**“I Have No Time for Anything:” Differences in Faculty Research Productivity during the
COVID-19 Pandemic**

Megan Carpenter¹, David Cotter², and Catherine White Berheide³

¹ Saint Lawrence University

² Union College

³ Skidmore College

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Megan Carpenter, Saint Lawrence University, 23 Romoda Drive, Canton, NY 13617. Email: mcarpenter@stlawu.edu

Abstract

Research investigating the impact of the pandemic on university faculty has highlighted the extreme time and energy demands that have negatively affected scholarly productivity (Krukowski et al., 2020). The present study examines barriers to scholarly productivity that faculty at three small liberal arts colleges in New York State encountered during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results suggest that women and parents of children 18 and under living at home encountered more barriers to scholarly productivity than men and participants without children in this age range, signaling potentially devastating long-term career outcomes, especially for pre-tenure mothers of young children. Considering this rapidly worsening equity issue, recommendations are made for considering an achievement relative to opportunity policy for tenure and promotion reviews.

Keywords: higher education, gender, COVID-19, parenting, faculty

“I Have No Time for Anything:” Differences in Faculty Research Productivity during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic’s effect on faculty scholarship has been unevenly distributed, accentuating pre-existing disparities in academia by gender and parental status. Mother-scholars, in particular, have faced a number of barriers to their scholarship including increased childcare (e.g., supervising remote learning), teaching, and service demands, which will undoubtedly have downstream effects on tenure and promotion reviews. This paper uses data from a survey of faculty at three highly selective private small liberal arts colleges (SLACs) in New York State to illustrate these differential effects.

We collected data from 204 tenured and tenure-track faculty between May and September of 2020 to evaluate the early impact of the pandemic on faculty work and personal life demands.¹ Of the 194 respondents who provided their gender, only two identified as genderqueer, too few to include in the analysis. Of the remaining 192 participants, (53.1% cisgender women, $M_{age} = 49.7$, 83.3% white), 36.8% were in natural science and mathematics departments (including psychology), 26.8% were in humanities, 16.8% were in social sciences, 10.5% were in the arts, and the remaining 8.9% were in pre-professional departments (e.g., engineering, management, business). Assistant professors comprised 22.4% of the sample while associate professors were 36.5% and full professors were 41.1%.

Scholarly Productivity

We asked participants, “To what extent have you been able to accomplish your scholarly and/or creative work during the COVID-19 pandemic?” Responses were rated on a scale of 1 (I

¹ This time frame reflects the initial shift to remote learning and the intensive strategic planning period that went into preparing for the 2020-2021 academic year. Additionally, for part of this period New York State was under “stay-at-home” orders.

have been *a lot more* productive) to 5 (I have been *a lot less* productive). Out of 184 faculty who answered this question, 145 (78.8%) indicated they were either *a little less* (23.4%) or *a lot less* (55.4%) productive. Though men and women were equally likely to experience this disruption ($t = -.971, p = .33, M_{men} = 4.20, SD_{men} = 1.04; M_{women} = 4.34, SD_{women} = 0.88$), gender differences emerged when investigating *why* their scholarship and/or creative work was impeded.

Participants who reported disruptions to their scholarly productivity identified the specific barriers they encountered from a list (see Table 1). Temporal (e.g., time spent on teaching) and resource barriers (e.g., lacking access to resources) had substantial effects on scholarly productivity, regardless of gender. Gender differences arose in the inability to focus and feeling overwhelmed and/or stressed, with women almost twice as likely to report these negative effects.

Table 1.

Chi-Square Test of Barriers to Scholarly Productivity During COVID-19 Pandemic by Cisgender Identity

Barriers to Scholarly Productivity	Men <i>n</i> = 76		Women <i>n</i> = 93		Total <i>N</i> = 169		χ^2	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Teaching consumed all my time	54	(70.1)	73	(78.5)	127	(74.7)	1.56	.21
Family/personal life consumed all my time	41	(53.9)	53	(57.0)	94	(55.6)	.16	.69
I did not have access to materials or facilities that I needed to engage in my scholarship or creative work	38	(50.0)	49	(52.7)	87	(51.5)	.12	.73
I was unable to focus on my scholarship and/or creative work	33	(43.4)	63	(67.7)	96	(56.8)	10.08	.00
I felt too overwhelmed and/or stressed to work on my scholarship and/or creative work	27	(35.5)	59	(63.4)	86	(50.9)	13.04	.00
Other reasons (fill in the blank)	15	(19.7)	17	(18.3)	32	(18.9)	.06	.81

Parenting and Scholarly Productivity

As Table 1 shows, over half the faculty indicated their family and personal life consumed all their time. This was particularly true for faculty with children 18 years old or younger. Parents with children in this age range were significantly more likely to report that family life consumed their time, that they were unable to focus, and that they felt too overwhelmed and/or

stressed, in comparison to faculty with no children in this age range. Of these three barriers, only one resulted in a significant gender difference among this subset of parents: mothers were more likely to say they felt overwhelmed and stressed than fathers (see Table 2). Interestingly, mothers were not more likely to report family/personal life as a barrier to productivity. This is despite the fact that in our study mothers more than fathers have borne the burden of supervising children's remote learning during the pandemic as well as routine childcare (Carpenter et al., 2021).

Some of the additional stress for women, and mothers in particular, stemmed from teaching demands, which mothers were marginally more likely to cite as a barrier than fathers. In another paper (Berheide et al., 2021), we found that both white and BIPOC women faculty reported that students made more special demands of them during Spring 2020 than of white men, and in an analysis not shown here, we found that students made higher demands of faculty who were mothers in particular.

Table 2.

Chi-Square Test of Barriers to Scholarly Productivity During COVID-19 Pandemic for Parents by Cisgender Identity

Barriers to Scholarly Productivity	Men <i>n</i> = 50		Women <i>n</i> = 53		Total <i>N</i> = 103		χ^2	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Teaching consumed all my time	33	(66.0)	43	(81.1)	76	(73.8)	3.05	.08
Family/personal life consumed all my time	35	(71.4)	41	(77.4)	76	(74.5)	0.47	.49
I did not have access to materials or facilities that I needed to engage in my scholarship or creative work	25	(51.0)	28	(52.8)	53	(52.0)	.03	.86
I was unable to focus on my scholarship and/or creative work	22	(44.9)	30	(56.6)	52	(51.0)	1.40	.24
I felt too overwhelmed and/or stressed to work on my scholarship and/or creative work	15	(30.6)	30	(56.6)	45	(44.1)	7.0	.01
Other reasons (fill in the blank)	9	(18.4)	10	(18.9)	19	(18.6)	0.00	.95

We also asked participants an open-ended question: "In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced your research and scholarship?" The qualitative responses further highlighted the innumerable challenges faced by parents during the pandemic.

The Demands of Parenthood

Parents reported that their children's needs consumed time normally spent on scholarship. One BIPOC mother who was an assistant professor in STEM, noted, "I have 2 young children and no childcare, and no idea when I will have childcare... Whatever time I have to do scholarship is cannibalized by childcare, extra service work, and my tenure file." While not always expressed so vividly, many of the respondents noted the degree to which the demands of parenting combined with teaching and service consumed all the time that otherwise would have been devoted to research. Mothers of young children described the difficulties of being both a mother-scholar and parent-teacher. As one white woman associate professor in STEM said "I am now a caregiver and homeschool teacher to multiple children; I don't have time to work." Fathers also described the significant toll that supervising their children's remote learning had on scholarly productivity. One father, a white associate professor in STEM, explained:

With two young children at home full-time, and with a spouse who also works full-time, we've had to split the schooling/caring of the kids during the day, and it's left a much smaller window of time to write.

Even faculty on sabbatical during Spring 2020 found their time to work on scholarship dramatically reduced due to childcare needs. This was made abundantly clear by one white cisgender woman associate professor in the social sciences:

I was on sabbatical during the spring semester... I spend my days feeding kids, helping with schoolwork, getting them to nap, and entertaining them... By 8 pm, I'm exhausted and can only ever force myself to catch up on emails. Definitely no writing or scholarship.

Importantly, while faculty who were not living with children were also affected by the pandemic, a few (6.5%) found themselves *more* capable of producing scholarship. One white man associate professor in the social sciences observed:

Since I do not have children, the primary consequence of the pandemic has been to eliminate social activities, travel, and anything that might be called ‘fun,’ leaving me nothing to do except do research... I have been more productive than usual.

In short, while the vast majority of the participants noted they were falling short of their pre-pandemic level of scholarly productivity, a few reported being *more* productive than usual – particularly those without young children. In fact, research is already documenting differences in publication rates as a result of having young children (Krukowski et al., 2020; Oleschuk, 2020).

Moving Forward

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on pre-tenure faculty, women, parents of younger children, and BIPOC faculty (see Berheide et al., 2021), for whom the impact of the pandemic may prove disastrous for long-term career goals. Academic institutions are attempting to address this problem in a number of ways, including offering to extend the tenure clock for one year. Importantly, this seemingly gender-neutral offer actually exacerbates existing gender disparities in long-term earnings and affects women’s ability to apply for large research grants and serve in leadership positions (Malisch et al., 2020).

A better way to reduce inequity may be to establish an *achievement relative to opportunity policy* (see Hill et al., 2014). This approach involves evaluating merit based on the value and breadth of teaching, research, and service taking into account any challenges that faculty encountered. In this regard, a faculty member who was supervising their children’s remote learning during the pandemic had significantly less opportunity to produce scholarship

than a faculty member with no children living at home, and thus their achievements should not be evaluated in the same way. Gonzales and Griffin (2020) also outline specific ways to acknowledge the differential effects of the pandemic and warn against comparing tenure and promotion candidates to the small number of faculty whose research productivity benefitted from the pandemic. Others have also provided guidance on COVID-impact statements to be included with tenure portfolios (Misra, 2020; Settles & Lindeman, 2020). Accounting for the differential impact of the pandemic does not promote a lower standard of performance but rather an appropriate assessment of achievement based on available opportunities, which for many faculty means at least a year and a quarter less time to work on scholarship.

Conclusion

Women faculty already experience significant inequality in faculty positions, grant funding, publication rates, and salary (Oleschuk, 2020). To avoid a mass departure of women faculty from higher education due to the downstream effects of the pandemic, colleges and universities need to recalibrate their tenure and promotion criteria for faculty whose scholarly productivity has been negatively affected. Academic institutions must consider the differential impact of gender and parental status on faculty productivity during this extraordinary time.

References

- Berheide, C. W., Cotter, D., & Carpenter, M. (2021, February). The emotional labor demands on women and faculty of color teaching during the time of COVID-19. Presidential thematic session at the virtual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.
- Carpenter, M., Cotter, D., & Berheide, C. W. (2021, May). Being a parent, scholar, and parent-teacher: Gender differences in household and childcare demands for college faculty during the pandemic and associations with mental well-being. Flash talk at the virtual convention of the Association for Psychological Science.
- Gonzales, L.D., & Griffin, K.A. (2020). Supporting faculty during & after COVID-19: Don't let go of equity. Washington, DC: Aspire Alliance.
- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WQrIG6LsR04jGASff6Z8WVxl4RIRpsMj/view>
- Hill, B., Secker, J., Davidson, F.S. (2014). Achievement relative to opportunity: Career hijacks in the academy. *Advances in Gender Research*, 19, 85-107. DOI: [10.1108/S1529-212620140000019004](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-212620140000019004)
- Krukowski, R.A., Jagsi, R., & Cardel, M.I. (2020). Academic productivity differences by gender and child age in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Women's Health*. 10.1089/jwh.2020.8710
- Malisch, J.L., Harris, B.N., Sherrer, S.M., Lewis, K.A., Shepherd, S.L., McCarthy, P.C., ... Deitloff, J. (2020). Opinion: In the wake of COVID-19, academia needs new solutions to ensure gender equity. *PNAS: Proceedings of the National Academic of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117(27), 15378-15381.
- <https://doi.org.stlawu.oclc.org/10.1073/pnas.2010636117>.

Misra, J. (2020). Documenting COVID-19 impacts: Best practices. University of Massachusetts

Amherst ADVANCE Program. <https://www.umass.edu/advance/documenting-pandemic-impacts-best-practices>

Oleschuk, M. (2020). Gender equity considerations for tenure and promotion during COVID-19.

Canadian Review of Sociology, 57(3), 502-515. 10.1111/cars.12295.

Settles, I. H. & Linderman, J. (2020, October 5). Faculty equity and COVID-19: The problem,

the evidence, and recommendations. University of Michigan ADVANCE Program.

<https://advance.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UM-ADVANCE-Faculty-Equity-and-COVID-19-Oct-2020.pdf>