

Beyond role strain: Work–family sacrifice among underrepresented minority faculty

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Abstract

Objective: This study describes the perceived work demands and family caregiving obligations associated with work–family life among URM faculty and the coping strategies used to negotiate the integration of roles.

Background: Past research on families focuses primarily on professional majority-culture families and often fails to include traditionally and historically underrepresented minority (URM) families. The study of how URM professionals negotiate work and family obligations and economic and institutional constraints remains relatively absent in the family science discourse.

Method: In-depth individual and group interviews ($N = 58$) were conducted with US-born African American, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican faculty at research universities.

Results: The overarching theorizing anchor that grounded the themes was sacrifice. Three themes emerged: excessive work demands/role strain; commitments and caregiving obligations to family of origin and nuclear family; and few coping strategies and resources to maintain a balanced life.

Conclusion: This analysis offers insight into the multiple factors that affect the experiences of URM academics in their workplaces that deeply influence work roles and self-care and its impact on family roles. These data fill a gap by applying alternative frameworks to explore the work–family nexus among racialized groups.

Implications: New research frontiers are offered to study the work–family nexus for URM faculty and how higher education can respond to alleviate excessive work demands and work–family life conflicts.

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KEYWORDS

academia, African Americans, caretaking, Hispanic/Latino/a, social class, work–family issues

INTRODUCTION

Work–family life inquiry has largely centered on three broad themes: time use in the work and family spheres (Sayer, 2016); a “second shift” for working women in dual-earner families who continue to shoulder disproportionate household duties (Sayer et al., 2009); and factors contributing to men’s participation in the home (Ray & Jackson, 2013; Wight et al., 2013). A growing body of research provides insights into professional, historically underrepresented minority (URM) dual-career families and how they negotiate daily home and work activities (Lacy, 2007; Vallejo, 2012). Research on work–family integration in professional families has focused primarily on White nuclear families (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010), with some exceptions (Dow, 2019; Hernandez et al., 2015). Studies that center White families’ experiences or employ racial comparisons often ignore the racialized processes of stratification and legacies of economic disadvantages that inform these differences. In academic settings, work conditions and demands may differ between URM and non-Hispanic White faculty, shaping disparities in whether and how individuals experience work–family conflict (Carlson et al., 2019), marital satisfaction (Sun et al., 2017), the quality of parent–child relationships (Dow, 2019), and role strain (Gordon et al., 2012). The broader sociological questions in this study are: what are the work experiences of highly educated racial and ethnic minority professionals in predominantly White workplace settings? How do these experiences impact their work–family life roles? How do they cope with multiple roles and racialized experiences?

This study describes how historic incorporation, race, ethnicity, economic gaps, and familial contexts mutually construct respondents’ work experiences and familial and caregiving obligations. Grounded in an intersectional analytic framework, we draw on inclusive definitions of family that define it as two or more individuals related or emotionally connected by blood, partnership, adoption, friendship, or choice (Allen et al., 2000). Work–family balance is referenced as the extent to which work and family roles are compatible with one’s life values (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

BACKGROUND**Institutional role strain: The quandary and its effects on URM family roles**

In 2016, less than 12% of full-time faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions were African American or Hispanic, despite representing nearly one-third of the US population (McFarland et al., 2018). For URM faculty, employment challenges in academia often stem from feelings of marginalization (Griffin et al., 2011), an absence of mentoring (Espino & Zambrana, 2019); discrimination from students, colleagues, and administrators (Eagan Jr. & Garvey, 2015); and excessive diversity-related service (Garrison-Wade et al., 2012). The racialized interrogation of the scientific rigor and merit of their research choices poses additional challenges (Griffin et al., 2013). Contemporary scholarship highlights some of the unique challenges facing URM faculty, while other literature focuses specifically on the obstacles in academia and issues of work–life balance (Denson et al., 2018). Negative workplace experiences can lead to role strain, “hardships, challenges, and conflicts or other problems that people come to

experience as they engage over time in normal social roles” (Pearlin, 1983, p. 8). These role strains are particularly salient for URM as they often lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion, resulting in an imbalance in the work–family nexus and low institutional retention patterns (Hernandez et al., 2015).

The study population includes three URM groups who often share distinct experiences due to their histories of involuntary (im)migration and persistent discrimination. Historic racial/ethnic social status is embedded in institutional forms of racism that inscribe patterns of inequality (Ridgeway, 2014). Multilayered identities distinguish these groups from non-URM groups due to intergenerational experiences of inequitable access to opportunity structures; wealth gaps that influence their life course; the higher likelihood of chronic encounters with racism and micro-aggressions in work settings (Solórzano & Huber, 2020); and high levels of university service expectations or taxation (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). This study makes a unique contribution to family science due to its inclusion of the distinct social experiences, economic challenges, and family caregiving obligations that URM academic professionals confront in the workplace and their impact on family and personal life.

Socioeconomic disadvantage, family obligations, and role strain

Socioeconomic disadvantage and family obligations are associated with role strain. Higher economic resources, access to safe and well-resourced public spaces, economic support from family, and supportive personal and professional social networks typically mark professional status. As Bonilla-Silva (1997) observed, Whites receive greater “economic remuneration, are granted higher social estimation, and often have the license to draw physical as well as social boundaries and receive a ‘psychological wage’” (p. 469). For racial and ethnic minority groups, broad access to middle-class status only grew after the passage of Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s (Landry & Marsh, 2011). Many URM, who are now middle class, are more likely than their White counterparts to have low-income parents and siblings (Heflin & Pattillo, 2006; Lacy, 2007). As a result, racial wealth gaps exist across income levels with socioeconomic inequality linked to institutional discrimination in labor, housing, and credit markets that exacerbate wealth gaps between highly educated URM and Whites (Hamilton & Darity Jr., 2010; Shapiro, 2017).

Dettling et al. (2017) estimated that in 2016, median net worth—the difference between gross assets and liabilities—was \$171,000, \$20,700, and \$17,600 for White, Hispanic, and African American families, respectively. One analysis of a nationally representative sample of URM faculty shows economic disparities by race and ethnicity in family size, home ownership, investment income, and spousal income. Results show that URM faculty compared to their non-Hispanic white counterparts are more likely to have children and other family members at home and less likely to own homes (70% of URM faculty compared to 82%). Large gaps in investment income (interest, dividend, or rental income) are notable. For example, only 18% of URM female faculty reported investment income compared to 33% of White female faculty. A similar pattern was found for male faculty, with 25% of URM male faculty compared to 44% of non-Hispanic White male faculty reporting investment income. Among married URM women, especially African Americans, their spouses were less likely than the spouses of non-Hispanic White women to earn \$90,000 (Mora et al., 2018). Economic racial disparities impact the flow of resources between families of origin and offspring (Burton et al., 2010; Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). For Whites, economic resources are more likely to flow from older to younger generations, with significant sources of wealth advantage coming from inheritances and major gifts (Dettling et al., 2017). For African Americans and Mexican Americans, resources often

flow in the opposite direction, as highly educated professionals become the social and economic resource that their less affluent family and community members draw upon (O'Brien, 2012; Vallejo, 2012).

Family obligations often extend into providing personal caregiving and financial assistance for members of the family of origin and extended family (Evans et al., 2014; Mendez-Luck et al., 2016). Although racial and ethnic minorities may be less likely to have the financial resources to outsource caregiving responsibilities, shared values around caring may increase a sense of obligation to take on these responsibilities (Dilworth-Anderson et al., 2005), while reducing time for work obligations. Caregiving burdens can be lessened by purchasing time-saving services such as childcare (Rothwell & Han, 2010) to improve work–family life balance (Raz-Yurovich, 2014). However, given wealth disparities that disadvantage a large portion of URM professionals, few resources are available to reduce the personal and economic costs of family responsibilities (Darity Jr. et al., 2018; Shapiro, 2017). Exploring the myriad ways that respondents cope with work responsibilities and family and extended family obligations can contribute to new understandings of how URM families manage multiple demands.

Coping strategies

There is limited inquiry on the protective self-care strategies employed by URM professionals as they strive to balance work and family life and have productive and successful careers. Protective self-care strategies can support a state of salubrious well-being in the face of discriminatory workplace experiences. URM professionals may cope with role strain and stress in culturally rooted ways, such as relying on institutionalized religion and spiritual practices, accessing community support (Shorter-Gooden, 2004), employing cognitive strategies to refocus energy away from workplace stressors, and using extended kin and community networks as caregivers of children (Dow, 2019). They may also draw on social support from other URM professionals in and outside of the institution, such as the use of family-friendly support services (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012), or other problem-focused strategies (Wingfield, 2010). Passive coping, such as ignoring, remaining silent, or doing nothing is another coping strategy that might be utilized (Aranda et al., 2001). Protective stress-reducing coping strategies can be viewed as preventive measures to avoid or alleviate the impact of role strain or distress stemming from discriminatory conditions (Smith, 2014) that are associated with exhaustion and lower research productivity. Coping strategies are also used to reduce the harm from inhospitable environments (Griffin et al., 2011) on personal lives, impacting work–family processes (Eagan Jr. & Garvey, 2015).

Anchoring the study in a critical framework

An intersectional approach seeks to understand the intersections of history, race, power, and social status and examines patterns of unequal treatment in institutional settings. Black feminist and intersectional approaches proffer alternative frameworks whereby it is understood that individuals are shaped within the context of a community of shared experiences, identities, and standpoints (Collins, 2019). The analytical strength of the intersectional framework is its rich understanding of how individuals are connected to the social institutions that structure complex inequalities. It provides a map for describing differences in power relations as understood by the people who experience them. Racial inequality constitutes a major driver of family patterns and access to the resources necessary for optimal family functioning and its connection to institutional power structures, such as employment opportunities and access to White residential spaces.

The critical intersecting of social identities of URM faculty with institutional systems shape their academic experiences and bidirectional relationships between work and family life. The intersectional framework, combined with a grounded theory approach, illuminates patterns of interaction to understand participants' realities as located in time, place, and the situation of inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Few-Demo, 2014). This study draws on constructivist grounded theory to synchronize with research questions that depend on a conditional matrix and allows researchers to continuously ask "How? When, and Why?" (Green & Thorogood, 2011).

Our respondents include three racial/ethnic groups who share involuntary historical incorporation into the United States via slavery (African Americans), colonization (Puerto Rico), or land acquisition (Mexican Americans) that shaped avenues of economic and social opportunity. These modes of incorporation created a multilayered identity associated with a legacy of exclusion, marginalization, economic disadvantage, and social interactions and experiences in higher education marked by stereotypic attributions of inferior intellect. Our inquiry is rooted in an intersectional framework that informs methodological choices and data interpretation (Few-Demo, 2014, p.170).

Four empirical findings guided data interpretation: (1) in higher education institutions, power is enacted through experiences of chronic episodes of racist encounters such as perceived discrimination, inadequate mentoring, and limited informational supports such as parental leave policy (2) additional episodes of work taxation, such as excessive diversity service reported by URM faculty, contribute to racial battle fatigue and role strain (Franklin, 2016; Smith, 2014); (3) stereotypic representations of merit versus affirmative action hires and intellectual inferiority versus non-URM intellectual superiority is prevalent and harmful to the careers of URM faculty; and (4) the definition of family as the nuclear unit is contested and requires rethinking in the study of racial/ethnic minority families.

We challenge existing traditional approaches comparing racial/ethnic families with White families as the laws, policies and norms that shape White professionals' lives are deeply embedded in a system that privileges White economic status and progress while deprivileging URM families. This study draws on the construct of structural or institutional racism, which emphasizes how past mistreatment drives current inequities and is codified in our custom, practice, and law (Flynn et al., 2017; Shapiro, 2017). In contrast, the traditional family framework ignores the detrimental effects of the racialization process and posits that all social groups progress through a developmental trajectory, resulting in increasing proximity to the ideal European, Christian, middle or upper-class family (Thornton, 2013).

Family science scholars such as Few-Demo (2014) have articulated the importance of examining multiple identities that are historically and contextually situated. An intersectional approach allows a critical rendering of how systematic racist structures in academic employment settings (e.g., racial taxation, income inequality) impact physical and emotional energy, depleting individuals of the time and ability to engage in productive family life and career persistence. Digging deep into the nexus of professional work spaces and optimal family life uncovers the additional demands and stressors that URM academic professionals experience. Wingfield (2010) observes that URM professionals engage in significant emotional labor in their work settings that may deplete the emotional and social resources necessary to fully engage in their family relationships.

This study contributes to the discipline of family sciences by drawing attention to factors often absent in the study of the work-family nexus. Our interpretive intersectional framework draws on theories of work and family role strain (Moen et al., 2013), economic resources and family stress, and coping strategies (Thoits, 2011) to provide insight on URM professional work and family life.

METHODS

This study employs qualitative data from in-depth semi-structured individual ($n = 37$) and six group interviews ($n = 21$) combined with a descriptive-linked survey. These data yielded rich narratives on the lived experiences of respondents to inform three central questions: (1) What are the work experiences of highly educated racial and ethnic minority professionals in predominantly White workplace settings? (2) How do these experiences impact their work–family life roles? (3) How do they cope with the multiple roles and racialized experiences?

Qualitative sample and procedures

The sample included 58 US-born (including its territories) women and men who self-identified as African American/Black (through the race question), Mexican American or Puerto Rican (through the Hispanic ethnicity question) and were tenure-track assistant and associate professors in research universities. Personal narratives to describe potentially significant work stress and family experiences and obligations associated with work–family life were coded and analyzed. Participants were identified through network sampling techniques using existing academic listservs, personal contacts, and respondent referrals to assure stratification by race, ethnicity, and geography. Data for self-identified Native American/Alaskan Native faculty are reported elsewhere (Walters et al., 2019). Faculty received written informed consent and were compensated for their time via small gift incentives. Human subject research was approved by the University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board.

Data instruments and procedures

Individual and group interviews were conducted to obtain lived experience information. Group interviews were stratified by gender and race/ethnicity, with an average of five respondents. The interview protocols each consisted of 20 open-ended questions. Four questions dealt with work–family responsibilities and coping strategies and were asked of all respondents. For this paper, data are drawn from responses to the following questions: (1) Describe how family (partner and/or children) and personal obligations and responsibilities have an effect on your career path? (2) Have there been any major family events in the last 5 years that affected work or work events that affected family life? (3) What types of supports are available to you to balance the competing demands of work and family/personal life (e.g., financial resources)?; and (4) What are the strategies you use to balance the competing demands of work and family/personal life (e.g., How do you care for yourself?)?

A survey was administered upon interview completion (100% response rate). Items included: (a) sociodemographic factors (e.g., age, marital status, sex, income, religion), (b) employment and educational background, (c) family structure, (d) economic asset indicators (home ownership and salary), and discrimination and mentoring. Mentoring and discrimination scales were adapted from the National Faculty Survey (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 1995) and reflected role strain experiences. Mentoring was measured using three items: Do you have a current mentor? (yes/no); Has your mentor prospectively advised you about your progress toward promotion? (yes/no); and what was the overall impact of inadequate mentoring on career growth. The last item had five response options: very significantly = 1 to not at all = 5. *Discrimination* in the workplace was a 6-item scale which asked, “if in your professional career, you have encountered gender, racial/ethnic, and/or class discrimination by a superior or colleague,” and “if in your professional career, you were ever left out of opportunities for professional advancement based on gender, race/ethnicity, and/or class.” Response options were on

a 4-point scale from 1 = never to 4 = always, with scale scores ranging from 6 to 24, with higher scores indicating higher perceptions of bias and discrimination.

The data collection procedures involved contacting all participants by phone or email to schedule a time and date for individual or group interviews. All interviews were conducted in private locations either on or off the respondent's home campus. The first author conducted the majority of interviews. In some instances, there was a match between the racial/ethnic identity of the interviewer and participants. However, common experiences were not assumed between the interviewer and participants and the interviewers asked for full explanations of any experience. Data collection was conducted over a 20-month period. All interviews were recorded digitally and professionally transcribed. The average individual interview time was 1 h and 51 min, and the average group interview time was 2 h and 42 min.

Analyses

All data were inputted into Atlas.ti 6.2, a qualitative analysis software program, to allow for systematic coding, analysis, and interpretation. The unit of observation is the individual as they provide their personal perceptions of role strain regarding how their work experiences impact family and personal life. The units of analyses are those (un)supportive interactions referred to by the interviewees' narratives (Roy et al., 2015). The initial coding scheme was based on pilot interviews and themes drawn from a comprehensive literature review on role strain in work–family life, economic resources, caregiving and stressors in academic positions. Four coders, two doctoral candidates and two postdoctoral researchers experienced in qualitative data, formed two teams. Coders were trained in the study purpose and definitions of codes and subcodes. An open review and reading of data to assess major themes was initially conducted by coders. Open coding involved line-by-line reading of texts by the assigned coders to develop case-ordered, then theme-ordered, descriptive matrices. Thirteen main codes were developed, including subcodes and an “Other” code. Three major themes emerged: (1) excessive work demands/role strain, associated with experiences of perceived discrimination and inadequate mentoring, (2) additional caregiving and economic obligations to family of origin and nuclear family, and (3) few coping strategies and resources available to maintain balance and a healthy self. Comparisons were made with constructs identified in the literature review such as the myth of balance and excessive time demands. The major theorizing construct was that of sacrifice, described as having to give up one's personal life, family time, or self-care to simultaneously meet the demands of work and family.

Key words or phrases consistently emerged: excessive workplace demands, discrimination, inadequate guidance/mentoring, work role strain, obligations to and caregiving responsibilities to family of origin. Axial coding was applied around three major thematic constructs: work demands/role strains; family of origin events/obligations; and multiple coping strategies. For these analyses, 467 quotes on work–family life and coping strategies were analyzed. Narratives were examined to understand the meaning and nature of work demands, the type of family of origin events that were perceived as burdensome and draining, and how participants managed the work–family nexus. This analysis stage provided key data to propose relationships among the variables in the broader area of work–family life (La Rossa, 2005)

The second phase of coding provided an understanding of the multiple demands and experiences on the lives of these participants, such as discrimination, high service burdens, limited economic resources, and life events related to families and difficult colleagues. These factors illuminated the construct of sacrifice that lends credibility to the pattern of findings that respondents report: feeling of not belonging in their academic environments, the lack of social supports and the emotional labor required in predominantly White spaces (Wingfield, 2010). Thematic saturation was reached about halfway through the interviews ($n = 30$). To ensure

reliability and credibility of data and confirm that the patterns observed reflected theoretical saturation and sensitivity (Roy et al., 2015), we employed analytic triangulation using multiple coders who were not present during data collection. The coders analyzed the data, and their conclusions were comparatively assessed and reflected consistency between the coders and the primary interviewer. Disagreements in coding were reconciled by an independent coder for each team.

Strategies used to check credibility included peer review, debriefing, and member checking in about 25 public forums to URM peers and representative stakeholders at conferences and panel presentations on work–family life, mentoring groups, and individual conversations. No one challenged the presentation of findings nor offered a divergent or minority perspective. Notably, we do not have unique negative cases—not a single respondent was positive about the impact of stressful work demands on family responsibilities. Multiple member checking processes help to enrich the trustworthiness and credibility of data (Creswell, 2007) and a resounding fit of experiences was confirmed. Data on discipline and department were recoded and collapsed into larger National Science Foundation disciplinary categories to avoid potential violation of confidentiality and anonymity. Descriptive analyses (i.e., frequencies, means, and standard deviations) were conducted with SPSS 17.0. Respondents were assured that only their race/ethnicity and gender would be revealed and case-studies would not be produced.

The quotes selected reflect patterns of experiences under a specific theme and may not reflect individual experiences within or across race/ethnic group. These data reflect a racialized pattern of lived experiences that powerfully demonstrate the impacts of structural racism in the work–family life course of URM respondents. In the current study, the major ways people talked about their multiple responsibilities was in terms of sacrifice and giving up one area to complete responsibilities in another area.

FINDINGS

Sample demographics, income and assets, and perceptions of mentoring and discrimination in the work environment illustrate the larger social context in which racialized, institutional, inter-generational processes operate and affect patterns of work–family life. Demographic, family, and economic profiles of the sample showed that 39.7% ($n = 23$) self-identified as African American, 36.2% ($n = 21$) as Mexican American, and 24.1% ($n = 14$) as Puerto Rican. Sex not gender was measured with a single item: Are you male, female, other?. The sample included more females, 57% ($n = 33$), than males, 43% ($n = 25$). The mean age of the total sample was 41.2 years. Most ($n = 39$, 67.2%) participants were assistant professors, with the remainder associate professors ($n = 19$, 32.8%). About one-quarter of the sample had never been married, 67% were married or living with a partner, and about 9% were divorced. Slightly over half (53%; $n = 31$) of the respondents had children, and almost two-thirds (65%) had children under 10 years of age. In terms of the economic characteristics of respondents, close to 70% of respondents reported home ownership. Data on individual income showed that close to 40% of the sample ($n = 22$) earned more than \$90,000/year and over one-third (36%; $n = 21$) earned less than \$70,000/year.

Experiences of inadequate mentoring and perceived discrimination increased work stress that impacted work–family strains. Although 93% of the sample reported a current mentor, less than half (42.1%) reported that a mentor prospectively (frequently/always) advised them about their progress toward promotion with over half reporting that inadequate mentoring had influenced their career. Among participants, race/ethnic discrimination in the workplace by a superior or colleague, was twice as likely to be reported (often/always; 39.7%) compared to gender discrimination (20.7%). The same pattern was observed for being “left out of opportunities for professional advancement” due to race/ethnicity (20.7%) compared to gender (10.3%).

African Americans were more likely to report race/ethnic discrimination and being left out of opportunities by a superior or colleague compared to Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. Regarding religion, among all participants, 77.6% reported identifying with a religious tradition with African Americans (95.7%) most likely and Puerto Ricans least likely to identify with a tradition. The second question, “How important is your religion in helping you cope with life and work?” revealed that African Americans were the most likely (78.3%) to report very important/important followed by 61.9% of Mexican Americans and 14.3% of Puerto Ricans.

The qualitative results anchored the theorizing construct of sacrifice, departing from the large body of knowledge on majority culture professionals. Three major areas of sacrifice yielded the following themes regarding work–family balance: (a) excessive work demands, discriminatory experiences and role strain; (b) additional commitments of caregiving responsibilities, and economic obligation to family of origin and nuclear family; and (c) few coping strategies and resources available to maintain balance and a healthy self. These themes were most salient for the majority of respondents, and patterns of themes were consistent by gender, race, and ethnicity.

Most participants reported the balancing act was one of “juggling” and “struggling” in work demands, obligations to family of origin, and time for recreational and/or social life. The overwhelming majority of respondents experienced “balance” as an oxymoron and a persistent sacrifice to give priority to one domain of life, work over family or family over work. One Mexican American male aptly captured the central construct of sacrifice in his role as father and academic:

It’s never going to be an easy time to raise a youngster. So, it’s kind of one of those things. You listen to advice, but a lot of those people that are giving you that advice, they are miserable. You know? It’s like I do not want to be that person. I do not want to sacrifice my life for this career.

These observations highlighted the multiple role demands of early-career respondents and their perceptions that excessive work demands jointly with perceived discrimination and inadequate mentoring were irreconcilable with family expectations and contributed to family strain. For example, the work demands often disallowed for significant family time. Inadequate mentoring resulted in limited guidance on how to manage the work and family demands while witnessing “stress and misery” among their peers. These observations provoked personal tensions and exacerbated the strains inherent in work–family life integration (Ray & Jackson, 2013; Zambrana, 2018).

Excessive work demands: Beyond role strain

Like all faculty, respondents have teaching, advising, mentoring, committee service responsibilities and expectations that they will conduct research and produce scholarly publications. Although work–family balance is perhaps a strain on all professional families, URM professionals experienced additional demands and unwanted daily discriminatory interactions that are associated with an intersectional identity. Respondents reported multiple work demands, including high levels of institutional diversity-related service, such as serving on diversity committees and excessive time expended on advising and mentoring students while they were under-mentored or experienced inadequate mentoring (Espino & Zambrana, 2019). For example, a Puerto Rican female shared her concerns of being overburdened with advising and mentoring:

You can potentially have a higher load of students because they all want to work with you and you are the only one around. And even if they are not your students,

they still want to come talk to you and they feel more comfortable with you...I am not their advisor. Then there is the sort of burden of having to represent every single Latino or underrepresented minority out there.

These increased work obligations decreased time for research, family, and self-care. Many respondents spoke about being divided between home and career, or between community service and career. They perceived two choices: sacrifice family and community commitments to focus almost exclusively on their careers, or honor service commitments, an essential part of their identity, at the risk of not earning tenure and sacrificing time with family. In addition to standard committees, respondents reported that they are expected to serve on diversity committees that addressed minority issues, racial/ethnic relations, and recruitment of students and faculty of color. As one Mexican American respondent confirmed: "I think of some of this extra pressure in terms of what my husband and I jokingly refer to as the brown tax which is that I get asked to do everything, sit on more committees, the students, you know."

Because participants perceived excessive work demands as a significant role strain, combined with racist experiences such as inadequate mentoring and discriminatory exclusion from research opportunities, it often contributed to consequences in family formation for both men and women. The work–family life events, particularly decisions not to have children or delay childbearing, were more prominent among female faculty. For those participants who had children, they perceived a subtle message to remain silent about family matters based on the sense that these issues could lead to a loss of political capital in their institutional setting. These implicit messages frequently led individuals to prioritize the work domain while sacrificing the personal (e.g., delaying childbearing). Altogether, respondents experienced a continuous unsettling of how to reconcile work–family responsibilities. Two respondents made cogent points: "Well, in retrospect, I basically decided to sacrifice my personal relationship with my partner for my job" (Mexican American, male). One African American female said, "As far as a personal life, I haven't dated—let's see, in over 10 years." Obligations that involved the outflow of material and emotional resources to family of origin exacerbated concerns of balance.

Outflow of resources: Commitments and burden of family of origin

An outflow of caregiving supports in the form of material resources and emotional labor were more likely to be provided from URM professionals to family of origin. Family caretaking involved managing caretaking responsibilities for both elderly parents or other relatives and children, which often pushed participants to prioritize family of origin over work. As one African American female shared:

So the summer was bad. This is very classic of women of color experience. My mom had to have her hip replaced. She's got nobody. She's out in this...state...by herself. So I had to - but before I've actually written my packet to go out for external review I'm having to spend a week away lifting, cleaning, cooking and just - it was so bad. Then I had been tapped to head my family reunion. I don't know why. So by the end of those - those two things came like this. At the end of it my back - I couldn't get off the bed. I couldn't move. I had to - I had to get my packet in.

Likewise, another respondent noted caretaking responsibilities as a determinant of their career decisions. "Initially I wanted to go into clinical medicine. I pretty much decided that I could not go into clinical medicine because of my family responsibilities. I had a baby, and my mother is mentally ill, and I'm her full-time caretaker." (Mexican American, female).

A majority of respondents had a commitment and obligation to provide financial and social support to family of origin. Middle-class minorities have more economic responsibilities concerning extended family than Whites (Heflin & Pattillo, 2006; O'Brien, 2012). These responsibilities are associated with the historical intergenerational legacy of exclusion from economic opportunity and the way many URM professionals adapt to support each other, especially as they ascend the social class ladder. As the most educated members of their family, respondents were often expected to financially support members of their family of origin. One respondent described the impact of economic legacies on her life choices:

Well, my Puerto Rican family is a big issue for me, because I help support them. [...] So, some of the job decisions I make that are economic are driven by that, I taught summer [courses] for six years because my brother didn't have insurance when he got cancer. (Puerto Rican, female).

Although family of origin concerns are not limited to URM faculty, time and financial investments vary by race and socioeconomic status of family of origin. Another Mexican American female respondent described the difference between non-URM and URM faculty: "I had friends who [when] they went to grad school, their parents bought them a condo. And I went to grad school, and I was sending my entire stipend home ... and I was working another job". For most participants, economic strain was paramount in their lives as neither they nor their parents were financially secure enough to supplement financial resources outside of their own salaries and savings. Respondents reported frequently confronting economic and institutional social support hurdles that hinder the pursuit of balancing family, work, and personal selves (Castañeda et al., 2015). For example, work settings that provide leave for childbirth or illness frequently do not cover a full-semester salary. To counterbalance stressful demands of workplace environments, inadequate economic resources, and family caregiving responsibilities, respondents applied varied coping strategies and resources to balance their work and family demands and maintain a positive and healthy personal self.

Coping strategies and resources to maintain a healthy self

Respondents reported five principal strategies that helped them negotiate role strain to promote a healthy self: health practices, religion and spirituality, mindset, time management, and, to a lesser extent, social support. Health practices focused on physical activity and healthy eating. Coping mechanisms were viewed as preventive measures to decrease stress and role strain and maintain favorable well-being. The majority of African American participants emphasized the role of religion and prayer as tools to maintain a sense of peace, focus on work responsibilities and performance, and maintain and restore self. An African American male described how his faith allowed him to persist in spite of obstacles: "But what I remembered, and this was through like prayer and meditation, was this is what I wanted, was to do research. This is what I love to do. Just do your research and stop worrying about it."

Other respondents discussed mindset as a tool to help cope with workplace stress and negativity. A Mexican American female stated; "I've become more aware of the things that are important to me which is family and taking care of myself. And, again, that's something that came out of these not-so-happy experiences in academia." Cognitive strategies helped participants refocus mental energy away from work-family stressors. For the majority of participants, making clear distinctions between work life and personal life made a difference. Being present

in both work and personal activities proved helpful in both work efficiency and coping. An African American female respondent stated: “My son catches the bus at 7:00 and I usually don’t have a meeting until 10:00 and so we [my husband and I] just sit with our laptops and have breakfast and watch the news together.”

Respondents discussed selectively employing or limiting the use of technology to manage time, cope, and protect themselves. Other participants mentioned the importance of social support, often from URM professionals external to their work institutions. An African American female respondent noted, “Sometimes I’ll go out with people that you can be around and you can just let your hair down.” For many participants, social support frequently came from family members who can serve as important reminders that there is a world outside of work settings. The importance of family social support was described in the following way:

My family, I could go to and I could say, “This is what’s going on. I can’t talk about this at work. I can’t talk about this with the people who are near to me, you know, at the institution” because I didn’t know what could, potentially, leak out until the issue was resolved. (Puerto Rican, female)

Although extended family can be a source of economic and emotional stress, they can also provide social support by providing respondents with a listening ear, a sense of belonging, and a deep valuing of their talents and accomplishments.

Though the majority of participants had a repertoire of coping mechanisms, a few ($n = 3$) reported difficulty in finding any effective strategies. This speaks to the high demands of work and home, defined by many participants as excessive labor. An African American male revealed “I don’t have any alone time, so I have to spend some time trying to carve that out a little bit. That’s a little bit hard right now because it will have to come at the expense of something else because there are no more hours left.” While a Puerto Rican male explains, “I think it’s like this swinging pendulum of commitment and self-care that gets totally overwhelmed by the demands.”

The respondents’ lived experiences and coping strategies to manage work and family demands revealed a determination to achieve work success despite excessive work demands and the sacrificing of their personal self. Many participants were able to come to terms with their stressful lives and find peace in the midst of chaos. Other participants demonstrated acceptance of work–family tensions while the personal self was frequently omitted or diminished in importance. This is an important finding, as the inability to engage in self-care practices can affect the well-being and quality of family life. An African American male respondent described priorities in the negotiation of family–work balance:

So for me [...] the decision I made was trying to learn how to work smarter and more effectively and efficiently so that at a minimum I could spend time with my children because, you know, I’m like, well, the marriage part, that’s a two-way street but with the kids, that’s something that is absolutely non-negotiable.

In summary, data illustrate a pattern of academic life permeated with invisible work role strain associated with minimal support and race/ethnic discriminatory experiences by superiors or colleagues. In effect, tensions between excessive work demands and family and caregiving responsibilities melded to deplete the personal resources of respondents. Our findings revealed that self-care practices, including religious and spiritual traditions, might lessen the effect of work demands in the face of chronic daily discriminatory encounters that uniquely shape inequality in URM professional career and family life experiences.

DISCUSSION

Study results proffer a novel understanding of institutional work environments among URM academic professionals that contribute to work–family strain and emphasize the importance of a broader meaning of family beyond the normative Anglo-centric nuclear family. Three critical findings are enveloped in an overarching theme of sacrifice. Respondents report work role strain related to high service demands and perceived race/ethnic discriminatory practices including exclusion from opportunities and inadequate mentoring. A strong body of knowledge has been produced on racialized experiential patterns that demonstrate powerful associations among inadequate institutional support, implicit bias and racism as contributing factors to role strain (Eagan Jr. & Garvey, 2015; Evans & Moore, 2015). The experiences of perpetual and chronic workplace strain, jointly with the stigma of negative historic racialized social status and inadequate economic resources may intensify work–family pressures. Inequality and discriminatory practices, including stereotypes of intellectual inferiority and presumed incompetence are rooted in institutional arrangements and contribute to additional racial tasks and emotional labor (Chávez, 2011; Nieman et al., 2020; Wingfield & Alston, 2014; Zambrana et al., 2021). In effect, respondents' life values and economic and emotional resources are not aligned with excessive work demands, and desired family engagement and contributions, impeding work–family life integration.

A second significant finding was the exacerbation of role strains due to obligations to family of origin that depleted available economic and emotional resources. Respondents described the work and family caregiving obligations associated with work–family life integration. The invisible economic forces of the reverse flow of resources to families of origin, minimal intergenerational assets to rely on, and exposure to chronic racialized experiences in the workplace are illuminated. A majority of respondents described how the lack of wealth strained their caretaking role that involved financially supporting, and emotionally uplifting their families of origin. Respondents reported lower levels of income, intergenerational wealth, and economic resources compared to their White counterparts, reflecting racial wealth disparities in the broader society (Flynn et al., 2017). Despite high status and income, URM professionals often experience an outflow of economic and emotional resources and are less well-positioned than their White counterparts to outsource care work or to purchase services that might alleviate the caregiving burden (Dilworth-Anderson et al., 2002; Dilworth-Anderson et al., 2005). Economic strains are particularly prominent at the early career professional level because of housing costs near large research institutions, childcare costs, caregiving costs, and the cost of unpaid family and medical leave needed for childbirth or family illness. In a study of parental leave among this sample, data show that “For many respondents, inadequate compensation affects who is—and is not—able to take advantage of a university’s leave policies because going weeks without pay is not feasible for faculty with limited financial resources” (Castañeda et al., 2015, p. 718). Financial resource inequities, coupled with excessive work demands intensify role strain, racial battle fatigue and the depletion of physical and emotional resources. While earning tenure status does provide job security and a modest increase in compensation, it does not necessarily decrease caregiving responsibilities, financial strain, or the chronic experiences of discrimination. Persistent discrimination and other workplace stressors may even hasten early departures regardless of tenure status due to burnout and physical ailments (Lawrence et al., 2021; Zambrana et al., 2021).

The third significant finding was the variation in coping strategies to balance the work–family nexus and negotiate the balance of competing demands with limited resources. Respondents reported a variety of coping strategies and social support resources, including religious and spiritual practices and reliance on family and friends. Many respondents reported seeking social support, often off campus, away from work environments perceived as hostile. For example, participants may attend houses of worship in nearby towns that are more diverse; women

were more likely to report use of dance and spiritual practices, while men were more likely to engage in sports. With few exceptions, respondents reported being overwhelmed with limited time for self-care and feeling at a loss for how to balance demands without sacrificing obligations. Yet all acknowledged the importance of self-care to surviving and thriving. Guillaume and Apodaca (2020) explored how faculty of color navigate tenure and promotion processes in response to excessive work taxation demands. Three common strategies were reported by participants: (1) judicious commitments to students and promotion and tenure efforts; (2) making connections between faculty workloads and pursuit of promotion and tenure; and (3) believing relationships with students were a benefit during the promotion and tenure process. These strategies suggest thoughtful intentionality yet are institutionally work-driven remedies. All too often URM professionals contribute to racial equity at their place of employment, which may be detrimental to their own careers, yet equity aligns with their professional values. Institutional acknowledgement of the public facing role that race-driven equity service by URM professionals accrues to the institution's public image may lessen role strain, align with professional values, and increase work–family life satisfaction. Moreover institutions need to acknowledge and include diversity and equity service as credit-worthy activities in the promotion and tenure process.

Despite the study's strengths, limitations include fear of disclosure of identity, potential selection bias; uncaptured differences by colorism (about two-thirds of URM Latinos identify as non-White), political ideology, activism; small sample size that does not permit between or within group comparisons, and absence of data on participants' gender identity and respondents' partner's demographic characteristics. These data are important in future studies because White color privilege and family wealth transfers matter. Nonetheless, these data provide an important depth of discernment of the multitude of factors associated with family–work life, such as economic wealth gaps, caregiving and inhospitable work environments among geographically diverse and historically underrepresented respondents.

CONCLUSION

The field of family science plays an important role in promoting new frontiers of research in the work–family life nexus. Our findings draw attention to historicity, power relations, privilege, and (dis)advantage—dynamic factors that shape the lives of underrepresented groups in the United States (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). Future investigations can no longer insist on comparisons with economically advantaged majority and elite cultures while omitting the contexts of income inequality and wealth gaps, discrimination in the workplace and its effects on the personal and family lives of URM professionals, nor fail to examine how family caregiving affects family and work role strain. These findings signal the need to expand the meaning of diverse family forms in the dominant literature that often focus on majority culture nuclear families, to the exclusion of race/ethnic couples, same-sex and unpartnered individual's connections and responsibilities to the sustainability of families of origin and kin family. Continued study of family patterns by race and ethnicity, gender and partnership status (single, married, cohabitating), and child-bearing decisions is needed to elucidate the meaning of sacrifice in work–family life integration. Further intersectional inquiry is imperative to uncover how work–family life sacrifices are associated with institutional service and treatment, racism, quality of personal and family life and career persistence.

The application of an intersectional framework challenges normative research paradigms and narrow foci that obscure the central role of the intersecting axes of history, racism, sexism, heterosexism and classism in structuring access to power, resources, and opportunities. This work brings to the fore central considerations between multilayered co-constituted identities and concomitant barriers to work–family life integration. These considerations include

obligations to family of origin regardless of family type; how institutional racism imbalances the potential for work/family integration (e.g., affecting decisions regarding romantic partnerships and childbearing); and how additional family responsibilities (along with fewer economic resources) and a lack of institutional support can encumber work–family-life balance. Intersectionality’s emphasis on the chronicity of the disproportionate lack of access to resources and power over the life course offers vital insight into the cumulative consequences of racial inequity, suggesting solutions to remedy the adverse and long-term harms of institutional racism.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings have implications for how colleges and universities can strengthen equitable work–family–life policies to provide support and resources for URM faculty managing personal and work responsibilities. Attention to work–family issues has largely focused on childbirth and parenting, with policies focused on parental leave and tenure delays after childbirth or adoption (Sallee & Lester, 2017). Work–life policies should not only focus on partnered faculty with children but also unpartnered faculty with and without children. For example, single faculty (i.e., those who are unmarried or unpartnered) report lower work–life balance and feel less agentic in their ability to balance work and life goals compared to partnered faculty. In addition to parent-centered policies focused on childcare and parental leave, more inclusive work–family policies may also provide paid or subsidized leave for caregiving beyond parenting and extending the tenure clock for personal or medical reasons not related to childbirth or adoption (Culpepper et al., 2020; Denson & Szelényi, 2020). Colleges and universities may adopt institutional models that have successfully established centers dedicated to helping employees navigate work–family issues, such as employment referrals outside the university for partner/spousal hires and wellness programs. To increase salary equity, departments can conduct annual equity audits of salary and service to account for the invisible academic diversity labor and provide additional compensation. Inclusive equitable work–life policies may reduce stress and financial hardship, increase support for work–family life integration and contribute to the larger goal of recruiting, retaining and promoting career success for URM faculty.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no interests to disclose.

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