Equity, Stress, and Resiliency in Higher Education

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Introduction

Pre-pandemic, a significant portion of tenured US faculty were suffering from "triathlete stress"[1] as a result of their attempts to maintain active research programs and robust teaching portfolios, while devoting many hours to institutional and disciplinary service. A related issue – that of faculty burnout – is an ongoing problem for people working in higher education[2]. As various scholars have noted, the underlying problem is clearly connected to mental health. Stress, depression, exhaustion, and burnout negatively affect faculty wellbeing and productivity[3].

Tenured faculty are not typically considered a population "deserving" of sympathy, either by the general US public or by themselves. At Seattle University, for example, the site where most of the data we discuss in this paper was collected, the institutional mission emphasizes social justice and equity. A similar institutional mission guides our comparative research site of Loyola Marymount University. Faculty displayed keen awareness that their lives are comparatively privileged on multiple levels and often prefaced a complaint with the observation, "I know my problems aren't as serious" as those of many others. While this is true, we argue that the articulated stress and inequity experienced by many faculty members is serious, systemic, and profoundly affects the ability of higher educational institutions in the US to fulfill their missions. Stress, as it came up in our research, refers to emotional stress and its negative effect on the health and wellbeing of individuals. Using an intersectional framework that considers how interlocking categories of oppression by gender, race, class, and other identities shapes experiences[4] also helps us to understand how the stress experienced by faculty is not equitable. Intersectional analyses show that gendered and raced patterns shape faculty experiences and result in systemic inequities, especially for women faculty and faculty of color across higher education[5].

Many activities integral to a university's continued functioning, especially administrative and curriculum-related tasks requiring time and expertise but not typically rewarded in traditional academic promotion structures, are often performed by women and faculty of color[6]. Women faculty overwhelmingly are tasked with care work: "taking care of the academic family" through time-intensive teaching and low-prestige institutional service work[7] and taking care of their families at home[8]. Accordingly, many women faculty in higher education are not promoted and do not move up through the faculty ranks as quickly as do men faculty[9]. Another result is that women are stressed. Indeed, a recent study[10] noted that the very flexibility most academic jobs allow is a "double-edged sword" for women faculty with children, at least when it is combined with a "limitless time culture" at work.

Almost a decade ago, Sarah Ahmed[11] wrote that institutions of higher education rest on nested systems of White privilege that are actively bolstered and continually reimagined through myriad everyday practices. This is still largely true[12], *even as universities claim commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts,* because the institutional structures themselves have not significantly changed. Individual faculty are expected to uphold assumed norms that are often racist and sexist or reform parts of the existing institution, while ignoring everyday experiences of racism and sexism in the classroom, in interactions with colleagues, and with respect to annual reviews, tenure and promotion, etc.[13].

The impacts of COVID-19 have aggravated general faculty experiences of stress and systemic inequities at US colleges and universities[14]. Pre-pandemic, institutions of higher education in the US faced issues ranging from

financial hardship to fluctuating student enrollment to litigation around issues of diversity[15]. The pandemic has exacerbated many of these problems[16], and increased faculty workloads. In early 2021, the National Academies of Science, Engineering & Medicine released a report that concluded COVID-19 disruptions disproportionately impacted women, but that initial administrative responses to the pandemic's challenges did not usually address equity. The report further concluded that an emphasis on *individual* coping strategies throughout 2020 was insufficient for addressing the *systemic* problems in higher education and that stress has been high among faculty in general but disproportionately so among women in certain disciplines and fields[17]. Also, a recent *Inside Higher Ed* piece[18] argued that sustained change in the academy is more important than ever in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic; such change must be rooted in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); and that the greatest obstacle to achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion is institutional reluctance to implement necessary structural change.

Rather than focus on clinical definitions of stress or symptoms that qualify faculty for "burnout,"[19] we explore faculty descriptions of "being stressed" as they intertwine with institutional wellbeing. Institutional wellbeing, resilience, and productivity decline when faculty are unhappy and stressed[20]. Thus, there are feedback loops between the stress expressed by individual faculty and the stress experienced by the institutions of higher education that employ them. When faculty struggle to balance the demands of achieving "triathlete" excellence, especially within an inequitable and unsupportive system, then their institutions in turn cannot meet their educational missions.

Stress and Resilience in Higher Education

From prior studies we know workplace conditions may *produce* chronic stress, as well as the gendered differences in these conditions[21]. Until recently, faculty and especially tenured faculty in US institutions of higher education have been understudied, although some interesting work has examined stress among non-tenure track faculty[22] in the US and faculty at a university in Brazil[23]. And yet, as an increasing commentary on faculty lives nation-wide reveals, stress is everywhere[24].

A substantial literature explores the multiplicity of health effects that experienced stress has on human health and wellbeing. The hormonal cascades triggered by stress are profoundly disruptive, and when chronic, they negatively impact the immune system, increase susceptibility to chronic diseases, and decrease emotional wellbeing[25]. Sociocultural and political economic inequities produce disproportionately experienced stress and thus, further inequitable health, social, and financial consequences. Experiences of racism in the United States, for example, produce chronic stress in communities of color, which is in turn, linked to a range of health disparities in these communities[26]. A similar pattern of disproportionate exposure to stress-inducing racism also affects Black and Latinx college students[27]. In other words, stress becomes embodied in a whole host of negative ways and the embodiment is often inequitable[28].

We know from public health, epidemiological, and economic data that the more unequal a system, the more stressed everyone within the system is – even those who benefit from that system[29]. Research on intersectionality in the academy unequivocally shows that a white man may accumulate all kinds of material, social, and emotional benefits relative to a woman of color. Meanwhile, women of color accumulate disproportionate exposure to all kinds of stressors.[30] Disproportionate advantage vs. disproportionate stress

exposure slowly become embodied over our lifecourse – and shaped it profoundly. Herein lies one of the central inequities we talked about in the previous section. Such inequity is not good for the health of the system itself. We know, for example, that hierarchical, inequitable social and political systems increase the experienced daily stress of *everyone* living in them[31]. They also reduce collective resilience. Madeline Morcelle wrote, "Resilience refers to the sustained capacity of an individual, system, or community to absorb, adapt to, and rebound from sudden shocks and chronic stressors"[32]. Other definitions of resilience, of course, exist, and scholars, activists, and healthcare professionals focus on different units of analysis[33], but Morcelle's definition is apt for experiences in higher education. Much of the research on resilience has widened the focus beyond the individual and explored community resilience in cities, neighborhoods, countries, regions, etc.[34]. However, if we follow Morcelle's definition of community[35], which states that a community is "a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations," then a university can be viewed as a community. The subsequent question that we are interested in asking here is: just how resilient are US colleges and universities in 2021?

As we observed at the outset of this paper, abundant evidence indicates that institutions of higher education are in crisis, as are many faculty. The institutions are under stress and so are the individuals working in them. Moreover, within higher education, resilience is framed as an individual concern, particularly for those faculty who are structurally more vulnerable to the shocks and stressors affecting the systems[36]. For example, a robust literature, particularly work informed by Black feminist scholarship, shows that individual faculty who face intersecting and overlapping kinds of marginalization in the academy intentionally deploy multiple identities and ways of being in the academy in order to cultivate resilience[37]. The organizational problem here, however, is that individuals are asked to "fix" themselves and to be resilient, even as the system remains "unfixed" and not resilient.

Materials and Methods

Importantly, for the arguments outlined in this paper, Seattle University and Loyola Marymount University have strongly articulated missions around social justice and excellence in education, are liberal-leaning culturally although connected to the Catholic Church, and are tuition dependent. Both are members of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. Research activities, which lasted 2016-2021, included classic ethnographic methods[38], and methods stemming from recent innovations in qualitative research around the incorporation of online forums and formats[39]. All aspects of this research were approved by both of our institutions' Human Subjects Offices.

From 2016 to 2019, SU research centered on the collection and analyses of in-person interviews and focus groups, complemented by the collection and analyses of faculty statements from successful promotion applications, as well as the collection and analyses of faculty CVs. From 2019 to 2021, we collected and analyzed statements in which faculty, responding to a series of questions from us, reflected on how the COVID-19 crisis and its associated shut-downs affected their work. Participants were recruited via online announcements sent to faculty listservs, as well as by word of mouth between faculty[40]. Ongoing participant observation was often essential in providing context for the other data.

Research activities at LMU mirrored those at SU, albeit on a much smaller scale. Six interviews (a sample size that is large enough to identify themes in the data[41]) were conducted with faculty who identify as white women and women of color. The interviews took place in 2018 and 2019 and the interview protocol used at SU was adapted for use at LMU. The interview data from LMU faculty was supplemented by extensive participant observation.

Table 1: An Overview of our Qualitative Research at SU

Activities and Products	Number of total participants	Participant Characteristics
In-depth, in-person faculty interviews	N=76	55 women, 21 men; Non-tenure track (NTT) faculty; assistant, tenure-track faculty; and tenured associate and full professors.
Faculty focus groups	N=2	11 women; Tenured full professors.
Faculty promotion statements	N=18	13 women, 5 men; Tenured associate and full professors.
Faculty CVs	N=40	20 women, 20 men; Tenured associate and full professors.
Faculty reflection statements	N=27	21 women, 6 men; NTT faculty; assistant, tenure-track faculty; and tenured associate and full professors.
Fieldnotes based on in-person participant observation in public university venues.	Variable	N/A
Fieldnotes based on online participant observation in public university forums.	Variable	N/A

Table 2: An Overview of our Qualitative Research at LMU

Activities and Products	Number of total participants	Participant Characteristics
In-depth, in-person faculty interviews	N=6	6 women
Fieldnotes based on in-person participant observation in public university venues.	Variable	N/A
Fieldnotes based on online participant observation in public university forums.	Variable	N/A

We conducted extensive thematic analysis[42] of our different data sets. Below, we present and then discuss emergent themes from our data.

Our Results: Faculty Perspectives and Experiences

Articulated Stress among SU Faculty Pre-Pandemic

Theme 1: An articulated sense of inundation with institutional asks. This theme emerged clearly in the interview, focus group, and participant observation data. In the absence of a course release to perform significant administrative leadership, the baseline teaching expectation is fairly substantial at SU. Moreover, because the institution prides itself on being community-driven and student-oriented, but also has financial shortfalls that limit staff and faculty hiring, additional service-related tasks – mentoring, development, administration – are added to faculty workloads. Many faculty members reported they struggled to find time for scholarship during the academic year, because of their teaching load and service to the institution.

Theme 2: An articulated difficulty managing the underlying structure of the faculty workload, particularly around institutional service. This theme emerged clearly in the interview, participant observation, and focus group data, as well as in the faculty CVs and promotion statements. Service was the wild card category for most faculty, both in terms of what service they did, how much, and how they were assessed. Some faculty balanced massive, highly visible service to the university; others did next to no service; and still others performed largely invisible but essential service to their departments or colleges. Faculty had difficulty assessing the importance of their service activities in their CVs, annual reviews, tenure and promotion files.

Theme 3: Institutional asks are not equitable, disproportionately impacting women and faculty of color. This theme emerged clearly in the interview and focus group data, as well as in the participant observation data. Institutional asks – especially around administrative leadership, service on committees within the University, and from students – are disproportionately heavy for women faculty and faculty of color. Moreover, when a woman faculty said no to institutional asks, she was perceived to be a bit of a bitch – by definition, not a quality often ascribed to male colleagues.

Table 3: Exemplars from our Data

Participant	Exemplar Quote	Themes
Mike Associate Professor, Faculty of Color, Man	I struggled to get through last year… I was going to the doctor. I had high cholesterol, couldn't sleep at night, stressed out. Fighting to keep a job that I didn't know that I really even wanted. I literally told myself this summer, you're gonna do what you can between 8:00 and 5:00, and outside of that, you're not gonna do it… That is my survival mode… I'm here because I don't wanna move again. I love the city and I wanna stay here. I'm building a program [through sustained institutional service work and administrative leadership] that I'm passionate about, doing work that I have the freedom to do, and I do appreciate that. There are some good things here, but I have no time to develop a community. I have no time to develop my scholarship. I have no time to become a better teacher, so I'm just	Theme 1 Theme 2

	getting by at this point. My father worked in a warehouse his whole life, and he said, “Go to college, so you don't have to work in a warehouse.” I work in a warehouse. That's the way I feel.	
Penelope Associate Professor, White Faculty, Woman	I have this feeling of being under a constant barrage of demands [for different types of administrative leadership and mentoring of students]. It is dying a slow death, like in that PACMAN video game, where they chase you around and take bites out of you…. I love my job. I genuinely do. I think everyone who knows me, my students and my friends, will say that I take great joy and delight. It’s a deep heart commitment to me to do what I do… [But] I feel like, in light of the conference cycle and APR cycle, now I’m behind.	Theme 1 Theme 2
Ingrid Associate Professor, Faculty of Color, Woman	A desire to be a part of a community: that’s something that I’ve been hungry for from the time that I started here, and wanting that in the department, and then finding all of these barriers… and then thinking it’s gonna happen within faculty of color, and meeting with [other] faculty of color, but… we didn’t have the capacity to meet regularly to talk with one another about these types of things without it causing harm in other areas of our life where we’re being spread so thin… It made me even more depressed.	Theme 1 Theme 3
Scott Associate Professor, White Faculty, Man	We work with a system where if everyone’s teaching six [classes]… That’s six-sevenths [where faculty workload is assessed, based on a 7/7 rubric]. Right?... Let's say that divided by seven would be eighty-something percent… Which means when you're filling out an APR, right, the scale for weight of the teacher responsibility should have an upper limit that ends at whatever six divided by seven is. Correct?... Okay. The upper limit is currently 50 percent… Okay. Let's keep adding up sevenths. Right? Then, another seventh is, let's say, service. For some people that represents even more... Then, you're adding a seventh of service. You're at seven sevenths. That service is definitely mandatory. You have to do that… That’s the stress. The stress is not rocket science. It’s not magic to figure out why they're stressed. Then, every other seventh you're doing on top of that is a secret seventh. How many sevenths of work are you gonna do? Eight sevenths? Nine sevenths? Ten sevenths?… That’s just inherently stressful… I can’t understand how it wouldn’t stress someone.	Theme 2
Hermione Associate Professor, White Faculty, Woman	I am trying to reduce the number of things that our tech coordinator's job [which is unpaid faculty service work to the department] encompasses in the hope of getting someone else to take it over. I have pushed some of the work to our College's new tech person and have automated some of the more tedious work. I have spent about 175 hours of time working on these issues this year and by June, I am sure it will be 200+. No wonder folks don't	Theme 1 Theme 2

	want to do it, but I have done it 26 of the last 30 years and I am on phased retirement.	
Alice Associate Professor, Faculty of Color, Woman	I feel like I'm very supportive of students, but I also set really clear boundaries. There are some students who feel like they should be able to have access to me whenever they want and I don't—first of all, I'm just too busy. I have my research and other things… I think certain demographics get over-asked [for institutional service]… I think there's some of my male colleagues in particular who are able to… stay on the periphery so they're not really looked to for it. They are able to skate, skirt it a little… Women and FOC get over-asked. And are less popular if they say no… There's a lot of people here probably not very happy with me 'cause I say no a lot… I've almost got this vibe like, well then, why do we have a faculty of color? We need somebody who's gonna say yes all the time.	Theme 1 Theme 3

Exemplar quotes are often used in qualitative research to illustrate themes that resonate widely across the data. Above, we illustrate three themes, all of which relate in some way to experienced stress among SU faculty. These themes also resonated in the LMU data.

Articulated Stress among LMU Faculty Pre-Pandemic

Theme 1: An articulated sense of inundation with institutional asks. This theme emerged clearly in the interview and participant observation data. LMU faculty articulated experiences that mirrored SU faculty experiences around a waterfall of institutional asks that were difficult to manage. LMU faculty also drew attention to the fact that these asks often extended into their personal lives.

Theme 2: An articulated difficulty managing the underlying structure of the faculty workload, particularly around institutional service. This theme also emerged clearly in the interview and participant observation data. LMU faculty again articulated experiences that mirrored SU faculty experiences, where institutional service asks were both experienced as unrelenting and difficult to assess and evaluate.

Theme 3: Institutional asks are not equitable, disproportionately impacting women and faculty of color. This theme also emerged clearly in the interview and participant observation data, again in ways that map onto the SU data.

Table 4: Exemplars from our Data

Participant	Exemplar Quote	Themes
Jessica, Associate Professor, Faculty of Color, Woman	A colleague said to me once, because I told them I was starting to feel very stressed and not happy coming to work, he was like, "Why are you chairing three department meetings?" or something like that… With hindsight… and just the workload, I probably should've been doing it, but whatever noise I made about trying to have them find someone else didn't work.	Theme 1 Theme 2 Theme 3

Mary Associate Professor, Faculty of Color, Woman	I don't think I have a work-life balance. I don't have a clear boundary about this whole thing. Even when I go out and have lunch with friends, they are people I met at LMU… What we talked about is students, classes… There's no clear boundary. I don't have a time like, oh, this is the time I should work. This is the time I should just relax. I feel guilty not working. I mean, I'm the only one at home on Saturday and Sunday. What am I supposed to do? A lot of times, I just feel guilty sitting there doing nothing, and I feel bad, but technically, I should not. I mean, it's weekend.	Theme 1
Sarah, Associate Professor, White Faculty, Woman	We [as an institution] pay absolutely no attention to—I've even been called out on this, is that you expect from single people that they're way more flexible and way more willing to do things. I've once been pressured by someone here at San Mateo to move into university housing because I was single and I had—clearly there were not enough people who wanted to do it. At some point, I just said, "I have a dog. I'm not giving up my dog," and that finally ended, this half-year assault on trying to get me to move into university housing, which under no circumstances did I want to do because I need that distance.	Theme 1
Sarah Associate Professor, White Faculty, Woman	The one thing is there are real costs for frustration. Over the years, I've been curious about learning that certain people who we know around at some point were really active and involved [in institutional service activities] and did all these things and now are barely existent… We are not good at recognizing when people do things… not acknowledging that you're doing five times as much as someone else.	Theme 1 Theme 2 Theme 3

Perhaps one of the most compelling aspects of the interview data from faculty at both institutions before the COVID-19 pandemic is that passion for the work did not alleviate stress. In fact, in many instances, it amplified stress and alienation because faculty did not begin their work with the attitude that it was an "8 to 5" job.

Faculty and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Stress Skyrockets

Prior to the pandemic, both SU and LMU prided themselves on delivering mostly in-person, small classes. Both universities also are tuition-dependent institutions that need students living and eating in campus facilities to support their operations. At the time of this writing, both universities' campuses have opened up to welcome (vaccinated and registered) students back for an academic year that has included in-person courses and dorm living. Many faculty and staff remain hesitant about being in-person; thus, many teaching and administrative activities have remained remote or have adopted a hybrid model. The previous year of remote instruction and administration was a major reorientation for both the institutions and also for their faculty, many of whom learned remote teaching practices only in the days between campus shutting down and classes resuming. Many faculty are now adapting yet again – to hybrid teaching models, students who are reluctant to come to in-person classes and office hours, to teaching in masks (with microphones attached), etc. The universities are in counties where the public primary and secondary schools were remote for most of the 2020-2021 academic

year, which meant that faculty parents had children learning from home at the same time that they themselves were working remotely. Schools have largely resumed in-person instruction for primary and secondary students during the 2021-2022 academic year, but the situation remains complicated.

There also are emotional burdens related to the pandemic: increased distress on the part of faculty members' children coming out of a year marked by trauma and social isolation, increased distress from university students also coming out of a year marked by trauma and social isolation, and increased distress on the part of the faculty themselves, who are apprehensive about safety related to in person instruction. Post-pandemic depression and anxiety are extremely high among US adolescents – but anxiety is also high among US adults[43].

Theme 1: All faculty are struggling to manage their (heavier and constantly changing) workloads, in comparison to pre-pandemic. As outlined above, faculty have had fluctuating teaching and mentoring demands. Many also face increased institutional leadership and administrative asks, as the institution continues to pivot to meet pandemic-related and financial crises and needs faculty participation to do so.

Theme 2: Faculty, and especially women faculty, are coping with suffering in their personal lives and within their family and this further exacerbates the struggle in Theme 1. Women have faced severe problems related to the pandemic and its associated shutdowns, much of it stemming from women's disproportionate childcare labor during this period[44]. Women's disproportionate childcare labor also seemed in evidence at SU. Nevertheless, men noted the increased and multiplying demands placed on them as well. Many wrote to us about the ulcer-producing stress of juggling their academic jobs and caregiving. On the other hand, some of the most thought-provoking reflections we received were from faculty who do not adhere to social norms around heteronormative marriage and reproduction. Two women, for example, mused about what it means when "the personal collapses into the professional" in a context where there are no family-related checks and balances.

Theme 3: Faculty are dealing with suffering in their communities and this further exacerbates the struggle in Theme 1. Many faculty, and disproportionately faculty of color, also noted that the communities with whom they work have suffered over the past years. This has increased professional commitments, but has also taken a difficult-to-quantify emotional toll. Also difficult to quantify is the nature of this type of professional work, in the context of faculty evaluations and reviews.

Table 5: Exemplars from our Data

Participant	Exemplar Quote	Themes
Caroline Associate Professor, White Faculty, Woman	All the time I have to work, which is very limited due to having to provide childcare and education for a young child who had school and summer camps cancelled, is put towards teaching. Then service according only to approaching urgency due to deadlines. Research is not happening at all. This is not how my time was allocated prior to COVID. I had much more time for research… And I spent more time on service… My family is suffering and I am also suffering. This is not sustainable and I	Theme 1 Theme 2

	don't know how long it will be possible to continue. I have considered leaving higher ed but I… cannot.	
Stephanie Full Professor, White Faculty, Woman	Although I have been making some progress in all of these areas [scholarship, teaching, and service], it is much slower than I would like and finding time to work productively is a struggle. My husband and I are both working from home and I am home schooling [two children] … As a result, childcare is a full-time job for at least one parent. Currently, my husband is taking one sick day each week and I am the primary caretaker the other four days. However, even my once-weekly dedicated work days are fragmented. It is hard to maintain physical space in our house and the needs of my older child are complex... As a result, I am operating with about 10-15% of my normal productive time. So, to answer the question, I am struggling to get anything done professionally.	Theme 1 Theme 2
Alexander Associate Professor, Didn't Identify, Man	My two kids can be distracting at times. They have their own school work and their own Zoom meetings. My wife and I tag-team a little bit… But there are always times when I will get distracted from work to handle a domestic issue. Sometimes it is spilled milk. Sometimes it is a paper airplane passing through my Zoom meeting. Sometimes I have to arbitrate a squabble. Sometimes they want to show me something they built out of Legos, or they want me to check some school work.	Theme 1
Nancy NTT, Faculty of color, Woman	There is a lot of grief in the community spaces I work. Community members have passed away, our usual social get-togethers and religious activities have stopped. We also have been pitted against each other in the bid for scarce resources and grants. This is extremely disheartening – people are taking their stress and grief out on each other. This loss makes it hard to focus at times. I am exhausted but sometimes have a hard time falling asleep.	Theme 1 Theme 3
Maisy Professor, Didn't Identify, Woman	I feel like I am literally working or dreaming work around the clock. I feel like I am in a permanent soundless Zoom bubble… I'm facing the blur we all face with the collapse of private/professional space. It's one that happens already pre-COVID with academics, but it's definitely worse now… Colleagues have all frequently and repeatedly raised the challenges of faculty dealing with childcare issues and I get that. I see how challenging it is. However there has been no verbal acknowledgement from leaders or colleagues that SOME of us don't have children, and still face challenges in navigating work/life balances; still have rights to have a weekend; still have families/friends or relationships that are of	Theme 1 Theme 2

	equal value; still have rights to spend time with our partners or reading a book. Some of us live alone. It feels incredibly heteronormative.	
Elizabeth Professor, White Faculty, Woman	The collapse of the personal into the professional… This challenge may be especially true for people without children or other caretaking duties. It has been very difficult for me to maintain good boundaries and work-life balance… I am working more hours, which also are much more stressful hours as I respond to faculty and student issues (some of which are related to people struggling to be tolerant and flexible post-COVID). Tensions are high… I've also been told on multiple occasions (mostly from faculty with children) about how lucky I am to live alone and not have the challenges that they do. Yes, I am in a good situation in many ways but I am also much more isolated and physically separated from all of my close family… I am hesitant to voice my challenges to faculty because I fear that my experience of COVID will be dismissed as relatively minor (and perhaps it is).	Theme 1 Theme 2

The limitation of the Reflection exercise was that there was no room for us as researchers to push further on some questions. Participant observation was therefore invaluable in helping to establish a larger context for the reflection statements.

Discussion

Our data highlight that faculty in institutions of higher education are, in the words of one of our participants, suffering. They were stressed pre-pandemic, but stress has increased during the pandemic. Our data also highlight the challenges faculty face in balancing all the complex components that make up their jobs, which most of them say they love. While non-tenure track and pre-tenure faculty members face more precarity[45] than the tenured counterparts who comprise the majority of voices in our data, stress-filled working conditions were impacting the majority of the faculty with whom we interacted. If "triathlete stress"[46] is common among university and college faculty – the result of attempting to maintain strong research programs and portfolios that reflect teaching excellence, while devoting many hours to institutional and disciplinary "service" work that is pivotal for institutional missions but doesn't "count" in faculty evaluations – then the data from SU and LMU provide important insights into the everyday experiences of faculty attempting to cope with these conditions.

As we observed at the outset of this paper, women faculty and faculty of color experience stress-inducing microaggressions and disproportionate asks on a regular basis in the academy generally. Women and faculty of color are also tasked with time-intensive administrative service tasks and are disproportionately penalized if they attempt to say no. As the articulated experiences and opinions of the faculty with whom we spoke make clear, issues of bias and marginalization within the academy create unhealthy, stress-filled institutions for everyone.

The crises associated with the COVID-19 pandemic may eventually provide impetus to change many of these problems plaguing the academy, but thus far, the COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated faculty stress in ways that remain profoundly inequitable[47]. Most of our study participants, for example, have managed their increasing workloads (especially with respect to teaching and administrative duties), but with the expectation that the current conditions are temporary and unsustainable. Meeting the adverse conditions with short bursts of productivity and an "all-hands-on-deck" mentality is not only unsustainable for an individual but also does not demand more sustainable, equitable institutional change. What happens if institutions of higher education decides that this is the new normal: that more can be asked of fewer? We already see trends in this direction throughout the country. Furthermore, we know that the pandemic is disproportionately affecting women across the country[48] and yet, institutions have been slow to change to mitigate these specifically gendered effects.

Lastly, we want to draw attention to something that is *not* a powerful theme in our interviews: resilience. This absence does not necessarily mean that everyone we spoke with was unhappy all the time, with no aspirations for personal and collective wellbeing. Indeed, participants actively sought out ways to manage stressors. Whether this meant carving out time to put a child to bed every night or going for a multi-mile run every morning or joining a social media group specifically for women of color in the academy, the faculty with whom we spoke were actively working towards personal (and familial) wellbeing and resilience. To reiterate the problem we mentioned earlier, however: *individual* work towards resilience does not fix the unbalanced *institution*. If "a resilient community has the flexibility and resourcefulness to adapt to changing circumstances [and] meet community needs"[49], then the two university communities examined here have not proven themselves to be especially resilient. Recent reports examining the US academy more generally[50] indicate that in this, SU and LMU are the norm, not the exceptions.

Conclusion

If a university can be viewed as a community, then what should universities and colleges in the US be doing to sustain themselves, organizationally and structurally? The current focus on individual faculty initiative and resilience – or on self-sacrifice for the greater institutional good – is neither an equitable nor a sustainable solution for institutions of higher education more broadly. Recognition that the pandemic did not create the factures in US institutions of higher education – but simply heightened them – necessarily means that larger issues of faculty workloads and reward structures, as well as cultural and policy-based inequities must be addressed.

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