still harmed by bullying behavior. This can include colleagues, students, or other individuals associated with the primary target, but may encounter negative or hostile treatment because of their association with the target or awareness of the bullying behavior. Faculty may experience higher stress, anxiety, and lower job satisfaction as a result of witnessing or learning about bullying within their department. Current research has primarily focused on direct bullying experiences, leaving a gap in understanding broader consequences. This is worth further exploration, as collateral bullying emphasizes the importance of addressing bullying not only for the target, but also for the overall vitality and functioning of the academic environment. While collateral bullying might uniquely affect faculty of color, it could certainly be applicable to all faculty.

The second main area for future research should focus on how bullying is situated within, and complicates, the perceived nature of being an academic. For instance, it is critical to explore the nuances of academic critique across the professoriate. While critique can be a useful tool for intellectual growth and faculty development, it can also be used in ways that perpetuate bullying culture. Critique is meant to be constructive to assist faculty in improving their work and complicating issues that will contribute to scholarly discourse. However, my findings reveal that in academia, “critique” can sometimes slip into the realm of interrogation, which aims to expose weakness, inconsistencies, and flaws within scholar’s work. This deserves more attention, considering critique is often perceived as a core component of the academy. Furthermore, some of my findings illustrated that faculty had experienced bullying as it relates to the classroom and academic freedom. Given that teaching is a primary component of the faculty work profile and tenure process, it is important to recognize and investigate the forms of bullying that compromise faculty academic freedom, as it relates to the content and modalities of faculty classroom instruction—especially from department chairs and deans.

Methodologically, future research should consider a range of approaches to further explore the lived experiences of faculty victims of bullying. While quantitative methods allow for larger sample sizes, qualitative methods provide a deeper exploration of the subjective experiences of victims and provide detailed examples. The combination of the two, through mixed methods approaches, could allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and impact of bullying.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Academic bullying is a growing topic within the higher education literature and should be taken seriously for being detrimental to the individual and organization. My study indicates that

bullying leads to a decrease in productivity, health, and motivation among faculty, and ultimately jeopardizes an organization's vitality. Thus, this problem must be addressed through impactful policy and practice. Below I describe my findings' implications for policy and practice at the institutional level and within the broader academic context.

First, it is important to address power imbalances. This study clearly shows that power imbalances greatly contribute to academic bullying and must be tackled in order to create a psychologically safe and inclusive academic environment. This involves not only increasing the proportion of diverse faculty being promoted to administrative leadership positions, but also promoting a more equitable decision-making process. This practice can help ensure all perspectives are considered and valued. To complement this practice, institutions must also guarantee that faculty have access to resources and support to navigate the complicated and often awkward power dynamics within their departments.

Second, institutions must develop interventions for effective reporting and ensure proper follow-up and accountability. This study found that participants' departments and institutions had no formal means to report bullying behavior and, if so, the mechanisms were not apparent to the participants. Moving forward, after a bullying incident has been reported, it should be properly investigated, and appropriate action should be taken to address the behavior and protect the victim from further harm. To accomplish this, a formal anti-bullying policy is necessary. Both the Society for Human Resource Management and the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources advocate for the adoption of anti-bullying policies at the institutional level (Kline, 2016; Maurer, 2013). A step further, institutions should consider restorative justice approaches as a component of this intervention. Restorative justice can elevate the voice and needs of the victim and others impacted by the behavior, and repair harm and

relationships, rather than simply punishment for the aggressor. Closely related, policies and procedures should not only address the perpetrators behavior, but also the cultural and structural factors across academia that enable academic bullying. This will require a larger discussion across professional associations, institutions, and academic influencers to drive healthier professional standards within higher education.

Third, policy and practice aimed at addressing bullying must transpire in the context of the most common job structure among professors, the ‘triple work’ profile that consists of teaching, scholarship or research, and service, as these are intricately linked domains of the faculty role (Shaw, 2008). My findings show that some faculty experience adverse consequences of bullying, including lack of confidence and self-doubt that cut across these domains of their work. This may cause them to second-guess themselves, their decisions, and their abilities in doing their jobs. In particular, the findings of this study indicate that teaching is a main avenue for bullying, with curriculum control being the driver. Institutions must consider faculty development programs with topics that support and affirm faculty in their abilities to successfully fulfill their role, such as addressing power imbalances in the classroom and workplace, navigating and leading research teams, and setting boundaries.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the subject of academic bullying is multilayered and complicated, with damaging consequences for both individual faculty and institutions. It is not enough to merely acknowledge the presence of academic bullying; we must take actionable steps to confront, mitigate, and prevent it from occurring. This can be achieved with clear policies and fair investigations to address bullying, fostering supportive and inclusive work cultures, and providing faculty with tools and resources to successfully navigate conflicts and resolve power

imbalances. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of all members within the academic community—administrators, faculty, and staff—to prioritize the well-being and dignity of all individuals, and to work toward an academic culture of respect, collaboration, and equity.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

**Guiding Interview Protocol:** A critical qualitative study on academic bullying among faculty at four-year institutions

**Interviewer:** Walter Parrish

**Participant Pseudonym:**

Date:	Interview Setting:
Start time:	End Time:
Faculty Rank:	Field/Discipline:
Institution: Public or Private	

### Introduction

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Again, my name is Walter Parrish. I'm PhD candidate in the department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research, which consists of a 60–90-minute interview today.

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of faculty who have experienced workplace bullying and other hostile behaviors within academia. For the purpose of this study, we define bullying as,

*a situation where one, persistently over a time, perceives themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several people. We are not referring to one-off incidents, but rather consistent patterns of behaviors.*

As a reminder all transcripts from this interview will be de-identified and we will use your pseudonym for any quotes.

Choose your own pseudonym—can you share or revisit after the interview

Thank you for signing the consent form **OR** (verbal consent) Do I have your consent to be the study?

### Faculty Status

1. First, please describe your current faculty status (i.e., faculty title, rank, discipline, tenure status, and discipline/field).
  - a. Do you have a dual appointment?
2. How long have you been a faculty member in your overall career, and at your current institution?
  - a. Are you currently on sabbatical or were you on sabbatical during the last academic year?
3. How many courses are you required to teach per academic year? And,
4. How many current doctoral advisees do you have?

Background

The next set of questions are related to your identity. You may choose not to answer if you do not feel comfortable.

5. As for your gender identity, how do you describe yourself?
6. How do you describe your racial identity?
  - a. Do you identify as Hispanic, Latin, or of Spanish-origin?

Hostile behaviors

7. How would you describe the environment in your current department?
  - a. How does this relate to the broader, institutional climate?
8. What was one of your first experiences with workplace bullying or hostile behavior at your institution?
  - a. What was the setting?
  - b. How did it personally affect you?
  - c. What did you feel when it was occurring—emotionally, physically?
  - d. How did you feel afterwards?
  - e. What type of support did you seek?
9. What other hostile experiences have you had at your institution? in any professional venues in which you regularly engage (e.g., conferences, advisory board, editorial boards, external committees etc.)?
  - a. What was the setting?
  - b. What did you feel when it was occurring—emotionally, physically?
  - c. How did you feel afterwards?
  - d. How has this affected your work (e.g., teaching, research, service, clinical obligations and overall management of work?)
  - e. What type of support did you seek?
10. How frequently do these behaviors occur?
11. Who would you say is usually the perpetrator of your bullying experiences (e.g., department chair, deans or other leaders, colleagues, students, patients, etc.)?
  - a. Can you describe them?
  - b. What are your thoughts on the “perpetrators” interpretation of these experiences.
12. How has anything changed in your thinking or confidence at work since these encounters?
  - a. How confident are you in your teaching, research, service, and overall management of your faculty responsibilities?
13. How do you feel about your academic career trajectory and future?
14. Is there anything else about this experience that you would like to share?

## Appendix B: IRB Approval



Minimal Risk Research IRB  
2/9/2023

**Submission ID number:** [2023-0163](#)  
**Title:** A critical qualitative study on academic bullying among faculty at four-year institutions  
**Principal Investigator:** Xueli Wang  
**Point-of-contact:** Walter P Parrish  
**IRB Staff Reviewer:** Laura Conger

The MRR IRB conducted a review of the above referenced initial application. The study was determined to meet the criteria for exempt human subjects in accordance with the following category(ies) as defined under 45 CFR 46:

(2)(iii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (identifiable); and for which limited IRB review was conducted via expedited review

If this study falls under VA regulations, you must get final approval from the VA Research & Development Committee prior to starting research activities.

NOTE: If the research under this exemption application becomes subject to FDA regulations, or other changes are made that could affect the exemption status, you must contact the IRB as the IRB's exemption determination may no longer apply.

You have identified the following financial sources to support the research activities in this IRB application:

None.

If this information is incorrect, please submit a change to modify your application as appropriate.

To access the materials the IRB reviewed and accepted as part of the exemption determination, please log in to your ARROW account and view the documents tab in the submission's workspace.

Although the human subjects research described in the ARROW application referenced above was determined to meet the federal criteria for exemption and thus does not require continuing review, please be aware of your responsibilities related to the conduct of the research and when additional IRB review is required. Prior to starting research activities, please review the

Principal Investigator and Study Team Responsibilities in the [Investigator Manual](#), which includes a description of the types of changes that must be submitted to ensure the research continues to comply with the conditions of the exemption and/or category(ies) of exemption.

If you have general questions, please contact the Minimal Risk Research IRB at 608-263-2362. For questions related to this submission, contact the assigned staff reviewer.