

PARTNERING THROUGH IT: CONFRONTING THE INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES FACING DUAL-CAREER ACADEMIC COUPLES

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Purpose: Meeting the needs of dual-career academic couples can be an important step in recruiting and retaining university faculty and researchers. The goal of this essay is to review the existing scholarship on dual-career hires and offer concrete recommendations for university administrators.

Background/Motivation: Attending to dual-career needs is especially relevant to efforts at diversifying the academic workforce, as multiple studies have indicated that faculty appointments are a major contributor to the so-called leaky pipeline causing attrition of women and scholars of color, particularly in biomedical and STEM fields. We take it as a feminist imperative to confront institutional discrimination against dual-career scholars and to intervene in the service of collective praxis.

Intended Audience: Scholars and administrators interested in understanding and overcoming institutional barriers to achieving diverse, inclusive, and family-friendly academic workplaces.

Contribution: This essay synthesizes the recent literature on dual-career hires and offers recommendations for university administrators.

Positionality: We approach this issue as a senior academic couple that has navigated dual-career job searches for close to twenty years and has held faculty positions together at three different academic institutions. We are a white, hetero dual-career academic couple interested in developing resources for individuals striving to activate change at their universities.

KEY WORDS: academic couples, partner hires, academic job market, precarity, discrimination, diversity

1. INTRODUCTION

Dual-career academic couples face incredible challenges under the best of circumstances. They often must live apart, face hiring discrimination, delay career advancement, and subordinate one partner's career to the other's, all while striving for the elusive goal of achieving two fulfilling positions in the same geographic region. Indeed, the academic job market is an anxiety-producing game of career and family roulette that is defined by

scarcity of positions and secrecy of hiring protocols. Scholars in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields may be especially affected by these dynamics because of how common academic couples are in these fields. For instance, one study found that 48% of women in the natural sciences were in academic relationships, which is a rate higher than any other academic field (Schiebinger et al., 2008, p. 29).

The circumstances faced by dual-career couples are reflective of structural and cultural problems in universities more broadly. They emerge from the corrosive interplay of neoliberal trends and patriarchal legacies in higher education (Ahmed, 2021; Ross, 2009; Slaughter and Leslie, 1997), which lead increasingly to the intensification of labor, the erosion of the tenure system, and the colonization of personal life (Fleming, 2021; Gregg, 2011; Strathern, 2000). These destructive pressures impinge unequally upon women and people of color (Flaherty, 2018; Schiebinger et al., 2008), but they also hurt universities' efforts to increase the representation of women, racially minoritized scholars, and others, particularly in biomedical and STEM fields (Zambrana, 2018). For these reasons, rather than approaching dual-career needs as an individual or personal problem, it is important to tackle them at the institutional level (Rosser, 2020).

One unfortunate result of the dominant individualistic approach to dual-career issues is that job-seekers are often left to fend for themselves without clear guidance. Based on our personal experience as a dual-career couple and our intensive mentorship of junior scholars, for instance, we have been struck by the general confusion and lack of consensus about how academics in this very common situation should navigate job markets. First, there is a near-total lack of transparency about how universities' dual-career policies are implemented in practice, if they even have such policies. Second, dual-career couples, in many cases, inadequately model successful hiring outcomes, possibly because the stigma of being seen as a partner hire compels some scholars to mask or downplay that status rather than openly discuss it with others. Finally, many dual-career scholars unwittingly engage in forms of self-sabotage (e.g., postponing job-seeking after receiving their PhDs, volunteering to split positions) due to a lack of information about hiring committee evaluation processes or a lack of understanding about the ramifications of putting one's career on hold.

The monumental upheavals engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic have only exacerbated the situation. When confronted with major budget shortfalls, many universities eliminated academic programs, fired or furloughed faculty members and staff, implemented hiring freezes, and restricted targeted-hiring programs (Dilawar, 2021; Anderson et al., 2020; Flaherty, 2020). From the position of those in academic relationships, the pandemic also radically constrained individuals' ability to live apart, particularly when frequent long-distance travel was dangerous and untenable. Although one might speculate that remote working (e.g., via Zoom) could allow for greater flexibility for academic couples, both anecdotal and empirical evidence has shown just how debilitating these work-at-home arrangements were and can be, especially for women who arguably face even greater labor inequities with childcare, eldercare, tutoring, housework, and academic service work than before the pandemic (Guy and Arthur, 2020; Nash and Churchill, 2020). The effects of these changes could compromise the careers of aca-

demic couples or push one or both partners out of the academic labor market altogether, thereby arresting—or regressing—the incremental progress that universities had been making toward gender equity over the past few decades.

The aim of this essay is to review some of the existing scholarship on the institutional dimensions of dual-career hires and offer concrete recommendations for university administrators. At present, there is an urgent need to remove impediments to dual-career recruitment and retention so that universities can work effectively toward their gender and racial equity goals. Moreover, we are at a moment when many graduate students and junior scholars are reconsidering the profession, which they increasingly see as hostile to family life (Larson et al., 2020; Mason et al., 2009), so universities risk losing some of the best talent unless they act quickly to correct the deficiencies that they can. This process can start by recognizing that scholars are not atomized individuals who make career decisions in a vacuum; rather, they are embedded in relationships and personal commitments that shape their identities and inform their choices every step of the way. Universities can be stronger—and more successful at recruitment and retention—if they approach academics on this level and collaboratively work to support these deeper ties.

2. SCHOLARSHIP ON INSTITUTIONS AND DUAL-CAREER COUPLES

Meeting the needs of dual-career scholars has become a pressing issue for universities. With 36% of university-based researchers having academic partners, and 72% being in dual-career relationships more broadly, faculty recruitment and retention can often depend upon addressing dual-career needs (Schiebinger et al., 2008). This challenge is especially relevant to efforts at diversifying the academic workforce, for multiple studies have pinpointed problems with faculty appointments as a major contributor to the so-called leaky pipeline causing attrition of women and scholars of color, particularly in biomedical and STEM fields (Flaherty, 2018; McMahon et al., 2018; Satiani et al., 2013; Stamm, 2010). Because women are more likely to be in academic relationships than men (40% of women to 34% of men) (Schiebinger et al., 2008), failure to accommodate academic partners has greater negative consequences for the representation of women in academic research settings (Flaherty, 2018). Indeed, women academics indicate that the inability to secure positions for their partners is the number one reason for them to *decline* a job offer (Schiebinger et al., 2008). Women academics are also more likely than men to consider *resigning* from a position if their partners do not obtain acceptable employment (Zhang et al., 2019).

While significant progress has been made in increasing the representation of women and people of color in doctoral programs, members of these groups continue to be underrepresented in tenure-track positions (Rivera, 2017; Wingard et al., 2019). At the same time, women as a group are overrepresented in non-tenure track positions (Colby and Fowler, 2020), with women faculty in STEM fields being “40% more likely than men to leave the tenure track and assume an adjunct position” (Pascale, 2018, p. 2). Notably, these trends are indicative of the extent to which the neoliberal transformation of US universities, particularly with the “adjunctification” of faculty—wherein over 70%

of all instructor positions are now fixed-term contracts (AAUP, 2020)—is also a gendered phenomenon. The gender inequalities of these changes are often aggravated by inadequate institutional support for women academics who opt to have children, pushing more women to adjunct positions. As one study indicated, “Instructors, lecturers and other unranked faculty compose 22 percent of all female full-time faculty, but only 11 percent of male faculty” (Wolfinger et al., 2009, p. 1594). These shifts in the professoriate are all the more important for the diversity of scholarship being produced given that adjunct positions often focus solely on teaching duties and offer no time or resources for research activities (AAUP, 2014).

Interventions have been made to patch the leaky pipeline in graduate school and on the tenure track, including, for instance, by providing mentorship and networking opportunities (Davis, 2008; National Association of Medical Minority Educators, 2020).^{*} However, “relationship status discrimination”—the unfair (and illegal) consideration of how someone’s personal relationship status might affect their recruitment or job performance—permeates academic hiring deliberations (Rivera, 2017, p. 1114). One notable study, for instance, found that hiring committees presumed that heterosexual women would not be “moveable” if their male partners already held stable academic positions, whereas male job candidates with female academic partners were always considered moveable (Rivera, 2017). Thus, women job candidates were being discriminated against and denied employment opportunities based on presumptions about their partners, which had nothing to do with the quality of their research or their ability to perform the job.[†] Although there is a dearth of recent literature on same-sex couples in academic relationships, evidence suggests that relationship status discrimination affects their employment as well, especially in more conservative regions or at religiously affiliated colleges and universities (Blake, 2020; Schiebinger et al., 2008).[‡]

When faced with the pressures of navigating dual careers, especially in less supportive university settings, the careers of women in heteronormative relationships often suffer in other ways too, as they are disproportionately tasked with household and family responsibilities (Feeney et al., 2014; Schiebinger and Gilmartin, 2010; Vohlídalová, 2014), experience conflicts between work and family (Fox et al., 2011), leave the academic job market (Pascale, 2018), and/or prioritize the careers of their male partners in decisions about academic jobs (Mason et al., 2009). When couples are in commuting relationships because of working in different locations, women are further disadvantaged

^{*}Although, as Sue Rosser (2020) cautions, even successful interventions like mentorship programs may exacerbate service inequities for the relatively few senior women in STEM fields who are enrolled, or who volunteer, to perform such mentorship.

[†]Given the potential for relationship status discrimination, there is also a debate in the literature about whether scholars should reveal their partner status during the interview stage. One study found that for academics who were eventually hired, revealing one’s relationship status before receiving a job offer correlated with higher productivity and better promotion outcomes, but revealing one’s relationship status after receiving a job offer correlated with lower salaries (Morton and Kmec, 2017). Because this study sampled only those dual-career scholars who were offered positions and accepted them, there is no way of knowing how many others were discriminated against and eliminated from consideration because they disclosed their dual-career needs during the interview process.

[‡]For some earlier scholarship on LGBTQ+ challenges with dual-career hiring, see Gibsonand and Meem (2005) and Miller and Skeen (1997).

by typically serving as the anchor partner who takes care of children and household responsibilities while men commute (Sallee, *in press*). Additionally, as has been well documented, even when they have successfully obtained tenure-track or tenured faculty positions, women and racially minoritized scholars are regularly tasked with greater departmental, university, and professional service (Feeney et al., 2014; Saffold, 2018), all of which pull them away from research activities and can potentially make them less competitive for more senior faculty or administrative positions.

There are deeply entrenched cultural biases—both overt and implicit—that contribute to ongoing discrimination against women and people of color in academic research settings (Fox, 2001; Jaggi et al., 2016; Turner and González, 2011), but for dual-career scholars there are also institutional barriers that are compounded by the absence of clear partner-hire policies or awareness of them. In a 2008 study of dual-career policies in the US, the researchers found less than half of the universities sampled had formal written policies; instead, many universities dealt with partner-hire requests on an *ad hoc*, case-by-case basis (Schiebinger et al., 2008; see also Morton, 2018; Morton and Gmec, 2017). Moreover, the vast majority of the more than 9000 faculty surveyed in the study had no idea whether their universities had formal policies to assist dual-career couples (Schiebinger et al., 2008). Another study found that dual-career hiring policies were seldom communicated by university administrators during the recruitment phase, even though doing so could have had the positive effect of signaling genuine support and increasing the competitiveness of those universities (Blake, 2020; see also Laursen and Austin, 2020, p. 114).

The existence or conveyance of partner-hire policies alone does not solve dual-career issues if universities are otherwise deficient in their support of couples and families. For example, one study found that “only 28% of surveyed North American research scientists agreed that their institution provided sufficient support for their spouse and was family friendly” (Tanenbaum, 2015, p. 75; see also Dean and Koster, 2014). Lack of support can be seen as well with the common practice of universities requiring existing faculty to obtain job offers elsewhere before partner-hire accommodations will be considered, which is a practice that often backfires with faculty rejecting “last-minute retention offers,” which many perceive as undervaluing the partner’s scholarly accomplishments and potential (Blake, 2020, p. 9). Instead of universities tackling dual-career matters only at discrete moments, such as when extending an offer or making a counter-offer, they would be better served by approaching retention as a continuous obligation and developing focused “programs that more adequately address dual career as an unfolding set of needs, challenges, and opportunities” (Sotirin and Goltz, 2019, p. 1210). This orientation applies across the spectrum of academic ranks, for even well-established academics deal with these issues in their careers and strive to shift university cultures to assist others. For instance, Nancy C. Andrews, the first female Dean of the Duke University School of Medicine, has described how Duke’s accommodation of her dual-career needs was a vital component of breaking through medicine’s “glass ceiling,” but that “the ‘two-body problem’—finding a position for a new appointee’s spouse—remains a major obstacle to the recruitment of

women in particular and of academic leaders in general" (Andrews, 2007, p. 1888). This suggests that as important as it is to adopt explicit dual-career policies, which have been shown to increase the representation of women in junior and mid-level positions, such policies may be insufficient to catalyze similar outcomes at the senior level (Juraqulova et al., 2019). Moreover, policies alone are unlikely to bring about structural or cultural change without a larger phase-shift in how universities treat their faculty and recognize their value, which in the context of academic couples would mean proactive efforts to recruit and retain faculty by supporting them, their partners, and their families.

Even in instances where university administrators are supportive of recruiting dual-career scholars, partner hires are still often regarded as risky on the departmental level. One of the primary concerns of faculty members in the "receiving" departments is whether a partner hire would present an "opportunity cost" that would be held against them when future allocations were made for faculty positions (Kurniawan, 2019). In the absence of guarantees against opportunity costs, departments tend to act in conservative, fragmented, and instrumental ways rather than as collective members of a more cohesive university community (Rivera, 2017). Thus, some studies have stressed the importance of having centrally administered partner-hire policies tied to guaranteed resources to help overcome departmental and faculty members' misgivings (McNamee, 2005; Schrader et al., 2000). Moreover, there is often stigma associated with dual-career hires, as can be seen with unfounded questions about the quality of such researchers (Carey et al., 2019) or with the unflattering, agency-stripping terms used to describe them (e.g., "trailing spouse/partner," "two-body problem") (Careless and Mizzi, 2015).[§] In response to these issues, scholars have stressed the importance of evaluating dual-career academics based on their merits, using more neutral or positive descriptive terminology (e.g., "dual-career hire," "opportunity hire"), and working closely with department chairs to spread accurate information about dual-career policies, where they exist, and to craft them where they do not (Feeney et al., 2014; Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2005).

Accommodating dual-career scholars is an important challenge for universities, but, additionally, there is growing evidence of the *benefits* of doing so. Effective dual-career support assists *universities* in recruiting and retaining diverse faculty (Center for WorkLife Law, 2013; Girod et al., 2011; Smith, 2015), cultivating allegiance among faculty (Zhang and Kmec, 2018), increasing successful tenure and promotion cases (Woolstenhulme et al., 2011), and raising productivity in terms of publishing (Woolstenhulme et al., 2012). Dual-career accommodations are beneficial for *academics* as well, increasing quality of life by allowing them to live proximate to their partners and fami-

[§]Such stigma may manifest in concrete and potentially harmful ways. For instance, one study ran an experiment wherein external evaluators were given candidates' files, along with information about partner status, and asked to review them (Allen et al., 2019). While there was no bias detected based on whether a primary candidate had a partner or not, there were differences with the evaluation of partners based on the evaluator's gender: men evaluators recommended more resources for the primary hire and women evaluators recommended more resources for partners. The authors reflect that "while it might be fine for a woman to disclose a dual-career need in her job application, her partner might not receive the resources needed to be successful when it comes time for the job offer to be extended" (Allen et al., 2019, p. 170).

lies (Schiebinger et al., 2008; Vohlídalová, 2014; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2003), and typically bringing in higher salaries than their peers (Woolstenhulme et al., 2011). Across the board, *diversity* stands to increase with the application of dual-career policies, for roughly one-third of scholars of color are in academic relationships (Schiebinger et al., 2008), and targeted and non-traditional mechanisms have historically assisted universities in correcting the underrepresentation of scholars of color in faculty positions (Onwuachi-Willig, 2010; Smith, 2015). Finally, *science* benefits from having a more diverse body of women and racially minoritized researchers bringing new questions and experiences to bear on scientific inquiry (Fisher, 2011; Harding, 1998; McCluskey, 2019) and serving as role models and mentors for future generations of scientists (Allen-Ramdial and Campbell, 2014; Drury et al., 2011).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS

Given the pressing need for universities to correct gender and racial inequities, particularly in biomedical and STEM fields, providing institutional support for dual-career academics could be a relatively straightforward and effective strategy to assist with those goals. Such a commitment could reap many rewards for institutions, academics, families, students, and scholarship. Based on the literature, as well as on our personal experiences, there are a number of ways to actualize such support.

3.1 Develop and/or Strengthen Dual-Career Policies

- a. Prepare clearly written dual-career policies that are aligned with actual institutional practices (Laursen and Austin, 2020).
- b. Provide a detailed overview of the dual-career hiring process, including who should initiate it, who should oversee it, what its steps are, and how outcomes will be determined (e.g., faculty vote in the receiving department). By including regular, albeit expedited, faculty vetting processes, this can secure faculty buy-in and reduce the risk of partner stigmatization (Blake, 2020; Schiebinger et al., 2008; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2003).
- c. Explicitly state in policies that they are applicable to all partner compositions (heterosexual/same-sex, married/unmarried) (AAUP, 2010).
- d. Indicate that open-search requirements will be waived for partner/opportunity hires and explain the rationale for doing so (Blake, 2020; Schiebinger et al., 2008).
- e. Describe university funding commitments for dual-career positions, including which offices are making those commitments (e.g., Provost's, College's), what the funding-contribution expectations are for other departments, and what the minimum duration is for those commitments (Schiebinger et al., 2008).
- f. Explicitly communicate the university's position that there will be no "opportunity costs" for any department participating in a dual-career search. By outlining funding commitments and making assurances of no future penalties for

accepting dual-career positions, this could help alleviate concerns from departments and minimize bias based on such concerns (Laursen and Austin, 2020).

- g. Systematically employ non-stigmatizing and inclusive labels (e.g., “target of opportunity” instead of “trailing partner,” “partner hire” instead of “spousal hire”) (Careless and Mizzi, 2015).

3.2 Circulate Policies Widely

- a. Proactively communicate policies in job ads, on university websites, and in interviews. This signals to job-seekers and to current faculty that the university recognizes the importance of accommodating dual-career needs and supporting dual-career scholars (Blake, 2020; Schiebinger et al., 2008).
- b. Share policies with departments on a regular basis to ensure continued awareness of them and equitable access to them (Laursen and Austin, 2020).

3.3 Provide Training

- a. Inform faculty of the university’s partner-hire policy and its components as part of search-committee and departmental training materials.
- b. Before each new job search, remind chairs and faculty that relationship-status discrimination is illegal, that they should not inquire about a candidate’s relationship status, and that relationship status should never be a consideration in making hiring decisions (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022; see also, Rivera, 2017). Such instructions should be shared with anyone who might interact with candidates during their visits.
- c. Provide chairs and faculty members with suggestions for how to facilitate low-stress interactions during the social components of interviews (e.g., at meals) so that candidates do not feel pressured into disclosing their relationship status. For instance, interviewers could share their views of the benefits of living in the region without posing direct questions to candidates about their personal interests or needs.

3.4 Establish Reciprocal Arrangements with Other Institutions

- a. Build ties to other institutions of higher education in the region and formalize reciprocal arrangements with them for considering dual-career hires. If there is a regional Higher Education Recruitment Consortium, universities could join those groups to assist with this objective (Ancarana and McMahon, 2018; Laursen and Austin, 2020; Schiebinger et al., 2008).
- b. As with policies for internal dual-career recruitment, develop arrangements with other institutions to offer a clear overview of the hiring process and financial obligations, which could take the form of “memoranda of understanding.”

- c. Share the possibility for such reciprocal arrangements with candidates and advertise this partner-hiring mechanism in job ads and on university websites.
- d. Periodically remind chairs and other administrators of existing reciprocal dual-career hiring arrangements, especially at the outset of new faculty searches.

3.5 Create “Dual-Career Liaison” Positions

- a. Establish a network of dual-career liaisons within the university who could meet with job candidates in a confidential capacity, provide them with information about dual-career hiring policies and practices, offer to put them in touch with dual-career scholars in other departments, and initiate the dual-career hiring process if applicable (Laursen and Austin, 2020).[†]
- b. Ensure that these liaisons include faculty members in other (i.e., non-hiring) departments who have no direct interest in the search process and who are trained to ask only legal questions and to maintain candidates’ privacy.

3.6 Designate a Dual-Career Point Person

- a. Task a designated administrator (or a dual-career office) with responsibility for managing all components of the dual-career hiring process (Brust et al., 2018; Kaunas et al., 2018).^{**} Chairs should be made aware of who this person is and what functions they perform.
- b. Once a dual-career hiring request is made, empower the point person to shepherd the process and provide regular updates to all the stakeholders involved (individuals, departments, institutions), which could be a function that expedites the process and significantly reduces the labor burden—and stress—for chairs (Blake, 2020).

3.7 Pursue Tenure-Stream Appointments as the Default

- a. Authorize, whenever possible, tenure-stream appointments for dual-career hires if that is their preference, not fixed-term or part-time positions. Tenure-stream positions communicate that the hire is taken seriously as an equally valuable member of the university community, which is a message that resonates both with the dual-career couple and with their (prospective) faculty peers.
- b. Prioritize retention of dual-career hires from the outset by ensuring both candidates have positions that sync with their career goals. If placed in fixed-term or part-time positions that were not the candidates’ preference, this could signal to those scholars that they are of lesser value, which may very quickly lead to both

[†]This was one of the models adopted by participants in the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) ADVANCE program (Laursen and Austin, 2020), which was a program designed to “to increase the representation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers” (National Science Foundation, 2022).

^{**} This option is not mutually exclusive with having Dual-Career Liaisons.

scholars feeling disgruntled and going back on the job market. Should the dual-career couple leave, the risk to the university is a loss of labor and resources put into the initial search, diminished faculty morale, and a potential loss of reputation for being seen as unresponsive to dual-career needs (Sotirin and Goltz, 2019; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2000).^{††}

3.8 Do Not Make Empty Promises

- a. Finalize all the contractual components for dual-career hires in writing as part of the recruitment process and honor them once faculty are on campus (Schiebinger et al., 2008, p. 8).
- b. Avoid engendering feelings of mistreatment and mistrust that result from postponing vital hiring components. One of the chief complaints of many dual-career couples is that verbal, and even written, commitments to them fail to materialize, which may lead them to search for positions elsewhere.

3.9 Treat Retention as an Ongoing Process

- a. Do not take current faculty members for granted or presume that they are content. To this end, retention could be approached as an ongoing process, not just something that occurs when faculty members disclose that they are on the job market or that they have job offers elsewhere (Blake, 2020; Sotirin and Goltz, 2019).
- b. Particularly for dual-career scholars whose partners have not found employment at the university or who do not have tenure-stream appointments, do not risk waiting for them (or asking them) to obtain job offers elsewhere. Doing so could propel them to leave, which could be an especially counterproductive outcome when trying to retain women and scholars from racially minoritized backgrounds (Blake, 2020; Kelly et al., 2017).

3.10 Regularly Evaluate Outcomes and Attitudes

- a. Systematically collect data on dual-career programs and on faculty attitudes about them. Participants in the NSF ADVANCE program, for instance, tracked many metrics, including the number of dual-career recruitment and retention attempts, outcomes, partner satisfaction, job-seeking activities, demographics of dual-career couples, rank and/or position of hires (e.g., tenure-track, fixed-term), and so on (Laursen and Austin, 2020).
- b. Use collected data of this sort to evaluate the successes and shortcomings of dual-career programs and to make continued improvements to hiring policies and processes.

^{††} These risks mirror those associated with “failed searches” too (Cohen, 2004).

- c. Use longitudinal data on the attitudes of *all* faculty to track the longer-term effects of dual-career programs on university cultures, which, some have found, shift from seeing dual-career positions as being “unearned” to becoming “understood as an asset for attracting strong faculty and an accepted element of institutional culture” (Laursen and Austin, 2020, pp. 119–120).

Perhaps not every one of these suggestions would be appropriate at every institution, but there is certainly room for most institutions to improve the ways they support dual-career scholars. In doing so, universities may also discover that they are making gains with their gender and racial equity goals and building more family-friendly environments. Those outcomes can be beneficial for the entire academic community.

4. CONCLUSION

All too often, academic institutions seem to approach dual-career couples as problems to be avoided or, at best, begrudgingly accommodated. The patriarchal legacies of academia are tenaciously encoded into policies, practice, and culture, making it difficult to detect such biases against couples *as biases*, yet their effects have significant negative consequences both for people’s lives and for the vitality of academic institutions more broadly. When the vast majority of doctoral students are concerned about finding “family friendly” workplaces but do not perceive universities as meeting that criterion, universities risk losing some of the top talent, as scholars move into government or industry positions instead (Mason et al., 2009; see also Smith-Doerr 2004). Even for dual-career scholars who choose to remain in the academic world, however, many face conditions of amplified employment precarity, labor intensification, and family stress that can diminish their overall wellbeing and productivity. In short, the absence of robust mechanisms to recruit dual-career scholars *and* ensure their long-term happiness is myopic on multiple levels.

We take it as a feminist imperative to confront institutional discrimination against dual-career scholars and to intervene in the service of collective praxis. A key part of that is to further legitimize the many experiences of academic couples by bringing together existing scholarly literature on the topic, which we have done here, both to document the state of knowledge and to offer a resource for individuals striving to activate change at their institutions. Particularly as the effects of the pandemic continue to be felt, this is a time to recommit to building our academic institutions and departments as truly inclusive and supportive communities; addressing the needs of couples and families is an integral part of these efforts.

Authors’ Positionalities: We approach this issue as a senior academic couple that has navigated dual-career job searches for close to twenty years and has held faculty positions together at three different academic institutions. We are a white, hetero dual-career academic couple committed to correcting problems of systemic sexism and racism in academia.

Protection of Vulnerable Populations: Although this essay is based on a synthesis of literature and on personal experience, we envision this work as a step toward institutional and cultural change in favor of those inhabiting marginalized or otherwise vulnerable social identities.

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