

RECRUITMENT & CAREER EXPERIENCES OF  
DIVERSE FACULTY COUPLES AT AAU UNIVERSITIES

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A DISSERTATION

in

Education

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2020

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Daniel Jerome Blake

### *Dedication*

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my mom, Connie McDowell.

I remember your look of pride and joy when I told you I got into this program,  
and though you left before it started, you lit the entire way.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am greatly indebted to the 11 couples in this study, who were generous with their time, gracious in interacting with me, and encouraging of my pursuit of this research. Participation in this study was a big ask not just in terms of time but in sharing both personal and professional aspects of yourselves. I am honored that you trusted in me to carry out this work, inspired by the love and support you show each other, and grateful for your candid insights and rich narratives.

This dissertation would also have not been possible without my amazing dissertation committee: Manuel González Canché, Ed Brockenbrough, and Marybeth Gasman. Thank you Manuel for stepping in with leadership of the committee, for your great feedback, and for being a competitive ping pong rival when I needed to blow off steam. Ed, you have been supportive since I first began exploring this topic as a student in your class. The feedback you have given me at various stages has been so thorough and helpful, and was especially influential for my interview protocol, which of course was the very heart of the study. Thank you.

Marybeth, your encouragement and advocacy since my cold email in summer 2015 have been incredibly consistent and meaningful and I am so glad you took a chance on a student with no background in higher education nor research experience. You have been pivotal to my development as a scholar through your mentorship and guidance, and helped with critical suggestions on this study's design and write-up that I was resistant to at first but in hindsight realize were definitely the right calls. I will always be grateful for your belief in my potential and for your unwavering support. Thank you.

I am appreciative of many other scholars, staff, colleagues, friends and family members who have supported me throughout the doctoral journey in ways including but not limited to: advice, feedback, constructive criticism, proofreading, check-ins, reminders, encouraging words, jokes, food (especially pasteles de yuca), gifts for Papaya (my cat), hugs, motivational speeches, visits, smiles, and laughter. Thank you all.

To the love of my life, Ivette Planell-Méndez, you have been an ever-present source of inspiration. I have learned so much about higher education from you. From persevering as the only woman or person of color in many of your classes in arguably the hardest major at Cornell, to bolstering your record and gaining admission to some of the most competitive Ph.D. programs in your field, to now becoming a seasoned doctoral student, teaching and launching your research agenda, you have been a firsthand example of strength, brilliance, and dedication. This dissertation was inspired by our relationship and I will draw from what I have learned to support you as you strive to fulfill your career aspirations. Thank you for cheering me on, being a sounding board, reviewing drafts, and for the extra labor that you took on so that I could focus on completing the study (I promise to return the favor). You are the best and I love you so much.

ABSTRACT

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More than one third of faculty are married or partnered to another faculty member, leading academic administrators to leverage dual-career hiring to compete for the best scholars. Although institutions cite recruiting faculty of color as one of the primary reasons to have these policies, qualitative research on academic couples has rarely included scholars of color, whose perspectives can inform hiring practices and enhance efforts to create more inclusive academic climates that support faculty retention and success. Guided by Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) intersectionality theory, this qualitative study investigates the recruitment and careers of racially/ethnically underrepresented faculty couples where both partners are employed at the same AAU university. AAU universities are impactful sites for reform because their faculties are generally less diverse than those of other universities despite institutional wealth that enables them to compete for scholars via strategies such as dual-career hiring. Through couple and follow-up individual semi-structured interviews, this study reveals critical factors guiding diverse faculty couples' institutional choice and departure decision processes and sheds light on racialized and gendered forces shaping their experiences as they navigate hypercompetitive institutional contexts. Couples are sensitive to how both partners are treated during recruitment processes and the potential for their joint satisfaction weighs heavily in their decisions. Faculty couples of color reported that they are more visible

targets of partner hiring-based scrutiny than White academic couples, and that they contend with racialized assumptions about their merit and deservingness for positions. Faculty couples described a stigma associated with their employment that manifested most strongly for women and was a barrier to their inclusion and engagement. Partners draw upon each other for support and benefit from having one another to interpret events within academic units and the broader university community. Faculty couples of color noted how students, especially students of color, welcome the family dynamic that they contribute to institutional contexts that often feel impersonal, and view them as role models. Based on the study's findings, administrators are advised to affirm and interact with partners as individual scholars, and to implement transparent dual-career hiring policies that include faculty colleagues in vetting processes, among other suggestions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
 Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION.....	 1
Purpose of Study.....	2
Significance of the Study.....	4
Positionality.....	5
 Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	 9
Intersectionality.....	11
Faculty Diversity and Marginalization.....	13
Dual-Career Faculty Hiring Policies and Practices.....	21
<i>Hiring Women</i> .....	27
<i>Hiring Same-sex Couples</i> .....	28
<i>Hiring Scholars of Color</i> .....	29
Benefits of Dual-Career Academic Partnership.....	33
Voices of Diverse Academic Couples.....	35
 Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY.....	 40
Research Questions.....	40
Research Design and Rationale.....	41
Site Selection.....	43
Participant Selection.....	45
Data Collection.....	51
Trustworthiness.....	54
Data Analysis.....	55
Limitations.....	57
 Chapter 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	 60
Initial Hiring as a Couple.....	61
<i>Concurrent Entry into the Faculty Ranks</i> .....	62
<i>Sequential Entry into the Faculty Ranks</i> .....	68
<i>Faculty Couples Seeking First Couple Hire</i> .....	76
Partner Hire Stigma.....	79
<i>Stigma Related to Hiring</i> .....	80
<i>Concerns about Employment as a Couple</i> .....	90
<i>Belief Couple is Unfairly Advantaged</i> .....	90
<i>Challenges When One Partner is Administrator</i> .....	95
Navigating the Institution Together.....	102
<i>Institutional Understanding</i> .....	102
<i>Strength in Numbers</i> .....	106
<i>Supporting Students</i> .....	109



Retention & Transitions.....	113
<i>Transitions</i> .....	114
<i>Retention</i> .....	119
Findings and Discussion by Research Question.....	126
Contributions to Intersectionality.....	142
 Chapter 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.....	145
Recommendations for Research.....	145
Recommendations for Practice.....	151
Concluding Thoughts.....	156
 APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	158
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL.....	160
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	161
APPENDIX D: POST-INTERVIEW EMAIL.....	163
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	164

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participants.....47

## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Faculty diversity has been a concern of colleges and universities for decades and is at the forefront of discussions about the U.S. professoriate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the U.S. population shifts toward being “majority-minority” with respect to its racial and ethnic demography, academic administrators have faced increasing pressure to recruit and maintain faculty members from racially and ethnically underrepresented backgrounds in the academy. Concurrent with the shifting racial and ethnic demography of the U.S. population have been changes in views towards women’s role in society, and growing attention to their labor market participation across a variety of industries, including academia. Women’s participation in academia has influenced the sector in numerous ways, including the emergence of the dual-career academic couple as a force within the academic labor market. Dual-career academic couples make up a large proportion of the U.S. professoriate, with 36% of full-time faculty being partnered with another scholar (Schiebinger, Henderson, & Gilmartin, 2008).

In order to recruit and retain the best faculty, college and university administrators have responded to the prevalence of dual-career academic couples by adopting hiring policies and practices to accommodate both members of these partnerships. Roughly 25% of all postsecondary institutions and 45% of research universities have a dual-career couple hiring policy (Wolf-Wendel, Twombly, & Rice, 2000). A major survey of academic administrators revealed that “to attract faculty of color” was the second most cited reason for having a dual-career couple hiring policy after “to be competitive” (Wolf-Wendel, Twombly, & Rice, 2004, p. 24). The administrators reported that they would be most likely to use their policies to recruit faculty of color, above categories

including all of the different ranks of professors, women, administrators, and accompanying spouses in the same or different departments.

Past scholarship suggests that academic couples, especially those employed at the same institution, are often stigmatized in hiring processes as well as during their faculty careers (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). While quantitative research has shed light on the rates at which faculty of color are in academic couples, with one estimate suggesting that 31% of underrepresented minority (URM) faculty (Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian/Alaska Native, and multiracial) are partnered with another faculty member (Schiebinger et al., 2008), we know little else about faculty of color in dual-career academic partnerships. Qualitative studies of academic couples have rarely included the voices of URM faculty, and there is a dearth of scholarly work focused on URM faculty in these partnerships. Given the prevalence of URM scholars in academic couples and the increased attention being given to faculty diversity, there is great potential for research on these couples to inform policy and practice.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to learn from URM faculty couples at institutions in the Association of American Universities (AAU) about their recruitment and employment in order to reveal their decision-making processes, their perceptions of their experiences as a faculty couple at the same institution, and their sources of marginalization and support. I explored this phenomenon through conducting couple and individual interviews with 11 URM faculty couples at AAU institutions.

I focused on this particular population of faculty couples for several reasons. The academic employment of both members of a diverse partnership is especially salient for faculty diversification efforts, and policies can be developed and refined in order to make universities more competitive in their recruitment and better equip them to support the success of both partners. AAU institutions are among the most prestigious and influential universities in the country and compete with one another for the best scholars. Despite their abundant resources, AAU institutions are generally less diverse than non-AAU institutions (Tierney & Sallee, 2008). The underrepresentation of diverse faculty remains a persistent issue at these institutions, with some scholars arguing that systemic racism, not a shortage of qualified academics of color, is the primary culprit (Gasman, 2016; Gasman, forthcoming). Faculty of color at these institutions are often questioned on their merit and deservingness for their academic appointment (O'Meara, Templeton, & Nyunt, 2018; Pettit, 2019), and efforts to foster inclusive climates for them are essential for their retention and success. Dual-career couple hiring is a means for these institutions to compete for URM faculty, but the employment of faculty of color with their academic partners likely makes them greater targets of hostility from their peers.

The following research questions guide this study of URM faculty couples:

1. How have URM faculty couples who attained positions at the same AAU university navigated faculty hiring processes?
  - 1a. What elements of their application and recruitment processes persuaded or dissuaded them to pursue and accept positions?
2. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be the advantages of their employment at the same institution?

3. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be the disadvantages of their employment at the same institution?
4. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be sources of marginalization?
5. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be sources of support?

The various dimensions of identity and marginalization inherent to the experiences of URM faculty couples make intersectionality an ideal framework for this study (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). These couples grapple not only with their individual marginalized identities, but their shared identity as someone who is partnered with another scholar at their university, which bring its own set of challenges. In her discussion of the promise of intersectionality frameworks for the study of faculty, Pifer (2011) alludes to characteristics beyond race, gender, and sexuality that “can all intersect meaningfully to affect professors’ experiences at their campus,” including marital status, parenting, and caregiving roles (p. 31). The use of intersectionality in this study is such an application, as it narrows in on partnered and married dual-career scholars of marginalized identities to clarify how they uniquely experience inequality in the academy. Uncovering and elucidating factors that contribute to inequality are the first steps towards developing policies and practices that ameliorate them (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is a much needed contribution to research on faculty of color and dual-career academic couples because it bridges these two literatures and centers the voices of

diverse faculty couples. Such research has the potential to better inform faculty diversification efforts because it sheds light on how URM academic couples navigate the job market and how various institutional practices serve to include or exclude them. This study's novel use of intersectionality provided a framework for understanding the salience of participants' various identities as they navigate academic norms and university structures. Investigating how this population of scholars experiences hiring processes and their respective departments and schools can assist academic leaders as they seek to cultivate and maintain inclusive organizational cultures, and inspire future work that digs more deeply into these issues. Beyond institutional recruitment, retention, and climate, this study is a resource to academic couples because it shares the stories of faculty couples and sheds light on challenges they have faced and strategies they have used to persevere and succeed.

### **Positionality**

My positionality as someone who is in an aspiring, ethnically diverse, dual-career academic partnership is intimately connected with my choice of this dissertation topic and the study's design. I am an African American man and my wife is a Puerto Rican woman. She has long held becoming a professor as a career goal and it was something I learned about her on our very first date. I was then interested in returning to school to earn a master's degree in higher education but had not considered pursuing a Ph.D. Through reading more about different careers in higher education and reflecting on my skill set, I realized that doctoral education would be a great pathway for me as it would provide the training to clearly identify, define, and work towards solving pressing educational issues, as well as the platform to reach the necessary audiences to make a

difference. Professorship became appealing to me because it expands that platform, is largely self-directed, and provides opportunities to teach the next generation of practitioners and scholars.

During the first year of my doctoral program, I had discussions with faculty members about how me and my partner both wanted to become professors and was often told how difficult it can be for couples to make this work. The faculty members I spoke with would share anecdotes about their colleagues who were in commuting marriages or situations in which one partner, often the woman in heterosexual relationships, compromised their aspirations so that the other partner's career could thrive. Being relatively early on in my program and with my partner having not yet applied for doctoral programs, I pushed these thoughts to the back of my mind.

I was first drawn to the literature on dual-career academic couples not by intellectual curiosity in the traditional sense, but as a means to cope with the uncertainty put forth by our career aspirations. This uncertainty became especially salient during her travels to Ph.D. interviews, with the reality that there were no guarantees that she would get into a program that was geographically convenient for us. It was at this point that I turned to the body of scholarship on the topic, urgently typing into Google Scholar whatever key words seemed appropriate. I found reports, peer-reviewed articles, books, dissertations, and a range of strongly worded opinion pieces in outlets such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*. Not only was this a topic that aspiring academic couples struggled with, it was one that was quite polarizing and seemed to exacerbate departmental and institutional politics.



I found that much of this canon of research is dated and that it rarely focuses on scholars of color. This is a body of literature in which I do not see me and my wife represented. When scholars of color are discussed, it is in the context of how dual-career couple hiring policies can be used to increase faculty diversity. Given the challenges facing academic couples, the polarizing nature of dual-career couple hiring, and the numerous hostilities and structural inequities that faculty of color encounter, I asked myself, “Wouldn’t it be helpful to faculty diversification efforts to actually understand the perspectives of diverse academic couples?”

This line of questioning ultimately led me to pursue this dissertation. My personal connection to the topic was a strength because it is something that I am deeply interested in learning more about, and because my positionality led me to notice that diverse populations have been ignored and to prioritize them in my own work. At the same time, my positionality as a doctoral candidate who is in an aspiring academic couple may have influenced how couples interacted with me. They may have not been as candid about their struggles than they would have been otherwise if they thought it might discourage me from pursuing this path.

Beyond the nature of my current position within the academic ladder, my race, gender, and sexuality were all important factors for me to be mindful of throughout the process, as they could influence how participants interacted with me and serve as sources of bias in my analysis. I am a heterosexual, cisgender African American man, and it is possible that the participants would have answered questions differently if they were posed by researchers of any other amalgamation of these and other identities. I have blind spots to issues facing women of color and LGBTQ communities. While I am a racially

underrepresented man in the academy, I also have blind spots about issues facing other men of color. One of the benefits of having a diverse committee was that they were equipped to recognize some of these blind spots had they been evident at various stages, and my communication with peers and the study's participants was also helpful in that respect. Nonetheless, I hope readers remain mindful of my positionality, as this is not a fictional work in the voice of an omniscient narrator, but my best effort at conveying the experiences of real-life couples navigating complex social and political terrain.

## Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The dearth of literature on underrepresented minority (URM) academic couples belies the fact that academic couples were prevalent among communities of color long before they became commonplace in White academia. Perkins (1997) demonstrates the long and widespread history of academic couples at Black colleges in *For the Good of the Race: Married African-American Academics—A Historical Perspective*. She draws particular attention to the underappreciated contributions of African American women, whose early presence on college faculties she attributes to the fact that slavery and its aftermath prohibited them from having “the same gender roles and expectations that whites had” (p. 81); their labor outside of the home was necessary for the progress of the race. She notes that even though African American gender roles increasingly resembled those of Whites during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that African Americans still recognized the need for women’s employment. In her conclusion, she suggests that rates of African American women’s employment in academia decreased after desegregation and laments that “little is known” about African American academic couples both historically and in the modern era (p. 103).

Perkins’ work directs our attention to how African Americans’ historical circumstances produced gender roles that differed from their White counterparts. That historical context also delimited the expressed sexuality of individuals, and all of the academic couples she documents were in heterosexual marriages. Moreover, Perkins acknowledges that Black colleges, and African American women’s employment as faculty within them, were borne out of a particular time period where races were legally

separated, and that desegregation may have led to lower representation of African American women in the professoriate.

Today's diverse academic couples inhabit a world in which the nexus of factors relevant to Perkins' analysis—race, gender, and sexuality, as well as institutional and legal contexts—are in the limelight. They are especially relevant in a historical moment in which universities are facing more pressure than ever before to recruit and retain faculty of color, for the betterment of the increasingly diverse students in their classrooms and lecture halls, and in order to produce knowledge that helps to solve the complex issues facing our society. As Perkins suggests while chronicling African American academic couples and the decline of African American women's participation in the academic labor market, today's academic couples do not exist within a vacuum and are not immune from societal forces and trends affecting their social identities.

Thankfully, a theory has emerged that helps us to make sense of these overlapping variables, and it is of no surprise that it was conceptualized by an African American woman, whose life experience and perspective provided her with the insight to develop such a nuanced framework. Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) intersectionality theory has guided much of my thought on diverse academic couples and undergirds the design of this study. This literature review begins with an introduction to intersectionality, and is followed by sections that provide an overview of some of the institutional and identity-related factors shaping the careers of diverse academic couples: Faculty Diversity and Marginalization, Dual-Career Faculty Hiring Policies and Practices, Benefits of Dual-Career Academic Partnership, and Voices of Diverse Academic Couples. Throughout this review, I illustrate the gaps and shortcomings of previous research on academic couples, which

pointed to the need for my dissertation, a qualitative study in which the voices of URM academic couples are amplified.

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a powerful lens for bringing underexplored identity-related phenomena to light, because it directs attention to how multiple domains of identity interact and shape lives (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). Its greatest, and often overlooked, function is to explore how individuals with multiple *marginalized* identities experience institutional discrimination and oppression (Crenshaw, 2016a). I draw from Crenshaw's articulation of intersectionality, which she developed through analyzing Title VII court cases dealing with discrimination against Black women in hiring and promotion (Crenshaw, 1989) and leveraged to examine "the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244).

In her analysis of three Title VII court cases, Crenshaw (1989) illustrates instances in which Black women's grievances were dismissed because of counterarguments that used examples of Black men to nullify claims of racism, and of White women to nullify claims of sexism. The courts failed to consider that Black women, whose identity exists at the intersections of racism and sexism, might experience wholly unique forms of discrimination from their racial and gender counterparts. While her early work focused on frameworks of race and gender, Crenshaw recognized the importance of other factors, such as class and sexuality, and scholars have since advanced the capacity of intersectionality to uncover and understand the intersections of those and

other marginalized identities (e.g., Battle & Ashley, 2008; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Grant & Zwier, 2011; Moore, 2012; Museus, 2011; Museus & Griffin, 2011; Pifer, 2011).

Past research on faculty suggests that scholars of color, women, LGBTQ faculty, and faculty from working class backgrounds are marginalized within the academy (e.g., Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Grimes & Morris, 1997; Kelly & McCann, 2014; Maranto & Griffin, 2011; Monroe et al., 2008; Settles et al., 2006; Stanley, 2006; Towers, 2019), and scholars have begun to leverage intersectionality in order to enhance our understanding of faculty experiences (Pifer, 2011). Further, the context in which Crenshaw originally developed intersectionality theory, hiring and promotion, has clear connections with the subject of dual-career academic couples, whose recruitment and career progress have been the focus of much of the literature. Scholarship and public discourse suggest that academic couples are often stigmatized in hiring processes as well as during their faculty careers (e.g., Anonymous, 2014; Bell, 2010; Blaser, 2008; Female Science Professor, 2011; Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wilson, 2001). Using intersectionality theory to analyze URM faculty couples is promising for several reasons, including:

1. the structural inequality and bias faced by marginalized members of academia;
2. the plurality of practices and policies associated with dual-career faculty hiring;  
and
3. the overlap between professional and personal identities that these couples may experience depending on their departmental, disciplinary and institutional affiliations.

The interactions of these factors make the use of intersectionality as a “frame to acknowledge the ways multiple social realities, structured by the dominant norms and values of institutions, converge to produce distinct, overlapping moments and experiences of disadvantage that are often rendered invisible by the majority” (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018, p. 150), especially fruitful for understanding how these couples navigate and experience the academy.

I recognize that while there are parallels between the context in which Crenshaw originally articulated intersectionality theory and its application in this study, that this application contributes to the growing body of work that deviates from the focus on the particularly vulnerable populations that she and other Black feminists have gone on to center in their work, such as victims of domestic violence and police brutality (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 2016a; Crenshaw, 2016b). I proceed because of my belief in the framework’s utility for contributing to equity, diversity, and inclusion within the academy and in the potential for colleges and universities to be engines for social justice.

### **Faculty Diversity and Marginalization**

This section provides a brief overview of how faculty diversity has been conceptualized and how the academy has served as a site of marginalization for underrepresented faculty. One of the challenges in discussing these issues, which Black feminists and scholars of intersectionality draw attention to, is that when individuals use the term “people of color,” they are often referring foremost to men of color; when they refer to “women,” they often mean White women, and when they discuss the “LGBTQ community,” they are often alluding to the White LGBTQ community (Crenshaw, 1989; Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1982; van Eeden-Moorefield, Few-Demo, Benson, Bible, &

Lummer, 2018). Because my study focuses on URM faculty couples, I review literature on faculty of color, a corpus of which focuses exclusively on issues facing women of color. I discuss literature in the larger body of work on women faculty, which reveals broad gender dynamics within the professoriate, before reviewing studies that focus specifically on women faculty of color, and I distinguish how their experiences differ from those of White women.

Because my study intended to include same-sex couples<sup>1</sup> and I am committed to drawing attention to their experiences and the need for more research, I also cover literature on LGBTQ<sup>2</sup> faculty; however, studies that focus specifically on LGBTQ faculty of color are nearly absent from the literature (Aguilar & Johnson, 2017). I alternate between discussions of “faculty of color” and “LGBTQ faculty” not to suggest that they are discrete groups, but because this organization allows me to draw from the literature on LGBTQ faculty to elucidate issues that are directly related to LGBTQ faculty of color and not their heterosexual peers.

Lastly, I conclude this section with a review of literature on faculty and class background, specifically the challenges facing faculty from working class backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss my struggles to recruit same-sex couples in the Participant Selection section.

<sup>2</sup> I also acknowledge that there is disagreement about the use of terms to describe these communities; for example, some believe acronyms like “LGBT” and “LGBTQ” inappropriately cluster these groups, which are incredibly diverse themselves (Allen, 2017; Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013), while others interpret “queer” as a pejorative term (Brontsema, 2004; Vicars, 2006). I opt to use “LGBTQ” throughout the literature review in order to be inclusive of various sexualities and gender identities that experience marginalization within the academy (and broader society). Other scholarship and media that discuss LGBTQ faculty in some cases appear to use “LGBTQ” and “queer” interchangeably (e.g., Cheng, 2016, Linley et al., 2016, Morrish & O’Mara, 2011); for consistency I only use “LGBTQ.”



By reviewing these literatures, I provide a contextual backdrop for understanding some of the intersectional identities and dynamics within higher education that shape the experiences of diverse faculty couples.

Affirmative action legislation in the 1960s and 1970s spurred efforts to recruit people of color and women into the faculty ranks (Orlans, 1992). Despite decades of ostensibly being a priority to U.S. colleges and universities, the underrepresentation of particular racial/ethnic groups in the faculty ranks is a persistent issue in the academy. While African Americans comprise 13% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), they represent 6% of full-time faculty (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). This gap is greater for Hispanic Americans, who make up 18% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), but also comprise 6% of faculty (NCES, 2018). Though these racial/ethnic groups are not underrepresented in terms of their student enrollment among all U.S. degree-granting postsecondary institutions, with African Americans representing 13% of students and Hispanic Americans representing 20% of students (NCES, 2019a), both groups graduate at lower rates than White students (NCES, 2019b).

As the U.S. population shifts toward being “majority-minority” and colleges and universities enroll more students of color, the underrepresentation of faculty of color has become increasingly salient (Moody, 2004; Myers & Turner, 2004; Tierney & Sallee, 2008). The gap between the proportions of students of color and faculty of color on campuses and its implications for role modeling and mentoring are frequently highlighted as a reason for increasing faculty diversity (Smith, 2015), however research documents other benefits of faculty diversity, such as research productivity, pedagogy, and

curriculum (Antonio, 2002; Austin, 2003; Hurtado, 2001; Luna de la Rosa, 2005; Marin, 2000; Milem, 2001). Researchers have drawn upon quantitative data to illustrate that assertions that the lack of progress on recruiting faculty of color is based on a limited supply of qualified candidates are overstated (Smith, 2015; Smith, Wolf, & Busenberg, 1996), and scholars have argued that their persistent underrepresentation is primarily based on discrimination in hiring processes (Gasman, 2016; Gasman, forthcoming).

LGBTQ identities have only recently begun to be included in mainstream conceptualizations of faculty diversity (Morrish & O'Mara, 2011). As of 2011, no U.S. universities had monetary benefits attached to hiring LGBTQ faculty members, like those accompanying the hire of recognized categories of diverse faculty (e.g., faculty of color), and non-URM LGBTQ faculty typically do not count as minorities in human resource policies (Morrish & O'Mara, 2011). The benefits of having LGBTQ faculty are understudied in higher education literature, but research suggests that LGBTQ students who are aware of LGBTQ faculty members who are “open about their sexuality, or ‘out’” may experience a greater sense of belonging on their campuses (Linley et al., 2016, p. 59).

Diversity research outside of higher education suggests that organizations benefit from LGBTQ diversity among their employees and from LGBTQ-supportive policies (Badgett, Durso, Mallory, & Kastanis, 2013; Cunningham, 2011; Cunningham & Melton, 2011). Cunningham & Melton (2011) write that sexual orientation diversity “positively contribute[s] to organizational effectiveness through three mechanisms: enhanced decision making capabilities, improved marketplace understanding, and goodwill associated with engaging in socially responsible practices” (p. 1). Postsecondary

institutions interested in recruiting more LGBTQ scholars to their faculties have sometimes sought to do so by investing in LGBTQ scholarship (Spitz, 2016). However, this strategy has raised concerns about assumptions that LGBTQ academics conduct research on LGBTQ communities, and it does not address their representation across disciplinary fields (Cheng, 2016).

Faculty diversification efforts require not only the recruitment of underrepresented and marginalized scholars but also their retention, and research has documented some of the inequitable treatment and structural barriers they often face during their careers. Faculty of color are frequently called upon for service, dedicating more time to mentoring than their peers, and being called upon to serve on committees, often as the sole representative of “diverse” perspectives (Shavers, Butler, & Moore, 2014; Stanley, 2006). Though they spend much of their time serving others, they often lack strong mentorship from other faculty members, who in some cases do not value their research agendas (Stanley, 2006; Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008).

The devaluation of faculty of color’s scholarly pursuits in combination with their service demands greatly hinders their research production (Stanley, 2006). Research also documents the social isolation that faculty of color experience (Smith & Calasanti, 2005), as well as the instances of individual racism that they are subjected to by their peers and their students (Pittman, 2012; Stanley, 2006). Students’ racial biases are also suspected to manifest in their teaching evaluations (McGowan, 2000; Stanley, Porter, Simpson, & Ouellett, 2003). These factors all serve to make faculty of color less likely to have success in tenure and promotion processes.

While men faculty of color experience bias in ways that often resemble women faculty of color, gender and race compound to restrict women's success (Turner, 2002). The body of literature on gender in the professoriate illustrates women's persistent underrepresentation in the tenure system, specific academic disciplines, and within the senior academic ranks (e.g., Finkelstein, Conley, Schuster, 2016a; Li & Koedel, 2017; Monroe et al., 2008). Studies have countered beliefs, such as those infamously espoused by former Harvard President Larry Summers (Rimer & Healy, 2005), that the underrepresentation of women in academia is based on biological differences, and shed light on ways in which a "chilly climate" characterized by "exclusion, devaluation, and marginalization" serves to disadvantage women and hinder their entrance and progression within the faculty ranks (Maranto & Griffin, 2011, p. 140). Similar to work that has presented quantitative data countering the claim that the underrepresentation of faculty of color is based on a shortage of qualified academics of color (Smith, 2015; Smith, Wolf, & Busenberg, 1996), researchers have drawn upon quantitative data to illustrate that pipeline-based explanations for the underrepresentation of women are insufficient and mask the ongoing role of discrimination and inequity in hiring and promotion (Monroe & Chiu, 2010).

Scholars have pointed to how gender stereotypes and expectations that are associated with women serve to undermine them in academia because of how it privileges masculine norms (Monroe et al., 2008; Williams, 2004). Ward & Wolf-Wendel (2012, 2016) direct particular attention to how faculty are expected to conform to ideal worker norms, which are expectations that employees are focused completely on their job and do not have to expend energy on other responsibilities (Hochschild, 1989). Ward &

Wolf-Wendel (2012, 2016) shed light on how these norms are at odds with gender expectations of women faculty who are mothers. They note that while colleges and universities have implemented policies such as parental leave and tenure-clock stop policies to be more accommodating of women with children, these policies are often underused because of women's concerns that they will incur negative repercussions in the future, such as retribution in tenure and promotion processes.

Another major area in which women faculty are structurally disadvantaged is with respect to service. Women faculty are sought out for and perform more service than men (Babcock et al., 2017; Guarino & Borden, 2017; O'Meara, Kuvaeva, & Nyunt, 2017). Such service inequitably draws away from their time to conduct research, which often weighs more heavily in tenure and promotion evaluation, and the service activities that women are disproportionately tasked with are rewarded less in these evaluations than service activities that men carry out (Babcock et al., 2017).

Scholarship focused specifically on women faculty of color overlaps in some ways with the broader canon of research on women faculty but also diverges in important ways. Studies on women faculty of color have also shed light on how they grapple with gender expectations and concerns about balancing caretaking and career (Kelly & McCann, 2013; Turner, 2002). Literature discussing women faculty of color's engagement in service points to how they are in demand as faculty members who can serve as same-race mentors for students of color, and are seen as more nurturing because of their gender (Kelly & McCann, 2013). Women faculty of color also describe experiencing gendered racism in their classrooms from students, whose transgressions range from challenges to their authority and academic expertise, to outright threats and

intimidation (Pittman, 2010). Women faculty of color receive worse student evaluations than White faculty and men faculty of color, making that form of retaliation particularly detrimental to their careers (Dukes & Victoria, 1989; Fries & McNinch, 2003; Hamermesh & Parker, 2005). As in other contexts, they often lack support from White women and men of color colleagues despite their overlapping identities (Agathangelou & Ling, 2002; Balderrama, Teixeira, & Valdez, 2004; Smith & Calasanti, 2005; Myers, 2002; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner, 2002).

The literature on LGBTQ faculty illustrates several factors that reduce their chances of success in the academy and sometimes lead them to exit by choice. Some experience overt hostility from their peers and from students on the basis of their sexuality and/or gender identities, as well as pressure from colleagues to conceal those aspects of their identity (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009; Rankin, 2003; Sears, 2002). Similar to faculty of color, who often feel a personal obligation to support students of color, LGBTQ faculty also face substantial time demands for service to LGBTQ students (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009). Those who conduct research on LGBTQ issues also sometimes encounter a lack of support, and in some cases outright discouragement, from their institutions to pursue these lines of inquiry (Sears, 2002). Much work is needed to elucidate biases and structural issues that make postsecondary institutions hostile climates for LGBTQ scholars (Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Rankin, 2003; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Sears, 2002). Of note, 43% of academics in same-sex relationships are partnered with another academic (Schiebinger et al., 2008).

In addition to race, gender, and sexuality, class is an identity that mediates faculty experiences and can manifest as a source of marginalization. While coming from a

working class background can be a source of pride and help faculty to connect with students who are also from working class backgrounds (Bugaighis, 2015; Jones, 2003; Jones, 2004), scholars from these backgrounds can also feel like they do not belong within academic environments that perpetuate middle- and upper-class norms (Grimes & Morris, 1997; Ryan & Sackrey, 1984; Vander Putten, 1998a). In addition to these feelings of exclusion, their transitions from working class backgrounds to the professional academic class can make them feel estranged from their home communities (Dews & Law, 1995; Ryan & Sackrey, 1984).

While there is a dearth of quantitative research, like that regarding race and gender, providing statistical evidence for discrimination against working class scholars in hiring and promotion, scholars have also suggested such discrimination exists (Harrison, 1992; Kennelly, Misra, & Karides, 1999; Muzzatti & Samarco, 2006). The lack of data on class differences among academics is representative of the lack of attention given to issues affecting working class faculty (Soria, 2016; Towers, 2019). While race and gender are explicitly included in conceptualizations of faculty diversity, and sexuality is gaining attention, diversity with respect to class background is rarely articulated as a priority with respect to the composition of the academic faculties (Haney, 2015; Moody, 2004).

### **Dual-Career Faculty Hiring Policies and Practices**

Two major national studies have shed light on the plethora of ways that postsecondary institutions seek to address and accommodate dual-career academic couples. The most comprehensive study on this topic was conducted by Wolf-Wendel et al. (2000), who administered a survey to chief academic administrators of institutions in

the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). This study served as the basis for their book, *The Two-Body Problem: Dual-Career-Couple Hiring Practices in Higher Education* (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). They received survey responses from 360 of the 617 schools, which include both public and private postsecondary institutions. They found that 24% of all institutions and 45% of research universities had a dual-career couple hiring policy. In general, research universities are better equipped to help dual-career academic couples because they have more financial resources and positions than smaller institutions (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2000). Of all institutions with policies, 42% were in writing and 58% were “unwritten policies or practices” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2000, p. 294). Recruitment and retention of high-quality faculty members were the institutions’ primary motivations for having a policy, and institutions not located in metropolitan areas were more likely to have a policy as there are fewer employment opportunities for partners in those areas. These policies did not solely refer to couples in which both partners sought faculty positions. Five general methods of assistance emerged:

1. assisting the spouse or partner in finding work outside the university;
2. creating or finding an administrative position within the institution;
3. hiring the trailing spouse in an adjunct, part-time or nontenure-track position;
4. creating a shared position; and
5. finding the trailing spouse a tenure-track position (pp. 304-305).

The first method most often referred to outreach such as sending letters, making phone calls, or sending résumés and seemed to mostly allude to non-academic appointments, though some institutions form consortia in order to advertise faculty appointments together. The researchers note that staff members with the classifieds division at the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that advertisements of this nature were growing



in popularity (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), and there are currently 19 regional Higher Education Recruitment Consortia (HERC) across the country that create connections between institutions for employing dual-career academic couples (HERC, n.d.).

Of the latter three methods, all of which refer to academic appointments, hiring the trailing spouse in an adjunct, part-time or non-tenure-track position was the most common. This was more common at larger universities because these types of positions (e.g., lecturers, instructors, visiting professors) were more prevalent there (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). These accommodations are highly varied in how they come to fruition across institutions. In instances where the partners are in different fields and a non-tenure-track position must be created, deans or other administrators draw upon established funding models, if there is a policy, or must negotiate how to fund the position. One example of this might be one-third of funding coming from the department hiring the accompanying spouse and two-thirds coming from the provost's office (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). While non-tenure-track positions can lead to full-time tenure-track positions once they become available, heavy teaching loads and less time for research decrease the likelihood of the eventual attainment of a tenure-track position. In addition to factors such as low pay and uncertainty about job security, partners in these positions also often experience second-class status within the university setting, even when they have similar credentials as the partner who is on the tenure track (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). Given the increase in non-tenure-track faculty since the time of this study (AAUP, 2017; Finkelstein, Conley, & Schuster, 2016b), it is likely that this method has become more common.

Shared appointments were the next most common method of accommodation. Shared appointments come in a variety of forms, and are sometimes referred to as joint or split appointments. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2004) borrow from McNeil & Sher's (1999) language and distinguish between shared appointments, where two partners hold a single faculty position, and split appointments, where each partner is employed half-time. In shared appointments, both partners go through tenure review at the same time, and generally either both earn it or neither do. In split appointments, tenure and promotion processes for the partners are separate. Given the nature of these appointments, partners are typically employed in the same department. These appointments were more common at smaller schools and in STEM fields (McNeil & Sher, 1999; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). Partners in this accommodation often feel as though they are both appreciated by their institutions and have similar status, however they generally contribute beyond what would be expected of a single faculty member and therefore may feel exploited because of their lower salaries (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004).

Both partners receiving full-time tenure-track appointments was the least likely of the accommodations, and in most cases when this occurred, each member attained tenure-track positions without intervention from the institution. While there were occasionally two available tenure-track positions that the partners pursued and attained at the same time, one partner generally worked in a non-tenure-track position and was hired for a tenure-track job through a competitive process once a position opened. Instances in which institutions created tenure-track positions for faculty were rare and generally only occurred when they were trying to recruit star faculty at the senior ranks (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). When partners are in different fields, funding models to support a new tenure-

track faculty line often have support from deans' or provosts' offices, and commonly include those offices providing one-third of the funding, one-third coming from the department hiring the primary partner, and the other third coming from the department hiring the accompanying partner (Schiebinger et al., 2008). In most cases there is an understanding that the departments will eventually cover the entire salary, but sometimes this funding structure continues in perpetuity (Schiebinger et al., 2008). These arrangements are sometimes made on an ad hoc basis or alternatively through formal processes.

Administrators who had unwritten policies sometimes justified their approach by arguing that they did not want to draw attention and stigmatize these hires, while others expressed concern that this approach is susceptible to inequitable use of the policy across departments and lends itself to favoritism (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). However, faculty who are hired via unwritten policies do not necessarily escape the stigma, and even after proving themselves to their colleagues, can continue to question whether or not they earned their positions. In addition to the psychological toll that second hire faculty sometimes experience, resentment for the first hire may occur among faculty whose partners were not accommodated. Faculty in these partnerships are also less likely to get salary increases because they are seen as less mobile, so there is less of a need to provide greater compensation in order to retain them (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004).

The other major national study on this topic, Schiebinger et al.'s (2008) *Dual-Career Academic Couples: What Universities Need to Know*, included a sample of 13 leading research universities. In addition to surveying 9,000 faculty members, the researchers collected hiring policies from the universities and conducted interviews with

administrators. They deemed the 13 universities to be a representative sample of major U.S. geographic regions as well as college towns and metropolitan areas. This study covered many similar themes as the Wolf-Wendel et al. (2000) study, however it produced starkly different results, which might be a result of its focus on leading research universities. For example, the survey revealed that most second hire faculty are hired into tenure-track or tenured jobs. The next most common accommodation was non-tenure-track positions, and shared or split positions were rare.

In contrast to the Wolf-Wendel et al. (2000) study, in which 24% of all institutions and 45% of research universities reported having a dual-career couple hiring policy, all 13 universities in this study had such a policy. Five of the 13 universities, or 38%, reported having written policies or principles on dual-career academic couple hiring, while the others “rely instead on informal practices developed over the years” (Schiebinger et al., 2008, p. 48). The researchers note that most of the universities in their study and nationally do not require open searches and have procedures for requesting a search waiver to hire academic partners, which is managed by the institution’s affirmative action/equal opportunity office. They suggest that in most cases the waiver is granted, especially when a woman or URM is involved as a first or second hire. Second hires are still evaluated based on their publications, teaching evaluations, and letters of recommendation, and also go through the interview process. They note that the recruitment process for second hires is the same as for any other candidate except for the potential for search waivers, and that departments may be asked for flexibility on the candidate’s rank and their area of specialization.

## *Hiring Women*

Dual-career academic couple hiring is regarded as a strategy for increasing the representation of women on faculties. Schiebinger et al. (2008) present compelling evidence to support this claim, pointing out that women have academic partners at higher rates than men (40% of female faculty vs. 34% of male faculty) and that rates of dual-career hiring are higher among women than men (13% vs. 7%). Further, they note how dual-career hiring is particularly important for gender equity efforts in certain fields, such as the natural sciences, where 83% of women and 54% of men in academic couples are partnered with another scientist, and law, where 79% of women and 38% of men in academic couples are partnered with another law professor (Schiebinger et al., 2008).

An earlier study found that half of female physicists are married, half of married female physicists are married to other physicists, and almost 30% of married female physicists are married to scientists in other disciplines, while almost three-fourths of male physicists are married and 82% of those are married to nonscientists (McNeil & Sher, 1999). Such gender differences within particular disciplines further illustrate how essential dual-career hiring can be to recruiting women faculty, especially in fields in which they are greatly underrepresented. Moreover, the top reason women in academic couples reject external offers is that their partner did not find satisfactory employment nearby, while this is not as prominent a reason for men in academic couples (Schiebinger et al., 2008).

The stigmatization associated with being in an academic couple also plays out in gendered ways. Second hire partners are more stigmatized than first hires, and three-fourths of second hires are women (Schiebinger et al., 2008). The overrepresentation of

women as second hires is at least partially based on men, on average, being older than their female partners, and therefore more experienced and developed with respect to their academic records (Schiebinger et al., 2008). This can exacerbate the perception that female partners are undeserving of their faculty appointments, which can persist despite their demonstrated potential and accomplishments (Schiebinger et al., 2008). Even when female partners in heterosexual academic couples are not the second hire, gender bias still sometimes leads them to be perceived and stigmatized as the “spousal” hire (Schiebinger et al., 2008).

### *Hiring Same-sex Couples*

As Schiebinger et al. (2008) and Wolf-Wendel et al. (2000) predated *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the 2015 Supreme Court case that legalized same-sex marriage across the U.S. (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015), policies they review that only applied to married couples, such as in states in which providing benefits to unmarried couples was illegal, effectively excluded same-sex couples in the many states in which same-sex marriage was banned (Schiebinger et al., 2008). At the time of the Wolf-Wendel et al. (2000) study, same-sex marriage was not legal in any U.S. state, as Massachusetts became the first state to legalize it in 2004 (Burge, 2003; *Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health*, 2003). Some postsecondary institutions had extended their dual-career couple hiring policies to include domestic, or live-in partners, either with guidelines for what such a partnership constituted, or allowing initial hires to define it for themselves (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). A few institutions explicitly “excluded unmarried heterosexuals, since they could marry, but included ‘live-in partners who are precluded by law from official marriage’” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004, p. 21). Institutional context influenced these decisions; for

example, a university in a conservative state had a policy that solely referred to spouses, yet in practice the policy extended to unmarried partners (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). The practice of including same-sex partners in the implementation of a policy but not advertising their inclusion was not uncommon.

Beyond the content of the policies and how institutions navigated their political landscapes, Schiebinger et al. (2008) touch on a couple of other issues related to the hiring of dual-career same-sex academic couples. In order to seek a dual hire for their partners, gay and lesbian faculty have to be “out.” This makes geographic location and institutional type (e.g., secular vs. religiously affiliated) especially salient factors for gay and lesbian academics to consider, and some may have reservations about disclosing their sexuality during the job application process (Schiebinger et al., 2008). The researchers also note that lesbians are less likely than gay men to secure dual-career academic hires. While they do not offer analysis to explain why this is the case, other research has suggested that gender-based discrimination leads lesbians to have worse employment outcomes than gay men (Badgett, Sears, Lau, & Ho, 2009).

#### *Hiring Scholars of Color*

With respect to scholars of color, dual-career academic couple hiring policies are suggested to be an effective strategy for increasing their representation on faculties, and have been leveraged to meet affirmative action goals (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, & Richards, 2004). Recall that Schiebinger et al. (2008) report that at universities that have procedures to waive open searches, faculty recruiters are especially successful in attaining search waivers when women or underrepresented minorities are part of the academic partnership. This presumably is one mechanism through which such

policies increase faculty diversity. In the Wolf-Wendel et al. (2000) study, the recruitment of faculty of color was the category that chief academic administrators at institutions with dual-career couple hiring policies reported that they would be most likely to use their policies for, above categories including all of the different ranks of professors, women, administrators, and accompanying spouses in the same or different departments. “To attract faculty of color” was the second most cited reason for having a dual-career couple hiring policy after “to be competitive” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004, p. 24).

Yet, there is not unanimous agreement that these policies actually further faculty diversification efforts. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2004) note that administrators at a few institutions referred to internal concerns regarding equity as barriers to the development and implementation of partner accommodation policies at their institutions—opponents believed such policies would be detrimental to the hiring of faculty of color. Further, Wolf-Wendel et al. (2004) point out that at their five case study sites, “the vast majority of dual-career accommodations were made for whites rather than for racial or ethnic minorities” (p. 156).

While Schiebinger et al. (2008) reiterate claims that dual-career academic couple hiring policies may advance racial/ethnic diversity on faculties, they present data that actually call these assumptions into question. They acknowledge that the rate of academic coupling among URM faculty in their sample (31%) is lower than the overall rate of all faculty in their study (36%), but add that the rate of dual-career couple hiring is the same (10%).



It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from these data about whether or not dual-career academic couple hiring policies increase, decrease, or maintain rates of URM faculty at these institutions. One obstacle is that Schiebinger et al. solely collected race/ethnicity of the respondents and not of their partners. However, if we assume that the rate of interracial or interethnic coupling among academics is similar to the general married U.S. population, then same-race/ethnicity coupling remains more common, as 2010 U.S. Census data revealed that 9.5% of all marriages were interracial or interethnic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Therefore, even if the rates of dual-career couple hiring are the same between URM faculty and all faculty, the fact that academic coupling is more prevalent among all faculty suggests that these policies not only may not increase URM faculty representation, but may even decrease it. However, a previous estimate suggested that URM faculty partner with other academics at higher rates than White faculty (Astin & Milem, 1997). A more recent estimate based on 2015 American Community Survey data further complicates these conclusions, suggesting that Latina (31.9%) and Latino (23.6%) academics are more likely to be partnered to other academics than non-Latina (22.7%) and non-Latino (17.5%) academics, while Black women (7.6%) and Black men (9.3%) academics are far less likely (Mora, Qubbaj, & Rodríguez, 2018).

The contentious debate among university communities about the use of dual-career couple hiring policies makes overstated or incorrect assumptions that they increase faculty diversity particularly problematic for scholars of color in academic couples. Such uncritical assertions may mask policies' real impact on faculty diversity and perpetuate the idea that colleges and universities are going above and beyond to recruit faculty of color. When these claims are unsubstantiated, they wrongly exacerbate the framing of

faculty of color as the beneficiaries of postsecondary institutions and contribute to the mythology that they do not earn their positions based on merit. In turn, scholars of color face more hostility and obstacles to their success, perpetuating a cycle that marginalizes and disadvantages them.

This is one example in this body of literature in which the utility of intersectionality theory for uncovering how policies and practices negatively affect URM academic couples is evident. Well-represented racial/ethnic populations in academia may indeed be the populations that dual-career academic couple hiring policies disproportionately recruit, but preconceived notions about faculty of color move such possibilities to the periphery of analyses, where they remain underexplored. Like the courts in Title VII court cases dealing with discrimination against Black women in hiring and promotion (Crenshaw, 1989), administrators and researchers may be overlooking the ways that policies and practices uniquely impact those with marginalized identities. Issues with each of the dual-career academic accommodations outlined by Wolf-Wendel et al. (2004), including compensation, status, and tenure, might all be experienced differently by scholars of color. For example, second hire tenure-track faculty of color exist at the intersections of at least two identities that are often highly stigmatized in the academy, so generalizations about second hire experiences that do not consider race/ethnicity overlook how these policies might differentially affect them. Likewise, women scholars of color and LGBTQ academics of color embody several marginalized identities that compound to further stigmatize them (Aguilar & Johnson, 2017). This dissertation contributes to our understanding of what diverse academic couples consider

to be the challenges linked to their intersecting identities, and points to ways in which institutions might better support them.

### **Benefits of Dual-Career Academic Partnership**

Research has shed light on the many privileges that married and partnered couples in the U.S. are often afforded, and suggested that single individuals face societal biases that have consequences for their lives and careers, a phenomenon known as “singlism” (Austin, 2012; DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Jones, 2014; Lahad, 2017). While a major goal of this study was to unveil sources of marginalization faced by URM faculty couples and how they manage them, previous scholarship on academic couples, mostly sampling White, heterosexual couples, has revealed the benefits and privileges that academic couples are sometimes afforded. Though scholars have coined the term “coupleism” to refer to bias against hiring academic couples (Barbee & Cunningham, 1990), the research literature provides evidence that counters narratives that they are uniformly marginalized and disadvantaged within higher education.

As the previous section indicated, dual-career couple hiring policies may help partners gain employment at the same institution, which can benefit quality of life as they commute together and are not separated by long distances. Further, academic employment generally lends itself to more flexible scheduling than other sectors, so partners can craft their schedules in ideal ways to meet their personal, household, and professional responsibilities (Baker, 2004; Ferber & Loeb, 1997). If both partners earn tenure then they each attain the associated benefits, such as job security and academic freedom.

While there is conflicting evidence about the specific professional benefits of such partnerships, particularly along gender lines, some studies have found advantages including higher compensation, research productivity, and acquisition of tenure-track positions to be associated with being in a dual-career academic couple. Astin & Milem (1997) found that women with academic partners earned more money than those with non-academic partners, although the opposite was true for men. However, Schiebinger et al. (2008) found, after accounting for several factors, that both male and female members of dual-career academic couple hires earned slightly higher salaries than their peers.

Bellas (1997) found no differences between the research productivity of members of academic partnerships and others; however, other studies have suggested otherwise. In the Schiebinger et al. (2008) study, a higher proportion of faculty in academic partnerships reported that they had gained in their research production because of their relationships than faculty who had non-academic partners. The study also found that second hires were as productive as their disciplinary peers, countering the claim that they diminish the quality of faculties.

One of the findings of a vast study of the long-term career patterns of over 5,000 humanities and humanistic social sciences Ph.D.s was that married Ph.D.s whose spouses were concurrently students with them had greater success in obtaining tenure-track positions than married Ph.D.s whose spouses had jobs or were unemployed (Main, Prenovitz, & Ehrenberg, 2017). The researchers suggest that this “may be due to shared values and understanding of the academic path, and perhaps related to academic institutions’ increasing attention to supporting dual careers” (Main et al., 2017, p. 24). Creamer (1999) found that prolific academic partners attributed their increased

productivity to the “ease of access to informal feedback” (p. 272). Researchers have also pointed to the role that sharing professional networks can play in the career success of academic couples (Astin & Milem, 1997; Ferber & Loeb, 1997; Schiebinger et al., 2008).

It is worth pointing out that some benefits transcend type of position, institutional affiliation, and even discipline. While opportunities to collaborate with one another is as an advantage of shared appointments, they are possible for partners of different ranks, at different institutions, and with divergent specializations. Shared values, such as appreciation for the pursuit of truth, can transcend interdisciplinary partnerships across the humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences. There is also often overlap in tenure and promotion processes across disciplines and institutions; having an understanding of what is required for one’s partner’s career success can be mutually beneficial and provide extra motivation to succeed. This dissertation sheds light on what URM academic couples consider to be the benefits of their employment as faculty at the same institution and reveals benefits that are distinct from those of other academic couples as they are tied to their unique positionality within predominantly White university contexts.

### **Voices of Diverse Academic Couples**

Qualitative research in which dual-career academic couples talk about their experiences is rare, and much of what exists is characterized by narrow and ambiguous sampling procedures, which obscure the diversity among academic couples. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2004) supplemented their survey data with case studies at five institutions with dual-career couple hiring policies and conducted interviews with various constituents, including faculty; however, their case narratives do not refer to the

race/ethnicity or sexualities of their respondents. For a follow-up case study about a dual-career couple hiring policy at the University of Kansas, Rice, Wolf-Wendel, & Twombly (2007) interviewed three heterosexual couples; race/ethnicity is not mentioned in the article. Creamer's (1999) study of academic couples who had published together included interviews with 33 members of academic couples, including 12 pairs and 9 in which only one member of a partnership participated. While she notes that "Not all are heterosexual pairs" (p. 265), she does not elaborate further, and race/ethnicity is not mentioned in the article. Baker's (2004) dissertation on dual-career academic couple lifestyles includes interviews with six heterosexual married couples, which she refers to as "ethnically diverse," though she does not describe what that constitutes (p. 68).

Studies that are less vague about the racial/ethnic demographics of their participants have yielded largely homogenous samples. Blaser's (2008) dissertation focused on women academic scientists and engineers who were partnered with other academic scientists or engineers; her sample included 15 heterosexual White women, all of whom were married. She writes of hoping for a more diverse sample but being unable to find women of color or lesbian scientists who fit the criteria; namely, being partnered with another academic scientist or engineer. For her dissertation on dual-career faculty couples at two Research 1 institutions, Collier (2001) interviewed seven couples, all of whom were White, heterosexual, and married. Her recruitment process was such that she did not learn their race/ethnicity or sexual orientation until the interview. Jorgenson's (2016) study, which focused on couples' sensemaking about their careers through joint storytelling, included 17 academic couples; all participants were White except for one participant, who was Hispanic. McNish's (1994) phenomenological study of dual-career

academic couples included six couples, one of which was a heterosexual African American couple and another a mixed-race African American and Asian American couple. The implications of their races and ethnicities are not a focus of her analysis, though one of the participants, an African American woman, mentions learning to be selective in response to the extra service demands that were expected of her. Yakaboski's (2016) study is also an exception to the overwhelmingly White representation in these studies, as she interviewed 21 international Asian women STEM faculty in academic couples and shed light on how they manage family, career, and culture in the U.S. context.

While traditional qualitative research on dual-career career academic couples has generally overlooked issues related to race/ethnicity and LGBTQ identities, contemporary narratives have pointed to how the experiences of members of these partnerships differ from White, heterosexual couples. In Creamer's (2001) *Working Equal: Collaboration Among Academic Couples*, Stacey Floyd-Thomas, one half of a heterosexual African American academic couple, describes aspects of her partnership that might be reflective of the experiences of other minoritized academic couples at predominantly White institutions. She writes of how she and her husband are aware of the unique demands and expectations that scholars of color face, noting that they "find the support and advocacy we give one another not only beneficial but actually essential" (Floyd-Thomas, 2001, p. 116). In a sense, they are their own critical mass of scholars of color in a White academic context, providing one another with the sense of community that allows them to persevere as marginalized members of the academy. She also writes

of the significance of meeting and learning from other academic couples, many of whom she notes were African American:

Every detail, from deciding whether or not to share office space, to deciding to hyphenate both of our names, to how to negotiate a job offer, was informed by our association with other academic couples. (p. 113)

Her reflections suggest that connecting URM academic couples with other academic couples might be an effective means of preparing them to navigate the academy together.

Lengermann & Niebrugge (2005), a mixed-race, Trinidadian and White American lesbian academic couple, reflect on holding temporary, shared appointments at a variety of institutions. They co-teach and write of the various identities, or “kinds of difference,” that they bring to the classroom, including their lesbian and mixed-race identities, as well as their working class status and “mixed global origins” (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2005, p. 60). They elaborate:

These differences are experienced by us and presented to the students not as separate features but in the mode...[of] “intersectionality,” the coming together in an embodied subject (or here in the embodied subjectivities of a couple) of various socially constructed and distinct locations in society’s hierarchies of oppression and privilege. This configuration of difference becomes apparent to the student in multiple ways. Some aspects are immediately visible.... But other differences only become apparent when and if we choose to enact them.... And even with the ascribed characteristics, there is still a partial element of choice in the degree of relevance or emphasis that we choose to give them. (p. 61)

Though this couple’s shared appointment and ability to co-teach may be rare, this passage is instructive of the utility in applying intersectionality to the study of diverse academic couples. Members of these partnerships present their “kinds of difference” in various stages and contexts (e.g., during the recruitment process, in faculty meetings, at campus events) and have to make choices about if, when, and to what extent they will enact them. These choices are especially salient for same-sex couples, who deal with homophobia



and the additional stigma associated with their relationships (Gibson & Meem, 2005; Miller & Skeen, 1997). This dissertation amplifies the voices of URM academic couples and sheds light on some of their choice processes with respect to enacting their identities, as well as what sources of support they draw from.

## Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to learn from underrepresented minority (URM) faculty couples about their recruitment and employment in order to inform future faculty diversification efforts. I focused on two stages in their career trajectories:

1. the application and recruitment process through which they both attained faculty positions at the same university; and
2. their shared and individual experiences as faculty members at their university.

In this chapter, I describe my research plan, starting with my research questions and design and following with details related to participant selection and recruitment procedures. I continue on to outline my data collection and analysis procedures, and conclude with the study's limitations.

### **Research Questions**

After revealing the gaps in the body of literature on dual-career academic couples that are most relevant to faculty diversity, I engaged in the iterative process of forming research questions that address these pressing issues. Principally, these gaps are our lack of understanding of the perspectives of URM academic couples on their faculty hiring processes as well as on their employment at the same institution. Understanding their perspectives through the various stages of application and recruitment processes can provide insight into strategies that help institutions become more competitive in hiring the best faculty. Focusing on couples at the same university is important because their employment is the most contentious and can have negative repercussions not only for their individual careers but for institutional and academic climate. An essential step in addressing such complex issues is to understand the perspectives of the faculty on which

they center. Successfully recruiting and retaining URM academic couples also bears great promise for academic administrators as they strive to meet their faculty diversification goals, so understanding positive and negative aspects of couples' employment at the same institution can directly inform university policies and practices. As such, the research questions guiding this dissertation are as follows:

1. How have URM faculty couples who attained positions at the same AAU university navigated faculty hiring processes?
  - 1a. What elements of their application and recruitment processes persuaded or dissuaded them to pursue and accept positions?
2. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be the advantages of their employment at the same institution?
3. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be the disadvantages of their employment at the same institution?
4. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be sources of marginalization?
5. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be sources of support?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The relative absence of scholarship on URM academic couples and the nature of my research questions led an exploratory, qualitative approach to be the ideal approach for this study. Qualitative interviews are especially valuable because they amplify the voices of participants and allow findings to emerge that may be obfuscated in other research designs (Creswell, 2015). Further, they allow the researcher to probe and

explore ideas in greater depth throughout the interview, in contrast with methods such as survey research, which are limited in their ability to adapt in real time to respondents' articulations of their experiences. Specifically, this study used a sequential design with two rounds of semi-structured interviews with each academic couple, the first of which was a couple interview, and the second an individual interview with each partner.

Past qualitative scholarship on academic couples has varied in its approaches to interviews, with some researchers solely using individual interviews with women in these relationships (Blaser, 2008; Yakaboski, 2016), others solely doing couple interviews (Jorgenson, 2016; McNish, 1994), and others doing a combination of both (Baker, 2004; Collier, 2011). In some cases, the researchers explained how this was an intentional decision tied to their research goals, while in other cases they did not provide a rationale. Of the previous studies on academic couples, the design of this study most closely resembles Baker's (2004) dissertation, in which she first conducted individual interviews and then used those findings to inform a protocol for the couple interview.

The rationale behind my sequential design is multifaceted. I began with a couple interview and followed up with individual interviews for the following reasons:

- Hearing how couples co-narrate their experiences helps to provide a more comprehensive understanding and they build off of each others' ideas throughout the interview (Allan, 1980; Jorgenson, 2016).
- Findings from the couple interview were used to inform protocols for the follow-up interviews (Baker, 2004), during which I probed issues in greater depth with each partner.

- A drawback of solely using couple interviews is that sometimes one partner overshadows the other (Allan, 1980); the perspectives of both partners was essential to my study because I am interested in each of their careers.
- One-on-one interviews provide participants with opportunities to share information that they would not share in the presence of their partner (Allan, 1980; Bass, 2015).

Prior to conducting individual interviews, I listened to the participant's couple interview and reviewed notes I had taken during it. I allowed at least one week to pass between the couple interview and the individual interview. Some participants attempted to schedule the couple and individual interview on the same day, but I wanted a chance to reflect on and review the couple interview prior to probing issues more deeply in the individual interview. The duration of time between couple and individual interviews mitigated the direct influence that the couple interview might have had on the individual interview had it occurred immediately afterwards. It allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and may have permitted them to consider points at which their individual perspectives may have diverged from what the couple articulated during the initial interview. In the Data Analysis section, I describe the process through which I drew upon each couple's three interviews and looked across the 11 couples in order to develop findings.

### **Site Selection**

I recruited URM faculty couples from U.S. universities that are members of the Association of American Universities (AAU). The AAU includes 62 North American universities, with 60 in the U.S. and two (McGill University and University of Toronto)

in Canada (AAU, n.d.-a). All 60 U.S. institutions are classified as “Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity” (colloquially known as “R1”) research universities by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education in 2019 (Carnegie Classification, 2019). AAU institutions disproportionately contribute to doctoral education and research production; they comprise 2% of all 4-year universities in the U.S. while awarding 42% of all research doctorate degrees and receiving 60% of all funding that federal agencies distribute for research (AAU, n.d.-b). Membership is granted by invitation and can be revoked; institutions are evaluated largely on faculty-based criteria, including federal funding for research, proportion of faculty who are members of the National Academies, faculty awards, and citations (AAU, n.d.-c). Non-AAU universities often aspire to join the AAU for its prestige, with some academic leaders believing that it is the foremost membership organization for research universities (Fain, 2010).

As AAU institutions are a collective group of universities whose membership is dependent on high-quality faculty who are influential researchers, their faculty hiring processes are competitive and recruits bear great expectations for their productivity. Though they are well-resourced and have the fiscal resources to be competitive in recruitment processes, their faculties are in most cases less racially/ethnically diverse than faculties at other universities (Tierney & Sallee, 2008), and some scholars have argued that this has less to do with the quality of faculty of color and more to do with systemic racism (Gasman, 2016; Gasman, forthcoming). This set of conditions makes AAU institutions intriguing contexts from which to recruit URM faculty couples for this study, because the high levels of competition for faculty positions, demands placed upon

faculty members, and overall underrepresentation of scholars of color likely present these couples with uniquely difficult circumstances. There is much to be learned from the experiences of these couples that could support faculty diversification efforts at these institutions, and such lessons may also bear relevance to hiring and retention processes at non-AAU institutions as well.

### **Participant Selection**

I used purposeful, snowball sampling in order to recruit couples to participate in this study (Patton, 2002). I set out to conduct data analysis based on interviews with 10 couples and was able to fully complete interviews with 11 couples. I had planned to recruit at least 14 couples to maintain enough participants in case certain partners did not complete all of the interviews. In all, I recruited 12 couples, and one couple did not participate in the individual interviews. I conducted data analysis of the interviews of the 11 couples who completed both rounds of interviews. My target number of ten couples was greater than the samples of previous academic couple dissertations in which both partners participated (Baker, 2004; Collier, 2001; McNish, 1994), and because I conducted three interviews with each couple, the total number of perspectives was larger than dissertations in which only one member of each couple was interviewed as well (Blaser, 2008).

The eligibility criteria for participation were:

- Both partners (same-sex or heterosexual) are employed as full-time faculty members (including tenure-track and non-tenure-track appointments) at the same AAU institution.

- At least one partner in the couple is from a racially/ethnically underrepresented background in the professoriate (Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian/Alaska Native).
- Partners attained faculty positions at the same institution after their relationship began (i.e. they did not meet as faculty members at the institution).
- Both partners are willing to participate in a couple and an individual interview.

The first criterion included non-tenure-track appointments because they are one form of partner accommodation that is likely to become more commonplace due to the increasing adjunctification of faculties (AAUP, 2017; Finkelstein, Conley, & Schuster, 2016b). The second criterion was inclusive of interracial/interethnic couples in which one partner is White and non-URM because such couples are relevant for faculty diversity and the non-URM White partner may face hostility for being partnered with a faculty member from a URM background. The third criterion was phrased to allude to a dual-career couple hiring process; however, it does not label it as such because “dual-career couple hiring” may have implied that partners earned faculty positions concurrently. I wanted to signal that my study was inclusive of other ways that that partners become faculty at the same institution, such as when one partner attains a position and the other continues applying and eventually attains a position, or cases where a couple does not divulge that they are partnered and attains positions at the same institution independent of one another (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). Shared disciplinary and departmental affiliations were neither a requirement nor a disqualifier; couples were solely required to be employed as full-time faculty members (including tenure-track and clinical appointments) at the same university.



Because one of the aims of this exploratory study was to leverage intersectionality in order to reveal how URM faculty couples experience multiple marginalized identities, I aimed to recruit a sample that was diverse by race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. I began identifying couples by asking people that I know if they could think of couples who met the criteria for the study. I also made IRB-approved recruitment posts to Facebook and Twitter, and circulated my IRB-approved recruitment email via university listservs and with alumni of my doctoral program who were employed at AAU universities.

I began reaching out to potential participants in June 2019 and recruitment continued throughout the summer and early fall. I identified and reached out to roughly 40 couples that might qualify for the study. Recruitment often required multiple follow-up emails in order to get a response, and approximately 25% of potential participants that I reached out to never responded. Table 1 summarizes demographic and professional data of the 11 couples.

Table 1. Participants

Couple	Race/Gender	Shared field?	Same/Linked departments?	Career Stage
Couple1	Black male Black female	Different social science	No	Senior
Couple2	Black male Black female	Same social science	Yes	Senior
Couple3	Black male Black female	Different social science	No	Early
Couple4	Black male Black female	Different social science	Yes	Early
Couple5	American Indian male Latina	Different social science	No	Senior
Couple6	International Hispanic male White female	Same STEM	Yes	Senior
Couple7	Latino Latina	Different social science	Yes	Early

Couple8	International Hispanic male White female	Same social science	Yes	Senior
Couple9	Black male Black female	Same social science	Yes	Senior
Couple10	Black male Black female	Different social science	No	Mid
Couple11	Black male Black female	Same social science	Yes	Mid

The information presented in Table 1 are broad approximations in order to obscure the identities of the couples, but the information is useful for understanding the diversity within the sample and contextual information relevant to understanding their experiences. In the findings, I refer to specific couples' trajectories and experiences, and I use \_f and \_m to denote the female or male partner; for example, Couple1\_f refers to the female partner in Couple1. In some instances, I omit specifying which couple I am referring to in order to further protect participant confidentiality, however in these instances I provide sufficient detail and contextual information for understanding how the example relates to the findings.

Though some couples are in different disciplinary fields, I denote in Table 1 those who are in the same department or closely linked departments from others as their academic unit proximity (e.g., same department, same school) was often consequential for their experiences as a faculty couple. Some couples have been employed at multiple universities and their proximity with respect to being in the same department may have shifted over time. In these instances, I include their proximity as it was most relevant to how their experiences are described in the findings. Couples who were in the same field may have had some areas that overlapped with respect to their research expertise, but in all instances they also had specific areas of expertise that were distinct from their partner.

All of the participants were traditional tenure-track faculty with the exception of the Latina faculty member in Couple7.

The universities were geographically diverse in terms of region and being situated in metropolitan or relatively isolated contexts. Past research suggests universities in suburban and rural contexts are more likely to have dual-career hiring policies and employ more academic couples (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). The universities in this study reflected this dynamic in that participants at universities in relatively isolated regions more often referred to a prevalence of couples. The institutions included a mix of public and private universities.

Despite efforts to recruit same-sex couples to the study, which included reaching out to LGBTQ faculty, who shared the recruitment message with their LGBTQ-related academic networks, I was unable to recruit any same-sex couples to the study. This may speak to a very low prevalence of same-sex URM faculty couples who meet the qualifications of the study, as well as a possible reluctance of same-sex couples to share their experiences, which was cited as an obstacle to recruitment in past research on same-sex academic couples (Miller & Skeen, 1997). I share further reflections on obstacles to recruiting same-sex academic couples in the Recommendations for Research section.

In developing the eligibility criteria, I did not specify whether I was referring to domestic-born URM populations, and two of the male participants were born in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries and self-identified as Hispanic and White. They were each partnered with non-Hispanic White women from the U.S. In their interview, one of these couples noted how there is contentious debate as to whether internationally-born faculty members should be included in universities' reporting of URM

representation. Efforts to diversify are often driven by a recognition that historical inequities perpetuate disparities, and there is debate as to whether affirmative action policies and other mechanisms to increase diversity should be used to recruit internationally-born populations (Lindsay & Singer, 2003).

In addition to surfacing the debate about if and how internationally-born faculty should factor in to universities' conceptualizations of faculty diversity, these participants' presence in the data as faculty who self-identify as Hispanic and White is complicated by the complex legacy of Hispanic and Latin American identities, particularly as they relate to Whiteness in the U.S. Mora (2014) chronicles how the 1960 U.S. Census's classification of Latin American immigrants with European Americans as "White" spurred efforts by Latinx activists for a separate classification that would expose inequality facing their communities and grant them access to protections and resources that African American communities were fighting for in the civil rights movement. Corporations realized that they could profit from the consolidation of multiple national identities into a unified ethnic identity. The interests and efforts of activists, businesses, and politicians, among others, ultimately culminated in the inclusion of "Hispanic" as an identity in the 1980 U.S. Census, and it continues to be used today (Mora, 2014).

While Hispanic identity is a relatively recent construction, racial identity in Latin America has a centuries' long history, and has been shaped by influences including European conquest, African enslavement, and the survival of indigenous communities (Wade, 2010). Scholars have argued that European colonialism has resulted in much of Latin America adopting Eurocentric beliefs and privileging Whiteness (Darity, Dietrich, & Hamilton, 2005; Quijano, 2000). There is variation in how factors such as skin color

and socioeconomic status predict racial self-identification across Latin American countries (Telles & Paschel, 2014), and within the U.S., Hispanic self-identification varies by factors such as residential context (Eschbach & Gómez, 1998; Light & Iceland, 2016), social setting, and institutional context (Eschbach & Gómez, 1998; Soto-Márquez, 2019).

Including the two couples in which an internationally-born Hispanic man was partnered with a White non-Hispanic woman helped to shed further light on dynamics affecting faculty couples. While conducting data analysis I noted the ways in which these couples' experiences diverged from those of faculty couples of color, which were the other nine couples in the study, each of whom were comprised of two partners from domestic URM backgrounds who did not self-identify as White. Though there is not consensus on whether or not internationally-born faculty should be included in universities' reporting of URM representation, these two couples embodied dimensions of diversity, and their perspectives were instructive. I am careful to specify when findings refer solely to faculty couples of color in the study, and while drawing upon literature that sheds light on the complex history of Hispanic identity and Whiteness, I have been transparent about how these participants self-identify. Colleges and universities, as well as researchers who study their diversity, often aggregate Hispanic and Latinx people of various racial backgrounds as people of color, and greater attention should be given to the histories and nuances of these identities.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews with each couple, both together and individually (Allan, 1980; Baker, 2004). I conducted these

interviews in person when feasible and by phone or video chat in other instances, during the summer and fall of 2019. I first reached out to potential participants via email with the consent form attached, which informed them of the purpose of the study and risks and benefits of participation, as well as that I anticipated each interview would last between 60-90 minutes. It also notified them that the interviews would be recorded and ensured them of the confidentiality of the study.

I used semi-structured interview protocols in each interview phase. My interview questions were open-ended, and the semi-structured nature of the protocols allowed me to ask follow-up questions about points of interest. The couple interview included questions about their backgrounds, their job searches and recruitment processes, and their experiences together at their institution. I asked questions about what they consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of being a faculty couple at the same institution, and what they consider to be sources of support. Individual interviews delved further into issues that were raised during the couple interviews and explored in greater depth the individual's experiences in their faculty position as well as their beliefs on sensitive issues such as what personal and professional sacrifices they feel they have made on their path.

Throughout the interviews, I was careful to not phrase questions in ways that would bias their responses, and gave particular care to not ask questions in ways that would lead them to confirm the assumptions that I held about diverse faculty couple experiences or reveal that intersectionality was the underlying theoretical framework of the study. For example, I did not ask direct questions about racism, sexism, or stigma that they might experience as a result of going through dual-career hiring. My open-ended

questions allowed room for these topics to arise organically, and for other forces shaping their experiences to emerge as well.

For couples who were not within a commutable distance, I preferred to conduct video interviews, but deferred to phone if that was their preference, and some calls shifted from video to phone if there was a bad connection. In the couple interviews, I tried to appropriately prompt both partners to respond to questions in order to get both of their perspectives. Couple interviews ranged between 50-100 minutes, with most lasting over an hour, while individual interviews were between 30-60 minutes. The variation within these ranges was sometimes based on participants' time constraints and sometimes because they were either concise in their answers or had a lot to share about their experiences. I restated and clarified questions when appropriate, and asked for elaboration in instances when it seemed necessary to understanding a particular aspect of their experiences.

I sent the recordings to an independent market research firm for transcription. To protect participants' confidentiality, I maintained recordings and transcripts in a password-protected and secure laptop and in encrypted online folders. I also removed identifying details.

A supplementary form of data collection was document collection of dual-career hiring-related documents, however none of the participants submitted these materials. I was specifically interested in dual-career hiring policy documents and correspondence that they received during their recruitment to universities, in order to see what kinds of messaging faculty couples receive from institutions during recruitment and application processes. I informed participants of this form of data collection in the recruitment email

and consent form, and reminded them at the conclusion of the second interview and in a follow-up email. I told them that I was interested in materials that included but were not limited to job postings, websites, emails, and policy documents that they encountered or received during their recruitment that alluded in any way to institutions' approaches to dual-career hiring. I also informed them that any documents they submitted would be de-identified and reviewed. Most of the couples noted that they did not receive any dual-career hiring policy documents during their recruitment, which was consistent with how they narrated not having any specific knowledge of institutions' dual-career hiring policies. Those that did recall receiving policy documents or correspondence alluding to dual-career hiring noted how it was a long time ago and that they would have difficulty recovering them.

Other forms of data collection included my engagement in memo writing and reflective journaling (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I wrote a researcher identity memo prior to interviewing the couples, in order to intentionally reflect on how my identity and their identities would influence my engagement with them (Maxwell, 2013). I also documented some of my experiences, evolving research ideas, and other thoughts on the dissertation process in a journal (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Doing so helped me to be reflexive and conscientious about my biases and how they affected my actions as a researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Trustworthiness**

Establishing trustworthiness is essential to qualitative research because it provides assurance to audiences of the study's legitimacy and the meaningfulness of the findings (Creswell, 2013). My reflexivity, which I have alluded to in the Positionality and Data



Collection sections, was my ongoing effort to hold myself accountable throughout the research process and was one of several efforts I made towards producing a study that readers can have trust in.

Other measures of ensuring trustworthiness included triangulation, or the use of multiple data sources, which was inherent to the study design as each of the couple's three interviews were a means of getting a perspective on their experiences and allowed for these perspectives to be expressed in distinct ways (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also engaged in peer debriefing with colleagues throughout the research process, and shared the findings with participants to see if they found them to be logical and credible.

### **Data Analysis**

I began data analysis by listening to all of the audio recordings, first listening to a couple's first interview and then each partner's respective individual interviews. There were sometimes weeks between a couple's first interview and my completion of the individual interviews with them, so doing this helped to refresh each of these experiences and unify them to give me a sense of the whole of what a couple shared. Listening also reminded me of instances where their voices conveyed emotion that may have not been apparent through a simple reading of the transcripts.

I proceeded to read through each of a couple's interview transcripts and returned to the audio recordings when it appeared that there were mistakes or the meaning was unclear. After an initial read-through, I engaged in another read-through during which I took reflective notes on each interview (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In addition to mapping out and summarizing their ideas, I noted connections between ideas that were expressed within a couple's three interviews, as well as ideas that related to

what other couples had discussed. I reviewed the reflective notes I had taken on each interview, organizing them by couple and individual interview, as well as salient identities such as gender and race.

I used both inductive and deductive coding, beginning with inductive coding so that my interpretation would not be restrictive (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Inductive coding centers the participants' interpretations of their experiences by allowing for themes and codes to emerge from the data and become visible to the researcher; it mitigates the propensity for researchers to be blinded by their own presuppositions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Inductive codes covered ideas related to mobility, joint satisfaction, and class, among others, which were recurring ideas in the data.

After I completed inductive coding, I engaged in deductive coding. I used a priori codes related to intersectionality, broadly speaking, as well as codes specific to the context of academic couples in higher education, which I developed based on the literature (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Examples of codes included "race," "gender," "overlapping identities" "power," "oppression," "inequality," "discrimination," "marginalization," "racism," "sexism," "stigmatization," "academic couple identity," "formal policies/practices," and "informal policies/practices." Throughout the coding process I engaged in constant comparison to make sure that the codes were distinct from one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Once I finished deductive coding, I continued on to axial coding, grouping the codes into categories and identifying key concepts from them (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). I paid attention to codes I was using frequently, as that helped to give me a sense of the relative importance of particular concepts to understanding the couples'

experiences. I was also mindful of the potential to over rely on codes (John & Johnson, 2000), and used the reflective notes I had taken on each interview to ensure that the concepts I was developing accurately conveyed the participants' experiences when looking at them holistically. I developed the study's findings through the process of identifying key concepts and seeing how they relate to one another to explain the couples' navigation of hiring processes and their experiences as faculty couples at AAU universities. I organized the findings into thematic sections that help readers understand different stages in recruitment processes, as well as positive and negative aspects of being a faculty couple within the same institutional contexts. Further, I summarized how the findings relate to each research question in the Findings and Discussion by Research Question section of the Findings and Discussion chapter.

### **Limitations**

Seasoned academics have cautioned future generations of scholars to “put to rest the misguided notion that research discovers truth” (Rudestam & Newton, 2014, p. 29). In pursuing this study and considering its limitations, I heeded their advice to think about the function of research as contributing “a series of thoughtful observations” (Rudestam & Newton, 2014, p. 29).

This dissertation was not intended to be a definitive study of diverse academic couples and was a much humbler endeavor to explore the lives and careers of a small segment of this population. Like other qualitative research, it was not intended to be generalizable. Rather, it was exploratory and sought depth in hearing the couples' perspectives and revealing challenges that they face, and the strategies that they use to overcome them and navigate their institutional contexts. The goal of this study was to

bring these issues to the attention of administrators, researchers, and aspiring academic couples and to serve as a basis for critical conversations and further inquiry.

My study focused on couples who both earned positions at AAU institutions so it did not include academic couples who found positions at other types of institutions, who are not employed at the same institution, or who were not able to find positions and left academia. Those are all situations that are deserving of future research, but I focused on couples at AAU institutions because of the implications for faculty diversity at these especially influential universities. I looked specifically at faculty couples who are co-employed because better understanding them can directly inform recruitment and retention policies and practices within individual university contexts.

The foremost limitation to this study was my own fallibility, and in previous sections I outlined some of the methods that I used to be vigilant and manage my biases. Another especially salient threat to the validity of this study was self-report bias (Maxwell, 2013). Self-report bias is a threat in any form of research in which a participant provides information about themselves, as there is always a possibility that they will withhold or misrepresent information. This study focused on a taboo, stigmatized topic that may have been difficult for couples to manage, and raising these issues may have unearthed thoughts and feelings that they were uncomfortable with. Some participants directly referred to not wanting to share particular, negative aspects of their experiences, and occasionally participants responded to probing questions in ways that were general and deflected away from their unique personal experiences. Self-report bias would have been a greater threat if I had only conducted couple interviews because individuals are likely less candid in front of their partner. Still, whether interviewed

together or separately, people often want to present idealized versions of themselves, and the fact that this study centered on not only them as individuals, but also their partnership, likely added to the sensitivity of their decisions about disclosing information. To combat self-report bias, I assured them of the confidentiality of the interviews, encouraged them to be candid if they seemed reluctant to share, and explained why I think the research has the potential to be beneficial. By taking steps to mitigate these limitations, I aimed to produce a dissertation filled with thoughtful observations that help to inform diversification efforts in the academic workforce.

## Chapter 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

I present the findings in four sections: Initial Hiring as a Couple, Partner Hire Stigma, Navigating the Institution Together, and Retention & Transitions. The first section, Initial Hiring as a Couple, introduces the couples as they went through the initial hiring process that led them to become faculty couples at the same institution. The second section, Partner Hire Stigma, covers the primary challenges associated with being a faculty couple at the same institution that participants shared. The third section, Navigating the Institution Together, includes findings related to how partners support one another within institutional contexts. The fourth section, Retention & Transitions, sheds light on a range of factors informing couples' career decisions. Finding sections are presented in a way that each builds upon what came before it, and I weave my interpretations throughout in order to relate participants' experiences to one another and to the literature in a digestible way.

In the Findings and Discussion by Research Question, I summarize the findings by research question in order to provide readers with a synopsis of what participants shared about their recruitment and career experiences. Additionally, I elaborate ways in which the findings align with and diverge from those of other studies. This chapter concludes with Contributions to Intersectionality, in which I describe how my study extends the use of intersectionality for understanding the experiences of faculty couples.

## Initial Hiring as a Couple

“I get the sense that part of the reason we’ve ended up in the places we’ve ended up is because those institutions don’t have as much angst, as much uncertainty, about the value of couple hires in general, but specifically what our contribution would be to those institutions.” – Couple2\_m

This section is organized into three subsections: *Concurrent Entry into the Faculty Ranks*, *Sequential Entry into the Faculty Ranks*, and *Faculty Couples Seeking First Couple Hire*. This organization delineates the various ways that academic couples come to be employed as faculty couples at the same institution, as the participants represented a range of ways in which relationship formation, career stage, and couple hiring processes converge. As the initial entry of scholars into the faculty market is distinct from situations in which standing faculty navigate recruitment and retention offers, I describe the application processes of four couples that entered the faculty ranks together and shed light on factors influencing and guiding them in the *Concurrent Entry into the Faculty Ranks* section. I subsequently describe the application processes of five couples whose initial couple hire marked one partner’s entry into the professoriate in the *Sequential Entry into the Faculty Ranks* section. In the *Faculty Couples Seeking First Couple Hire* section, I conclude with two couples in which both partners were faculty members before they went through a faculty couple hire process together. Later, in the *Retention and Transitions* section, I consider how couples navigate career decisions after entry into the academy. Table 1 summarizes demographic and professional data of all 11 couples.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of this table, please see p. 48 of the Participant Selection section of the Methodology chapter. As mentioned in that section, I use \_f and \_m to denote the female or male partner in a couple; for example, Couple1\_f refers to the female partner in Couple1.

Table 1. Participants

Couple	Race/Gender	Shared field?	Same/Linked departments?	Career Stage
Couple1	Black male Black female	Different social science	No	Senior
Couple2	Black male Black female	Same social science	Yes	Senior
Couple3	Black male Black female	Different social science	No	Early
Couple4	Black male Black female	Different social science	Yes	Early
Couple5	American Indian male Latina	Different social science	No	Senior
Couple6	International Hispanic male White female	Same STEM	Yes	Senior
Couple7	Latino Latina	Different social science	Yes	Early
Couple8	International Hispanic male White female	Same social science	Yes	Senior
Couple9	Black male Black female	Same social science	Yes	Senior
Couple10	Black male Black female	Different social science	No	Mid
Couple11	Black male Black female	Same social science	Yes	Mid

### *Concurrent Entry into the Faculty Ranks*

Of the 11 couples, four entered the faculty ranks together: Couple7, Couple11, Couple2, and Couple10. Each of these couples met during or before their doctoral programs and navigated their initial faculty application processes as a couple, and each were able to attain faculty positions their first time on the job market together. These couples are distinct from the other seven couples, in which there was one partner who was already a faculty member at the time their relationship began or who attained a faculty position prior to the other partner. Each of the four couples who became faculty together had multiple dual-career job offers, and all but one was able to land two tenure-track positions at the same institution; the exception was a couple in which the female



partner attained a clinical position. I explore these couples' recruitment experiences and decision processes in this section.

Upon initial entry into the faculty market, only one of the four couples was aware of dual-career hiring policies at the institutions they applied to. That couple, Couple7, is Latinx, and they are in different fields that are related. The male in the partnership, who was the first hire,<sup>4</sup> learned of the institution's dual-career hiring policies from mentors who pointed him to online information pertaining to these processes. In his case, he had two offers, one from the institution at which he held a postdoc and the other at an institution that better suited his and his partner's geographic preferences. Though he had been able to leverage his postdoc offer to facilitate the institution's hiring of his wife in a research position that enabled her to further build her scholarly expertise, it was apparent early on in his attempt to attain a faculty position at the university that they would not be able to offer his wife a faculty position due to budget constraints.

Nonetheless, his wife was able to earn an offer for a tenure-track faculty position at a nearby institution, and the couple believes that her offer was better than it might have been otherwise because the dean at the postdoc university had contacted the dean at the nearby institution in hopes that such an offer would make the husband more likely to accept their offer. Though the university in his preferred geographic location had a well-established dual-career hiring policy, they at no point in the recruitment process provided materials to him about this policy. After earning an offer from this university, the

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<sup>4</sup> I follow the lead of Schiebinger et al. (2008), who use "first hire" when referring to the partner who receives an initial offer and negotiates for their partner, and use "second hire" when referring to their partner, "to overcome the negative terms often applied to this partner, such as 'trailing spouse'" (p. 15).

husband, with his knowledge of their dual-career hiring policy from his mentors, brought up his partner and began negotiations for a position for her. He leveraged his tenure-track faculty offer from his postdoc university during these negotiations, and she was ultimately offered a clinical position in the same department as her husband after meeting with administrators and faculty at a conference, without giving a job talk or a vote being held regarding her position by the school's faculty. The couple accepted the offer, though the method through which she was hired proved to be consequential for her treatment by her colleagues during her time at the institution, which I explore in the *Partner Hire Stigma* section later on.

Counter to how this couple was aware of the university's dual-career hiring policy and how the husband delayed seeking a position for his wife until after he attained his offer, the institutions recruiting the other three couples that entered the faculty ranks concurrently, all of whom are Black couples, were aware that they were seeking a dual-career hire early in the process, and none of these couples knew anything about their dual-career hiring policies. Two of these couples, Couple11 and Couple2, are in the same field and applied for some of the same positions. They described how universities knew about their relationship from the very beginning, sometimes because they previously knew members of their faculties. In other instances, they do not know for sure how the institutions found out but presume there may have been general knowledge in their field that they were together or that information in their applications, such as the address in their CV or a mention in letters of recommendation, may have tipped them off.

Both of these couples managed to attain dual-career offers from multiple institutions in their initial application cycles and in each case they both gave job talks at

the institutions from which they attained these offers. Though the institutions that they were hired by at no point informed them of their dual-career hiring policies and practices, they each received hands-on guidance about navigating these processes from faculty mentors, who while not knowing about the specifics of these institutions' practices, were able to offer advice and help with negotiations. Both couples ended up being hired in the same departments at universities where faculty couples were common and recall each being treated equally during their campus visits and job talks. Couple2 is senior and described how their university was ahead of its time in terms of its willingness to engage in dual-career hiring, as well as how this willingness was directly tied to their desire to recruit quality faculty and enhance their institutional profile:

Couple2\_m: ...even though it was atypical at the time it wasn't atypical at [institution]. So, [institution] was out in the forefront.... In a small department there were already [multiple] couples...they had already recalibrated. This wasn't that bizarre to them.... [institution] was one of these places that knew it wanted to be a top tier institution.

Couple2\_f: They knew they were going to lose people.

Couple2\_m: And so, if they were going to do it, they had to be willing, especially if it was the right pair, to do what other folks might've been a little bit more mealy-mouthed about and flatfooted with. And once they stepped it up the other institutions knew if they were going to be serious, they had to be willing to go for both of us. And a lot of them were.

The institution's willingness to engage in dual-career hiring resulted in an arms race for other institutions to also make dual-career offers, and this also played out for the other couple who attained multiple offers, Couple11, who described how institutions that began recruiting them later on in the application cycle expedited their processes in order to be able to make them offers. In deciding between these multiple offers at this beginning stage of their career, these two couples' responses suggested that they placed

significant importance on intellectual fit and the potential for collegial relationships and collaboration within the institution. Moreover, they each recounted key administrators at the institutions they chose, who stood out for their efforts to make the dual-career offer come to fruition and their enthusiasm for hiring them.

The fourth couple, Couple10, are in different fields and faced challenges during their initial application cycle that delayed them becoming faculty at the same institution for a year. This couple had no knowledge of dual-career hiring policies at the institutions they were applying to and did not receive guidance from anyone throughout the process. They did not know who they could go to for advice, particularly about the nuances of navigating hiring as a couple in different fields. The female partner attained a faculty position at her dream institution, which was in an area with lots of postsecondary institutions that she thought would have viable job options for her partner. She mentioned her partner during the process and the institution informed her that a position would be opening up in his field within the coming year, but she did not formally negotiate for his position and therefore did not get any guarantees of a position for him in writing. She accepted her offer and began working at the institution, but there was ultimately resistance from the department that the college was optimistic would hire her partner because they wanted autonomy in their hiring processes, so no position materialized for him.

In the meantime, her partner had begun a tenure-track position in a different region of the country at an institution that is in a relatively isolated area and struggles with retaining diverse faculty. Though the institution knew about her from the beginning of his application process and began to prepare a partner hire offer for her, she postponed

that process because she had her ideal position and hoped that a position for her partner at her institution would come to fruition. When it did not and she decided that it would be best to join her partner at his university, she went for a job talk and they followed through on offering her a partner hire, which was a new faculty line that was supported by funding from his school and the provost's office so that the school she was placed in only had to pay for a third of the line.

The application and hiring processes of these four couples point to how institutions rarely provide information about their dual-career hiring policies and practices to applicants and that couples attain knowledge of how to navigate these processes through informal networks such as faculty mentors. Partners with multiple offers are able to leverage offers against one another in order to get dual-career offers, and this is easier to accomplish when they are in the same department or school. As was indicated by the last couple described in the section, partners lose leverage to negotiate positions after they sign their contracts and begin their positions, however in some instances institutions will hire the other partner afterwards if they are interested in their contributions and/or believe doing so will help retain the partner they already employ. Interest in being employed at the same institution drove these couples' application processes. In situations in which couples considered multiple dual-career offers, their ultimate decisions were largely motivated by intellectual fit and the efforts of key administrators to signal that they would both be valued and to make the offers happen expeditiously.

### *Sequential Entry into the Faculty Ranks*

For the seven remaining couples, one partner became a faculty member prior to the other. For five of these seven, their hiring as a couple at the same institution marked the entry of the latter partner into the faculty ranks. These five, Couple8, Couple5, Couple3, Couple4, and Couple1, are the focus of this section, and the other two, whose hire as a couple occurred after both were already faculty members, are discussed subsequently in *Faculty Couples Seeking Couple Hires*.

Of note, in each of the five instances when one partner's entry as a faculty member coincided with the couple's hiring together at an institution, the institution that previously employed the faculty partner made a failed attempt to retain that partner through offering a position to the other member of the couple. Only one of these couples, Couple8, described strong retention efforts by the faculty partner's institution, which were ultimately outweighed by geographic and quality of life considerations. Another of the couples, Couple5, noted that though the retention offer with a partner hire came through only after the couple attained two outside offers, administrators there were overall very supportive, even offering that the faculty partner take a year leave of absence so that the couple could return if they did not like their new institution. For that couple, geographic and quality of life considerations, as well as intellectual fit essentially ruled out the prospect of their retention once they got the other offers. The male partner in that couple noted how in addition to those factors, the university was particularly proactive in their approach to recruiting them:

...there was a real high degree of receptivity to the opportunity, and it was seen really, I think, as an opportunity. So, folks were really affirmative and were very articulate on how to move this forward, how to move it forward quickly and here

are the steps, like here's the process, and they were, I think "aggressive" would be a fair word.

He noted that the university's proactive approach was driven by their "long-standing history and experiences of just having to accept spousal hires to get the quality of people they want to come to a place like this." Given the university's isolated geographic location, partner hiring has become a normal practice for the institution, and he noted that the university's location is often not appealing to people of color. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2004) reported that universities in suburban and rural areas are more likely to have dual-career hiring policies than universities in metropolitan areas, and in light of Couple5\_m and other participants' reflections on geographic preferences that people of color often have, these policies may be especially important for recruiting couples of color. Couple5 represented an opportunity for the university to leverage their experience with dual-career hiring in order to recruit two faculty of color, and they were well-prepared and optimistic to do so.

The other three couples, Couple3, Couple4, and Couple1, all of whom are Black couples, recalled inaction and reactive retention efforts that played significant roles in their departure. Here, I put forth their perspectives on these efforts and factors that led them to reject retention offers and transition to new settings, as they are illustrative of missteps institutions make that lead to the attrition of faculty partners and missed opportunities to bolster their faculty diversity through partner hiring.

Two of the three couples, Couple3 and Couple4, consisted of a junior faculty member and their partner, who managed to attain one outside offer that they leveraged to get a counteroffer from the junior faculty member's institution. Couple3\_f and her

husband attained doctoral degrees the same year, in different fields, and she got offered a tenure-track faculty position at an elite liberal arts institution in an urban area. Having prior knowledge about the possibility of dual-career hiring, she raised her interest in attaining a faculty position for her husband when she received her initial offer from this institution and they let her know that they were not willing to do a partner hire. He worked outside of academia and after a few years they decided to try to attain faculty positions together and she was encouraged to apply for a position by a colleague at an institution where there was also a faculty opening in her husband's field. At this point they had more knowledge about how to navigate dual-career hiring processes from having seen several faculty members they know attempt to negotiate partner hires, with varying success, and speaking to couples about their triumphs and pitfalls.

Couple3\_f applied first because her application deadline was earlier and she was brought in for an interview. The colleague at the university who encouraged her to apply was already aware that it would need to be a dual-hire situation from knowing her personally, and after her interview the university reached out to her with an offer and commenced the partner hire process. In the meantime, she made her institution aware of her offer and that the recruiting university was also interested in hiring her husband. He gave a job talk at the recruiting university and the faculty supported his hire, so he was also offered a position.

Couple3\_f hoped to leverage these offers to get her institution to offer her husband a position because they did not want to relocate to this other university in a different part of the country. Her husband recalled Couple3\_f's institution's counteroffers:



[Her institution] barely competed for [her] because I think they were calling her bluff in terms of whether or not she was really going to leave. Because it was higher ranked and then also it's an attractive thing to stay where you are and not have to move your whole family across the country.... When it came to me, they saw it as a situation where they could be less accommodating.... They did not offer me a tenure-track position even though [recruiting university] had offered me a tenure-track position. They offered me a lecture position, and even though the title may not have mattered, the salary...wasn't anywhere close to what [recruiting university] was offering.

Based on this weak counteroffer, Couple3\_f and her husband decided to accept the recruiting university's offers and leave the institution. She suggested that they may have had a better outcome negotiating with her institution if she had waited until her husband's offer from the recruiting university was finalized and presented that offer first rather than making her institution aware of her offer and that they were trying to put together an offer for him. Her departure ended up being part of a large migration of faculty from the institution, which she argued was partially based on them generally not taking recruitment offers from lower ranked institutions seriously, especially for junior faculty.

Given the institution's struggles with faculty retention that became apparent that year, Couple3\_f imagines that they would have had a better outcome negotiating for counteroffers had they gone through the process of getting outside offers a year later. With how things played out, the institution did not have an ideal outcome because her departure was part of a broader attrition of faculty of color at a time when the institution was facing pressure to diversify, and she and her husband did not have their desired outcome of being able to remain in their geographic location with two faculty positions. Further, her institution missed the opportunity to further their faculty diversity by not only retaining her but also employing her husband, which would have given them two

faculty of color who were linked to each other and more likely to be retained in the future (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004).

Couple4 was the other couple in which a junior faculty member's institution made a failed attempt at retention, and in that case the partner who was becoming a faculty member for the first time, Couple4\_f, was actually the first hire at the university the couple was recruited to. Unlike Couple3\_f and her husband, who both applied to positions, only Couple4\_f applied, and she is in a different but related field to her husband's. Though they were aware that dual-career hiring could be done and received advice on the process from a senior faculty couple, they were not aware of specific policies at the institutions to which she applied. After receiving an offer, she let the recruiting university know that her husband would also need a position, though she knows that people already knew of him and were aware that directly bringing up family members is illegal during hiring processes until prospective employees specifically mention them.

After her husband gave a job talk, people at his university became aware that they were being recruited and eventually made an offer, but he reported that the institutional response was slow and partially attributes this to their unique position as a faculty couple of color:

...they could wrap their heads around one Black person being really exceptional. Right. But to have two people, a couple, be as exceptional almost positioned us as being these two unicorns, if you will. And that I think at least at [my institution] made them maybe somewhat drag their feet a bit on the spousal piece for [my wife].... [my colleague and I] kind of sense that they just couldn't...wrap their heads around two Black people...who are a couple...who happen to be brilliant enough and have found each other and are sane and happy and would want...and then would be deserving of a position at the same institution. Like the one was good, but two would just create a sense of cognitive dissonance and led to, at least

we felt like, [my institution], dragging their feet and really essentially allowing us to be poached.

Once the counteroffer from his institution came through it ended up not being as strong as the recruiting university's offer with respect to salary and benefits for both of them, and she also mentioned her desire be employed by an institution that valued her as a scholar and not simply as a retention strategy for her husband. There would have been compelling reasons for them to stay at his institution had the institution been more proactive in recruiting her and emphasized how she would fit and be valued, because of the prospect of having to move with their children to another part of the country and her husband having had very positive experiences as a faculty member there. However, the institution's slow response made the decision to leave much easier than it might have been otherwise.

Both of these last two couples represented opportunities for the junior faculty member's institutions, which each face pressure to diversify their faculties, to increase their faculty diversity through partner hiring, and in each case the institutions seemingly took for granted that the junior faculty member of color would remain at their institution even without proactive attempts to retain them. As Couple4\_m suggested, there may have been racialized dynamics at play with respect to institutions struggling to grasp that a faculty member of color might also have a deserving partner of color who desired a position.

Couple1 was the other couple that recalled that inaction and reactive retention efforts played significant roles in their departure, and they consisted of a tenured female faculty member who was partnered with a male who was on the faculty market for the

first time. They sought a partner hire from her institution while he applied to other positions, and though she was already a faculty member and he was finishing his doctoral degree, they learned about spousal accommodations from his mentors. They were in different fields and at her institution there was resistance to hiring him into the department aligned with his expertise from its faculty members. They collectively recalled this departmental tension and how the department eventually became more receptive to hiring him, but only after he got an external offer and was already set on leaving:

Couple1\_m: ...so what [department in his field at her institution] were interested in was in some kind of an appointment, but not a tenure-track.... So her appointment was in [department in her field], my appointment was in [department in his field]. And so there was a bit of tension where the folks in [department in his field], I think were willing to host me. But they weren't necessarily interested in doing something that would be a benefit to [her department]. So you do get into these issues sometimes about merit and fit.

Couple1\_f: And departments wanting to have control over who their hires were. This was the dean stepping in and saying...

Couple1\_m: can we make this happen?

Couple1\_f: And they said "Yes, but here's what we will do." "But no, absolutely we are not going to hire somebody just because you told us."

Couple1\_m: And it really wasn't until it was becoming clear that [university they went to] wanted to recruit me that the temperature in the [department in his field at her institution] changed. But by that point I was looking at the front door. And let me be clear...I think these things are, they're gendered and they're racialized.

Couple1\_f: Oh, sure it was an all-White [department in his field].

Couple1\_m: Yeah, right.... So I do think that those discourses about merit, I think people can be very selective about when they want to invoke those.

Couple1\_f: They could have easily made him an offer at the outset into a tenure-track position. They were just like, "We don't have to so we're not going to."

Couple1\_m: And let me be clear, it was their prerogative to make that decision. In this case, a school-level administrator, the dean, made an effort to facilitate the dual-career hiring process for the partner, which was met with resistance at the department level. This department lacked racial diversity and the couple do not mention any support for his consideration as a tenure-track partner hire until he had already received a tenure-track offer at another university, which in this case was ranked higher than her institution. He alluded to competition between her department and the department in his field as a motive for the resistance, but also raised his perceived merit and fit as factors that in this case likely came up because he was a Black scholar and the department was comprised solely of White faculty members.

While the couple respects departmental autonomy in making hiring decisions, Couple1\_m's offer from a higher ranked university suggests that he did indeed have a strong record that merited consideration as a tenure-track faculty member at the institution. The fact that the department did not engage in the process of vetting him (e.g., offering him a job talk) when the dean reached out and that the "temperature in the department" towards considering him changed only after he received an external offer suggests that though it was within their means and self-interest to recruit him from the beginning of the process, the all-White department did not place enough value on faculty diversity to do so. That he was by that point "looking at the front door" suggests that the department squandered an opportunity that he would have considered had they expressed interest and good faith in considering him early on. Thus, dual-career hiring only serves as a mechanism for increasing faculty diversity if institutions want to use it for that

purpose and are proactive in their efforts (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004).

Given the investment that institutions make in tenured faculty and the negative optics associated with the departure of tenured faculty, especially tenured faculty of color (Kelly, Gayles, & Williams, 2017), there is a strong argument that this institution had even greater incentives to accommodate the faculty member's partner and could do so at a comparatively lower cost than with couples in which both partners are already faculty because they would have brought in the partner as a first-time faculty member at the assistant rank. The dean's efforts may have been informed by this realization, however he was limited in bringing this to fruition because of the tension between the departments and departmental autonomy in hiring. What is unclear in this example is whether or not the institution had a policy that would have provided supplemental funding to support a tenure line for the partner hire, which may have mitigated their initial resistance and is a strategy that facilitated the dual-career hiring of other couples in separate disciplines described in this section (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004).

#### *Faculty Couples Seeking Couple Hires*

For the two couples in which each partner was already a faculty member, Couple9 and Couple6, their transitions to a new institution as a couple hire were prompted by direct recruitment of the male faculty member, who was more senior and the first hire, and each couple was comprised of scholars in the same general field being recruited to the same department. Neither of the couples were in commuting marriages as they each had faculty positions in the same area. They each learned about navigating hiring from other academic couples, and each of their decisions to transition to new institutions were

largely driven by research opportunities they would have there. They did not discuss retention offers from their respective institutions and it did not surface in the interviews that any of the partners were particularly conflicted about leaving their institutions to become couple hires at their new institutions.

When discussing their recruitment processes at these institutions, Couple9 did, however, describe disparities that foreshadowed the challenges that the female faculty member would face at the institution. This couple is Black and recalled this experience during the couple interview:

Couple9\_m: I was being recruited by them and they then interviewed [wife's name] for a position there as well...one of the things that sort of struck us about that whole period...was the unevenness of our recruiting to [institution] which I think at the end of the day it never quite sat well with us and probably contributed to, at some level, the length of time we stayed there.

Daniel: And when you say unevenness of recruiting what do you mean by that?

Couple9\_m: I mean they treated me really well in the recruiting process and not that I think they treated you poorly but they didn't, they weren't as attentive to you as they were to me.

Couple9\_f: Yeah. The best example is that when [husband's name] came for his job talk...they were very excited about him and so they sort of escorted him place to place and really were very attentive. When I came for mine they sort of said, "Here's your agenda for the day. You need to go up to that hill and you need to go over to that building," and at one point I got lost and I called and they said, "Oh, well, you'll find it. You just need to kind of go down the hill and around the corner," and whatever and it was just such an experience of not being cared for at all. I mean it was very clear that they saw me as an appendage.

Couple9\_f's experiences are representative of the fact that institutional willingness to engage in couple hiring in and of itself does not mean that they will interact with faculty partners in ways that make them both feel valued and respected. Moreover, faculty couples are attuned to these behaviors. While this couple still decided

to transition to this institution together, they never forgot the institution's treatment of her during recruitment, and as her husband mentioned, it "probably contributed to, at some level, the length of time" they remained there before moving to another institution. As they were two of very few faculty members of color in their school at the time, their departure, within a few years of arrival, likely did not reflect well upon the institution and may have placed pressures on administrators that drew attention and energy away from their other responsibilities (Kelly et al., 2017).

As this section illustrates, academic couples become faculty couples at the same institutions through a range of ways. Though couples rarely know the specifics of how institutions manage dual-career hiring, they often rely on advice from faculty mentors and other academic couples in navigating these processes. Couples leverage offers against each other in order to secure dual-career hires, and the speed with which institutions make offers, as well as the enthusiasm that administrators show for each partner while they recruit them, can play significant roles in their decisions. Failed efforts to retain faculty whose partners were seeking their first academic appointments were often characterized by inaction and delayed attempts, and some participants attributed these lackluster efforts to racialized assumptions about their merit. Couples are attentive to differences in how they are treated during recruitment, and their treatment factors into decisions that are also guided by intellectual fit as well geographic and quality of life considerations.



## Partner Hire Stigma

“In any situation, I want to make sure that we’re both respected by the stewards of the university, and if we’re not, at least speaking for myself, that’s a problem.” – Couple1\_m

Given the frequency with which anecdotal evidence and past scholarship on academic couples have pointed to the stigma associated with faculty couple employment at the same institution, one goal of this study was to reveal the extent to which these negative associations and experiences hold true for diverse faculty couples. The primary ways in which partners expressed this in the interviews were with respect to their treatment by administrators and colleagues because of the nature of their hiring, which is described here in the *Stigma Related to Hiring* section, and concerns administrators and colleagues had about their employment together at the institution, which is described subsequently in the *Concerns about Employment as a Couple* section. The *Concerns about Employment as a Couple* section is divided into two subsections that reflect two predominant sources of concerns: *Belief Couple is Unfairly Advantaged* and *Challenges When One Partner is Administrator*.

The forms of stigma described here were not uniform across the 11 couples and varied in the intensity with which they were consequential for them. Some of the couples had little to report with respect to how being a couple negatively impacted their experiences at their institution. However, those that did report challenges came from various academic ranks, were sometimes in a different department than their partner, went through dual-career hiring processes that varied in formality, and sometimes occupied contexts where academic couples were common. This suggests that there is no magic formula that produces ideal circumstances for diverse faculty couples, but through

investigating the varied impacts institutional contexts have had on these couples, I am able to shed light on a range of factors that shape their experiences.

### *Stigma Related to Hiring*

The ramifications of being a partner hire were most consequential for three women of color in the study: Couple7\_f, Couple10\_f, and Couple9\_f. For Couple7\_f, her negative treatment seemed to largely be driven by disapproval of the process through which she was hired, and she also connected her difficulties as a spousal hire to broader hostilities towards women of color in her department and field:

...this is to point out to some of the issues I think with being a spousal hire, at least for me, what I experienced being a woman, a woman of color, entering [her field]. And it's not always the friendliest space for women, for women of color.... there's a need to diversify [her field].... It was...something that I was sought after [for]. But the reality was that I experienced challenges being the spousal hire, being somebody who was seen as a temporary, as someone who wasn't hired by the faculty, words that were thrown out or things like "she wasn't vetted." Because I didn't give a job talk at [institution], so I was sort of just brought in. I met with faculty and the admin leaders at [academic conference] over lunch. That's how they hired me. It wasn't done by the faculty. And so those were things that impacted my experiences.

Despite having achieved her and her husband's goal of being employed in faculty positions at a research university in their preferred geographic region, Couple7\_f's hiring process led her colleagues to be unsupportive and created a set of difficult working conditions that made her deeply unsatisfied with her position. Her husband recalled the isolation and lack of support that she was experiencing:

It was just a lot of tension around being here and her role, and I know that she'd come back home with stories about what it felt like for her to be in these meetings alone without anyone else who was backing her up or with very few people who were being vocal about supporting her.

Couple7\_f began applying to faculty positions at other institutions and eventually landed a position over an hour away. At this other institution, she was able to establish an academic identity separate from her husband and felt valued as a scholar; these aspects of her employment far outweighed the inconvenience of the commute. When her husband became the target of recruitment from another institution, his university's efforts to retain them included recruiting her back to the institution. However, this time around, she went through a more traditional hiring process, visiting the campus and giving a job talk as any other candidate would. She ultimately decided to return to the institution, and she and her husband attributed her improved experiences as a faculty member to factors including this more traditional hiring process, the increased prevalence of faculty couples at the institution, and intentionality from administrators in making her feel valued and giving her opportunities to develop. With administrators, this meant direct communication about her expertise and how it could be leveraged to meet the goals of the school upon her return, as well as continued coordination to support her in these efforts.

Though the stigma Couple7\_f faced during her initial employment at the university seemed directly tied to the informality of her hiring, formal hiring processes did not always preclude partner hire stigma for the other couples in the study. Couple10\_f was hired after giving a job talk and the department she joined was responsible for funding only one third of her faculty line because of support from her partner's school and the provost's office, therefore the department was getting a new faculty line at a steep discount. The institution had a reputation for being conservative and several social-justice oriented colleagues in her department who had been supportive of her left the institution. She recalled the aftermath of these departures:

...because they were supporters of me, when they left, the people who didn't like them were like, well, [her name]'s part of that contingent. Which I was like, "I'm an assistant professor. I'm on nobody's side." But anyways, it became increasingly clear that I was not going to get tenure in that department. People told me that.

She proceeded to apply for faculty positions every application cycle until she and her partner were able to land a dual-career hire and left the institution. However, despite her general awareness of how being a partner hire contributed to her stigmatization in a department where she had also become collateral damage of infighting, she described not realizing the great extent to which her having been a partner hire affected how some of her colleagues had viewed her until after she left:

A few years later, I ran into a former student of mine...and she said that she had come to one of my sessions at [academic conference], and went back and told one of the faculty members that she went to this great session. And they were like, "Oh, that's great. Whose session was it?" And she said it was my session, and that faculty member said, "Oh, well you know she's just a partner hire. So there was nothing of value that she could have offered to you." And I was like, "Dang. That many years later."

Later in the couple interview, she contrasted her experiences at the first and second institutions and shared general reflections on how being involved in partner hires has affected how people have interacted with her and her husband:

...being a partner hire sunk me for tenure, like absolutely that was the driving force of what happened there. And the negative stigma that is associated with being a trailing spouse, or being a partner hire is.... Most of our experience in our professional careers and most of the people we know, when people are like, "Oh yeah. This person came through as a partner hire." It's not a positive association. I am very aware of how much better my experience has been at [second institution], but that doesn't negate how completely disrespectful people have been to both of us at various stages in our careers as a result of us being a partner hire.

At their second institution, Couple10\_f was the first hire and her husband, while not having nearly as difficult a time as she did at their first institution, still described contending with bias related to having been a partner hire:

On the negative side there's always someone who's going to question your validity as a scholar. "Oh, you're just a partner hire".... That happened to me [when I started at second institution], when I interviewed for [administrative position]. More than one person was like "You came here as a partner hire" or what have you.... And I was like, "Well, actually, had you looked at the CV you would have seen that...I have a [record] that says that I can do this job. And you have letters from references...who have spoken to my capabilities. But in your mindset, you've just reduced me as somebody who comes really as an appendage to my wife.... It's just this assumption that if you weren't hired in directly as a part of a search, somehow you're less of a scholar.... You reduce everything to how you got into the university.

Couple10\_m noted that the longer he's been at the institution, the less he has been on the receiving end of such comments. He was one of few participants who spoke of directly confronting people who have made these comments and elaborated on how his approaches vary based on his audience:

If it's amongst my colleagues...I would voice it, very open and very candidly. But if it's senior level administrators or something like that I have to use a little bit more finesse on how I say it. And so one of the things I've done in those situations is like, "Well, you know there's a high percentage of faculty at [this institution] who are in partner positions and there's a lot of senior-level administrators who came here as partner positions. So, just because a person is a partner doesn't necessarily mean that they are incapable of doing the work because everybody has PhDs at the end of the day, and everybody's been trained." I will frame it more in that way and maybe get some statistics or something like that if I'm talking to administrators.

Couple10\_m's statement that he "voices it, very open and very candidly" with colleagues is unique among the second hires and his being a man may be a factor in his comfort in advocating for himself this way, whereas women, especially women of color, have to contend with gendered expectations about their behavior in the workplace (Kelly &

McCann, 2013; Turner, 2002). His strategy with administrators also alludes to racialized ways that faculty couples of color are received in these contexts, as the large numbers of faculty and administrators at the university who were partner hires are mostly White couples, and his being a person of color makes him a more visible target of scrutiny in this context (O'Meara et al., 2018; Stanley, 2006). He noted that many of the colleagues and administrators who he has addressed have been receptive to his feedback and that the few that have not now avoid him, although they are colleagues who he reports have alienated themselves from others for a range of reasons.

Another Black couple, Couple1, has also been through partner hiring at multiple institutions and spoke specifically to the racialized dynamics faculty couples of color face at predominantly White universities. Their reflections help to contextualize some of the dynamics underlying what Couple10\_m shared with respect to being singled out due to being a partner in a faculty couple of color:

Couple1\_m: I think when you're a faculty member of color in environments like these, sometimes there is a presumption...that you have the opportunities that you have because of your race. And so I do think that there are all kinds of ways that our White counterparts are privileged in environments like these. And no one even really has to think about it. And so the thing that you have to be mindful of is that people do pay attention to things that you get or perceptions of unfair advantages that you have, which is ludicrous because these are [predominantly White institutions].

Couple1\_f: People will notice when the fall starts if there's a couple on campus. But I'm sure there will be several White couples who are hired during the same period of time no one will pay any attention to.

Couple1\_m: So, there is always kind of that you can expect that kind of sense of scrutiny that occurs.

Couple1\_f: Because there's just so few of us.

Further, Couple10\_m's allusion to being reduced to "an appendage" of his wife mirrored Couple9\_f's description of her experiences during her campus visit to the institution that she and her husband ultimately joined, described in the *Faculty Couples Seeking Couple Hires* section. She proceeded to recount how in her transition to the university it became clear early on that her treatment during recruitment was not an aberration and that she would have to deal with the stigma of being a partner hire:

Things went bad very quickly [at institution], which is related to an administrator.... They were predisposed to try to keep [husband's name] happy.... But with me, [I] wasn't really, even though the work we were doing was very much my work as well, I was not regarded as a partner in that work by them, even though I was by [husband's name]. So it was more of a kind of, "okay, she's the little woman," and I'm like, "Yeah, I'm actually the person that knows about all this particular aspect of the stuff.... You guys are acting like I'm just like a tag-along," and that was particularly coming from [an administrator].

In this instance, the faculty partner pointed specifically to an administrator as being someone who negatively shaped their experiences as a partner hire, which is in contrast to how Couple7\_f described administrators in her return to her first institution as providing support that made her feel valued. This also illustrates how influential just one individual can be; indeed, for many of the partners who described negative treatment that arose from being a faculty couple, there were typically only a handful of people that they recalled treating them poorly. However, when these are administrators or faculty colleagues, these experiences can prove pivotal to their job satisfaction and inform their retention and departure decisions.

Of particular note among the faculty who cited their hiring as a faculty couple as leading to negative treatment by administrators and colleagues were those whose narratives alluded to racialized and gendered hostilities. Couple7\_f framed her discussion

of being a partner hire around her entrance into her department as a woman of color in a field that is not welcoming to women of color. Though not explicitly making the connection between her identity as a woman of color and her treatment as a partner hire, Couple10\_f's description of the conservative institutional context in which she was situated and the departure of social-justice oriented colleagues who supported her suggests that her remaining colleagues may not have been advocates for racial and gender equity. Their treatment of her, which she attributed to being a partner hire and her remaining colleagues' association of her with the social justice-oriented colleagues, was likely exacerbated by the fact that she was not just a person who was brought into the university through dual-career hiring, but that she was a partner hire who embodied marginalized racial and gender identities that are the focus of much social justice work (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991).

Couple9\_f's reference to an administrator treating her as "the little woman" rather than a partner whose work and expertise were part and parcel of what the administrator was crediting her husband for calls forth how gender bias intermingles with bias against partner hires in ways that dovetail with intersectionality's focus on how individuals with multiple marginalized identities experience institutional discrimination and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 2016a). Blaser's (2008) participants, who were all White women, also described experiencing partner hire bias in gendered ways, and noted that the presence of other academic couples had a normalizing effect within their institutional contexts. The subtext in Couple9\_f's description of this scenario is that this school had a history of making partner hires so it was not novel for the administrator to have interacted with women who had been employed through dual-career hiring. What



was unique, however, was that she was a woman of color among a faculty with very few faculty of color. While the normalization of faculty couples seems to mitigate hostility towards faculty couples in certain institutional contexts (Blaser, 2008), faculty couples of color contend with racial and gender bias in ways that are distinct from White faculty couples (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991).

While Couple10\_m spoke to the salience of being a second hire at their second institution despite he and Couple10\_f being in different departments, the other three males who had been second hires made no mention of experiencing a partner hire stigma. What separates Couple10\_m's experience from the others is that the examples he gave were in relation to him pursuing and carrying out leadership positions within the institution, a theme that I explore in the *Challenges When One Partner is Administrator* section. For men who were second hires and not involved in leadership, the means through which they were hired into their positions was not something that surfaced in negative ways as it did for women second hires. This was reflected in the following comment by Couple3\_m:

Being faculty members at [institution], there's certain things like say from my perspective and just in relation to me being a partner hire, I don't remember that many times. I don't remember it until someone starts asking me questions. I'm like, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. My wife is a professor here," et cetera.

In contrast, his wife described the ways in which being a first hire, which was generally a privileged position for men, serves to complicate her experiences as a faculty member:

I think for me in a department that is predominantly White and male the fact that my husband also teaches on campus is complicated. So people in my department know that this was like a dual hire situation, but because it's predominantly White and male there's like these unspoken things going on like I'm Black, I'm a

woman, I'm junior, I'm young, so they already perceive me in a particular way. And so if I'm talking about I also have a partner and he's also Black. He ain't White, he ain't Asian, he's not Latinx, he's Black just like me. They don't really know how to deal with all of that. And so that then in turn impacts how they view me and assess me.... And they're trying to assess you like "Are you good enough? We hired the both of them, this is our investment, are they going to falter?".... So I think I had to shoulder that burden a little bit more than [husband's name] does because I was the first person to do an interview here.

As reflected in these remarks, being the first hire makes Couple3\_f feel an extra burden to prove herself. She is a Black woman whose hire also brought a Black man to campus as a faculty member and her existence in a predominantly White and male context where the faculty "don't really know how to deal" with a Black faculty couple makes her feel an additional layer of pressure to disprove deficit narratives and succeed. Adding further complication to her task of navigating this context is the fact that not all couples are able to acquire a partner hire, which she described:

I've had people in my department who [left] because they didn't get that [partner hire] that they really wanted, they had to go elsewhere. So, it's like (*whispering*) "Ok yeah, [her and her husband's names], they got a [partner hire]," and people are like really in your business.... They're like, "Oh, well, why did that Black couple get it and we didn't?" And you have to negotiate all those different politics.

Couple3\_f was not unique among the participants in sharing that some of her negative experiences related to other scholars being critical based on their having not been able to achieve a partner hire. Other participants also reported a racialized dimension to this criticism. That much of the criticism that these couples receive in regards to their hiring mirrors anti-affirmative action discourse, even in contexts where partner hiring is common, does not appear to be coincidental, especially when considering that these universities have low rates of faculty diversity (Tierney & Saltee, 2008). Indeed, as Couple4\_m remarked when recalling his institution's lack of vigilance

in retaining him that he and his wife being a successful academic couple of color positioned them as being “two unicorns” in the eyes of others, other couples also reported grappling with shock and disbelief from people within and outside of the academy. While this disbelief is often followed by pride when their audiences were communities of color, with White scholars it is sometimes followed by loaded reactions suggesting that their hiring was based on their race. Referring to interactions they have had with White colleagues at their institution, Couple11 commented:

Couple11\_m: ...I think the awkward thing I always confront...I’ve had a few where people want to know like, how did it go? Like how did it turn out? I’ve been in a few situations at our campus where I feel like a tension...

Couple11\_f: They have a situation where it didn’t work out. How did we make it happen?

Couple11\_m: And they want to know. There’s almost an anxiousness, I feel, and it’s not like a “I’m just interested,” they want to know “how did that work??” It’s almost a surprise to a certain extent.

Couple10\_f’s reported similar sentiments, including from couples who have sought their advice:

When people find out that we are married and both are faculty at [second institution] in tenured positions, and both came in in tenured positions, there is always like a stutter step that people take. Like a shock, a surprise. Like, “Oh, that was unexpected.” And then follow-up questions. “Oh, you’re both faculty at [second institution]? You both have tenure? You both came in with tenure? Like almost with a sense of disbelief almost.... Like I mentioned before, people will come to us for advice on things, and some of those couples are White. And they’ll be a sense of like, “Well, they did it for you. So of course they should do it for us.” And then when they don’t or if they don’t, like almost a sense of entitlement, like, “How dare they not do for us what they have done for you.”

The couples in this study often remarked on the confluence of factors allowing them to attain dual-career hires, and while pointing to their records they also in many cases noted luck and serendipity. They emphasized that the lack of success in gaining

positions is not an indication of lack of merit and deservingness. However, for some of the partners, described in this section, their dual-career hiring has led to persistent assumptions about their merit that play out in racialized and gendered ways.

#### *Concerns about Employment as a Couple*

While a handful of the couples reported experiencing challenges based on the circumstances of their hiring, what was more common among the couples, particularly those who were beyond the junior ranks, were concerns related to them being employed within the same departments and institutions. The primary concerns that arose in the interviews were 1) the couples' perceptions that some of their colleagues' and administrators' believed they were unfairly advantaged and 2) challenges that arose when one partner held an administrative role. As the couples discussed these concerns, they described how they navigated related situations.

#### *Belief Couple is Unfairly Advantaged*

Couples' belief that their colleagues and administrators viewed them as advantaged varied in the extent to which they believed it was consequential for them. For some, this belief was grounded in firsthand or secondhand comments that colleagues had made to or about them, for others, it was based on a "general feeling" that they had. These comments often referred to the power they might wield within their departments and institutions, and those for whom concerns about their perceived advantage were most consequential pointed to how it led them to miss out on opportunities for higher salaries (Blaser, 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), awards, and administrative positions. One Black couple who is employed in the same department spoke about this in both the couple and individual interviews. The female partner reported:

I do think that there are ways that we can get pigeonholed. I think sometimes people don't want to give us certain things.... What does it mean to have both of us in an administrative position?... I do think that people sometimes won't give things because of the fear of us both having it. Only one can have it, and not the other.... Especially when we're in the same department too. If we were in different colleges where it's spread out, it's different...I do think that there probably are calculations that people make because of that uniqueness.

The couple noted that neither of them have been strongly drawn to pursuing departmental or college-level leadership positions so this is not a concern that they have brought to administrators, however as they have become more senior they have been considered for university-wide leadership positions. The recognition of their leadership potential outside of their department suggests that colleagues' concerns within the department had precluded them from being nominated for leadership positions within that context. She also reported that they had not anticipated that concerns about their influence as a couple within the department would be an issue:

People don't really just say like you can't have this. They're not that open. But there are things that I've heard, and it might be an offhand comment made or something I've heard from someone else who says they heard someone talk, said to them something. And that was probably when it hit that, oh my gosh, people are worried about that. Okay, I wasn't even thinking like that. I wasn't even thinking that somehow we would take over some space because we were together.... But then I think that it might be a stronger impetus to shut us down maybe or I don't know. All of this I think happens in quiet ways....

Partners worked together to make sense of concerns that they might have undue influence and to figure out how to navigate their departmental contexts and several, including this couple, emphasized that they do not carry themselves as a couple. Couples cited deliberate strategies such as not sitting together at meetings, as well as naturally not agreeing on issues, sometimes to the surprise of their colleagues. This couple has not directly raised these issues related to them being a couple with their colleagues, but the

female partner said they would if they felt it was necessary. The male partner in this couple elaborated on how their achievements and contributions were conflated in the eyes of administrators and how their being viewed as a collective entity disadvantages them in salary negotiations:

...you see even like undercutting where you think if this one gets something that I get it at the same time without recognizing that I'm an entity. So if I give [his partner's name] a raise, will, in fact the whole family gets a raise. So rather than [his name] is deserving of the raise and [his partner's name] is deserving the raise, I think sometimes it works at our disadvantage because people think the merit that we receive, it comes to both of us without realizing that we're individual entities, even if it...flows into [the] economic base of our home.

This couple's concerns echo broader concerns among the couples about being valued and rewarded as separate scholars and their comments point to tangible ways that being viewed as a unit has hindered them. While they did not suggest that their race played a role in being limited with respect to salary and leadership opportunities, other couples at times noted how their colleagues' perceptions of them as advantaged intersected with assumptions about how racially and ethnically minoritized faculty are unfairly advantaged in higher education (O'Meara et al., 2018). The female partner in a Black couple that has held leadership positions reflected:

I think White faculty tend to see Black faculty period, faculty of color period, as being privileged, as being there primarily because of affirmative action.... And when you're a couple then that perception is that, they must be getting some kind of special attention, right? Because they are a couple, right? They came here as a couple, right? And then if we advance, but both of us have advanced in ways that most faculty members don't. And so, folks probably see that as some sort of advantage that they have.... So, we've heard some minor chit chat with that.

This faculty member emphasized that she considered the perception from White colleagues that they were advantaged as not "a big deal"; she and her partner have not been hindered nor did they report facing significant hostility based on being a faculty

couple, despite the fact that they had been employed in the same department at one point during their careers. Nonetheless, she acknowledged that perceptions of their advantage as faculty of color are magnified because they are a couple and referred to some of her colleagues' comments confirming that they held these beliefs.

Another Black couple also pointed out how their colleagues had viewed them as advantaged; however, in their case they reported this rising to the level of them being perceived as a "threat" within their department. The male partner recalled that when they were in the same department a few of their faculty colleagues seemed to "be a little envious or felt threatened by what we could represent and the kind of power bloc we could be in a small department." They had not anticipated these concerns and after deliberating with each other decided that the best course of action would be to communicate directly about these issues with their colleagues. He recalled their general approach to handling these concerns:

We tried to find productive ways to engage faculty in faculty meetings or in one on one meetings with faculty and with the chair of the department to engage them on this issue, allay their fears and concerns, address any questions they might have. But I think also it meant not getting caught up in any irrational weirdness or anxiety because academics for a whole bunch of reasons, just like in any other sphere or domain, can sometimes be very miserable, and so, trying to be constructive in resolving any potential concerns without feeling like you're getting caught in some sort of weird, dysfunctional trap around group dynamics or something. So, I think trying to be as straightforward as possible, opening up spaces for real dialogue and conversation and trusting that if we are able to talk things through, we probably can gain some traction in ways that can create a better outcome than we would if we just tried to pretend it away.

This faculty member's reflection sheds light on the fact that there is no surefire solution that ameliorates these issues and that they can be complicated to manage (Schiebinger et al., 2008). This couple was one of few in the study who reported directly engaging

colleagues on these kinds of concerns. He specifically recalled an instance in which he and his partner met with the chair and the chair explained how a few of their colleagues in the department were concerned about the university attention they were getting. The colleagues felt that they were not getting the respect they deserved compared to him and his partner, who were relatively new to the university. In the meeting, they and the chair brainstormed strategies that might help alleviate fears their colleagues had about their relative sense of being appreciated at the university. He recalled afterward that they talked directly with one of the faculty members and worked to keep the lines of communication open as best as they could. In response to a probe about the outcome of that meeting, he remarked:

I think at least on the surface it seemed like it was fine, but I think you never know. I think for what it's worth, my sense was we had done our job by getting it out in the open, talking it through, trying to be as honest as possible about it, and I think nothing, ultimately I would argue, bad could come of that. I think the worst scenario would have been to just keep it bottled up, not discuss it.... We all just kept continuing to evolve as scholars and institutional leaders, and it just became less consequential, but I don't know. I think it probably didn't hurt.

In the specific example he shared, the concern was tied to university attention, and while acknowledging uncertainty as to how the colleague felt about them afterwards, the situation became less consequential. For this couple, concerns colleagues may have held about their power in departmental decision-making also became less consequential because of how their careers evolved. For other couples who remain deeply entrenched as faculty in the same department, these concerns are more persistent, especially when one partner serves in an administrative role.



### *Challenges When One Partner is Administrator*

For three couples who were each employed in the same department, issues arose when one partner became the chair. In each of these cases, it was the male partner who became the chair, and the female partner became the primary target of colleagues' reactions to having a faculty partner serve as an administrator. The most common way this manifested was in colleagues' comments that made reference to the female partner being connected to the chair and caused the female partner discomfort, and in some instances the female partner had concerns about retaliation they might be subjected to because of their partner's actions as chair. Male partners noted that navigating these dynamics added a level of stress to their roles, and couples collectively elaborated on the strategies that they have used to preempt and work through issues.

In the interviews, one female partner compared and contrasted her and her partner's past experiences working in different departments with their experience at an institution in which they work in the same department. She highlighted the role of his service as chair in complicating her experiences:

Female: It's hard for people to forget that you're married. It was better when we were in two different departments, but now that we're in the same department, and he's the chair of the department, it means that everyone sees me through that glass.... Sometimes some faculty I've noticed will say, [his name and her name] said, or, [his name and her name] want, when I have nothing to do with it. I'm just a normal faculty, and that bothers me that they would act like the two of us did something where I'm not the chair. So things like that seem silly to me.

Daniel: So how do you manage those situations?

Female: I tend to ignore them, and if I think it's egregious, which usually it isn't, I've talked to one of the faculty before like, "I have nothing to do with these decisions." Just trying to remind them that there's a separation of church and state here.

In this exchange, the faculty member clearly expressed her frustration with assumptions that she plays a role in the decision-making processes of her partner. While generally disregarding such remarks as “silly” she noted that their employment in the same department and his service as chair present a challenge to the independence of her professional identity that was not as salient when they were in separate departments. She also noted the intentionality with which they had tried to establish separate identities upon their initial employment in the department, which preceded him taking on the chair role:

...we would do things to make sure people saw us as separate and not ganging up because you had to be careful, and we were [senior faculty]. So, we were very cautious, I think, to make sure that we had two separate identities and that people wouldn't feel overwhelmed by seeing us as a unit, as a power play unit.... I think we were very purposefully not always pointing attention to the fact that we were married.

In addition to these efforts, her husband also described how they sat on opposite sides of the room during faculty meetings, and she shed light on the fact that they do not always agree on issues and would do so in public knowing that it might help people distinguish and trust them as individuals. Despite all of these efforts, his service as chair led precisely to them being perceived as a “power play unit,” which was revealed in how some of their colleagues referred to them collectively when referring to his administrative actions. His service as chair has also led her tread lightly in meetings when it comes to critiquing ideas colleagues put forth to the department. In reference to some of these situations she remarked “I would not of course say a word out loud because you can't do that when you're the wife of the chair” and noted that she would follow up with him to provide feedback on these situations afterwards.

Likewise, another female partner pointed out her frustration with colleagues' assumptions that her partner, as chair, was providing her with information that they did not have access to:

[partner's name] held a supervisory administrative position at one point and for me I found it was difficult to go the faculty meetings because faculty assumed...that there was a kind of pillow talk that was happening and [partner's name] is a really discreet person and so they assumed I knew things and had prior knowledge of this and that but I didn't. That was just sort of weird, but for the most part people have been fine.

While she noted that her experiences as a faculty partner at this institution have generally been good, she later returned to this topic and pointed out that these assumptions took a cumulative toll and made her become "totally disconnected" from faculty meetings and not attend as often, though she specified that this was in reference to broader faculty meetings and not those of her and her husband's specific academic unit. Nonetheless, given the function of faculty meetings in shaping the direction of academic bodies and building community, her disengagement during this time is noteworthy.

She did, however, point to a general improvement in her colleagues' ability to view them as separate entities over the course their time at the university, which was a challenge upon their arrival:

...when we first got [to the university] I think people did think that we were going to vote the same way on some issues. I remember a colleague, the first time [her husband's name] and I came down on very different sides of an issue and a colleague said, "Oh my goodness. There's trouble in paradise." They are voting differently. And we were just like God, that's stupid but whatever.

Her colleague's comment carried with it not only a direct reference to their personal relationship when it was not relevant to the issue at hand, but also the implicit expectation that they would be a "power play unit" by voting uniformly during faculty decision-

making processes. Establishing distinct voices during their early time at the university aided in their departmental colleagues engaging them as separate entities throughout the arc of their time there, but his service as chair revealed some faculty members' biases about their professionalism as a couple and caused her frustration that led her to disengage from the broader faculty community.

The third female faculty partner whose partner served as chair expressed similar concerns about them not wanting to be perceived as the “enforcer” of each other's opinions in the department and shared an example of not wanting to be perceived as “ganging up” in hiring decisions. She also shared how his service as chair made her colleagues resistant to her serving in an administrative position, and raised a broader point about the vulnerability of being a faculty partner. In response to a question about how being a partner in an academic couple influences her relationships and interactions with faculty colleagues, she commented:

I feel like people have always, there's this tension between, you're just always aware of it. I'm not quite sure how to articulate it, but you know, [her husband's name] was chair for a while and so people couldn't just come to me and complain about the chair the way they might complain to somebody else about the chair. And we needed a new [department-level position] while he was still chair and I was the logical person to do it, but somebody said, “Oh, I don't think that would be good for him to be chair and her to be [department-level position] at the same time. That might pose some sort of conflict of interest” or something like that.

Her example of colleagues not coming to her to complain about the chair like they would to somebody else points to how his service as chair affected her camaraderie with colleagues, in this case the way they engaged with her. Further, she described the position she was willing to take on in service of the department as “not exactly a fun job” and described the informality of the selection process for it. While there was no written policy

that one partner could not concurrently serve in this position while the other was department chair and she viewed herself as the “logical person” for it, resistance from colleagues rooted in her partner being chair led her to not take it on.

The point she raised about faculty partner vulnerability was with respect to her worries about colleagues’ retaliation against her for his actions as chair. Unlike the other female faculty partners, she had not yet attained tenure when he took on the chair role, and spoke of not wanting him to become chair until after she got it. She elaborated on her concerns when he took on the role:

...as chair, I don’t want to say you fight with people or you make enemies, but people get mad at you, because not every answer is yes, and so those things could still come back to haunt me when I come up for [tenure and promotion], so there are all kinds of complications. I guess if you’re at exactly the same career stage, maybe not, and maybe once you’re all the way through to full, but there is definitely a tendency for people to get mad at one and take it out on the other.

She and her partner both noted that this weighed on him during his service as chair but that it ultimately was not something they were aware affected how faculty engaged with or voted about her. Nonetheless, the potential for retaliation against one partner for the actions of the other is a concern for couples in which at least one has not attained full professor, and relevant for how faculty partners cultivate and maintain relationships with colleagues more generally. Some participants reported that they interact with colleagues with added care because they do not want their relationships to negatively impact their partner, and this dynamic is magnified when one partner is in an administrative role, such as department chair, due to the increased opportunities for disagreement that being in such a position entails (Berdrow, 2010). Her partner did, in fact, cite minor examples of retaliation from staff who were upset with him, which played out in them not answering

her emails or helping her with requests. He noted that they did not confront the staff and just let it go.

He and the other male faculty partners who had served as chair noted the sensitivity and attention they gave to abiding by policies and navigating issues related to their partners while in these positions. One highlighted the fact that in addition to not showing biases or preferences towards his partner, he also had to be careful to not show bias against her, and that they each had to be tactful in situations that required his advocacy for her, including situations that would be normal for any other faculty member:

Sometimes it has been tricky for her to handle things in which it required the boss's intervention, knowing that the boss is her husband, right?... I mean suppose that there is a travel reimbursement that there is some issue with that and she mentions that. Of course, it doesn't matter that she's my wife. I mean it could be anybody. I go and intervene, but I have to be careful that it is not [perceived] that I'm intervening just because she's my wife....

In addition to such issues and the challenges female faculty partners had in being seen as distinct from their partners when they were chairs, partners also cited the emotional toll one being in a politicized administrative position exacted on both of them.

A male partner reflected:

When you are a leader in an academic organization from time to time you...see the ugly side [of people and they] become unhappy with you and when your [partner] has to see that it causes them a certain amount of consternation that you wish they didn't have to go through...it's kind of different than if you come home from work and you say "Well, I had a personally tough day" and the person you live with commiserates with you...when you work in the same organization...it's not just like "The department chair is getting a lot of grief." It's like "My [partner] is getting all of this grief" and you feel it kind of differently.

He noted that the period of time he served as department chair was the most difficult time he has experienced with respect to being in a faculty couple at the same institution, and

this was directly related to the stress she was feeling because of the criticism he was receiving as chair. This example is representative of the broader idea, reflected in participants' narratives, that the emotional toll associated with the challenges of being a faculty couple, which frequently play out along gendered lines (Blaser, 2008), is often not felt in isolation by one partner but affect both.

The fact that issues arise for faculty couples, be they the stigma associated with being a partner hire, concerns about influence within a department, or challenges when one is an administrator, does not necessarily mean that couples should not pursue these positions. What is striking in these findings, however, is how couples often felt blindsided by their colleagues' concerns and that there was rarely open dialogue about what employing a couple might mean for an academic unit. Administrators should anticipate issues that might arise, and be prepared to work collaboratively with couples and their colleagues to address them, and couples should be proactive in establishing separate professional identities. Given the variable nature of interpersonal relationships and intradepartmental competition for resources, issues will inevitably arise, but policies and practices can be enacted that help ensure colleagues of the fairness of processes (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), and an understanding that couples generally appreciate being viewed and interacted with as individual scholars can help promote positive work environments.

## Navigating the Institution Together

“People think of faculty members as just being in the classroom. But our personal lives and our intimate lives impact so much of what our potential is and what we can do and what the possibilities are.” – Couple3\_f

While being a faculty couple at the same university can present challenges that were explored in the Partner Hire Stigma section, couples described several ways in which they benefit from their employment together. Beyond practical benefits such as dual-career hiring facilitating the employment of both partners, the convenience of being in the same geographic location, and greater ease of commuting and coordinating scheduling (Blaser, 2008; Ferber & Loeb, 1997), couples also described how being together allows them to support each other within the university context and makes them feel more invested in their campuses. Their support for one another manifests in a range of ways, which are organized here into three thematic sections: *Institutional Understanding*, *Strength in Numbers*, and *Supporting Students*.

### *Institutional Understanding*

Couples work with one another to interpret institutional structures, policies, and situations that take place within their university contexts. In addition to couples who are in the same department, who are able to debrief regular activities such as departmental meetings, couples in different academic units and schools also described how they work through understanding university issues together. Couple5\_f and Couple5\_m are in different schools and gave examples of the types of issues they discuss with one another:

Couple5\_m: ...there's a spectrum [of conversations]...so it could be from, “Hey, what do you think about this grant opportunity that's come up through a particular kind of program in the institution?” “Do you know the director of that program?” “What's your sense of the arc of that program and their commitments? Is it worth my time?”...there's that kind of stuff, and then of course, it goes to the other end



of like, as you say, real policy kinds of decisions and what is the role for both of us individually in terms of our faculty role in issues like governance?

Couple5\_f: But things like that, like, “How do you interpret that?” “What do you think of that?” “Should we go to the protest?”

Couple5\_m: “What’s the role of faculty governance?”

Couple5\_f: “What’s your knowledge about so and so on the faculty, the senate? You were present when they said something and something,” and then we share knowledge about that.

Couple5\_f and Couple5\_m gave specific examples of major changes that have occurred within their university, such as restructuring, and discussed how they rely on one another to make sense of leadership actions that are consequential to the academic direction of the institution.

For some of the couples in which one partner took on an administrative position, their partner described learning more about how their university functions than they would have known otherwise. Gaining a greater understanding of their institution’s bureaucracy allows them to better understand the various units that broker deals, and the interests guiding decisions. With this contextual knowledge, they are able to process decisions and changes affecting them, their colleagues, and students. This was especially salient for partners who were at a lower rank than their administrative partners and described how given their rank they were more focused on fulfilling faculty responsibilities that weigh heavily in tenure and promotion than investing energy in engaging with their university’s decision-making bodies. In having discussions with their administrative partners about their work, they gained a broader perspective on the university without having to expend the extra energy that it would take to grasp the workings of the institution alone.

More junior partners also learned from their partners about how to navigate tenure. This occurred through being able to observe their partners going through tenure procedures before them, as well as getting their advice on preparing for these processes. The kinds of advice they received from their partners mirrored what might be expected from a senior faculty mentor. Partners helped them to decide which service opportunities to take on, how to establish a distinct research agenda, and how to prioritize their various professional responsibilities. This feedback was informed not only by the more senior partner's general understanding of academia, but also the nuances of their particular university and departmental contexts.

Couples with similar experience levels were also able to support one another with understanding and navigating their institutional contexts. Partners who entered the faculty ranks together noted how, though they each lacked experience, they were able to help one another along the way. Couple7\_m recalled:

We came together when we were brand new, first of all we were brand new here and we came together and we kind of had each other to get through the process, like we were learning the ropes together.... There were some hierarchies and she was understanding them, we were understanding them together.

He later described how they continue to help one another make sense of their workplace and how they are each navigating it:

What we love doing is just unpacking on our way home...there are the conversations about work that we have to make time for at home because we have to just unpack them, think through some of the things...like, "Did I make sense when I said this?" or "Should I have said something when this happened?" or "I wasn't sure how to articulate [that]."

Partners described how having an additional perspective from someone they know and trust is an advantage, though in some instances they noted how a related

disadvantage is that it can be difficult to get away from work at home. They articulated how they try to set up boundaries related to separating their work life and home life and that it is something that they grapple with on an ongoing basis. Nonetheless, couples largely described that the benefits of having a partner who was in the same institutional context to debrief with outweighed these work-life balance challenges. Couples noted how their interpretive support for one another with respect to understanding their work environment was interwoven with emotional support that helped both of them persevere.

Couple2\_m reported:

There is a version of the benefit that comes from being at the same institution, both academics but then also at the same institution for us to be even in the same departments, where you're never in a different world. You're always engaging one another, so you don't have to feel like somehow you're drifting apart or you're experiencing something you can't even in any way translate to someone who doesn't know the academy or doesn't know your field. And there's a benefit to not having to do that extra labor to get someone who you love and who loves you to even begin to wrap their head around what you're doing and that stuff I think, we know that's important but that's something, I mean we kind of take that for granted.

Couples often alluded to the advantage of having the same "language" to discuss their work and that their ability to concurrently read situations that take place within their academic units and the broader institution facilitates conversations that help each of them to process and strategize. Further, their collective interpretations of situations were often attuned to racialized and gendered dynamics. Men noted how they became more aware of issues of gender equity in the academy from hearing their partners' perspectives, and couples applied critical lenses to make sense of various situations and scenarios that they encountered. Couple5\_f reflected:

So we talk about administrators' actions and behaviors and then how different departments function and how the colleges function [and] I think we're able to

add like a critical race and settler perspective and analysis to these issues. So it's always intertwined...it's always racialized.... We're always checking out what are the racial scripts that are going on? Right, we're always talking about that as we discuss higher education. So it's another support in that way. Being able to read the microaggressions together and the macroaggressions together.

Having a partner who not only understood but also experienced forms of marginalization resulted in multilayered dimensions of support that helped couples to cope with and navigate challenges that they faced. Couples generally discussed this support as beneficial but in some instances noted how relying on one another when both were stressed proved to be challenging. Couple3\_f reported:

I think that we both bring home just the racial trauma, the intersectional trauma that we deal with at work.... We can understand what both of us go through and he's not going to obviously understand what it's like for me to be a Black woman and I'm not always going to get what it's like for him to be a Black man. But we get the overarching theme.... You walk into your door and you're looking at each other and you're depleted. You're exhausted. But you have to be able to give and love and show concern.... It's incredibly challenging. It's really hard.... So, you have to be really strategic about your love and nourishing it and nurturing it and showing up for each other.

She and other participants noted that to cope with this fatigue it was important for them to make time to have conversations that were not about work and to plan activities that were not work related, such as date nights. Setting boundaries and dedicating time to their personal lives helped them to be able to have the energy to provide work-related support to one another.

### *Strength in Numbers*

In addition to having one another to debrief and share knowledge about their institutional contexts and experiences, couples also described how it was a benefit to be able to support each other as faculty of color in predominantly White universities that lacked diversity. Their reflections on the university contexts in which they have been

employed included examples of exclusion and overt hostility towards faculty of color. Participants referred to classed and racialized norms in academia that are often implicit and alienate marginalized faculty members. They described expectations of faculty to engage in informal networking via social gatherings and events and how it can be isolating to be the only person of color there. Couple1\_f reflected on what it is like as a faculty member of color to attend these kinds of gatherings:

When you're first-generation working class African American...you just don't feel like you're a part, like you belong, because you don't. Even if people are inviting you, well, they're inviting this idea of you. And so, if you were to be your true self, they would not know what to do with that. And so, part of being a faculty member of color is of always performing. You're always performing. At least that's been my experience is the performance. Yeah. And so, it can be a pretty weighty on an everyday basis....

She and other participants noted how being able to discuss such feelings with their partner, and in some instances attend events with them, helped them to mitigate the isolation and alienation. Couple1\_f continued:

The experiences that I just described are shared experiences. We have each other to kind of talk them through and you know, we always have someone who gets it and who will try to protect us when they can. And it means that if I have to go to a dinner or [partner's name] has to go to a dinner, he doesn't have to go alone, I'll go with him, so he's not the only one...in that way we work together to support one another.

In addition to supporting each other, several couples described how they collaborate to bring together faculty of color on their campuses and support one another as a community. Couples who have become more senior often spoke of the importance of these efforts for younger generations of scholars of color, especially those from first-generation and working class backgrounds. Couple10\_f recalled the importance of communities of color for her and Couple10\_m:

When we were at [first institution], we had to create a community out of self-preservation, like to be in this very conservative space, in a very White institution, all of these things, like creating that community of folks who were like-minded people, who looked like us was really important. Coming here, some of those things are still true. We're still in a predominantly White community, but where we were and are in our careers coming into [second institution] is different. So understanding how important that community of fellowship was for us early in our careers at [first institution] and how we really benefited from the wisdom, especially of some of our senior colleagues. Now, here we are as senior colleagues to a lot of really young scholars who are just coming through. So we have tried to cultivate that environment for them. We are always having social events at our house, people will just stop through.... Just feeling like we're...like a place of safety in this institution that in so many ways does not treat us fairly.

Though he and Couple7\_f are earlier in their trajectories, Couple7\_m also pointed to the role that they play in bringing together scholars of color:

We have a pretty strong group of scholars of color who will get together all the time.... We know there is more to us beyond the work we do here and we check up on each other as we're going through tenure, as we're going through review. I feel like the home that we have created is not just for us, our home is also a space for these colleagues that we have here and our faculty friends and that's been really important to us...we are about creating families beyond our given families.... Our home has typically been a space where people congregate and people get together and that for us was an important thing, not just for our colleagues but also for our students to have a space that looked different from what we typically saw in academia.

They and other couples noted how, by being together, they are able to leverage their respective networks towards efforts to bring together scholars of color at their institution and work for the benefit of their colleagues. These efforts have included informal gatherings as well as forums and academic convenings of interest to communities of color. Couples in different departments and schools also described how they benefited from being able to connect, via their partner, with communities of color in spheres of the university that they might not otherwise interact with. Facilitating connections among faculty of color helped couples and their colleagues to persevere in highly racialized

academic environments, and they are better equipped to build these communities as a faculty couple at the same institution. Further, couples alluded to these efforts giving them a greater sense of collective purpose at their university.

### *Supporting Students*

Couples described a range of ways in which being employed at the same institution helped each of them to better support students. Participants described how they give each other general advice on teaching strategies, and in instances when they share students, are able to give specific insights on facilitating their learning. Couple5\_f reflected:

We don't share grades or anything like that but...sometimes we do touch notes if we do have the same student in the class. Just if a student needed help in something, or in one of our classes he's not doing well, "What do you know about the student that can help me understand where they're at, what they're going through or what they need?".... So sometimes we'll help each other understand what a student is all about.... I'm always curious as to which students are taking his classes. And that helps me with my teaching to know what it is that students like and understand or what topics or themes or issues they're drawn to. So we do share a lot about students and about teaching. Just, "What activities did you do today or what did you read today and how'd the students take it?" and so that's always fun to share that.

A few of the couples have had opportunities to co-teach and shared how positive their experiences had been. Couple9\_m reported:

...we get a chance to teach classes together which is great. We get a chance to share a bunch of students which is also great. We get a chance to get things like advice on teaching where the advice is not generic as it might be if you're at two different institutions but highly specific because we know the students.

Couples noted that they did not completely agree on teaching strategies and materials but that they benefited from sharing their ideas with one another. Couple2\_m co-taught with his partner and recalled:

People would tease us when we said we were going to start teaching because they were like, “uh oh, be careful. Make sure your marriage is strong enough for that.” But we had a great time. And we do think differently about the material and I think we have enough confidence in our connectedness that we can express those differences in the context of students also engaging and feel good about it, and feel like it was useful for them and for us.

Couples of color who are in the same field also reported how, by matriculating students of color as doctoral advisees, they had a significant impact on populating their departments with graduate students of color. They described their intentionality in creating spaces for students of color to feel supported as well as how they help one another’s students and work to develop a sense of community among their advisees.

Couple2 reported:

Couple2\_f: ...it feels like we have a little stable. We have them over sometimes...all of our students. And they see themselves as “[his name] and [her name]” students, I think. And others outside recognize them as “[his name] and [her name]” or “[her name] and [his name] students.... There aren’t that many Black [their field specialists].... People know where people are coming from. They know you intellectually, I think. We’ve mentored a lot so I think they can appreciate that and that carries over to the lure of the unit....

Couple2\_m: ...I do think we also approach mentoring differently and I think students appreciate that they can have two of us and be in the same unit but also get such different kinds of feedback.

Couple2\_f: They know who to call for what. Just like our kids know who to call for what.

Couple2\_m: And no advisor is kind of a one-stop shop for everything and so I think we, between us, for the students who have both of us, I think we cover more of the functions together in ways that can be useful.

Other couples also noted how their mentoring strengths complemented one another. Couples noted how they caution students not to select both of them to serve on their dissertation committees under the assumption that they would agree. They reported that they often disagree with one another while providing feedback during advisees’ oral



proposal and dissertation defenses, but that they agree to serve on committees together if their respective areas of expertise could be useful for the study.

Beyond teaching and advising, several couples of color spoke of how students of color seemed to very much appreciate having them at their institution and looked up to them as role models. They described how this form of support was both aspirational because of what they represent, as well as tangible in that they often answer students' questions about what it is like to be in an academic couple and how they have navigated the academy together. Couple3\_f reflected on how students perceive her and her husband:

I think for [students of color], it's nice for them to see that, A, there are faculty of color and B, there are faculty of color that are in committed relationships and are doing the thing. So, for them, it's like there's a way in which they can see perhaps themselves or feel proud or whatever when they see just the folks and scholars who are partnered up, because so much of academia is, a lot of folks are single and if they're not single oftentimes you don't see their partner. So, you don't really get to see them in a family dynamic situation. But when you're a couple, you oftentimes go to events together, people see that, and that becomes meaningful.

Other participants gave examples of students directly sharing these views with them, such as by calling them "the Black love couple" or saying that they are "hashtag goals."

Couples described being happy that they were perceived in that light and welcoming that family dynamic by hosting students and going to events together. Couple7\_f described how students work alongside her and her husband and enjoy seeing their professional and personal sides:

I think graduate students, particularly [doctoral] students have been very gracious and supportive. We work together. Sometimes we collect data together, we write together, we present together, and the students are in the mix. They come to our home, they know who we are together.... They made comments...like, "We really appreciate seeing your family. This is something that's valued here, and we like

that. We want to see, we want professors to feel like people. So it helps to have that, that we see your [family] and you work together.”

Couple1\_m shared his thoughts on how students typically perceive faculty and how seeing a faculty couple shifts their perspectives:

I think that there are a lot of folks, particularly students of color, who like the fact that we're academics, but we actually have lives, or so we think, outside of that. So, I think that makes us and faculty more generally three-dimensional, because I don't know that students always think about how faculty live outside of the university. I think some of them might, if they care to think about it, might think that at the end of the day we kind of climb into a file cabinet until the next day, and they don't always get to think about us as three-dimensional human beings who are husbands or wives or partners, parents and the like. And we're a couple that, when it's appropriate, we would bring our children to events or what have you, and I think people can see themselves in their own families and can recognize that. I think for a lot of students there are ways that even you and I have probably forgotten, what we do can feel very distant from them, and I think seeing an academic couple can have a leveling effect where it's like “Okay, you're parenting, so that must mean you go to the grocery store, that you do the normal things.”

Couple1\_m and other participants were attentive to what their presence as a faculty couple of color represents in university contexts with little racial diversity and often hostile climates for racially and ethnically underrepresented faculty, staff and students. Couples emphasized their impact with students, and for students of color, especially those who are from first-generation and low-income backgrounds, the benefits of seeing and interacting with couples manifest on multiple levels. These students are often from close-knit racial/ethnic communities, so seeing a couple of color in prominent positions within a university can make them feel more connected to the university community (Museus, 2014). For students from low-income backgrounds, these couples can represent role models for socioeconomic mobility. For all students and other members of university communities, they can also represent models of loving

relationships in which partners are supportive of one another's careers and collaborate to serve others. In serving as role models for students, couples benefit the students while becoming more invested and connected with their university communities. Couples' awareness of their unique positionality within these contexts makes their employment more fulfilling and provides greater meaning to their careers.

### **Retention & Transitions**

"Academia is a small world. Everybody knows we're married and they know they have to have two positions if they're going to move us. That's why everybody in our business is always listening for divorces. 'Oh, so and so got divorced, we want to recruit them.'"

– Couple8\_f

As was evident in the Initial Hiring as a Couple section, faculty couple career decisions are driven by a range of factors including intellectual fit, institutional type, and geographic and quality of life considerations. While some of these factors are fixed and outside of institutions' control (O'Meara, Lounder, & Campbell, 2014), that section also sheds light on how administrators can play a pivotal role in couples' decision-making processes. Counter to beliefs about the immobility of faculty couples (Schiebinger et al., 2008), four couples in the study have changed institutions, and eight have had dual-career hire offers. This is within a sample that had three early-career couples, who are less likely, as newer faculty pursuing tenure, to seek new appointments or be recruited. Only one of the eight mid-senior level couples had not sought outside offers or been recruited, but they were confident and had records that suggested that they could move if they desired to.

In this section, I look at couples who have faced retention and transition decisions and zoom in on factors that have guided them, with particular attention to how

institutional actions and inactions have influenced their decisions. In addition to their examples, I include general insights from various participants on these processes. First, I cover the four couples who have transitioned institutions, and subsequently I review couples who have been retained.

### *Transitions*

The four couples that changed institutions were all Black couples and include two couples who were discussed in the Partner Hire Stigma section. For Couple10\_f and Couple10\_m, their decision to depart was primarily driven by the negative experiences Couple10\_f was having based on being a partner hire, while the negative treatment Couple9\_f experienced was a key contributing factor to her and Couple9\_m's decision to leave, which was also based on unhappiness with the geographic location in which the institution was situated.

Notably, both couples had multiple options of institutions that were willing to hire them during the application cycle in which they took new positions. Both couples spoke of the contrast in their treatment during the recruitment processes to the institution they chose than with what they had experienced at the institutions they were leaving. There was an open listing at the institution that Couple9\_m was encouraged to apply for and he remarked that the process was "180 degrees different" than at the previous institution, with respect to how Couple9\_f had been given much less attention, and not been cared for during her campus visit. While they were unaware of a specific dual-career hiring policy at the university, they knew that they had hired other couples, and they had disciplinary colleagues at the institution who made the case to the broader faculty about why they should hire them. In addition to that offer, they received an offer from another

institution and cited the geographic location of the institution they chose as a significant determining factor.

After a few years of seeking a dual-career offer, Couple10\_f managed to attain three dual-career offers in addition to a solo offer that was in a commutable distance from their institution and would have allowed her husband to remain employed there. While reluctant to go on the fourth visit because of her other offers, that institution actually managed to turn around the partner hire offer for her husband faster than the first two. This impressed the couple and the positions at that institution were also better in terms of intellectual fit as the other partner hire offers for him were outside of his core discipline. Couple10\_f reflected on their recruitment to this institution:

Of the universities where we've worked, but also the universities where we've tried to negotiate partner hires in the interim, it has been the best example of us both feeling validated through the process, like not one of us is a trailing spouse. Like that both of us are valued for who we are and what we do, and that has mattered a lot too.... I think we had some particular factors, [Couple10\_m] being known to the [his discipline] department here, all those kinds of things that facilitated things for us. But...if they want to do the right thing, they have the resources to be able to do it.

Though they are in different disciplines and were hired into different departments, they were able to make this dual-career offer work and credit Couple10\_m's department's prior familiarity with him. Similar to Couple9\_m and Couple9\_f, these kinds of personal connections increase the likelihood that dual-career offers will be approved by hiring departments. In her individual interview, Couple10\_f elaborated on strengths in how the institution approached their hiring:

In our hiring process at [their second institution], although they started connected obviously through my position, they were really good about separating. I had nothing to do with how he was negotiating his contract and vice versa. Like they were very good about treating us as independent scholars as they should. That

wasn't necessarily the case at [their first institution], but it was a little bit like we were much earlier in our careers and there was definitely a push from [his] department to [school that eventually hired her] to try to figure something out for me. The [school] was not like immediately receptive to the partner hire thing...it did feel a little bit like we were more connected there because of these things.

Her appreciation for the second institution engaging them as separate scholars is evident in this quote, and she alluded to them being more established academics at that point in their career as a factor that allowed for a smoother partner hiring process, which was followed by better professional experiences for them at this institution.

Of note, one of the dual-career offers she received was from a public university that, though she was the first hire, would have hired her husband into a more prominent university in the state's system, with a far higher salary. Their reflections on this offer suggested their discomfort with him having a higher status and higher paying position and seemed to be undergirded by a broader awareness of gender equity issues in the professoriate. One other couple in the study, also a Black couple, described receiving a public two institution partner hire offer as well, where one position was from a more prominent university in the system, and they expressed similar discomfort. The female partner recalled:

...one of us would've been at a university that would have had much more status.... We were very cautious about that, and what we imagined was that one of us shouldn't be at a university that had different status, because we felt like that would in the long run probably create some tension, and so especially when we think about how gender plays out.

This couple related their wariness about being placed at universities of unequal status to the repercussions it might have on their relationship and alluded to their awareness of broader gender inequities in the professoriate as influencing how they assessed offers. In addition to external offers that seemed uneven along markers such as salary and

university status, couples also declined offers that disadvantaged female partners in terms of tenure. These included female partners who had earned tenure and were being offered non-tenured positions, as well as those who presumed that their path to tenure would be difficult based on cues they picked up during the recruitment process. One female partner reported:

They had an amazing position for [husband's name] and they had a tenure-track position for me. I would have been [an assistant professor] which I had a problem with because I was [close to going up for associate] but they had someone in mind that they wanted and there was at least one person who was seemed to be very resentful in the interview process of my being brought on...this person who seemed to feel this way was also going to be the person who probably was going to have a lot to do with whether I got tenure. And so [husband's name] and I decided...it probably wasn't going to be a good situation.

This couple and others, particularly those who also navigated processes when partners had not yet both become full professors, placed high value on tenure considerations and declined offers that did not point to long-term security for both of them.

The other two couples that changed institutions, Couple1 and Couple2, did not cite negative experiences associated with being a faculty couple as a contributing factor to leaving. Couple1 was relatively content at the institution they departed and had not anticipated that they would leave. Couple1\_m was invited for a short-term visiting professorship at the institution that ended up hiring them. When it became clear during his visiting professorship that they wanted to recruit him for a full-time position, he said he was interested but that they would need to hire his partner as well. She was more senior than he was and he recalled that the recruiting administrators joked with him after her visit, saying "You can stay at [their previous institution]. We'll just take her." Couple1\_m continued "So it was good because people saw that we were two individuals

who would bring value to the university.” In addition to each of them being affirmed by this recruiting university, they ultimately decided to move there largely because of the prospect of joining the community of Black faculty at the institution and because there were less volatile campus politics than at their institution.

The fourth couple that has changed institutions, Couple2, was also relatively content at the institution they left but in their case had planned on moving on at some point for geographic and family considerations. During an application cycle while they were assistant professors, Couple2\_m applied for positions and they were able to earn three external dual-career offers. They leveraged these offers to attain tenure early because their institution was trying to retain them. They had each given job talks at all three of the recruiting universities and the male partner recalled how well each of the universities interacted with them:

...I will say that one of the things that I think was really important at the time was that when we were doing all of this negotiating [at the recruiting universities], they were very purposeful about making it clear to us that they weren't more interested in one than the other. I think they know how sensitive people can be about that...it wasn't in this way that seemed so obvious, but I think you never got the sense that somehow they were showing their hand and you know so that felt good to us too, I think it made it less complicated.

His reference to the tactful manner with which the universities engaged them making the process “less complicated” suggests that uneven treatment during recruitment would have been influential in how they considered each offer. Like Couple1, they were also interested in joining a Black intellectual community and two of the offers were immediately appealing in that respect. They were least familiar with the faculty at the institution they eventually chose, but after learning more about collaborative possibilities



at that institution, their geographic and family considerations made it edge out the competing offers.

In choosing institutions to transition to, couples' mutual treatment by institutions during the recruitment process informed their decision-making processes. Negative treatment of the female partner played a significant role in Couple10 and Couple9's decisions to leave their institutions, and they each highlighted the contrast between their former institutions and the ones they selected. Couple1 likely would not have left their former institution had the recruiting university not affirmed the female partner, as they had not been seeking a transition to a new institution. Couple2 was attuned to how the three recruiting universities interacted with each of them, and the fact that all of the universities were tactful meant that their decision could come down to consideration of other factors. Affirmation for each partner informs transition decisions, and proves to be a salient factor that is within institutions' control and guides couples' choices when they are encountered with job offers.

### *Retention*

All of the four couples that have moved institutions have also declined dual-career offers during their careers, as have four other couples in the study. These offers have mostly been via direct recruitment, as participants noted that it is tricky as senior scholars to go out on the job market, especially when they have administrative roles. Participants described how they thought through these offers together, and in their reflections it became clear that their joint satisfaction was a more important factor in their decision-making processes than salary considerations. Their articulations of joint satisfaction dealt primarily with intellectual fit and position rank, and they rejected offers that were

mismatched on either criterion. The male partner in a couple that has declined several dual-career offers from other AAU universities explained how he and his partner deliberate these decisions:

...it's been a combination of being at institutions where in some instances it would've been a better intellectual fit for one of us versus the other. Whereas [current institution] feels like it's good for both of us. So, one place...would've been perfect for the kind of work I do. But it wouldn't've been as good for [his partner's name].... So, it's kind of one of the things, this is the place where, it can work in ways that are beneficial to both of us and doesn't seem a disadvantage [to] either one of us as scholars. I think that's been our thing.

While the couples that moved found positions that were collectively better for them, in most cases the offers couples received were not more equitable or appealing than their current positions. In a few instances, male partners were recruited at their tenure rank while their partners, who were also tenured, were offered non-tenured positions. While men were generally more senior than their partners, which is consistent with overall trends among academic couples (Schiebinger et al., 2008), this occurred also in an instance when the female partner was the more senior faculty member, and in no instance did men report receiving offers in which their rank would not be accepted. In each of these cases the couples declined the offer and noted that aspect as the decisive factor. Such inequities were also prevalent in Blaser's (2008) study, as she noted that "regardless of which member of the couple was more established, the women would receive offers that were worse than those that were being made to their partners" (p. 151). These findings support Rivera's (2017) conclusion that "the 'two-body problem' is a gendered phenomenon embedded in cultural stereotypes and organizational practices that can disadvantage women in academic hiring" (p. 1111).

Unless couples are having negative experiences at their institutions or have compelling personal reasons to move, they are more likely to remain, especially at the senior level. Though the sample had a notable amount of mobility and potential offers, a few couples did point to how their faculty couple status restricts their respective career options. Participants spoke about how difficult it is to attain two tenure-track faculty positions in the same location, and referred to individual sacrifices they have made with respect to institutional and geographic preferences in order to be employed at the same institution. They ultimately prioritize being able to physically be in the same location over being employed at institutions in different regions, even if positions at two geographically disparate universities might be more aligned with their ideal characteristics for an academic appointment.

Beyond the difficulty of attaining two faculty positions, couples spoke about the demands of the application process itself, and how that has played a large role in discouraging them from pursuing positions. One couple reported:

Male: The thing is the spousal consideration is certainly, it's hard and it limits career-wise, because now I would not entertain anything, unless it includes a spousal consideration. The same with her. We just would not, and so people just don't approach, so there is a huge penalty.

Female: We basically have never applied for anything...it's just so exhausting, the prospect of applying for things, and both of us getting an offer is just...

Male: But if you are by yourself, you might pursue it to see where it goes, but when you are a career couple...

Female: You both have to put together job talks...however many hours of effort there is to try to get a job, that's multiplied by two in your household.... They'll email one or both, either of us usually, more often [husband's name]...he'll get an invitation to apply.... He shows these emails to me, and I'm like "Oh, you'll get me out of [location of university] in a casket." I'm like "No, I don't want to move.

I don't care how much money it is. The kids are in...school. Forget it." and then the idea of doing all this work, just to get a raise, to get a bigger raise, it's hard.

Male: The thing is it is a joint decision when you think about it, and it's not just your income that you care about. It's a joint income...

Female: And joint satisfaction.

Male: Joint satisfaction, everything.

While this couple has been recruited and declined dual-career offers, they still consider their couple status as a limitation to their mobility. In addition to the energy that application processes entail, family considerations such as children also disincentivize couples from applying to positions and transitioning to other institutions. The male partner in the couple that has not received dual-career offers reflected on their orientation toward not seeking positions:

We certainly could probably do more if we wanted to contact deans and work hard to leave, but again, that's never been our style. Kind of, if you want us you'll find us. We're not hard to find if you're really interested. And we're just at a different point also in our lives where there would have to be a really compelling reason for us to leave. Even beyond money, although money helps...but there are other reasons, places where you'd want to live, how your children will be educated, all those things, so it becomes difficult. So we're not in any way settling.

By mentioning their children's education and being at a point in their lives where there would have to be "a really compelling reason" to leave, he sheds light on the centrality of family in shaping how they think about their retention at the institution. His partner described how they would not consider offers that did not include both of them even if an offer was for a desirable position:

If someone offered me something that would cause a tension, cause problems for me and [partner's name], it's not happening.... If someone were like, we want to...bring you here in this position as an endowed professor, but we wouldn't be able to get [partner's name] a position, we wouldn't take the job. We wouldn't do

that. We wouldn't do something that would literally put us in different kinds of situations where he would have fundamentally more capital than me, or vice versa.

Their prioritization of family means that, while they have not ruled out the possibility of transitioning in the future, their recruitment would require two positions of similar status in a geographic location more favorable than their current university, with educational opportunities for their children that are as good or better than what is currently available to them.

These kinds of considerations are factored into decision-making processes that also take into account university's efforts to retain, and couples also discussed ways in which their institutions have shown they value them. Participants who have been retained referred to how administrators seem to generally be aware that one partner's unhappiness could lead to the couple's departure and work to affirm them. A partner in a couple that has been retained after receiving multiple dual-career offers described the thoughtfulness with which their institution interacts with them:

Folks often think about us as a pair, and so they're at least cognizant of the fact that if they're asking one of us to do something, you know they aren't going to ask us both to be on the same committee or anything like that. And I think they just then generally show a mindfulness about the fact that we're both sort of faculty working full-time as hard as we can in service to the university and our students and our colleagues but that we're also full-time parents. And it seems like it's been a very supportive place that also has been trying to signal to us...that they value both of us, not just one of us, which is sometimes a hard thing to do.

While joint satisfaction weighed heavily in career decisions and the opportunity for higher salaries was not enough to lure couples to move, a few couples who have received external offers noted how counteroffers played a role in retaining them. Dual-hire offers spurred by one partner's search or direct recruitment often yielded salary

increases for both partners. Couples generally did not share the specifics of their offers but alluded to both getting pay bumps. In one instance, the male partner described, in his individual interview, how his partner got an external offer and the institution gave him a greater raise than what they gave her in order to retain them:

...sometimes we go and get external offers. And she gets an external offer and then they pay me more, it's a retention offer, than what she gets for stuff like that. And so some of the administrators confuse these things.... I thought it was unfair.... There's some benefits of being treated as a package because we got the two positions...but it also hurts you.... There's a trade-off.

He elaborated that they did not raise the inequity of the retention offer to administrators because of their tenure statuses and carefulness about what issues they brought to the table. While they decided to remain at the institution and in retrospect he believes the institution would have been responsive to their concerns, the inequity of the counteroffer stood out as “unfair.” His reflection on this incident suggested that administrators may have not been aware that they would perceive the counteroffer as problematic. Their default treatment of the couple as “a package” because of the nature of their hiring overlooked that while they are a couple and navigate career decisions together, they are also individual scholars. She was the first hire with this external offer and they felt the counteroffer should have reflected that.

Another female partner reflected broadly on how universities handle dual-career negotiations in ways that often disadvantage women:

If they're going to give you something that they think is going to benefit the household, for example, like, say, a faculty recruitment fund or something like that, they're like, “Oh. Well, you got that. So, he doesn't need it.” Or “He got that, so you don't really need it.” But I think what ends up happening is you lose that sense of individuality and I think women take a hit as a result of that because they tend to give you less...I already feel like they already give you less when you're a woman. But they're going to give you less in terms of salary or whatever when

they feel like they're negotiating a partner. They don't see you as these separate people with two separate salaries.... It's all combined together, which I don't think that they do the men's like that. So, I think in terms of just the institution, they're trying to maneuver their pockets and using the marital unit as the way to save money.

Whether the inequity in the aforementioned counteroffer was driven by rank, gender, or other factors, it was one example of an offer that left the couple feeling that the female partner was shortchanged. They remained, however the couples who had received external offers passed on taking positions that were starkly uneven, and their narratives alluded to their sensitivity to gender inequities in these decisions. Blaser (2008) noted that disparate offers in which male partners received better offers than their female partner were "particularly blatant" for couples in her study that navigated the job market before the 2000s, namely from the 1970s onward, and my participants' experiences suggest that inequitable offers for women persist (p. 151).

In addition to passing on such offers, inequitable treatment of the female partner was a significant factor that led two couples to change institutions, and couples who have been retained spoke of how each partner had suitable roles and were affirmed by their administrators. Each partner having positive experiences generally leads to their retention, unless there are compelling reasons such as geographic considerations and intellectual fit that make another institution seem more promising. Couples with school-age children discussed their children as among their foremost considerations in thinking through decisions to remain at their institutions, and senior couples note that they rarely apply for positions but are often the target of direct recruitment. The institutions that are most successful at recruiting and retaining faculty couples treat partners equitably and do not take for granted that they will remain. As Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey, & Hazelwood

(2011) argue when discussing the retention of Black professors, institutions “cannot assume that the climates in academic departments are acceptable simply because professors have not relocated to another institution”, but engage in ongoing efforts towards inclusion, and this advice is pertinent to the retention of faculty couples as well (p. 522).

### **Findings and Discussion by Research Question**

The purpose of this study was to learn from underrepresented minority (URM) faculty couples at institutions in the Association of American Universities (AAU) about their recruitment and employment in order to reveal their decision-making processes, their perceptions of their experiences as a faculty couple at the same institution, and their sources of marginalization and support. In this section, I summarize the findings by research question and elaborate on how they relate to the literature on dual-career hiring policies and academic couple experiences. The race-related findings in the study are novel given that past research has not focused on the experiences of racially/ethnically underrepresented faculty couples in predominantly White contexts (Perkins, 1997), and I also elaborate on ways in which the findings connect to diversity literatures.

1. How have URM faculty couples who attained positions at the same AAU university navigated faculty hiring processes?
  - 1a. What elements of their application and recruitment processes persuaded or dissuaded them to pursue and accept positions?

The couples in this study represented a spectrum of ways in which academic couples can approach faculty hiring processes. Participants in the same field sometimes applied for the same positions, while in certain application cycles only one partner



applied. Couples rarely had knowledge of dual-career hiring policies at the institutions they applied to, and often relied on guidance from their faculty advisors as well as other academic couples who had gone through these processes. Participants' lack of knowledge about dual-career hiring policies, even at institutions with established policies, is significant in light of past research that has focused on the prevalence of these policies and consistently recommended that institutions be transparent about their processes (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004).

Some couples described that recruiting institutions were aware from early on in the application process that both partners would need faculty positions, while in other cases they would bring up the need for a position for their partner after they received their offer. Schiebinger et al. (2008) found that only 2 percent of their respondents were "joint hires, "a known couple and are recruited together by a university—there is no first or second hire", but noted that this situation was becoming more common (p. 15). Morton & Kmec (2017) found that dual-career academic couples who reveal their dual-career status before a job offer reported more positive outcomes related to productivity and promotions than other couples. They suggest that, contrary to popular belief that applicants should wait until after they receive offers to mention their partner (Vick & Furlong, 2012), the real risk is in not revealing dual-career status prior to receiving an offer. The representation of joint hires in this study therefore contributes qualitative perspectives to these processes. The participants' experiences illustrated that sometimes institutions' awareness of their dual-career status is not intentional on their part but may be common knowledge within their field and influences their recruitment without the couple's prompting. Further, couples that are beyond the junior ranks noted how when they are

approached with job opportunities, recruiting universities most often acknowledge the need for a position for their partner early in the process.

Among couples in which one or both partners were entering the faculty ranks for the first time, those who received multiple individual offers leveraged them against each other in order to secure dual-career hires. Those in different fields sometimes noted how resistance from the department that would have fit the second hire either prevented or stalled dual-career hire offers. As with any individual scholar deliberating employment decisions, participants' choices were driven by factors such as intellectual fit, geographic location, and family considerations (O'Meara et al., 2014). What distinguishes couples' job decisions from individual job decisions is that the potential for a couple's joint satisfaction at institutions matters. They typically rejected offers that were significantly better for one partner than the other, and they pointed to the pivotal roles of administrators in making dual-career offers materialize and affirming the potential contributions of both partners. While survey-based research on academic couples has found that women are more likely than men to decline a job offer if their partner could not attain appropriate employment (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Zhang, Kmec, & Byington, 2019), and Jorgenson's (2016) qualitative study alluded to members of academic couples considering the implications of offers for their partner, this study sheds light on how couples assess offers and articulate their attention to each partner's offers with respect to salary, status, and fit, among other considerations.

Couples often reject offers in which one partner is not offered a tenure-track position or is expected to sacrifice their tenure status. They are also attuned to how they are each treated during campus visits and described instances in which they ruled out

options where it was clear that one partner would be valued more than the other. Cues that they picked up on included differential degrees of attention paid to each partner during their visits (e.g., being escorted around campus or handed a map) and the ways in which interviewing faculty and administrators spoke to partners that would become second hires. In instances where a discrepancy in treatment was apparent during hiring processes, it often foreshadowed challenges that partners would face, and these couples departed for other institutions. While past research on academic couples has given attention to how partner hires are sometimes treated negatively (Blaser, 2008; Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), this work has largely focused on their treatment post-hiring. This study's attention to treatment during recruitment processes helps to provide a more holistic perspective on ways in which academic couples, particularly female partners, are stigmatized, and how their treatment informs their decisions on employment offers.

This study also contributes to our understanding of how academic couples assess retention offers, which is an area that has largely been unexplored in this body of literature. Participants' sequential entry into the academy often included failed retention offers for the partner who was already a faculty member. They expressed frustration that their institution dragged their feet in making an offer to their partners, and alluded to potential racialized deficit perspectives that made administrators and faculty undervalue and overlook the potential contributions of their partner. This is a finding that contributes a new dimension to work on the devaluation of scholars of color and racism in faculty hiring (Gasman, forthcoming; O'Meara et al., 2018), because it points to how such biases hinder academic couples of color as they navigate the academic labor market as a unit.

Institutions eventually made partner hire offers in order to retain these participants after they had garnered external dual-career offers, but couples passed on what they perceived to be last-minute retention offers. They expressed reluctance for the partner who was entering the faculty ranks to take a position that was being offered in a last-minute attempt to retain their partner, rather than because of their own scholarly merit and potential. Couples sometimes received and accepted offers in which the partner who was newly becoming a faculty member was the primary hire.

After their initial employment as a couple at the same institution, couples generally remain unless they are having negative experiences or are recruited to more ideal geographic locations. Only one couple in this study made a move that was primarily driven by other reasons, which included two positions that were compelling intellectual fits for both of them. Senior couples, especially those in which one partner had taken on an administrative position, expressed that they rarely applied to positions, which is consistent with Zhou and Volkwein's (2004) finding that seniority reduces individual faculty members' intention to depart. Most of the offers that couples received were the result of direct recruitment. In assessing these offers, they considered their potential joint satisfaction and often leveraged these offers to each get raises from their institution. While academic couple research has considered how being in a couple influences the salaries of male and female partners and produced conflicting results (Astin & Milem, 1997; Schiebinger et al., 2008), this study points to the role of external offers and counteroffers in facilitating raises for both partners. The potential for higher salaries at other institutions was not enough to sway couples to transition, and their respective

intellectual fit as well as geographic location and family considerations were the factors primarily driving their decisions to remain or change universities.

2. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be the advantages of their employment at the same institution?

Participants described a range of advantages to being an academic couple at the same university. Dual-career hiring prompted each of them to be employed, and they acknowledged their privilege in being in the same geographic location, as they were aware that many couples have commuting relationships. Practical advantages included the convenience of commuting to and from work together as well as coordinating schedules, and their proximity to one another allowed them to more easily manage unexpected circumstances that arise, such as changes in childcare plans for their children. These practical advantages are consistent with those mentioned in other academic couple literature (Blaser, 2008; Ferber & Loeb, 1997).

In addition to practical advantages, couples noted benefits including having the ability to interpret their work environments together, having solidarity with one another as underrepresented faculty, and being able to better support students. Participants who were in different departments noted how they interpreted university-wide events and policies, while those in the same department were able to discuss meetings and intradepartmental dynamics together. Couples described how it was beneficial to have an additional firsthand perspective on work situations. Those in separate fields reported that it was helpful to share with each other general knowledge on the workings of academia and their experiences with colleagues and administrators. Couples in the same academic units were better able to support each other with preparing for processes such as tenure

and promotion, especially when one partner was of higher rank and had already gone through it. Other studies have documented general benefits of couples' ability to support each other in navigating their institutions and academia more broadly (Baker, 2004; Blaser, 2008), however my findings are unique because participants also described how they supported one another with respect to navigating racialized and classed institutional norms.

Given their employment at institutions that lacked high levels of faculty diversity (Tierney & Sallee, 2008), couples of color noted how valuable it was to have each other to relate to in these contexts. They were able to share similar experiences that they had, while also noting the gendered ways in which the forms of marginalization they faced diverged (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). In addition to discussing and processing these experiences with one another, they found their ability to attend campus social gatherings together to be an advantage as it prevented them from feeling as alienated and isolated as they might be if they had to attend alone and were the only person of color (Smith & Calasanti, 2005).

While academic couple literature has documented ways in which faculty couples benefit from sharing professional networks (Astin & Milem, 1997; Ferber & Loeb, 1997; Schiebinger et al., 2008), this study highlights how this benefit manifests differently for couples of color. Couples' presence as two faculty members of color within their institutional contexts prompted several partners to combine forces in bringing together faculty of color at their universities. They hosted and organized social gatherings, and leveraged their networks in order to convene campus events and conferences of interest to communities of color. Their ability to use their positions together to serve others

provided an additional sense of fulfillment to their careers, and they placed great value on mentoring younger faculty of color.

Participants also described how being employed at the same institution helped each of them to better support students. They were able to advise one another on teaching strategies, as any academic couple might be able to, but also had the additional benefit of being able to provide specific insights on ways to connect with particular students. A few couples were able to co-teach and described how they enjoyed being able to lead classes together and felt that students also enjoyed the unique opportunity to be taught by a faculty couple.

Several couples emphasized how students, especially students of color, appreciate having them at their institutions and view them as role models. Students express to them how they enjoy seeing a couple of color be successful and assist one another. This form of support for students is aspirational in that students have them as an example to strive for, and some students express interest in becoming a faculty couple to them and ask them about strategies for navigating academia with their partner. Participants also reflected on how their being a couple of color at the institution and getting to know students increases students' sense of belonging and serves to humanize faculty. Students of color often come from close-knit racial and ethnic communities, so having a faculty couple of color to look up to and interact with is particularly meaningful and contributes to their feelings of inclusion (Museus, 2014).

Participants noted how they matriculate graduate students of color and contribute significantly to diversifying the graduate population of their departments and universities. They often support one another's graduate advisees and work to foster a sense of

community for them. They described hosting students at their homes and how students noted how much they enjoyed interacting with them professionally and personally and meeting their families. Students remarked to them how interacting with them helped them to see faculty as normal people, and that they welcomed this family dynamic within institutional contexts that often feel impersonal.

3. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be the disadvantages of their employment at the same institution?

The primary disadvantages of being an academic couple at the same institution that participants described related to the stigma associated with being a partner hire and colleagues' concerns about their employment within the same academic unit. While past studies have alluded to partner hire stigma (Blaser, 2008; Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), this study centered couples' perspectives on how they experience it and how it relates to the circumstances of their hiring and particular departmental and institutional contexts. These past studies, as well as anecdotal evidence (e.g., Anonymous, 2014; Bell, 2010; Female Science Professor, 2011; Wilson, 2001) have largely focused on stigma as it relates to second hires' perceived merit and deservingness of positions, however this study elaborates on how couples are also stigmatized due to concerns about their influence within departments and when one partner takes on an administrative role.

The stigma associated with being a partner hire arose for less than half the couples in the study and was felt most heavily by women. The fact that women were more stigmatized is consistent with what past work has suggested (Blaser, 2008; Schiebinger et al., 2008), however this study had a more holistic approach to studying this topic because



the perspectives of both partners in a couple were included. Partner hire stigma occurred both in instances where partner hiring was via formal hiring practices (e.g., they did a job talk and interviews) and informal practices (e.g., they were hired after meeting administrators at a conference), as well as when partners were being hired into the same or different departments. It also occurred for partners at similar career stages and when the second hire was at a lower rank than their partner. The stigma was especially consequential for three women in the study as it was a significant factor in their departure from the institution.

These women described being alienated by their colleagues and feeling a lack of support. Being treated as second-class citizens within their academic units wore on them and one female partner recounted how she knew that having been a second hire was going to be the reason she would not get tenure at the institution. In another instance, the treatment the female partner received led her to take a position at a university an hour away, despite the inconvenience of commuting and missing out on other practical advantages associated with being at the same institution. The stress induced by these situations was also felt by their male partners and soured their perceptions of the institution.

Couples' employment within the same academic unit sometimes prompted their colleagues to be concerned about their potential influence. Partners in Blaser's (2008) study noted their suspicion that departments do not want to hire couples because of the potential for them to act as a voting bloc, and scholars have broadly alluded to these concerns (Barbee & Cunningham, 1990; Female Science Professor, 2011), however my couples shared specific experiences that confirmed related challenges. Couples referred

to being perceived as a “power play unit” or a “threat” within their departments because of their ability to act as a voting bloc and sway departmental decisions.

Participants noted that they made efforts to distinguish themselves from each other, and some, similar to participants in Blaser’s (2008) study, emphasized that they do not “act like a couple at work”, such as by not sitting together at meetings. They reported that their colleagues sometimes acted surprised and commented when they did not agree with each other in meetings, suggesting that there was an expectation that they would always be aligned on department-related issues. Couples also alluded to colleagues’ concerns about them each being rewarded, receiving accolades, or being offered leadership positions within their departments and schools. This often played out in them being disadvantaged in these realms and not being appropriately rewarded or offered positions that they merited. Past work has mentioned couple disadvantage related to salary (Blaser, 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), but these other forms of merit recognition have rarely been discussed.

In instances when one partner became chair, their partner described colleagues suggesting that they knew information privileged to the chair, played a role in their partner’s decision-making processes, and would reinforce their actions. This played out for women whose partners became chair, and these suggestions sometimes led them to disengage from meetings and full participation in their departments and schools. One couple noted that they became concerned about potential retaliation for the male’s actions as chair against the female partner, which might be carried out during her tenure and promotion process. Such concerns, as well as worries about showing favoritism and having to cope with discontent that chairs sometimes face, took an emotional toll on

couples. These findings regarding how colleagues react to one partner becoming a department chair and how couples are affected by these reactions and related stressors are largely unexplored in past work.

4. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be sources of marginalization?

Couples in the study described instances of marginalization related to being a faculty couple that manifested in the form of negative and inequitable treatment by administrators and colleagues. The strongest examples of marginalization were those of three women faculty who were second hires. For one, their inequitable treatment began as early as the campus visit, in which she was given little attention and not treated as a serious scholar. She and the other two women faculty reported being alienated and unsupported in their departments. They shared examples of administrators and colleagues making disparaging remarks and encountering a general lack of respect as a professional colleague. The stigma they experienced was persistent and played a large role in them leaving these institutions. Though directed at these women, their treatment also took an emotional toll on the women's partners, and sapped both partners of energy that could have been directed towards their various responsibilities. These findings corroborate much of what past research has suggested about how partner hires are stigmatized (Blaser, 2008; Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), and are presented in more thorough accounts than in other studies, focusing not only on instances of marginalization, but their emotional consequences and the relationship of their stigmatization with partners' decisions to transition to new institutions.

That such marginalization is derived from individual actors and is contextually dependent is evident in that each of the partners have had better experiences at other institutions, or in one case after serving as a faculty member elsewhere and returning to the institution. In that instance, her second hiring at the institution occurred via a more formal vetting process than her initial hiring, which she credited as leading to a better situation. Transparent hiring processes in which both partners are vetted can therefore help lead to greater respect for second hires, and participants also noted that contexts with more faculty couples were often less stigmatizing. Blaser's (2008) participants also noted how being in contexts with other academic couples had a normalizing effect. However, instances of negative treatment also occurred within these contexts for my participants; hiring policies and a prevalence of couples did not preclude individual administrators and faculty from creating hostile work environments for them.

Some participants drew attention to how their uniqueness as faculty couples of color within institutional contexts that lacked faculty diversity increased their visibility and made them greater targets of scrutiny than White faculty couples. Participants shared how questions about the general merit of faculty of color became amplified when they were hired through dual-career hiring. Second hires of color noted how their scholarly merits were undervalued even when they had previously been the primary hire in their relationship, earned tenure, and independently attained prominent faculty positions. Participants drew connections between anti-affirmative action discourse and the remarks they contended with after going through dual-career hiring. They described racialized aspects of their marginalization in application and retention processes, as well as during

their employment, suggesting that faculty couples of color have fundamentally different experiences than White faculty couples.

For women, such racialization also intersects with gender bias (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991), and some women in the study described contending with sexism. They made reference to gendered remarks that belittled them and tied them to their male partners in unfavorable ways. Such remarks made them feel devalued as scholars and sometimes led them to distance themselves from their colleagues.

Several couples cited their frustration at not being recognized as separate entities, and pointed to ways this could disadvantage them in negotiations, with respect to leadership positions, and in navigating everyday workplace dynamics. Their frustration at not being recognized as separate entities is consistent with past work touching on the challenges academic couples face in navigating their shared identities in the workplace (Baker, 2004; Blaser, 2008; McNish, 1994), however disadvantage related to leadership opportunities has rarely been discussed in past work. Though many couples in this study had received external dual-career hire offers, some also alluded to it limiting the frequency with which they get approached for positions, which may restrict their collective career prospects and is a common concern in research on academic couples (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004; Woolstenhulme, 2013).

5. What do URM faculty couples at AAU universities consider to be sources of support?

The couples in this study referred to various sources of support that they drew upon during application processes and while navigating institutional contexts. In strategizing approaches to the job market, they often sought and received guidance from

their doctoral advisors, and those that knew academic couples reached out to them for advice in ways that were similar to how Floyd-Thomas (2001) described how she and her husband, who are an African American couple, rely on other academic couples. Forms of advice included when and how to reveal to institutions that they were interested in dual-career hiring as well as how to negotiate for these positions. Some advisors were able to share general awareness about how particular institutions handle dual-career hiring, which proved useful because institutions rarely shared any information on their dual-career hiring practices and policies with applicants. Partners also review each other's materials, help each other prepare for campus visits, and provide emotional support for each other throughout application processes.

Upon entry into their positions, couples rely heavily on each other for support in understanding their institutional contexts and adapting to their new environments. They help each other make sense of university policies and, if in the same academic units, are able to discuss meetings and process what is happening around them together (Blaser, 2008). They are also able to help each other adapt to teaching courses at the institution, and if they share students can communicate on how to best support them. Further, couples of color have each other to rely on for emotional support in environments that may be generally taxing due to their lack of diversity (Floyd-Thomas, 2001).

Couples also noted how other academic couples have helped them with navigating challenges related to being a faculty couple at the same institution (Floyd-Thomas, 2001). Participants who were employed at institutions with other couples also noted how this resulted in a normative backdrop in which they faced less issues related to being a faculty couple than they would if they were in a context where it was rare (Blaser,

2008). Participants also referred to administrators as sources of support, when the administrators affirmed both partners by acknowledging their respective merit and contributions. The positive role that administrators can play in increasing couples' feelings of inclusion through affirmation is a finding that has not been emphasized in past research but that provides administrators with a tangible recommendation for improving the experiences of faculty couples.

As faculty couples of color progress and have spent more time in their institutional context, they are able to leverage their respective networks to bring faculty of color together. These communities serve as a source of support for couples, who noted that it is good to discuss what it is like to be a faculty member of color with others at the institution. Couples also noted the importance of engaging with their colleagues of color socially and engaging in non-academic activities. Meeting and getting to know one another's families makes them feel more at home and welcome in their local communities and within their institutions.

Couples of color also consider other communities of color, including their students, to be sources of support because they give greater purpose to their work, and helping them develop as scholars and people is fulfilling for them. They take pride in recruiting and training graduate students of color and in being role models to students of color at the institution more broadly (Vander Putten, 1998b). They often enjoy hosting their students and having their families get to know them.

Participants also described their non-academic families and communities as sources of support. They found their family members' support to be crucial especially when they were able to help with children, as it freed up time for them to be able to

dedicate to work and to their partnership. They credited engaging with family members and non-academic friends as helping them to be more balanced and not fully consumed by academia. Past work on academic couples that considered work/life balance largely focused on how couples try to separate their personal and work lives within their households and places of employment (Baker, 2004; Blaser, 2008; McNish, 1994), and this study points to how couples of color rely on broader communities of color as support systems to help them strive towards balance.

### **Contributions to Intersectionality**

This inquiry was inspired and framed by Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) intersectionality theory, and the findings illustrate the need for greater consideration of the ways in which being in an academic couple mediates the experiences of marginalized populations. In this study, the most salient way in which this played out for faculty couples employed at the same institution was with respect to the stigma associated with being in a faculty couple. Partner hire stigma was particularly impactful for three women of color in the study, and other participants, including a man of color, also referred to instances in which being a second hire led to negative treatment by colleagues. Primary hires had fewer negative experiences to share, but having a faculty partner at the university also influenced how colleagues interacted with them and it was a factor that they were attentive to while navigating their institutional contexts.

Critiques about the scholarly merit of second hires mirrored anti-affirmative action discourse and participants alluded to how it had a multiplicative effect on the racial and gender biases that they contend with (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991; O'Meara et al., 2018). Couples of color noted their heightened sensitivity to racial



dynamics due to their presence as a couple within predominantly White university contexts, and women of color alluded to ways in which being in a faculty couple sometimes exacerbates the gendered racism they experience. Participants also described how differential treatment of male and female partners gave them firsthand examples of how gender inequity manifests in the academy. In addition to treatment by colleagues, these differences played out in the ways women were sometimes disadvantaged in salary offers and counteroffers. Analyzing the experiences of faculty couples proves to be a revealing lens for unearthing the ways in which racial and gender bias play out in the academy, and partner hire status is a useful construct to incorporate into intersectional frameworks in the study of academic couples (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991).

In addition to race, gender, and partner hire status, this study drew attention to how faculty couples' class backgrounds shape their experiences. Several participants' reflections on being faculty couples within their university contexts referred to their first-generation and working class backgrounds. They spoke of relying on one another while navigating the middle- and upper-class norms of academia. While adapting to and learning how to navigate these norms and the hidden curriculum of academia is a challenge for scholars from these backgrounds (Margolis & Romero, 1998), partners were advantaged in that they entered these contexts with someone they knew and trusted to learn and process with. Within contexts that reflected the impersonal and independent aspects of academic culture (Lindholm, 2004), couples formed communities with scholars from similar backgrounds and created environments that were supportive of students from these backgrounds. By creating room for participants to discuss their class

backgrounds and how they cope with the classed norms of academia, this study points to how intersectional analyses that consider class can lead to more nuanced perspectives on academic couple experiences (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991).

## Chapter 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter is divided into three sections: Recommendations for Research, Recommendations for Practice, and Concluding Thoughts. In the Recommendations for Research section, I point to several important areas for future research, drawing attention to where studies might address the limitations of this inquiry to provide a more holistic understanding of academic couples and faculty diversity. In Recommendations for Practice, I outline the policy implications of the study and provide guidance for administrators interested in optimizing their dual-career hiring practices and retaining academic couples. In Concluding Thoughts, I share brief reflections on the dissertation process and my hopes for this line of research.

### **Recommendations for Research**

Researchers interested in conducting studies in this area would be well served in recruiting diverse samples of academic couples and leveraging frameworks, such as intersectionality, that attend to race, ethnicity, gender and other dimensions of difference in their analyses. This study had a small representation of couples in which the male partner was the second hire, but future studies could focus on such couples and further investigate the salience of partner hire status in shaping their experiences. Sample diversity by class would also be illustrative; for example, analyzing the experiences of a White faculty couple from a working class background and how they navigate the middle- and upper-class norms of academia could serve as a point of comparison with faculty couples of color from working class backgrounds. Analyses of first-generation and working class backgrounds often conflate the two, however shedding light on the experiences of faculty from backgrounds that diverge with respect to generational and

class status would add further nuance to our understanding. Investigating couples in which partners do not share racial/ethnic and class backgrounds and seeing how their differences shape how they interact with and experience the academy would also enhance the study of academic couples.

While my eligibility criteria were inclusive of non-tenure-track faculty, only one of my participants was not in a traditional tenure-track role. Further, none of the couples were in joint or split appointments; each partner had their own faculty line. Couples with non-tenure track positions inherently deal with more precarity than tenure-track couples and face challenges that are unique from those faced by tenure-track couples. Given the increasing adjunctification of faculties (AAUP, 2017; Finkelstein, Conley, & Schuster, 2016b), a greater proportion of couples will likely start taking on these roles, and this is an area that past academic couple research has largely ignored. Joint and split appointments for couples are also a cost-saving measure that universities use, so research on these topics will help us to understand specific impacts of the corporatization of higher education, and enable administrators and stakeholders to consider these effects while making decisions and spurring reform.

The lack of representation of these groups in my sample also calls to question their representation in the population of academic couples and how hiring varies across institutional types. Schiebinger et al. (2008) produced their statistics on academic couples through a survey in which respondents “identified themselves and their partners as ‘academics’”, and note that that could have been interpreted by respondents as including partners that were “tenured, untenured, lecturer, or unemployed” (p. 92). More refined data collection could help to produce a more precise picture of the landscape of academic

couples, including what proportion are employed as faculty at the same institution. Such research could also provide a more precise accounting of representation across racial and ethnic groups, which has varied significantly across studies (Astin & Milem, 1997; Mora et al., 2018; Schiebinger et al., 2008).

Research about the prevalence of policies, if they are written and unwritten, and what processes entail will also be helpful as past work has also diverged in those respects (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). Schiebinger et al. (2008) reported that second hires “present a full dossier of published work and teaching evaluations, go through a full set of interviews, and are vetted through letters of recommendation” but that was not always the case for participants in my study who were hired through a dual-career policy (p. 60). With updated demographic data and greater knowledge of policies, researchers could investigate if dual-career hiring policies have a positive net impact on faculty diversity, or if they, as I called attention to in the *Hiring Scholars of Color* subsection of the Literature Review, might actually be reinscribing inequity in faculty hiring and contributing to the marginalization of scholars of color. More work is needed with respect to other hiring practices that forgo national searches in the name of diversity, as assumptions that they are used to increase faculty diversity may be misinformed.

This study was limited in that it focused on the perspectives of couples, and the findings point to future work that might help to shed further light on the recruitment and career experiences of faculty couples. First, the fact that so few of the participants knew anything about recruiting institutions’ dual-career hiring policies suggests that there is a disconnect between policy formation and communication. Past research with administrators pointed out how those with unwritten policies believed that formal policies

would draw attention to and stigmatize partner hires (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), but the experiences of participants in this study suggest that this approach is misguided. There is a possibility that some institutions do not want applicants to know exactly how they handle dual-career hiring, and qualitative work with administrators could unveil how they think about their policies and their disposition to communicating them. Since finding out if a dual-career offer is an ultimatum for applicants early on in the process is in the interest of institutions as it allows for more time to make the offer come to fruition or to consider other candidates, it would be interesting to see how administrators rationalize their decisions to not communicate dual-career hiring policies.

Further, studies with faculty and staff who are or have been the colleagues of faculty couples in their schools and departments could reveal their perceptions of challenges that arise and provide insight into the best ways to mitigate issues. Attention should be given to how they view dual-career hiring policies and practices and their suggestions for managing these better, as well as the implications for having couples within the same academic unit. Participants could also be asked what actions they believe administrators and couples could take that would help them to have greater trust in hiring practices and the roles faculty couples might play within academic units.

Couples in this study also shared their beliefs about how students, especially students of color, benefit from having academic couples on campus and appreciate the family dynamic that their presence introduces. Researchers could seek out students who faculty couples have mentored, taught, or simply interacted with via being engaged on campus and see what their perspectives are and if they perceive the same benefits that these couples shared. Such research could probe if this varies by racial/ethnic population

of students and couples, and may provide insights for administrators interested in campus culture and inclusion.

Another potential area that this study points to is mobility of faculty couples across race and ethnicity. Past work has suggested that there are high mobility costs to being in a couple (Woolstenhulme, 2013), however little attention has been given to how this might vary for different demographic groups. The couples in this study were surprisingly mobile, and institutional incentives to increase faculty diversity may have played a role in couples' mobility. Large-scale survey work might help to disentangle whether academic couples of color are more mobile than White academic couples, and further work could also shed light on whether the mobility of couples varies by the type of universities at which couples are employed and transition to (e.g., research universities), as well as if indicators of faculty quality such as publication record are positively associated with mobility. Qualitative exploration of couples at different types of institutions (e.g., liberal arts colleges, minority serving institutions) might also reveal interesting ways in which academic couple experiences vary across institutional context.

The challenges that I had recruiting same-sex couples also raise the question of if same-sex couples, and LGBTQ communities more broadly, face greater difficulty in attaining dual-career hires than other couples. Schiebinger et al. (2008) reported that gay men comprised 4% of partnered men and 4% of dual hires, suggesting that they were not disadvantaged in dual hiring, while lesbian respondents represented 7% of partnered women but only 4% of dual hires. Today's sociopolitical context differs greatly from when that study was conducted and same-sex marriage became legal in 2015 (*Obergefell*

*v. Hodges, 2015*), so updated data would help to reveal if certain LGBTQ communities remain disadvantaged in dual-career hiring.

Future qualitative work with less restrictive eligibility criteria than this study may fare better in terms of recruiting LGBTQ couples. This study was limited to academic couples who had attained employment together as faculty at a small subset of institutions, but studies that open eligibility to academic couples who are employed at separate institutions or may have not attained faculty positions would provide insight into how they navigate the job market and reveal ways in which they are disadvantaged in hiring processes. Scholars specifically interested in LGBTQ couples navigating the same institutional context might consider opening their eligibility criteria to participants from all racial and ethnic backgrounds; however, they should avoid the lack of transparency in previous academic couple research, much of which has been ambiguous in reporting the racial/ethnic demographic data. As this study reveals, the experiences of academic couples of color are sometimes racialized in ways that differentiate them from White academic couples, so future researchers should not generalize the experiences of White couples to the entire population.

Relatedly, while past work has examined whether being in a dual-career academic couple was positively or negatively associated with salary compared to male and female faculty with non-academic partners (Astin & Milem, 1997; Schiebinger et al., 2008), this study, included distinct examples of when couple offers and counteroffers appeared to be made that were inequitable along gender lines (Blaser, 2008). Future work might investigate this further to see if women are disadvantaged relative to their partners after controlling for factors such as rank and quality. Some participants also mentioned



compromises they felt they made during negotiations in order to bring their partners in, including salary and research funds, so research could delve deeper into what kinds of compromises couples make and how they decide to make them. Because women are more likely than men to be in academic couples (Schiebinger et al., 2008), any disparities negatively affecting academic couples serve to structurally disadvantage women in the professoriate and perpetuate broader inequities.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The foremost recommendation for practice, which has been put forth in past research on dual-career academic couples, is for universities to have a clear dual-career hiring policy (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). Having such policies can not only help mitigate the concerns colleagues may have about fairness, but as is apparent in this study, can help to expedite hiring processes and signal to applicants that institutions are committed to hiring them.

The least formal hiring process described by a participant in this study was the instance in which a partner was hired after meeting with administrators at a conference. This led to a degree of hostility for her from colleagues that ultimately drove her to leave the institution. Having policies that require potential partner hires to participate in a campus visit and have faculty vote on their hiring, like any other candidate, can help colleagues to feel like they have a stake in the process.

Vetting processes may not always result in faculty voting to approve a partner hire, but in cases that they would not approve, the hiring of that partner without a formal hiring process may create more difficulty for administrators and for the couple than either party anticipated. The potential manifestations of such difficulty are abundant, especially when

considering colleagues' resentment, the resulting treatment the partner might incur, and the worsening of departmental climate that administrators would be left to manage, which might even outlast the couple's departure. Formal hiring processes also make colleagues more aware of partner hires' qualifications, which is helpful as some partner hires in this study who had exemplary records still dealt with stigmatizing comments from colleagues who were unfamiliar with their record.

Further, having a dual-career hiring policy can help institutions to turn around dual-career hire offers faster than if there is no set policy for accommodating partners, which helps them compete for high quality faculty with multiple offers. Some couples in this study who had multiple offers noted how they were swayed to pick institutions that came along later in their application cycles, after offers for the primary hire had already been made by other institutions, when the later institutions were able to make a dual-career hire offer faster. These couples were surprised by the speed with which these institutions were able to make these offers, which stood in contrast to institutions without formal processes. Seeing how institutions were able to make these offers come to fruition signaled to couples that they were both committed to hiring them and that the institutions were well-run, which were convincing factors in their decision-making processes.

Some participants noted how there was a designated administrator who managed dual-career hiring at their institution, and that having a person who departments knew could help facilitate deals and develop dual-career offers was useful in expediting processes. It is in institutions' interest to know as early on in recruitment processes as possible that applicants need a partner hire as it allows more time to prepare offers that will help them compete, so communicating to applicants that they have a dual-career

hiring policy can make them more willing to share this information. It was noteworthy that so few participants were aware that the institutions they were applying to had dual-career hiring policies, so communicating this can help institutions stand out, and this also bears significance because seeing dual-career hiring as a normal process can signal to them that the institution is accustomed to hiring couples and that they would not be an aberration.

A related recommendation is for institutions to treat faculty partners as separate scholars throughout hiring processes and affirm how each of them would fit. Couples notice when their treatment is uneven and both partners want to be recognized for their merit and the ways in which they would be able to contribute at the institution. When faced with multiple offers, couples were more likely to choose institutions that treated them evenly and where their joint satisfaction would be the greatest. As such, in competing for faculty, institutions would be well-served in articulating to each partner that they would be valued. Administrators who are highly interested in recruiting a couple should also be mindful of potential resistance to partner hiring and do their best to clearly articulate to faculty colleagues how both partners are qualified. Some partners in this study picked up cues from individual faculty that they interviewed with that they would not be welcomed, so helping faculty to understand how partners are qualified may mitigate such hostility and lead to smoother hiring processes and better experiences for partners at the institution.

As I mentioned in the Partner Hire Stigma section, the fact that issues arise for faculty couples, be they the stigma associated with being a partner hire, concerns about influence within a department, or challenges when one is an administrator, does not

necessarily mean that couples should not pursue these positions. Transparent dialogue about what employing a couple might mean for an academic unit can help to reveal areas in which policies may be needed to ensure fairness and help to make faculty colleagues feel that they have a voice and are respected by administrators. Administrators should anticipate issues that might arise, and be prepared to work collaboratively with couples and colleagues to address them, and couples should be proactive in establishing separate professional identities and willing to engage in conversations about these issues.

Institutions should also not assume that members of academic couples are immobile and should be proactive in their retention, which was evident when looking at the mobility of couples in this study. Participants shared examples of institutions squandering opportunities to retain them through being slow in making an offer to hire their partner who was entering the faculty ranks for the first time. This was noteworthy because the institutions ended up losing a faculty member of color when hiring their partner could have been done at a relatively low cost as they would be entering as a first-time assistant professor, and hiring them would have also bolstered their faculty diversity and helped for future retention. Participants described that such a lack of attention made them feel that their institutions were taking them for granted, and they decided to depart in cases where there would have been compelling reasons for them to remain. Further, failed retention offers occurred with both junior- and senior-level faculty, so institutions should not assume that faculty at any rank are immobile. As institutions are facing increasing pressure to diversify, their vigilance in retaining academic couples of color can help to prevent administrators from drawing negative attention associated with the departure of faculty of color.

While valuing and affirming partners for their individual contributions strengthens their joint satisfaction, couples also appreciate mindfulness around them being in the same family unit. For example, couples with children mentioned appreciating not being put on evening committees together, and they also noted that policies that facilitate them taking sabbaticals together are a way in which they feel their institutions acknowledge the needs of academic couples. Practices such as these lead to a more family-friendly experience, which can factor into their retention decisions. Couples of color broadly noted how it appeared that White faculty were more aware of family-friendly policies and had greater success leveraging them, so institutions should also make sure that faculty of color are aware of family-friendly policies and that they are enacted equitably, as they can improve the experiences of faculty of color and help them to feel more invested in their campuses.

Lastly, while many of the couples cited learning from other academic couples as being particularly beneficial as they navigated hiring processes and their careers, a few lamented that they did not have academic couples to reach out to for advice during critical points in their trajectories. Some couples who knew or had received advice from other couples specified that they were White academic couples, who while sharing certain experiences, were not able to relate to their unique experiences as a couple of color. Many of the couples in the study are often called upon for advice by younger couples of color, but participants expressed that couples' awareness of and ability to connect with them were based on degrees of separation. As such, a formal network of academic couples might serve to facilitate such connections and allow couples to connect with others from similar backgrounds and learn from one another.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

While conducting and analyzing these interviews, it became clear to me that by uniquely positioning this inquiry at the nexus of diversity, relationships, and the professoriate, I was revealing more questions than I was answering. As the participants so eloquently articulated, efforts to maximize their potential as faculty must consider not only who they are as researchers and educators, but attend to who they are as people. Individuals from underrepresented backgrounds in academia contend with norms that are often at odds with their identities, and when they navigate careers with their partners, they introduce a personal dimension to their professional identity that further differentiates their experiences.

The presence of two diverse academics operating as a unit presents a unique opportunity for institutions to increase their diversity, and couples of color in this study described how being together made them more deeply invested in their universities. At the same time, couples that have negative experiences are susceptible to departure, and the attrition of two diverse faculty members can leave administrators in a difficult situation. As academic couples take center stage, administrators must attend to these dynamics if they wish to recruit and retain diverse faculty, and this study places a spotlight on these couples while also calling attention to areas in which future work will better inform institutional efforts.

I noted in the Methodology chapter that I set out to produce a dissertation filled with thoughtful observations and transparent about its limitations, and I hope that future researchers will be inspired to chip away at some of these limitations by conducting studies that add new perspectives on these issues. By building a body of literature on

diverse academic couples and informing efforts to increase representation and create more inclusive academic climates, scholars can help to improve the wellbeing of higher education and the communities it serves.

## APPENDIX A

### Informed Consent Form

**Study Title:** Recruitment & Career Experiences of Diverse Faculty Couples at AAU Universities

**Lead Researcher:** Daniel Blake, danielje@gse.upenn.edu, (267) 223-9609

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Manuel González Canché, msgc@upenn.edu, (215) 898-0332

The purpose of this research study is to learn from diverse academic couples' recruitment and career experiences at AAU universities in order to inform policies that support faculty diversification efforts. Research on dual-career academic couples has rarely included the voices of scholars of color, whose perspectives can help to improve hiring and retention practices and create more inclusive academic climates. Through interviews, the lead researcher will collect qualitative data about academic couples' job application and recruitment processes as well as their employment as a faculty couple at the same institution. You are invited to participate in this study to provide insights on your experiences as a member of a diverse academic couple.

This study is being conducted by the University of Pennsylvania. You are being asked to participate in two interviews, one with your partner and one by yourself. We will analyze your and other participants' responses in a qualitative study on diverse faculty couples at AAU universities.

#### **WHY WAS I ASKED TO PARTICIPATE?**

You were asked to participate because you and your partner's perspectives are beneficial for improving our understanding of faculty members' experiences and because you meet the following criteria:

- Both partners (same-sex or heterosexual) are employed as full-time faculty members (including tenure-track and non-tenure track appointments) at the same AAU institution.
- At least one partner in the couple is from a racially/ethnically underrepresented background in the professoriate (Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian/Alaska Native).
- Partners attained faculty positions at the same institution *after* their relationship began (i.e. they did not meet as faculty members at the institution).

#### **WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to participate in this research, you will participate in two interviews, each lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The first of these interviews will be conducted by the lead researcher with you and your partner, and he will conduct separate, individual interviews with each of you at a later date. The interviews will be in person when feasible and by video chat in other instances. They will be audio recorded, stored in a password-protected, secure laptop and an encrypted online folder, and transcribed by an



independent market research firm. We will also request that you submit dual-career hiring policy documents that you received during your recruitment (optional). We may contact participants with follow-up questions and to discuss the study's findings. You will likely invest between 3-4 hours over a 6-month period.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

Data (audio recordings, interview transcripts, and documents) will be managed by the lead researcher. To protect participants' confidentiality, data will be stored in a password-protected and secure laptop and in encrypted online folders. Audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription. Pseudonyms will be used and no identifying details will be included in the study.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

Though the aforementioned measures will be taken to protect confidentiality, loss of confidentiality is a risk of participation. There is also a risk of stress and emotional upset from discussing and reflecting on your career and life.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

You may not receive any benefits from your participation in this study. Your participation will present you with opportunities to reflect on and share your experiences. It will also increase the representation of diverse academic couples in scholarly literature and may aid in the development of policies and practices that make the academy more equitable and inclusive.

**WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have questions about the study, you may contact the researchers, Daniel Blake at (267) 223-9609, or Dr. Manuel González Canché at (215) 898-0332.

If you are not satisfied with the response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board at (215) 573-2540.

Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw at any time by notifying the lead researcher and no information that you have shared will be used in the study.

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Research Participant Printed Name

Date

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Research Participant Signature

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Researcher Printed Name

Date

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Researcher Signature

APPENDIX B  
**Recruitment Email**

Dear [Professor/Dr.] \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Daniel Blake and I am conducting a research study on the recruitment and career experiences of diverse faculty couples at AAU universities. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Higher Education Division of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. Research on dual-career academic couples has rarely included the voices of scholars of color, whose perspectives can help to improve hiring and retention practices and create more inclusive academic climates. Full participation in the research study will entail two interviews that are approximately 60-90 minutes each (in-person or via video chat) and your submission of dual-career hiring policy documents that you received during your recruitment (optional). The first interview will be a couple interview with you and your partner and the second will be an individual interview conducted with each of you at a later date. You will likely invest between 3-4 hours over a 6-month period.

Eligible participants meet the following criteria:

- Both partners (same-sex or heterosexual) are employed as full-time faculty members (including tenure-track and non-tenure track appointments) at the same AAU institution.
- At least one partner in the couple is from a racially/ethnically underrepresented background in the professoriate (Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian/Alaska Native).
- Partners attained faculty positions at the same institution *after* their relationship began (i.e. they did not meet after either of them was already a faculty member at the institution).

To ensure confidentiality, data will be stored in a password-protected and secure laptop and in encrypted online folders. Audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription. Pseudonyms will be used and no identifying details will be included in the study.

Participation is completely voluntary. Please see the attached informed consent form. Please let me know if you are open to further communication, would like to refer a couple, and/or have any questions about your or others' potential participation.

Thank you,

Daniel Blake  
(267) 223-9609

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Protocol

#### **Couple Interview**

1. Please tell me a little bit about your backgrounds, where are you each from originally?
2. How do you each self-identify in terms of race/ethnicity and gender?
3. How did you meet each other?
  - a. Probe for: how did the relationship start?
4. Please tell me about the job searches that led both of you to become faculty members at the same institution.
  - a. Probe for: what were your priorities/must-haves?
  - b. if hired concurrently, probe for:
    - i. were you aware of dual-career hiring policies at institutions (if yes, how?)
    - ii. if and when you brought up having an academic partner (who brought it up and how? what was the reaction?)
    - iii. depending on their ranks: did you both come in with tenure? was tenure something that you actively negotiated for during recruitment? if so, at what point and what was that process like?
  - c. if not hired concurrently, probe for:
    - i. timeline of acquisition of their positions
    - ii. was this something the first hire negotiated for or did it happen independently?
  - d. with both concurrent and non-concurrent: were you considering other offers?
    - i. if so: what ultimately led you to choose this institution over the others?
  - e. from where have you learned strategies for navigating academic hiring as a couple?
    - i. have you learned from other academic couples? If so, what?
5. What has your experience as a faculty couple at the same institution been like?
  - a. probe for: advantages/benefits, disadvantages/challenges (adversity they deal with), have they collaborated on research, teaching, service, other academic responsibilities/initiatives? If so, what have those experiences been like and how has it differed from collaborations with others?
  - b. do you feel as though you have to downplay your relationship in certain instances/situations (e.g. at research settings, committees, faculty meetings, conferences)?
6. How, if at all, do you think your recruitment and career experiences as a diverse academic couple have been different than the experiences of White academic couples?
7. What have been your sources of support?
8. Are there support networks/structures not currently in place that you would like to see established for academic couples? Please describe.

9. Since you've been at [current institution], have you actively searched for or been recruited for positions at other institutions?
  - a. if searched, probe for: why? what has that process been like?
  - b. if recruited or offered position after search, probe for: what led you to stay at your current institution?
10. Is there anything I didn't ask that you think is important for me to consider?

### **Individual Interview**

1. What achievements are you most proud of as a faculty member?
2. What achievements are you most proud of as a member of an academic couple?
3. How, if at all, has being a partner in an academic couple influenced your:
  - a. relationships & interactions with faculty colleagues?
  - b. relationships & interactions with administrators?
  - c. relationships & interactions with staff?
  - d. relationships & interactions with students?
 (ask after each "has this evolved since you began your position or been consistent throughout?"; probe throughout for examples, incidents, instances)
4. Are there other ways in which being a partner in an academic couple has shaped your experiences as a faculty member? Are there other instances when you feel the impact of being a partner in an academic couple?
5. What personal sacrifices have you made to pursue a career as a faculty member?
6. What career sacrifices have you made for the sake of your partnership?
7. What advice would you offer to aspiring academic couples?
8. Throughout these interviews I have focused on race/ethnicity and gender. Are there other identities that play a major role in how you define yourself and/or how you see and experience the world?
9. How would you describe the relationship between all of these identities for you personally? [Are they intertwined, or do you ever "experience" each identity separately? Are some more salient to you than the others? (Probe for stories, situations, etc. to illustrate themes.)]
10. How do the additional identities that you've just described influence your experiences as faculty member? What about as a partner in an academic couple?

APPENDIX D  
**Post-Interview Email**

Hi [Professor/Dr.] \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation study, it has been great to learn about your and [Professor/Dr.] \_\_\_\_\_'s journeys and I am excited to dive into data analysis and write up the findings.

I am also interested in reviewing any dual-career hiring-related documents that you feel comfortable sharing. These could include but are not limited to job postings, websites, emails, and policy documents that you encountered or received during your and [Professor/Dr.] \_\_\_\_\_'s recruitment to [institution] that alluded in any way to their approaches to dual-career hiring. If you received such documents from other institutions before and/or during your time at [institution] they would also be useful for the study. Any documents you submit will be de-identified and reviewed to see what kinds of messaging faculty couples receive from institutions during recruitment and application processes.

Lastly, at the end of this email I've included post-study reflection questions. Your responses will help me as I reflect on the dissertation process, share my findings with various stakeholders, and pursue further work related to this important topic. I very much appreciate all your time and insights.

Thanks again,

Daniel

- 1) Why did you agree to participate in this study? What led you to volunteer your participation?
- 2) Which aspects of this study did you find most engaging, thought-provoking, and/or enjoyable? Why?
- 3) Which aspects of this study could have been conducted differently? What suggestions do you have for how follow-up studies on this topic should be pursued?
- 4) What do you hope will come of this study? Who should be the audience for this study, and what do you hope that audience will gain?

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