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# They Were Surprised: Professional Legitimacy, Social Bias, and Dual-Career Academic Couples

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Dual-career academic couples, or faculty members who are married or partnered to other faculty members, make up a critical mass of the professoriate in the United States. Women faculty members are more likely to be in these kinds of relationships. Thus, many institutions have implemented dual-career support policies to increase the number of women in the academy. Though a few studies have examined the rates at which these policies are used, less research examines the way using (or not using) said policies can impact each partner's ability to advance toward their professional goals. Drawing from a multiple, embedded case study of 16 couples at three research universities, I found that features of dual-career hiring processes (e.g., unstructured and informal processes) and biased notions about academic merit, quality, autonomy, and independence undermined professional legitimacy, particularly for women who were, or who were perceived to be, the "second hire." Nevertheless, couples and partners took steps, as individuals and together, to assert their legitimacy and advance toward their professional goals. Implications for more equitable improvement of dual-career hiring policies are considered.

**Keywords:** dual-career academic couples, social bias, professional legitimacy, faculty members

About a third of U.S.-based faculty members have a partner who is also an academic (Schiebinger et al., 2008). Most frequently, the challenges of these so-called dual-career academic couples are considered to be an issue of hiring and recruitment. That is, it can be difficult for dual-career academic couples to find two professionally fulfilling faculty roles at one university or at two universities in the same geographic locale. As such, many institutions have put in place "dual-career partner policies" intended to make it easier for a college or university to hire the partner of an initial hire (Kmec et al., 2015; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2003).

Few studies have considered the experiences of academic couples who use, or try to use, dual-career partner policies. A limited number of program evaluations mark the success of dual-career accommodations by quantifying the number of couples hired (e.g., Loeb, 1997; McMahon et al., 2018), though research also suggests that central dual-career policies are underutilized (Blake, 2020; Morton & Kmec, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Still, we lack insight into what going through the hiring process was like, how partners were received by departmental colleagues, and if each member of the couple was advanced and retained. Faculty members hired through "target of opportunity" and other so-called diversity hiring programs often encounter bias and negative treatment (Hughes et al., 2012) because department members perceive that they received their position through illegitimate or unmeritorious means. As such, there is reason

to believe that members of academic couples who use such policies might encounter similar biases, therefore constraining their advancement and professional satisfaction. Thus, drawing on concepts of professional legitimacy and social bias, the purpose of this study was to examine how members of dual-career academic couples seek to establish professional legitimacy as faculty members and identify aspects of bias within institutions and academic culture that constrain their professional legitimacy, with a particular emphasis on the partner who was or was thought to be the "second hire."

Understanding the experiences of dual-career academic couples warrants examination for numerous reasons. Women faculty members are more likely to have a partner who is also an academic (of any gender) compared to men faculty members (Astin & Milem, 1997; Schiebinger et al., 2008) and are more likely to cite professional opportunities for their partners as a reason for departure (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education [COACHE], 2018; Gardner, 2013). Thus, meeting the needs of dual-career academic couples serves a critical way in which greater gender equity in the professoriate might be achieved (Laursen & Austin, 2020). Furthermore, faculty members, regardless of gender and whether their partner is an academic, are often forced to live separately from their partner to facilitate their professional careers (Sallee & Lewis, 2020). This can undermine work-life integration, lead to greater burnout and stress, and lower relationship satisfaction (Denson et al., 2018; Sallee & Lewis, 2020; Sorgen et al., 2020), all of which may undercut productivity and retention (COACHE, 2018; Gardner, 2013). Given the high cost of faculty departure for institutions (Kaminski & Geisler, 2012) and the overall concern that many top scholars are leaving the professoriate for careers in industries that are more amenable to work-life flexibility (Catherine, 2020; Chen, 2021), colleges and universities, disciplines, and academic leaders have a vested interest in understanding the needs of dual-career academic couples to achieve higher education's mission of teaching students and contributing to the creation of new knowledge.

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This study is structured in the following way. I first review the literature on dual-career academic couples and the kinds of policies and practices institutions put in place to facilitate their recruitment, hiring, and retention. I consider the limitations of these policies. Next, I discuss the guiding framework professional legitimacy and consider how this concept is in conversation with the literature on social bias. I then describe the methods and findings of the study. Finally, I discuss my findings and consider the implications of this work for policy, practice, and theory.

### **Literature Review: Dual-Career Academic Couples and Dual-Career Hiring and Retention**

In the last 20 years, policies to support the hiring of dual-career academic couples have become increasingly visible and prominent. Faculty unions, disciplinary associations, and federal agencies all recommend institutions create policies and practices to facilitate dual-career recruitment (American Association of University Professors, 2010; American Philosophical Association, 2010; Laursen & Austin, 2020; Putnam et al., 2018). Still, approaches vary. Some institutions use subsidies to encourage the creation of new faculty positions for partners, while others put in place dual-career resources offices or hire administrators who provide career placement services to dual-career couples (McCluskey et al., n.d.; McMahon et al., 2018; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2003). Others use multiinstitutional approaches, intended to facilitate the hiring of partners within a consortium of institutions (McMahon et al., 2018; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2003).

The evidence on whether these policies increase the hiring of dual-career couples is mixed. Some research showed policies may be flawed or underutilized, with dual-career academic couples reporting that they had not used and did not know if their institution had a dual-career support policy (Blake, 2020; Kmec et al., 2015; Schiebinger et al., 2008). Other studies suggested couples are more likely to be hired through an informal policy at the department level compared to formal policies at the institutional level (Kmec et al., 2015). This suggests that institutional resources are being devoted to dual-career hiring, but that these resources are not necessarily being used, or used well. At the same time, other researchers found that over 50% of dual-career academic couples used a hiring policy (Zhang & Kmec, 2018) and that dual-career academic couples who revealed their need for a partner position early in the hiring process experienced more positive career outcomes (e.g., promotion, salary) compared to couples who did not (Morton & Kmec, 2018). Thus, interrogating the experiences of dual-career academic couples is critical for understanding how and if institutional resources allocated for dual-career hiring are being used, being used effectively, and to what effect.

Beyond understanding effectiveness, there are other potential limitations to our current understanding of dual-career hiring policies and their impact on the satisfaction and retention of academic couples. Studies that focus on the quantitative rates of policy usage give little insight into the institutional conditions under which dual-career negotiations are successful (or not); the factors academic couples consider when negotiating with the institution; and the experiences of couples who use policies. Moreover, multiple studies over the last 20 years show that among different-gender couples, men are more likely to be the initial hire, or the partner who is first recruited to the institution, whereas women compose a greater

percentage of partner hires or second hires (Blake, 2022; Kaunas et al., 2018; Loeb, 1997; Schiebinger et al., 2008). Such trends are potentially problematic, as faculty members hired outside of so-called traditional or open searches often encounter challenges related to establishing the quality of their scholarship or their “deservingness” of a faculty role (Griffin, 2020; Hughes et al., 2012).

Multiple factors contribute to the continued relegation of women into the “second hire” position. In different-gender couples, men are often further along in their careers and may therefore wield more capital on the faculty job market (Yakaboski, 2016). Frequently, a couple’s decision to have children contributes to uneven career progression, as many women experience a pause or gap in their productivity or scholarly progress after the birth of a child (Mason et al., 2013). Women may be less likely to negotiate for a partner hire (Morton, 2018) and may encounter greater obstacles and penalties when they do (Blake, 2022; Kelly & McCann, 2019). Such findings about academic couples are in conversation with a larger body of social science research that shows that in different-gender couples, women are more likely to make career sacrifices to maintain their relationships (Gelfand et al., 2006) and less likely to be the partner whose career is considered to be the lead or primary (Chesley, 2017). Yet, many of these explanations ultimately suggest that career inequality among partners in an academic couple, and therefore the overrepresentation of women in the second hire position, is the result of individual or shared choice, rather than considering how institutional policy and practice and academic culture that may cause these patterns to persist. This study takes a different view, considering the experiences of academic couples through the lens of professional legitimacy and social bias.

### **Conceptual Framing: Professional Legitimacy and Social Bias**

The concepts of professional legitimacy and social bias framed this study. I defined professional legitimacy as a “condition reflecting cultural alignment, normative support or consonance with relevant rules or laws” (Scott, 1995, p. 45), where the more an individual fits in, mimics, and adopts “the kinds of behaviors and forms that have already been deemed as expected and acceptable, the more legitimacy they accrue” (Gonzales & Rincones, 2012, p. 11). In this view, the act of being or becoming legitimate is an intrinsically social and cultural practice(s), inferred and interpreted by individuals themselves but also through their interactions, for instance, with colleagues, organizational processes, and field/societal/institutional norms and expectations (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016). In this way, legitimacy can be viewed as a form of capital, a resource that professionals seek, and seek to leverage, as they pursue career goals and advancement (Gonzales, 2013; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; O’Meara et al., 2018).

In academia, faculty members accrue and pursue legitimacy in a variety of ways over the course of their careers by, for instance, pursuing doctoral study at a highly ranked institution (Austin, 2002), being hired through a competitive, open search process (Posselt et al., 2020), going through promotion and tenure (Posselt et al., 2020), and via the endorsements of colleagues (O’Meara et al., 2018). Although what constitutes legitimacy varies as a function of institutional type (Gonzales, 2013), field-level socialization of academics tends to normalize certain behaviors, specifically those

pursued by faculty members in research-intensive universities (Austin, 2002), including being viewed as independent and autonomous (Gardner, 2008; O'Meara et al., 2018); dedicating limitless time and effort to scholarship and research (Gonzales & Terosky, 2016); and/or relentlessly pursuing prestige in the form of grants, publications in reputable journals, and other high-visibility professional opportunities (Gonzales, 2013). Research also suggests that faculty members do not “achieve” legitimacy, but rather continually pursue it over the course of their careers (O'Meara et al., 2018, p. 2), meaning that the quest for legitimacy, and the benchmarks associated with being legitimate, are often amorphous, intangible, and changing over time.

That a faculty member pursues professional legitimacy is not in and of itself problematic (Gonzales, 2013); however, scholars observe that monolithic assumptions about what and who is legitimate is a pressing equity concern that constrains the full participation of many faculty members (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzales, 2013; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; O'Meara et al., 2018). When faculty members engage in scholarship considered to be outside the mainstream (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzales & Rincones, 2012); pursue nontraditional paths to academia (Rhoades et al., 2008); take positions perceived to be less prestigious (i.e., contingent faculty roles or roles at institutions with a lower rank; Gonzales, 2013; O'Meara et al., 2018); resist the productivity norms associated with their field and institutional type (Gonzales, 2013; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016); or have (or are perceived to have) priorities other than research (i.e., family; teaching; diversity, equity, and inclusion; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; Griffin et al., 2013), they are viewed as less legitimate. It, therefore, stands to reason that faculty members hired using a dual-career hiring policy—outside of a normal, legitimate search—may also encounter threats to their legitimacy. Moreover, because research shows gendered and racialized patterns in the groups of faculty members who typically engage in activities thought to be less legitimate (Gonzales & Rincones, 2012; O'Meara et al., 2018; Rhoades et al., 2008), legitimacy, and who it is available to, becomes inextricably tied to aspects larger issues of social bias in the academy.

### Social Bias and Professional Legitimacy

Decades of research show that social bias—on the basis of gender, race, and the intersections thereof—shape the recruitment, retention, and professional growth of faculty of color and women faculty (Griffin, 2020; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012). Social bias is defined as the patterns by which social role expectations, norms, and stereotypes implicitly and explicitly shape our perceptions of individuals from different social groups, often in ways thought to be unfair or prejudicial (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). Researchers observe social bias across multiple domains of the academic workplace. For instance, gender and racial bias have been well-documented in peer review (Bendels et al., 2018) and grant-making (Hoppe et al., 2019); who gets credit in collaborative work (Sarsons, 2017); perceptions of who is hireable (Eaton et al., 2020) and competent (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012); and in faculty workload (O'Meara et al., 2021). Bias against caregiving impacts all faculty members but is particularly well-known to shape the careers of women (Kachchaf et al., 2015; Mason et al., 2013). Furthermore, epistemic exclusion, or the devaluing of

research using certain methods or focused on marginalized populations, has been shown to be one of the major biases that inhibits the career progress of women and faculty of color (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Settles et al., 2022). These biases are intersectional, with White women, women and men of color, and/or faculty in contingent faculty roles encountering different kinds of barriers and privileges depending on their race, gender, and/or appointment type (Griffin, 2020).

Many of the domains in which bias has been documented are also ones wherein faculty members demonstrate or accrue legitimacy. For instance, productivity demonstrated by a high *h*-index, publications in prestigious journals, or large grants engender legitimacy (Gonzales, 2013; O'Meara et al., 2018)—yet faculty of color and women are less likely to be cited or funded and more likely to publish in less mainstream journals. Similarly, women and faculty of color are more likely to be in contingent roles (Finkelstein et al., 2016) and/or take up teaching, advising, and service-related work (Misra et al., 2021), which means that they take on work perceived to be less legitimate in many university contexts (Gonzales, 2013). Moreover, faculty members may engage in bias avoidance, for instance, hiding their family commitments or refusing to use work-life policies like dual-career hiring policies, as a way to enhance their professional legitimacy (Drago et al., 2006), but doing so may lead to greater work-life conflict and marital stress (Sallee & Lewis, 2020). As such, “not all faculty face an even playing field in trying to access professional legitimacy” (O'Meara et al., 2018, p. 8)—bias plays a critical role in understanding who and what is legitimate in academe.

Cumulatively, professional legitimacy and social bias work together in this study to illuminate challenges and potentially explain why differences in the career advancement emerge and persist among members of an academic couple. That is, given that one member of an academic couple may be hired through a “less legitimate” path and often holds a marginalized social identity, legitimacy and bias may provide some explanation for the experiences of academic couples in hiring, as well as their experiences as they advance in their professional careers.

### Method

To examine this topic, I used a multiple, embedded, qualitative case study (Yin, 2014) of dual-career academic couples at three research universities: Sunnysdale University, Midstate University, and Lakeland University. Each institution was a public university with very high research productivity, large student enrollment (>25,000), and a large, full-time faculty (>1,300). Sunnysdale and Lakeland were both located in rural areas while Midstate was in a suburb of a large urban city. Although I had initially sought institutions with different dual-career policies, interviews quickly revealed that each institution in fact had the same central dual-career policy: departments could apply for a subsidy from academic affairs for the hiring of a partner. While this policy was enabled at each institution, institutional informants indicated that partner hires were more often made within academic units (e.g., colleges or departments), outside of the central policy.

I drew findings from three main sources: joint and individual interviews with couples; interviews with institutional informants; and document analysis. Institutional informants included vice provosts for faculty affairs and central administrators ( $n = 5$ ) involved

in faculty development and/or the administration of dual-career policies. These interviews focused on dual-career policies and other faculty work-life policies and benefits. For interviews with couples ( $n = 16$ ), couples needed to both be full-time employed as faculty at the same institution and agree to participate in a joint interview as well as an individual interview (for a total of three interviews per couple). They also submitted their curriculum vitae, which I used as a data source to verify and better understand career trajectories and research interests. Document analysis included analysis of each institution's public faculty affairs and human resources website(s), wherein I searched for and downloaded each institution's faculty work-life policies, including dual-career policy. This study was approved by the institutional review board of the University of Maryland (Protocol No. 1459737).

## Participants

This study primarily draws from interviews with couples and thus further description of this sample is warranted (Table 1). Ultimately, I recruited four couples from Sunnyside University and six couples each from Lakeland University and Midstate University. Participants self-described their race, gender, and sexual orientation: a quarter ( $n = 8$ ) of participants identified as being Black, Asian, or multiracial, while 24 identified as White; 17 participants identified as men and 15 as women; and 15 couples were in different-gender relationships with one couple in a same-gender relationship. In terms of rank and appointment type, 13 participants were full professors; 12 were associate professors; four were assistant professors; and three were nontenure eligible faculty (however it is worth noting that four of the participants who currently held tenured or tenure-eligible positions were initially hired into nontenure eligible, short-term contract positions). Seven participants were currently in academic leadership roles (e.g., chair or administrator).

Interviews revealed a variety of hiring pathways for couples. Ten couples indicated that they used a partner hiring policy at the time of their initial hire to their institution. In nine of these couples, there was a clearly established initial and second hire. In these nine cases, the initial hire was a man (eight White and one Asian) in a tenure-track or tenured faculty role. The second hires were more racially diverse and had more varied appointment types and career trajectories: three participants were hired into tenure-track or tenured roles (one Black man and two White women); one participant (an Asian woman) was hired into a promotable contingent role; four White women were initially hired into contingent positions and moved into tenure-track or tenured roles; and one White woman was hired into a contingent role, moved to a tenure-track role, and then moved back to a contingent role after a negative pretenure review. Of the 10 who used a partner hiring policy, only three couples indicated that they had used the central hiring policy; the other seven couples indicated that the second hire was facilitated informally, often as an ad hoc deal with a college or department.

The remaining six couples indicated that they had been hired separately: some met as faculty members; others were hired as part of a cluster hire; others applied to separate and distinct faculty positions at the same time; and others were sequentially hired, often (though not always explicitly) as part of a retention offer for the faculty member who joined the institution first. For clarity's sake, in this study, I broadly refer to the partner who was hired second, either

as part of a formal partner hiring arrangement or not, as the "second hire"; although this term does not apply to all couples in this study.

## Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Because I used a multiple, embedded case design, I conducted this analysis in two steps (Yin, 2014). First, I developed an individual case report for each couple, which highlighted aspects of their career trajectories and hiring experiences. I then conducted a cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014), identifying similarities and differences across dual-career academic couples within their institutional context. Findings in this study, in particular, draw from this cross-case analysis. Within each step, I used both inductive and deductive processes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Saldaña, 2016). That is, the concepts professional legitimacy and bias informed my initial read-through and coding of the data. For instance, I read through transcripts and noted the strategic actions or perspectives that partner hires used to establish legitimacy in their relationships with colleagues. Similarly, I noted aspects of institutional policy or practice (e.g., hiring processes) that undermined partner hires' legitimacy within their departments. Using an inductive process, I also coded the data to mark places that provided counterexamples or aspects of participants that did not align with the concepts of legitimacy or bias.

I established the trustworthiness of results through multiple strategies over the course of the study. I triangulated data across sources, including comparing different types of sources (e.g., participant understandings of policies vs. the actual policies) and comparing the experiences of different people (e.g., one member of a couple to their partner; Patton, 1999). I engaged in thematic member checks (Merriam, 1998) by presenting participants with a memo of my preliminary themes via email. Participants responded to these themes and I incorporated their feedback into the individual case descriptions and cross-case findings. I also engaged in peer debriefing/examination (Patton, 1999), wherein I asked two colleagues to review and examine my data and findings for accuracy and feedback. I shared excerpts of coded transcriptions, my final codebook, and a case description with two peers and asked them to review the codes for consistency with my own codebook and logic. I then incorporated their feedback into my codebook and findings.

## Limitations

As with any study, this research had limitations. I focused on a subset of colleges and universities, namely research institutions with very high research productivity, which employ only a small percentage of faculty members. As such, the findings may not be applicable to faculty members employed in other contexts such as community colleges or primarily undergraduate-serving institutions. I also focused on faculty members employed at the same institution who, by definition, experienced some success at navigating the dual-career faculty search. Although this was strategic, in that I wanted to examine participant experience with dual-career hiring, it is likely given the constraints academic job market that many dual-career academic couples are not employed at the same institution and/or not employed in academia at all. There were also limitations in the diversity of the sample: although I sought diversity in terms of sexual orientation and gender orientation, only one couple identified as gay and all participants identified as cisgender.



**Table 1**  
*Descriptions of Couples—Sunnydale University*

| Couple              | Pseudonym | Gender | Race         | Sexual orientation | Rank at hire                 | Current rank                  | Field                             | Used a dual-career accommodation/initial hire |
|---------------------|-----------|--------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Karl and Roy        | Karl      | Man    | White        | Gay                | Professor                    | Professor                     | STEM                              | Yes/Karl                                      |
| Lori and Andy       | Roy       | Man    | Black        | Gay                | Assist. Professor            | Assoc. Professor              | Professional Field                |   |
|                     | Lori      | Woman  | Asian        | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Professor                     | Social Science                    | No  |
| Dax and Divya       | Andy      | Man    | Multiracial  | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Associate Professor and Chair | Social Science                    |   |
|                     | Dax       | Man    | Asian (Intl) | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Professor and Chair           | STEM <sup>a,b</sup>               | No  |
| Oscar and Marta     | Divya     | Woman  | Asian (Intl) | Het                | Lecturer                     | Senior Lecturer               | STEM <sup>a,b</sup>               |   |
|                     | Oscar     | Man    | White        | Het                | Assist. Prof                 | Professor                     | Social Science                    | Yes/Oscar                                     |
| Jim and Christine   | Marta     | Woman  | White        | Het                | Postdoctoral Fellow          | Professor                     | Social Science                    |   |
|                     | Jim       | Man    | White        | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Assoc. Professor              | Social Science <sup>a,b</sup>     | Yes/Jim                                       |
| Dwight and Olivia   | Christine | Woman  | White        | Het                | Visiting Assist. Professor   | Assoc. Professor              | Social Science <sup>a,b</sup>     |   |
|                     | Dwight    | Man    | White        | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Associate Professor and Chair | Professional Field <sup>a,b</sup> | No  |
| Michael and Chelsea | Olivia    | Woman  | White        | Het                | Teaching Assistant Professor | Associate Professor           | Professional Field <sup>a,b</sup> |   |
|                     | Michael   | Man    | White        | Het                | Assistant Professor          | Associate Professor           | Social Science <sup>a,b</sup>     | No  |
| John and Kelly      | Chelsea   | Woman  | White        | Het                | Assistant Professor          | Associate Professor           | Social Science <sup>a,b</sup>     |   |
|                     | John      | Man    | White        | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Assoc. Professor              | Social Science                    | Yes/John                                      |
| Brett and Stacy     | Kelly     | Woman  | White        | Het                | Teaching Assist. Professor   | Assistant Professor           | Professional Field                |   |
|                     | Brett     | Man    | White        | Het                | Assistant Professor          | Assoc. Professor              | Humanities                        | Yes/Brett                                     |
| Stanley and Vivian  | Stacy     | Woman  | White        | Het                | Teaching Assis. Professor    | Service Assoc. Professor      | Professional Field                |   |
|                     | Stanley   | Man    | White        | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Professor and Associate Dean  | STEM <sup>a,b</sup>               | Yes/Neither                                   |
| Toby and Anna       | Vivian    | Woman  | White        | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Professor                     | STEM <sup>a,b</sup>               |   |
|                     | Toby      | Man    | Asian        | Het                | Professor and Chair          | Professor and Chair           | Professional Field                | Yes/Toby                                      |
| Timothy and Katy    | Anna      | Woman  | Asian        | Het                | Clinical Assist. Professor   | Clinical Assistant Professor  | Professional Field                |   |
|                     | Timothy   | Man    | White        | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Assistant Professor           | Social Science <sup>a,b</sup>     | No  |
| Meredith and Roland | Katy      | Woman  | White        | Het                | Assist. Professor            | Associate Professor           | Social Science <sup>a,b</sup>     |   |
|                     | Meredith  | Woman  | White        | Het                | Professor and Chair          | Associate Professor           | STEM <sup>b</sup>                 | Yes/Roland                                    |
| Emmett and Helene   | Roland    | Man    | White        | Het                | Professor                    | Professor                     | STEM <sup>b</sup>                 |   |
|                     | Emmett    | Man    | White        | Het                | Visiting Assoc. Professor    | Associate Professor           | Professional Field <sup>a,b</sup> | Yes/Emmett                                    |
| Clark and Allison   | Helene    | Woman  | White        | Het                | Professor                    | Professor                     | Professional Field <sup>a,b</sup> |   |
|                     | Clark     | Man    | Black        | Het                | Visiting Assoc. Professor    | Associate Professor           | Professional Field <sup>a,b</sup> | No  |
| Trevor and Claudia  | Allison   | Woman  | White        | Het                | Professor                    | Professor and Chair           | Professional Field <sup>b</sup>   |   |
|                     | Trevor    | Man    | White        | Het                | Asst. Professor              | Asst. Professor               | STEM                              | Yes/Trevor                                    |
|                     | Claudio   | Woman  | White        | Het                | Assoc. Professor             | Professor and Chair           | Social Science                    |   |

*Note.* STEM = Science, Technology, or Mathematics.  
<sup>a</sup> Same department. <sup>b</sup> Same field/discipline.

## Positionality

Before reporting findings, a discussion of my own positionality relative to this study and topic is warranted. I came to the topic of dual-career academic couples through my work as a scholar-practitioner who engages on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the academic workplace on my own campus. In my practitioner role, I engage frequently with faculty hiring committees and officials who often cite “dual-career” issues to be a challenge as related to faculty recruitment and retention, particularly for women academics. Thus, my interest in this topic emerged primarily as a way to interrogate how higher education institutions can better address dual-career issues. My own identities as a cisgender, multiracial (White and Asian), heterosexual woman who was born in the United States also shape my position relative to this topic. My partner, while not an academic, is also in a demanding professional role and we have navigated challenges similar to participants in this study. In many ways, I view these positionalities as a strength, in that they helped me develop rapport with the participants and understand their experiences, while my status as a nondual-career academic allowed me to maintain some distance from the topic.

## Findings

There were three ways in which participants described professional legitimacy as related to being a member of a dual-career academic couple. First, couples described ways that the stigma associated with being a “second hire” undercut their legitimacy and the steps they took steps to resist the label, even while some couples acknowledged that their relationship status positively influenced their hiring. Second, participants discussed aspects of their institutions and departments that undercut their merit and attempts to assert their quality as faculty members. Finally, participants described actions they took to establish themselves as autonomous or independent entities, separate from their partners. Within each theme, I consider the strategies that faculty members used to assert their legitimacy in these areas and aspects of social bias that seemed to shape their experiences.

## Experiencing and Resisting “Second Hire” Labels

Participants possessed awareness of the challenges commonly associated with dual-career hiring and the negative stigmas commonly associated with being, or being viewed as, the faculty member hired second. Participants who had used a dual-career hiring policy and were in the second hire position revealed that department colleagues and/or leaders often made references to their hiring pathway in public settings. For example, Anna recalled that at her first faculty meeting, her department chair introduced as her specifically as “Toby’s wife,” saying that Anna was “a spousal hire,” rather than emphasizing Anna’s scholarship or teaching expertise. Meredith likewise indicated departmental colleagues referred to her constantly as “the spousal hire” rather than by her name, serving to both delegitimize her as a faculty member and, to some extent, dehumanize her altogether. Claudia, who had been hired second, relayed that she thought that most of her departmental colleagues had “no idea” that she was a second hire, which she viewed as beneficial to her ability to navigate the department. Couples who had

been hired separately also acknowledged that being a second hire was imbued with negative meanings. For instance, Lori commented that it was likely that some campus colleagues assumed that Andy had come to Sunnysdale as a “partner hire,” which in some ways undercut his initial status and credibility on campus. As these examples show, across contexts, being the second hire, or even being perceived as the second hire, moved participants into the category of “other,” marking them as different and therefore less legitimate compared to their partners and to other faculty members.

When it was possible to avoid the stigma of being viewed as the second hire, couples went to great lengths to do so, even when being in an academic couple seemed to give them an advantage in the hiring process. For example, six couples indicated that their hiring had occurred separately or via mechanisms not explicitly related to a partner hire policy. However, it became clear through interviews that their hiring departments/units were well-aware of each couple’s status as partners prior to receiving offers. For instance, Lori and Andy explained that they applied to two different positions in different departments at Sunnysdale. They felt fortunate each of their potential hiring departments had open positions and each person had been independently vetted by their potential department through a national search. However, Lori and Andy both recalled that their partnership likely facilitated their hire, in that the hiring departments knew that both partners were being offered jobs and thus more likely to accept. Andy indicated that he felt his offer came in quicker “in part because we had the fiction really that Lori might not take the offer if we didn’t hear quickly.” In this way, Lori and Andy asserted legitimacy by playing into the notion of competition, maximizing Lori’s legitimacy as signaled by the perception of competition from another institution, which forced Sunnysdale to act quickly to firm up positions for both partners.

In a similar vein, Dwight and Olivia explained that they were hired separately into the same department at Lakeland. Dwight was hired through an open search and then a few years later, Olivia joined the department, first as a contingent faculty member and then as a tenure-line assistant professor. Though Olivia was, in Dwight’s word, technically not a “spousal hire,” Dwight had lobbied his dean and department chair to hire Olivia when funding for a faculty position became available. This lobbying worked and Olivia was hired, both because of her qualifications and because Dwight made it clear that hiring Olivia would lower his likelihood of departure. In these scenarios, it was clear that institutions viewed couples to be an advantage only when funding for separate positions already existed and they did not need to create new positions, in that it increased the likelihood that a candidate would accept the offer. For couples, when two positions existed, it was an advantage because it could limit the extent to which either partner’s legitimacy as a hire could be questioned. Viewed in this way, when two positions already existed, hiring units and couples could better maintain the illusion of “separate hires” that enhanced their legitimacy, even when one partner did not go through a formal search process.

Even couples who indicated that they used a partner hire policy resisted the notion that one person was the initial hire and the other a second hire. For example, Stanley and Vivian indicated that they used a dual-career policy, but that neither was considered to be a partner hire. Vivian explained,

I don’t think [the department] ever said, “Oh, we want you, but we’ll also hire him.” Or, “We want him, but we’ll also hire you.” It was two

completely equal positions. I don't think either of us were really a spousal hire.

At the same time, the institutional informant at Lakeland indicated that Stanley had been the initial recruit and that it was in effect a bonus that ultimately both Stanley and Vivian had both been successful in their careers. Divergent perspectives in this case reveal the ways in which perceptions about the legitimacy of partner hiring were constructed internally and externally. Internally, Stanley and Vivian perceived and rationalized their hiring as a "package deal": neither partner was the second hire. This internal, shared perspective seemed to ameliorate potential tension or conflict between Stanley and Vivian as partners, and also made it easier for them to accept the offer from Lakeland because they were both receiving legitimate offers. Externally, however, the institutional informant perceived a different story, one wherein Stanley was the initial, or legitimate, recruit and Vivian, a surprise, bonus hire who, despite no or low expectations, happened to also be a legitimate researcher.

### Establishing Merit and Quality

Many participants who were hired second described that they often felt (or were made to feel) that they did not earn their job fairly or based on their own merit or qualifications, which therefore undermined their legitimacy as they tried to advance their careers within their hiring department. Stacy's case was perhaps the most emblematic of these challenges. Stacy was originally hired in a contingent teaching role. The following year, a tenure-track position in the department opened, for which Stacy planned to apply through the regular open search process. However, Stacy's college leadership, seeing an opportunity to leverage Lakeland's dual-career policy and therefore receive some funding for a tenure-track position, decided to waive the search and hire Stacy as a tenure-track assistant professor. As Stacy described, this context caused members of her department and college administration to treat her as a "charity case." She described how she was not invited to faculty orientation or provided with a faculty mentor. Her partner Brett commented that despite being on the tenure track, Stacy's workload did not change, so she continued doing the service and teaching typically associated with a teaching-focused faculty member, leaving less time for research. As such, Stacy received negative feedback on her research in her final review before being evaluated for tenure. Faced with the prospect of being denied tenure and needing to find a new position at another university, Stacy elected to find take an administratively focused contingent position in another department, though she later learned that her research productivity was consistent with others in the department who had been tenured. While she ultimately found professional success in this position, Stacy felt her department colleagues and college leadership had never taken her seriously as a tenure-track faculty member because she had been hired through the dual-career policy. Other participants likewise mentioned that they were made to feel like they were "riding their partners' coattails" or were "tack ons" even after they were tenured, promoted to full, won important institutional grants and awards, and/or were otherwise celebrated for their contributions to their units and institutions. That is, even when second hires participated in processes (e.g., promotion and tenure) and accrued achievements (e.g., publications, grants) typically thought to be legitimizing, their

hiring pathway remained a mark that made legitimacy impossible to reach.

Often, aspects of the hiring process itself contributed to the extent to which second hires felt their individual merit was undermined. Anna, Meredith, Stacy, and Kelly, all second hires, described informal interview processes as diminishing their sense that their potential department took them seriously. For example, Anna described the process in which she was interviewed by her department as unstructured. She did a Skype interview with her would-be department chair and a few other faculty members wherein they asked her to talk about herself generally. She said, "I think they just wanted to see if I would be a good fit or if I was a problem, if they could work with me." In response, Anna offered to do a job talk and she described the reaction as positive, saying she thought the department members were "surprised" that her research was strong and that she "wasn't pretending to know stuff." This quote and process highlight the extent to which Anna felt she had to prove herself as an independent scholar meritorious of her own position during the interview process, as well as the steps she took to assert her legitimacy even though the structure of the interview was not clear. This process also marks a place where Anna's identity as a woman of color played a role, in that the department presumed that she would be incompetent and when she proved otherwise, it came as a surprise. Meredith, Stacy, and Kelly likewise viewed their interviews to be perfunctory, with little structure or information provided to them and little interest displayed by the departments in which they interviewed. Meredith recalled that during one of her interviews, one department chair questioned why she would want to take a position at Midstate at all, given that she already had a faculty role at another institution. In the end, this department chair encouraged Meredith to stay where she was. In all, there was a sense that because participants even entertained the possibility of using a partner hiring policy, they were too easy to get and therefore not legitimate candidates—even when they performed well in interviews and/or had established scholarly track records.

In contrast, interviews where the second hire's would-be department treated the hiring process as "normal" seemed more positive. For instance, Roy (at Sunnydale) and Claudia (at Midstate) were both second hires facilitated by their central institutional policy. Both participants indicated that their interviews with their potential departments were traditional, day-long processes. Claudia indicated that the department "took [the interview] very seriously ... it was the same interview process as it had been for an open search." Roy echoed similar sentiments about his hiring process at Sunnydale, noting that the dual-career hiring policy enhanced the likelihood that his curriculum vitae would get a "look over" but beyond that, did not give him much of an advantage. It is worth noting that both Roy and Claudia were interviewed and ultimately hired into different departments and colleges than the ones in which their partners had been hired, which may have strengthened their ability to be viewed as individually meritorious of their faculty roles. In these two cases, a formal interview process, with standard research talks, meetings with department faculty, chairs, and college leadership, served to legitimize Roy and Claudia as quality scholars, even though they were not being hired through an open search, and seemed to pave the way for each to be better received within their respective departments.

Tied to the theme of merit was the underlying assumption that it would be impossible for partners to be of equal quality, suggesting that partners were evaluated in contrast to one another (as opposed to



in contrast to department colleagues in general). Andy summarized this notion when he said, “there are still many people that will assume that a partner hire or even two people coming at the same time suggests one is weaker. And it isn’t always on gender grounds [though] obviously, gender bias can be severe.” Other participants recognized this assumption when they indicated that they felt fortunate that their partners were of equal quality and thus, never had their relative merit questioned. For instance, Jim said, “I’m just lucky that Christine and I don’t have that huge asymmetry in our successes.” Dwight echoed a similar sentiment when he explained that he and Olivia had not worried about her tenure case being viewed with suspicion because “[her case] was above reproach.” These quotes reveal the tendency to scrutinize the quality of partners, and in particular the quality of women partners, in comparison to one another, regardless of their hiring context. Women needed to be beyond reproach when it came to their achievements to mitigate the perception or the reality that they had been hired in relation to their partner.

### Asserting Autonomy and Independence

Finally, participants encountered threats to their legitimacy as related to being viewed as autonomous or independent from their partners. Partners were sometimes wary of collaborating because they were aware of the assumption that one partner did the bulk of the intellectual work. Kelly, for example, said that she was initially hesitant to coauthor with John because she was “worried that there would be a perception that, he’s been gifting me these things” even though she was listed as the first author and had a different last name. As a response, she was careful to ensure that she and John equally contributed to any collaborative research. John, in contrast, indicated that he doubted anyone in his department realized Kelly was his partner and furthermore stated:

No one’s ever said, “Oh, you shouldn’t be publishing with your wife.” Frankly, I would dare them to say something like that, right? Honestly, if I have five publications and one of them is with my wife and you have one or zero for the year, try me, try to say something about that.

Allison likewise reflected that she took deliberate steps to not work with Clark at certain times during her career so that her independence as a scholar was never second-guessed. Clark recognized Allison’s concerns but did not express similar reservations or concerns about their collaborations as related to his own reputation. As these passages highlight, women who collaborated with their men partners were well aware that they could experience backlash or receive less credit for doing so, whereas men participants did not need to worry about their contributions being questioned. Women participants, therefore, crafted strategies, like establishing independent research trajectories and carefully monitoring for equal contributions, so that the legitimacy of such partnerships was less likely to be questioned.

Participants also tried to be viewed as independent colleagues with separate interests and opinions. This was particularly salient for participants who were members of the same department or who shared affiliations with research centers. At a formal level, several couples described scenarios wherein one partner became a unit head to whom the other partner would (under normal circumstance) report. All participants who experienced this scenario indicated that their institution had formal conflict of interest policies and

guidance to establish separate reporting lines, which were particularly important when one partner was chair while their partner went up for promotion or tenure. Even with these policies in place, participants engaged in a kind of performance with their department colleagues to ensure that the entire process was viewed as legitimate. For instance, Dwight described going out of his way to make it “very clear to the faculty on multiple occasions” that the associate chair would manage Olivia’s tenure process. Dax/Divya and Michael/Chelsea likewise indicated that they took precautions in ensuring that conflict of interest policies were visible to members of their department, for instance, reminding colleagues of the separate reporting lines in faculty meetings.

Many couples made efforts to maintain separate institutional identities on an informal basis, taking steps to manage the perception of independence with their colleagues. For instance, Dwight indicated that he typically “stayed away” from Olivia in department meetings because he wanted her to have her “own identity.” Clark explained that he and Allison enacted “firewalls” or at least a “plausible deniability” on issues of shared governance, personnel, or other departmental matters. Allison similarly stated that over the years:

I struggled a lot with making sure that I had my own identity, and that people recognized that just because we worked together, that didn’t mean that I spoke for him, that he spoke for me, that we walked in lock step.

As these passages indicate, gender norms and expectations played a role in these attempts to maintain separate identities. That is, for different-gender couples, women were more worried about making it clear they were independent members of their departments and institutions. Furthermore, although men took actions to establish their partner’s independence, they did not feel it necessary to assert their own. In other words, participants took different kinds of actions to respond to and avoid the gendered assumptions that partners would always share opinions, and in particular that men partners would exercise undue influence over their women partner’s opinions and actions.

In some cases, participants acknowledged that maintaining distinct institutional identities was a performance that they engaged in for their colleagues. For instance, participants like Dwight/Olivia and Jim/Christine indicated that they did not sit next to one another in meetings to give the appearance of separate entities. However, even if partners did not sit next to each other at a meeting, it was not as if they were not going to discuss the matter at a later time. As Olivia explained, she and Dwight just waited to discuss on the car ride home. Likewise, Dax said, “I certainly act differently” when interacting with Divya as compared to other department colleagues. He indicated that, as both a chair and as a partner, he was less likely to personally advocate for Divya, even if he thought she had a “legitimate beef” or concern within the department. Instead, Dax encouraged Divya to find a third-party ally to act as her advocate to avoid the perception of favoritism. Said another way, Dax did not disengage entirely from the situation but instead used a different strategy to make his action(s) less visible to the department. Other participants described departmental meetings in which their partners were equally, if not more, vocal in their disagreements over department matters. For instance, Christine explained:

[Jim] didn’t change his behaviors whatsoever [when I started leading faculty meetings] ... I thought maybe he would be more quiet. And he

wasn't ... He didn't ease up on me because I was the chair. And I didn't on him either, like if he said something that I disagreed with, I let him know.

All said, there was a sense that participants, especially those who shared a unit, went to some lengths to assert their independence from one another as a kind of bias avoidance tactic. Couples realized that their colleagues might view them as a voting block and were sensitive to the perception that if one partner agreed with the other, it could delegitimize their opinions. They, therefore, took steps to avoid the spotlight when possible, as a way to assert their legitimacy as independent faculty members, even when both partners agreed on departmental matters or decision-making.

### Discussion and Implications

This study examined the experiences of 16 dual-career academic couples in three research universities using the lens of professional legitimacy and social bias. I sought to examine how members of dual-career academic couples established professional legitimacy as faculty members and identify aspects of bias within institutions and academic culture that constrained their professional legitimacy. Overall, data showed that dual-career academic couples, and typically the partner considered to be the second hire, encountered challenges in establishing their professional legitimacy. Challenges emerged because of the hiring process and stigmas associated with it but also related to biased notions about academic merit, quality, autonomy, and independence. Couples took steps to assert their professional legitimacy, for instance, by demonstrating their separate intellectual knowledge, publishing independently, and literally and figuratively distancing themselves from their partners during professional interactions. These kinds of performances of legitimacy helped, to some extent, second hires move toward their professional goals, but they were also distinctly shaped by social bias and in particular gender bias, with women encountering a greater uphill battle, and steeper climbs, to establish their legitimacy. In this section, I discuss these findings in greater depth in two domains. First, I consider how these findings speak to the larger context of the recruitment and retention of dual-career academic couples. Next, I discuss how my findings related legitimacy and bias can be considered in the context of ongoing conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion in academe.

### Recruitment and Retention of Dual-Career Academic Couples

One of the key contributions of this study was the nesting of dual-career academic couples within three research universities. Although several studies have looked at dual-career academic couples across institutions (e.g., Blake, 2022; Culpepper & Blake, 2022), my findings speak to the importance of context, and in particular, departmental contexts, in understanding the experience of dual-career couples. Each of the three institutions in this study was similar in terms of their size, mission, and approach to dual-career hiring. Yet, participant experiences with dual-career hiring processes, with colleagues, and with academic leaders varied substantially from unit to unit. Some departments were composed of faculty members and led by chairs more amenable and open to partner hires; others were not. Similarly, couples' experiences varied a great deal depending on their own context: couples that shared

departments, and to some extent colleges, seemed to encounter greater threats to their legitimacy. When couples were in the same department, it was more likely that their colleagues knew that a dual-career hire had been made. Couples in these positions then had to perform their legitimacy on a more ongoing basis. In contrast, couples who were in different departments could more easily hide the fact that they had used a dual-career policy, which meant that they had greater legitimacy to begin with. These experiences remained true across departments representing different disciplines/fields with different gender compositions, suggesting that the departmental dynamics—rather than cultures related to distinct disciplines or fields—drove negative or positive experiences. Such findings are consistent with past research that shows departmental contexts, including colleagues, leaders, and culture(s), are critical for understanding faculty experience (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014), especially in work-life (Lester, 2013).

Findings showed that much about the dual-career hiring process itself created conditions where the legitimacy of partners could be more easily undermined, and again this was true across institutions. Even with the central dual-career hiring policy, some departments evaluated second hires haphazardly, without buy-in from department members. As such, second hires were discredited and viewed with skepticism. This was perhaps best exemplified by participants who recounted department colleagues using terms like "partner hire" or "spousal hire" as a slur that delegitimized and undermined their qualifications and merit. These terms are innately gendered, reflecting the patriarchal and heteronormative assumption that women faculty members are wives whose careers are subordinate to their men partners (Shoben, 1997). In some ways, the dual-career hiring process seemed to activate these biases. That is, by putting partner status "on the table" as the key context in which potential hires were considered and evaluated, department members were able to thinly veil their gender bias and general resistance to partner hires in concerns about merit, quality, or independence (Griffin, 2020; Posselt et al., 2020).

Overall, dual-career hiring policies are often cited as a mechanism for increasing the recruitment and retention of women faculty members (Laursen & Austin, 2020). Faculty search committees are often encouraged to be "open" to the possibility of dual-career hires as a way to be more inclusive and equitable (Fine & Handelsman, 2012; Rivera, 2017). Yet, consistent with past research (Gonzales, 2013; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; O'Meara et al., 2018), my results suggest that narrow views of what and who is considered to be a legitimate academic seriously constrains the opportunities that dual-career academic couples, and particularly women in these couples, have for professional success. This is not to say that dual-career policies should be discontinued, but rather to call attention to the ways that biased views of legitimacy can subvert well-intentioned and equity-minded policies.

### Bias and Professional Legitimacy in the Academy

This study makes three major points about the construction of professional legitimacy in the academy. First, the construction of professional legitimacy for dual-career academic couples who share the same institution seemed to occur at three levels. Consistent with past studies of faculty (e.g., Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; O'Meara et al., 2018), legitimation occurred interactionally, as a result of exchanges with other organizational members (i.e., departmental

colleagues), organizational processes (i.e., hiring), and social and cultural norms (i.e., quality/merit and autonomy/independence). However, the findings in this study also bring into focus the extent to which legitimacy is constructed internally, on an individual level and relationally, on a couple level. Internally, participants described the ways that being in an academic couple and navigating dual-career hiring influenced their perception of their own legitimacy and identity as faculty members. For participants who had not used a dual-career hiring policy, it mattered a great deal that neither partner was a second hire; it imbued a sense of internal legitimacy that each partner had been hired on their own merit. For couples who had used a dual-career hiring policy, the second hire took additional steps to sure up their internal legitimacy, for instance, creating an independent reputation in a different area of research/scholarship. Although these findings suggest an internalization of stigmas associated with partner hires, they also reveal how an individual's view of their own professional legitimacy shapes their perceptions and experiences.

At the couple level, findings reveal how legitimacy was constructed in relation to their partner's. Findings showed that participants regarded and benchmarked their own legitimacy as scholars as compared to their partners. This was sometimes competitive (e.g., who had more publications), but also a by-product of (a) being in a field wherein peers play a critical role in granting legitimacy and (b) being in a partnership with one of those peers. Moreover, participants also perceived that their interactional legitimacy (from colleagues) could be enhanced by, in some cases, maintaining a professional distance from their partners. All said, the findings from this study suggest that considering professional legitimacy in the context of organizations is important, but equally important is the consideration of professional legitimacy on the individual and relationship level.

Second, many of the findings revealed the amorphous and shifting nature of professional legitimacy. One of the main reasons why second hires struggled to accrue legitimacy is because the goalposts for what is considered legitimate are inconsistently applied and constantly changing (O'Meara et al., 2018). Even as second hires performed their legitimacy—by publishing independently, by moving from contingent to tenure-track roles, by being promoted to associate professor—they still encountered negativity and hostility, continually reminded of their status as other. As in prior research, the “normal rules” for legitimation “did not seem to apply to them” (O'Meara et al., 2018, p. 25), which constrained their ability to achieve professional satisfaction even when they were, by all other measures, achieving professional success. Such findings mark the importance of understanding professional legitimacy for faculty members, in that it is intrinsically tied to faculty members' feelings of value, worth, and inclusion in the academy (Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; O'Meara et al., 2018).

The findings in this study showed the ways that professional legitimacy in the academy is biased, specifically gendered, and can be deployed in ways that limit the participation and success of women academics. Women participants in this study, regardless of whether they used a dual-career policy or were the second hire, took steps to ensure that they asserted their merit, quality, autonomy, and independence. They expressed an underlying sense of anxiety and worry about maintaining this performance of legitimacy that their men partners did not. Indeed, one of the ways that men in this study supported their partners was by also engaging in the legitimacy performance (e.g., sitting separately at meetings), a sort of

recognition that their partner's legitimacy could be threatened as a result of their interactions. The findings that women needed to beyond reproach in ways that their men partners did not speak reflect the overall experience of women in the academy: the double standards for competency, the daily microaggressions, and masculine norms and culture that blend to create a chilly climate for women (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Laursen & Austin, 2020; Valian, 1999) regardless of their partner status. However, because women in this study had men partners at their institution, they experienced a heightened need to enact their legitimacy by putting up more barriers and working harder to ensure that they were beyond reproach.

Ultimately, findings in this study offer insight into the ways in which the construction of professional legitimacy in the academy has consequences for diversity, equity, and particularly for inclusion in academe. The participants in this study successfully navigated the dual-career hiring process, a process which numerous studies and op-eds have intrinsically tied to the recruitment of women in academe (Laursen & Austin, 2020), which suggests that dual-career hiring policies can in fact contribute to faculty diversity. Yet, the experience of participants, and in specifically women participants, in this study suggests that earning and maintaining professional legitimacy remains a pressing inclusion challenge for women in dual-career academic couples which can influence their engagement, motivation, and overall satisfaction with the profession.

### Implications for Policy and Practice

Diversity practitioners and others involved with faculty hiring and faculty gender equity efforts may find these results helpful in several ways. Although institutions in this study seem to have heeded the wider call made by disciplinary associations, unions, and researchers to put in place dual-career hiring policies, results show that attention should be paid to the ways such policies are implemented, and in particular, the extent to which implementation varies in different academic units (i.e., within and across colleges and departments). Institutions should consider formalizing hiring processes for “second hires” (and indeed, all contingent faculty or other kinds of “target hire” processes) to increase their legitimacy (Hughes et al., 2012). For instance, creating standardized protocols for the hiring of faculty, even when a search waiver is in place, can help increase buy-in from department members. Such protocols might include a process for faculty members to present their research/scholarship and/or teaching in a formal job talk; opportunities to meet with members of the department faculty and students; and formal meetings with chairs/deans as would be the case in a typical search for a tenured or tenure-track search.

Chairs and deans are also a critical mechanism in ensuring the legitimacy of dual-career hiring programs and faculty members hired through them. Chairs and deans can help legitimize second hires to department members by giving second hires opportunities to share their scholarships via seminars or guest lectures. Similar to the practice of chairs introducing new faculty members on the first day of class as a way to reduce gender and racial bias in student teaching evaluations (P. Norris, personal communication, January 26, 2021), chairs and deans could send introductory emails to the department members about each new hire's research/scholarship, teaching, and/or past experience. Chairs can also ensure that second hires are given access to similar transitional resources (e.g., access

to orientation, start-up funds, departmental mentors) and to ensure that those resources are available to faculty as they advance toward critical career junctures (e.g., tenure, promotion). Many of these insights apply to all faculty members who are hired outside of so-called “normal” hiring processes.

Findings on the role of bias and professional legitimacy also lend itself to implications for the faculty socialization and education. Graduate students and faculty members often are taught there is only one way to be a legitimate faculty member (Gonzales, 2013; O’Meara et al., 2018), and in particular, that there is only one legitimate pathway by which successful academics can be hired (Posselt et al., 2020). Faculty members must understand that there are multiple pathways into the professoriate, and moreover, that a faculty member’s work, not their hiring pathway or the politics surrounding it, is the best barometer of quality and merit.

### Implications for Future Research

There are also implications for future research. As related to dual-career hiring policies, more research on the experiences of couples who use policies and the ways that institutional, field, and societal culture(s) shape the ways that policies are implemented and received is needed. Turning to broader issues of faculty work–life, findings in this study showed the important interaction of individual circumstances (namely, partner status and partner profession) and institutional policy/practice. More research could examine the ways in which certain features/characteristics of individual faculty members (e.g., partner status, career stage) interact with challenges in work–life integration and the institutional policies that ought to be pursued to support faculty members across different contexts and life stages, and how these findings relate to the continued underrepresentation of faculty from marginalized groups such as women and faculty of color. Findings in this study also suggest that legitimacy may be threatened for other faculty members hired outside of the traditional search process (such as target of opportunity hiring or cluster hiring), which is another avenue for future research.

### Conclusion

The quest for professional legitimacy as a faculty member is a journey that many faculty members take, with many barriers and potential roadblocks. Yet the stakes of being viewed as legitimate are higher for dual-career academic couples, in that each partner’s ability to be successful in their career influences perhaps their most important personal relationship—the one with their partner. This study showed that aspects of dual-career hiring processes and academic culture(s) continue to undermine the legitimacy of members of dual-career academic couples, particularly those who are the second hires and who identify as women. Institutions and departments can do better in enhancing the experiences of these faculty members and must do better to ensure the recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty.

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