



Professional and Personal Impacts Experienced by Faculty Stemming from the Intersection of the Covid-19 Pandemic and Racial Tensions

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SPECIAL COLLECTION:
LEARNING FROM
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ABSTRACT

The disruption that resulted from COVID-19 in 2020 impacted the ways in which higher education faculty lived and worked. Earlier literature describes how faculty members' experiences during the early months of the pandemic included emotional impacts such as stress and anxiety, with little support to manage these impacts. In this paper we report on a thematic analysis of interviews with Canadian faculty members which revealed that the sources of impacts on Canadian faculty were both the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as racial tensions. These impacts revealed themselves in both the personal and professional lives of participants. With regard to their professional role, participants reported that the additional time and care that they put towards learning new technologies, implementation of new teaching practices, support of students, and efforts to sustain their perceived obligations as a scholar carried an emotional burden. With respect to their personal lives, participants noted that emotional impacts emanated from increased caring responsibilities for family and friends, reduced in-person connections, and news reports and social media. We conclude by presenting support recommendations for individual faculty members, teaching and learning centres, and university administrators.

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From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education faculty have shared their experiences with teaching remotely while working from home. Through blogs, opinion-editorials, social media, commentaries in scholarly publications, and anecdotally, faculty detailed the highs and lows of their lived experiences (e.g., Jandri et al. 2020). At the same time that faculty were grappling with a new reality of remote work, racial tensions were rising in the United States in response to the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. In Canada tensions in Indigenous communities arising from pipeline and railway protests in January and February of 2020 were compounded several months later in June 2020 by the killings of Chantel Moore and Rodney Levi. These were just a number of the racial injustices that were sparking worldwide activism, protests, and renewed calls for racial justice to address systemic anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and violence. As with the pandemic response, many faculty members shared their lived experiences and desire to fight racial injustice via online platforms. As a result of the changing environment in which faculty lived and worked, faculty grappled with the challenges these changes presented, often resulting in feeling overwhelmed and burned out (VanLeeuwen et al. 2021).

The objective of this research study is to better understand the emotional impacts of the pandemic and anti-racism movement on academics, particularly the underlying sources of additional emotional stress and demands that faculty experienced in their work and lives during the early months of the pandemic that coincided with racial tensions. We ask: How do faculty describe the sources of additional emotional impact during the pandemic? Because we view the COVID-19 pandemic and racial tensions as intersecting issues, and academics' personal and professional lives as overlapping and intertwined (Veletsianos & Kimmons 2016) in this study we adopt an ecological conceptual framework. Our study is situated in Canada and draws from interviews with twenty faculty members at different career stages and positions. We proceed by presenting a review of relevant literature and the methods used to investigate the topic. Next, we provide the results of this study and discuss their implications.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The combination of the pandemic and anti-racism efforts is a unique set of events impacting Canadian society. Although literature related to the impact of the events of 2020 is still emergent, there is evidence indicating that these events have had significant emotional impacts on Canadian society (Kuzmowich 2020; Liu & Tahirali 2021). Emotions play an important role in human interactions, in communicating intentions, shaping behaviors, and building mutual trust (Chapman & Coups 2006). Providing empathic responses and emotional support to others during a crisis can impact the health and well-being of professionals, draining their cognitive and emotional resources, which can contribute to burnout as well as emotional pain, exhaustion and dissonance (Bakker & Heuven 2006; Mann 1999). Conversely, intense emotional situations may also energize professionals (Guy, Newman & Mastracci 2008).

Research, including studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, on the emotional impacts and labour of educators (e.g., Bodenheimer & Shuster 2020; Price 2001; Wang, Hall & Taxer 2019) and other professionals impacted by the pandemic (e.g., Hayes, Corrie & Graham 2020; Msiska et al. 2014; Smith & Burkle 2019) found that awareness of emotions can help professionals remain efficient and focused during stressful events. Empathy and empathetic communications, although they may require additional effort, are protective factors in preventing emotional exhaustion and the expression and management of emotion are crucial elements in negotiating the day-to-day demands of teaching. In addition, professionals in healthcare education often feel responsible for managing stressful situations (Janzen & Phelan 2019); a similar sense of obligation is likely mirrored and felt by many academics.

Past research shows that the emotional aspects of work in academia can include how teaching approaches and communication skills mediate student experiences (Bellas 1999). Dhanpat (2016) also identified emotional elements within an academic career arising from committee work, research collaboration, and maintaining collegial relationships. Studies that investigated the expectations and experiences of emotional labour for male and female faculty found that even when doing identical tasks, the type and intensity of emotional labour may differ by gender (Bellas 1999). Further, researchers found that tenure status mitigated the effects of emotional labour for male faculty whereas female faculty often did not experience like

benefits, suggesting that women in academia may feel less autonomy and greater pressure as a result of traditional gender roles (Tunguz 2016).

Within the early literature on faculty experiences specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is evidence that new emotional demands emerged in academic contexts. For example, Kimmons, Veletsianos and VanLeeuwen (2020) found that faculty were using social media to express care, concern, support, and encouragement for their students and colleagues. Costa (2020) published accounts from five women academics about how they have been navigating the emotional demands of the pandemic, and reported that expectations of emotional labour have increased. Calarco (2020) found that women, caregiver, and Black Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) faculty have increased their teaching and service as much as all other faculty, but had to balance such additional demands with no reduction or even with increases in personal responsibilities, leaving less time for research. Such demands also had negative impacts upon their well-being and many reported feeling overwhelming stress. Similar accounts of struggles were reported in a series of 84 first-person accounts of academics' lives between March and May, 2020 (Jandrić et al. 2020). Donnelly, Miller, and Strawser (2020) found through key informant interviews that many faculty were heavily supported by academic support units in doing this work, not just in their faculty development but in exercising their resiliency.

Researchers have also conducted large-scale surveys of faculty in 2020, focusing primarily on issues related to teaching remotely during the pandemic (Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) 2020; Dalhousie Faculty Association 2020). The findings from these surveys questioned the sustainability of emergency remote teaching, emphasized the care and concern that faculty directed toward supporting students, and noted respondents' feelings of trepidation in planning for the 2020–2021 academic year. They also reported that many faculty were experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety as they worked extra hours to transition to remote instruction. The faculty in these studies also reported negative impacts on their research activities during this transition. Issues surrounding the demands of the changed work environment and challenges related to research, professional development and personal life in the pandemic context also emerged in the survey findings.

The emotional impacts of racism and of racial tensions during the pandemic are not new experiences for the BIPOC community whose members face systemic and overt racism and already carry a greater emotional load (Ritter & Dutt-Ballerstadt 2020; Zoledziowski 2018). Racially marginalized faculty have been emotionally impacted by the experience of having to expend additional energy to cope with racism (e.g., Hartlep & Ball 2020; Smith 2004). In addressing the rise of anti-racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, we seek to further understand the particular sources of emotional burden on academics.

To examine emotional impacts and their sources we adopt an ecological framework to guide analysis and understanding. The application of an ecological framework provides a mechanism for capturing and articulating complex and multi-faceted phenomena that have both professional and personal implications within the context of faculty members' broader lives (e.g., Veletsianos, Johnson & Belikov 2019). In his ecological theory of human development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the impact of interrelationships between interactions, contexts, and interpersonal structures on psychological growth. Drawing upon the work of Barron (2004), González-Sanmamed, Muñoz-Carril and Santos-Caamaño (2019), and Jackson (2013), we considered the interrelationship between contexts, relationships, resources (e.g. technologies), and past experiences in examining emotional impact. In other words, we approach the COVID-19 pandemic and racial tensions as not only overlapping and intersecting issues, but as issues that impact faculty members' personal and professional lives which are also intersecting rather than monolithic.

METHODS

To understand academics' emotional impacts during the tumultuous months of 2020, we asked the following research question: How do faculty describe the sources of additional emotional impact during the pandemic?

PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

We sent recruitment notices via email and social media to faculty at higher education institutions across Canada, directing potential participants to an information and consent form describing

the goals of the study, and their rights and responsibilities as research participants. We limited participation to those individuals who were employed as faculty in any rank or appointment in March 2020 at a Canadian university. Consenting participants were invited to respond to a short pre-interview demographic survey, enabling us to ensure that our selection criteria were met, but also providing us with sufficient information to make purposeful participant selection, reflecting diversity in demographic markers, including gender, discipline, province, institution, and size of their institution. To incentivize participation, we offered participants who completed an interview the choice between a \$25 Amazon Gift card or a \$25 donation to Food Banks Canada. We purposefully selected individuals to interview as prescribed by common qualitative approaches to research (e.g., Patton 2015). We selected participants iteratively, starting with a few participants, and adding to our pool of interviewees until we reached a point of saturation at twenty participants (*Table 1*).

Table 1 Participant demographic information.

* Professional degree (e.g. DVM, MD, JD).

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PSEUDONYM	PROV.	AGE	GENDER IDENTITY	DEGREE	POSITION	STATUS	DISCIPLINE/ SUBJECT AREA
Amir	BC	60+	Man	Doctoral	Adjunct faculty	Limited term	History and Religion
Bentley	ON	46–59	Non-binary	Doctoral	Assistant professor	Tenure-track	Education
Brenda	AB	46–59	Woman	Doctoral	Sessional Faculty	Limited term	Nursing
Charlotte	PE	30–45	Woman	Doctoral	Associate professor	Tenured	Nursing
Caleb	ON	18–29	Man	Master’s	Sessional Faculty	Part-time, Limited term	Psychology
Cynthia	PE	46–59	Woman	Professional*	Associate professor	Tenured	Veterinary pathology
David	PE	30–45	Man	Doctoral	Associate professor	Tenured	Kinesiology
Jeff	NL	46–59	Man	Doctoral	Associate professor	Tenured	Public health
Jessica	PE	46–59	Woman	Doctoral	Full Professor	Tenured	Nutrition
Lauren	AB	60+	Woman	Doctoral	Adjunct faculty	Part-time, Limited term	Psychology
Morgan	NB	46–59	Prefer not to answer	Doctoral	Full Professor	Tenured	Math
Mariah	PE	46–59	Woman	Doctoral	Full Professor	Tenured	Biology
Parker	ON	30–45	Man	Doctoral	Dir. of TLC**	Tenured	Education
Preston	BC	46–59	Man	Doctoral	Sessional Faculty	Full-time	Engineering
Ryan	ON	46–59	Man	Doctoral	Associate professor	Tenured	Engineering
Samantha	PE	46–59	Woman	Doctoral	Associate professor	Tenured	Psychology
Simon	SK	46–59	Man	Doctoral	Associate professor	Tenured	Engineering
Stella	PE	30–45	Woman	Doctoral	Assistant professor	Tenure-track	Nutrition
Suyin	AB	46–59	Woman	Doctoral	Assistant professor	Tenure-track	Occupational Therapy
Travis	BC	46–59	Man	Doctoral	Full Professor	Tenured	Classics

DATA COLLECTION

We used a semi-structured interview protocol to gather data (VanLeeuwen et al. 2021). Verbal informed consent was re-secured prior to the start of each interview. One researcher conducted all interviews between June 23 and July 8, 2020, and asked participants to describe their experiences working as a faculty member during the initial months of the pandemic (March to June 2020). Interviews lasted about 60 minutes each, were conducted by videoconference or by phone, and were recorded. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate method for data collection because the goal was to understand lived experiences of faculty which is most often accomplished through the use of semi-structured interviews (Creswell 2012). In keeping with phenomenological norms, participants responding to interview questions were encouraged to describe their emotions, environment or physical sensations in concrete ways rather than in an analytic manner.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and lightly edited for clarity without changing meaning. Interviewer notes also became part of the data. Notes included information that the interviewer gleaned during the interview that may not have been reflected in the transcript such as behavior or tone. To gain an overall understanding of the data, four researchers read through the transcripts independently, and discussed them collectively. Following initial discussions, two researchers independently reviewed the data to identify preliminary patterns, codes, and themes in the data. Then, all five researchers engaged in ongoing discussions about the data and findings. Discussions continued until a consensus was reached that the data shed light on the sources of emotional impacts faculty members were experiencing. Identified emotional impacts were a result of capturing the lived experience of faculty and as such could not be categorized and inquired about prior to the data collection. Two researchers then returned to the data to reread transcripts, discuss possible codes/themes, and reduce and synthesize broad initial findings into the main thematic areas presented in this paper. To do so, the two researchers used the constant comparison process of generating, checking, and regenerating codes and themes (Glaser & Strauss 1967). After a few rounds of this cyclical process, a final round of selective coding was completed, which was used for writing the findings presented below (Allen & Roberto 2019).

RIGOUR

We followed several recommendations for thematic analysis of qualitative data to ensure the quality of this study. First, to document our process, we kept a researcher's journal to record our decisions and reflect on the management of the study and maintain consistency (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Second, we documented our prior experience and interests in higher education and educational technology (Freeman et al. 2007). Third, our persistent engagement with the data during analysis included multiple discussions. This dialogue supported our checking of assumptions and biases. Fourth, sensitizing concepts were employed to help us make decisions about the importance of findings (Patton 2015). Fifth, we presented our findings in detail and used ample direct quotes, including important contextual information which allows readers to determine the applicability of findings (Patton 2015). Finally, we conducted member checks by emailing participants a summary of major findings; asking them to comment on whether our findings reflected their experience. Twelve participants responded to the member check with ten confirming that the findings reflected their experiences; two participants noted additional points of consideration.

FINDINGS

The overarching theme arising throughout the interviews was the emotional impacts on faculty arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, racist and anti-racist events, and the broader anti-racism movement in North America. Participants reported feeling that their emotional load during this time had been unexpectedly heavy and described feeling overwhelmed and overextended. For example, Morgan remarked, "I acknowledge that I was by then absolutely exhausted, and so I wasn't reacting well to any extra demands or even requests because I just couldn't take it anymore." The emotional responses that participants described were based on multiple factors that appeared to intersect in compounding ways. New sources of stress and emotional impact were present in both the personal and professional lives of participants, and below we expand on two sources of emotional impacts: changes within a faculty member's professional role and changes within a faculty member's personal life. Importantly, while much of the data focus on negative emotional impacts, the data also reveal some instances of positive outcomes. In particular, several participants described that amidst the trying times, they enjoyed the extra time they had with family and expressed appreciation for the sense of mutual support among their colleagues.

CHANGES IN PROFESSIONAL ROLE

The rapid shift to remote learning required faculty in this study to make significant changes to their roles and responsibilities. Participants reported that the additional time and care that they put towards learning new technologies, implementing unfamiliar teaching practices, supporting students, and their perceived obligations as a scholar were emotionally burdensome.

Learning New Technologies

Adapting to new technologies during the rapid transition to online course delivery had an emotional impact on participants. Although learning how to teach with new technologies is a practical skill, the effort required to rapidly and unexpectedly adopt new technologies drew additional emotion into the work that participants were doing. Participants expressed feelings of anxiety, frustration, and stress as they worked to implement quality instruction and a positive student experience using unfamiliar teaching modalities. When asked about the challenges she experienced during the shift to online course delivery for example, Suyin said, “for me, this is a journey about technology.” With regard to creating a positive student experience, Samantha shared how concern about being able to create connections with students using technology was an additional source of anxiety.

I have clinical-level anxiety issues to begin with. So I come into this [pandemic] primed and ready to be worried, ... I love being in the classroom. My students enjoy being in the classroom with me. How much of what I do successfully is predicated on the relationship building that happens face-to-face? And being of a generation of people who did not grow up with this kind of interaction being the norm.

Implementing New Teaching Practices

Similarly, and interconnected to the emotions expressed related to learning new technologies, participants reported a negative emotional impact related to changing their pedagogical approach. The shift to remote instruction necessitated a shift in pedagogy, which caused some faculty to feel negatively about their remote teaching self-efficacy. Reflecting on the pedagogical shifts that they had experienced, Bentley, an experienced online instructor, stated, “I wouldn’t wish it this way because none of us are getting to do the kind of online teaching that we could do if everything were not so weird and pressured and everything online.” Faculty shared how implementing new teaching practices affected them, and some were tearing up and becoming emotional while thinking about their efforts. Travis stated:

I am unhappy with the lectures. I don’t think there was good take up of the students. I am really sorry for my students because we had good rapport but I really feel that between the messaging from [my university] and other technological limitations of myself ... whatever [rapport] I had got lost and so I was very disappointed.

Supporting Students

As faculty shared experiences that had an emotional impact, they commonly mentioned aspects of teaching that involved care for their students. This care ranged from having minor emotional impacts, such as Caleb noting he had been “thinking a lot more about the students,” to more significant examples, such as when Travis advocated for student support at his institution, and expanding that support in material ways when he and his family invited a graduate student to live in his home when the student encountered severe lack of resources and support during the pandemic. Travis shared this experience, stating: “So you know, he’s around, he’s trying to complete his coursework. It’s really nice having him but, we now have an adult in the house, who we don’t fully know.”

Participants remarked that supporting students was rooted in care for student well-being. They noted that such care required additional time and effort, beyond what they would have normally provided to students during a regular term. Stella shared that one of the most important things for her during the transition to remote teaching was that her students felt supported. She shared the emotional nature of this saying: “The emotional management and anxiety management for [students] and also your anxiety, yourself. You need to, as the faculty member and the leader, not put all that anxiety on them.” The energy required for supporting students and accommodating their evolving needs proved to also be physically draining for some faculty. Morgan mentioned feeling as though there were simply too many things to attend to and shared, “You have to accommodate for this, but I physically can’t and so [I did] for a while, then I was far too tired. It started to feel like people were trying to pull [me] in multiple directions.”

Obligations as a Scholar

Participants described the early months of the pandemic as a time of reckoning in terms of their role as a scholar. Several faculty spoke of a sense of obligation, amidst the pandemic and racial tensions, to take action. As an example, Bentley's knowledge and experience with teaching online meant they felt compelled to support educators in the K-12 system. They stated:

I was doing all kinds of [professional development] stuff to try to support home learning and actually did get a lot of the teachers from my kids' school in on that, and that was, you know, part of the goal . . . I was doing more of these webinars and things in addition to my own work. These are just things that I took on because of the moment, it felt important to do at the time.

Bentley, along with multiple other participants, also described supporting colleagues with less online teaching experience and heavy teaching loads. Travis noted that he would "try and send encouraging messages to the junior faculty." Participants recognized that some faculty members experienced a greater burden during the shift to remote instruction and Morgan expressed concern for teaching faculty, noting that "the instructor-stream ends up doing twice what the professor-stream does in terms of teaching."

Conversely, receiving practical and emotional support from colleagues was described as a positive emotional experience for participants. Samantha shared:

I'm fortunate that I have colleagues both in and outside of my department, that I've been able to stay in contact with, who are sharing the same kind of perspectives I have on wanting to do this well ... but on the other hand, are deeply afraid we're going to do it wrong or screw something up.

The timing of our interviews meant that, amidst the challenges of the pandemic, participants were also experiencing emotional impacts of varying intensities from the anti-racism movement. Several participants described paying attention, processing the evolving global and local situations related to racial tensions, but not necessarily getting actively involved. Other participants mentioned taking the time to educate themselves to become aware of their own biases.

As a member of the BIPOC community herself, Mariah described increasing her efforts to address racial tensions by using her platform as a scholar:

So I've been starting to think that I should be using my platform as a faculty member, but also as a woman in STEM, a racialized female faculty member and so I think with that in mind, I had kind of started kind of amping my game.

A few non-BIPOC participants mentioned an awareness of the added burden to BIPOC colleagues during the anti-racism movement. Bentley remarked that when talking to a racialized colleague, they were careful not to put the colleague in the position of having to educate them about racial issues. Bentley added:

I'm aware of all of the active organizing that is happening by racialized faculty right now to try to speak for and push forms of institutional change that I can recognize need to happen, but I didn't know anything was happening before this. And that's just like a lifelong ignorance that I'm kind of going, 'oh, here we are, right?' I'm seeing the work that nobody, who looks like me [non-BIPOC], is often even aware is happening.

Participants also described their experiences in supporting students while also taking a stance on racial tensions. Parker spoke about trying to find ways to support Indigenous students at his institution while Ryan commented on the emotional labour involved in deciding to be vocal about being anti-racist, despite an administrative directive not to make any official statements to students, remarking that "there's been a lot of that kind of heavy emotional thinking about that."

CHANGES IN PERSONAL LIFE

The emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic extended beyond scholars' professional lives with significant emotional impact stemming from their personal lives as well. In particular,

participants described caring for family and friends, reduced in-person connections, and news reports and social media as being sources of emotional impact. Participants also reported that the lack of physical and temporal separation between home and work during the pandemic had an emotional impact. As Charlotte shared, “I want the separation. Not getting separation between my work and my home has really bothered me.”

Caring for Family and Friends

One of the most significant sources of emotional impacts was managing one’s workload while caring for children. As childcare centres closed and K-12 schools across Canada had shifted to emergency remote teaching, participants with young children and adolescents were expanding their caregiving responsibilities while also adjusting to their changing professional role. Bentley explicitly categorized their experience of supporting their children, and helping them manage their schoolwork, as *emotional labour* and stated, “Making sure that we were just kind of all okay through this transition took a lot more time out of my day than I had ever anticipated.” As the father of an elementary school-aged child, Preston shared the challenges of trying to motivate his son to do schoolwork online, stating: “His [Preston son’s] teachers switched everything online. They did a great job, but there was a lot of screen time,” adding that his son needed a lot of direct supervision. As an essential worker who was unable to be at home during the day to support her child’s online learning, Cynthia remarked, “I found it frustrating. ... And I wasn’t able to be the support person at home that I felt I would have liked to have been during that time.”

Participants noted they were taking more time than they normally would to check-in with family and friends to ensure their well-being during the pandemic. These physical and virtual check-ins placed not only additional demands on their time, but also on their emotional energy. Amir stated: “I’ve got a very elderly mother just a couple of minutes away from me and I see her every day now,” to compensate for the abrupt halt to all her other social interactions.

Reduced In-Person Connections

Participants commented that restricted contact with others during community lockdowns also had an emotional impact. Amir, who shares custody of his child with his ex-partner, commented that the experience of spending less time with his child as a result of the pandemic had an emotional impact, saying, “it’s not been easy for me to manage the loss of the very rich weekend routines that we have.” The unexpected loss of in-person contact and isolation from loved ones was hard and stressful for many participants. Mariah spoke of the inability to visit and provide care to her mother residing in another province and missed family celebrations saying, “I kind of told myself I was being a little cry baby. So I let myself have a little pity party for a minute or two and then yeah ... It was hard not seeing other people in the flesh. I’m not gonna lie.” Lauren also commented on the impacts she felt came from not being able to engage in social contacts and physical interactions. She shared:

It’s been so hard not to be able to be together and not be able to hug people. I miss hugging people I care about ... Even when the boys [her sons] came this morning, you know, and I won’t see them again for who knows how long and, you know, I didn’t hug them. It’s just hard ... not to be able to be together in support of one another physically.

As participants described the sense of isolation associated with reduced in-person contact, they also described how they mitigated some of the negative feelings that they were experiencing. Participants mentioned moving their interactions online to maintain connection and some engaging in bonding activities with family that elicited positive emotional impacts such as bike riding, activities with children, fort-building, and cooking. Travis noted: “It’s not what I was expecting from my life, but oh, it was pretty delightful.”

News Reports and Social Media

The COVID-19 pandemic and anti-racist events at times dominated news media and social media platforms, which stirred up emotions for participants. Mariah said, “It was a bit draining listening to the news because everything was COVID-related.” Preston described how he was impacted by content posted to social media which encouraged people to seize this opportunity

to “explore your passion that you never had time to do and, you know, try baking and gardening and do those home renovations” and that he should be taking the time to do these things, but “there’s the reality of prioritizing sleep over physical activity, cleaning up and personal hygiene.”

Media content related to the anti-racism movement elicited an emotional response among participants as well. Although Canadian news and protests primarily focused on racial tensions in the United States, there were also protests and widespread news coverage on Canadian events, such as the killing of two Indigenous people in New Brunswick by police (Morin 2020).

For some participants the emotions stemming from consuming the media coverage of racist events and the anti-racism movement were based on concern for the well-being of family members or loved ones. For example, Lauren expressed fear for the safety of her son, saying, “It just scares me to death because, you know, he’s vulnerable . . . he’s the *wrong color* and I just fear for him all the time, actually.” Other participants described the emotions they experienced as they supported family members and friends who were impacted by the racial tensions. Charlotte mentioned how a biracial friend of her daughter, who had been close to her family since childhood, had cut off ties with her family and had an argument with her daughter, saying “that has been a hard thing for us.”

In addition, participants talked about how the emotional impacts they felt in regard to the racial tensions of the time compelled them to take action. For example, Jessica shared that hearing of the death of George Floyd in particular caused her sadness and outrage, while at the same time feeling heartened that so many others on social media shared these emotions. When her son invited her to attend a march in their community in response to the deaths of the two Indigenous people in New Brunswick she related how this moment was one of affirmation and pride:

[Son] and I went to the Indigenous Lives Matter march, I was so proud. He actually messaged me and said, I want to go, are you going? And I didn’t have to ask him and it was like, that was the best parenting moment for quite a long time.

Bentley related how, despite their strict compliance with health directives to remain at home, they ultimately chose to safely and distantly participate in marches with family members because of the importance of the protests because “while there’s lots of times to stay in and sit down to protect other people, there’s also times to stand up and protect other people, and try to educate ourselves.”

Several participants described private but emotional and time-intensive efforts they decided to take to increase their awareness of racism in Canada. David remarked:

I’ve been paying close attention to what’s been going on. I’ve questioned my own understanding of this. In the past month, I’ve started doing a lot of reading on this topic. So, I’ve been reading books on white privilege and on trying to understand the whole situation more thoroughly to really try to get a sense of what it means for me and understanding my own misunderstandings about racism, and then from there, I’ll see where it brings me in terms of trying to have an impact in the community.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In describing the sources of new or amplified emotional impacts faculty participants described antecedents to these emotional impacts that we grouped into two categories: professional and personal. In the first theme they described sources which arose from changes in their professional roles in higher education, such as shifts in their teaching and learning; their care, concern and advocacy on behalf of students; and from their broader role as scholars. In contrast, sources of emotional impacts in the second theme were rooted in adjustments in their personal lives including changes connected with family needs and demands; coping with uncertainty; and racial tensions. Consistent with other studies of faculty within the Canadian context (CAUT 2020; Dalhousie Faculty Association 2020), these sources of emotional impacts appeared to resonate and cut across age, family status, employment status, race, and gender. Eaton and Warner (2021) discuss their experiences doing social justice work resulting in personal and professional struggles during their 20 years of doing this work. They describe not only

experiencing unpaid labor, but also the resulting feeling of being exhausted emotionally. This study also supports earlier findings in the literature around the emotional impacts of racism and racial tension. Gorski (2019) for example, found that racial justice activists face burnout caused by four themes: emotional-dispositional causes which arise from a feeling of being personally responsible for effecting change; backlash, which relates to concerns about losing their job; structural causes which arise from a feeling of affecting change being an impossible, never ending task, and in-movement causes which relate to a sense of competition around who is doing the most and has faced the most barriers.

Consistent with the ecological framework used to make sense of the findings in this study, it is important to note that the two themes identified (personal and professional) are overlapping and intertwined (e.g., Charlotte described the negative impacts of lack of separation between work and home life). Further, while faculty reported emotional impacts they experienced, much of the extant literature also notes that faculty were able to pivot to remote instruction quickly in March and persist through waves of ongoing changes through the 2020/2021 semesters (Fox et al. 2020). Their efforts and successes speak to related literature on resilience (Killgore et al. 2020), but also to the contextual factors that an ecological framework emphasizes: individuals live within unique sets of circumstances and past experiences that influence their responses, the options they have to respond in different ways, and the magnitude of the emotional impacts they face. Consistent with such a framework, the implications of this study exist at multiple levels, and not solely at the individual faculty (micro) level. As we describe below, there are implications at the institutional (meso) level as well.

While this study and related literature reveal the challenges that faculty have faced, there's a need for further research into the resilience that faculty exhibited during this time, and the practices and factors that supported it. Some of the existing literature has highlighted the gendered nature and invisibility of emotional labour in the academic workplace, noting that emotional labour associated with supporting students and teaching has not been appropriately valued by higher education institutions (Bellas 1999). This leads us to believe that the outcomes, particularly negative, associated with impacts of this time may be long-standing for certain faculty (e.g., early-career or women) who tend to shoulder a heavier burden when it comes to emotional labour in academe (Calarco 2020; Tunguz 2016). Given that faculty are facing higher workload demands, and an increasing amount of work related to emotional engagement and support of others, we anticipate increasing levels of fatigue and burnout among faculty (Bakker & Heuven 2006). To counter these outcomes, further support for faculty is necessary. Options could include identifying and engaging with academic and personal support networks, professional development, but more importantly administrative action such as policy creation and amendments to existing policies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FACULTY

Many of the individuals participating in this study spoke of the difficulties in separating and balancing their personal and professional lives and how this lack of separation was a source of emotional impact. This finding suggests that strategies which can help faculty establish effective boundaries may be helpful, particularly as remote teaching and pandemic pressures persist, but would serve faculty in the long-term as well. These may include intentional time management approaches such as only responding to students during a certain time, or ending virtual meetings with enough time to transition between meetings. It can also be beneficial to connect with peers to share and brainstorm ways to cope, manage self-care, and set boundaries. We encourage faculty who feel isolated to reach out to colleagues and build a personal and professional support network. This may mean looking beyond their particular unit or department at their institution. Social media, especially during times of remote work, can be one way to find colleagues outside their institution to connect with, but those tools aren't the only ones. As one additional example, support networks via professional organizations may also be available. Another venue for this type of support can be found at support units within the university, who during the pandemic provided not only eLearning support but support for general resiliency (Donnelly, Miller, & Strawser 2020). Additional support may be needed for faculty such as BIPOC faculty who may not always be represented in these support networks. The disruptions arising from this time can serve as opportunities to do things differently. This might also involve advocacy in the form of proposing new or altered policies to administrators.

Faculty may have been reminded in many ways that asking for help is not a sign of weakness; however, those who are pre-tenure or in precarious contract positions may need greater reassurances and support from their more senior colleagues (Shillington et al. 2020).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTRES

The current circumstances open up opportunities to explore ways to create and enhance professional development and needed support structures in Teaching and Learning Centres. Innovative approaches to professional development offerings and strengthening support systems are two routes that should be considered.

Professional Development

Struggles of balancing family needs and demands; coping with uncertainty and change; and racial tensions related to anti-racism and anti-Indigenous movements impacted participants emotionally. This finding points to the importance of professional development which can address these issues across all levels of faculty and teaching staff. Emotional work being done by faculty is not new, (e.g., Guy, Newman & Mastracci 2008; Hartlep & Ball 2020). However, recent events appear to have increased the weight faculty are carrying, making it more difficult to ignore. Institutions need to explore faculty development opportunities that acknowledge and include the intersection of academic and personal lives in meaningful and supportive ways.

It is imperative that these support units adjust to not only support the development of digital learning skills and digital pedagogy, but also resiliency, particularly in disaster scenarios (Donnelly, Miller, & Strawser 2020). Drawing from our participants' descriptions of emotionally challenging situations, areas where we foresee continued demand for professional development include digital pedagogy, critical education, educational technologies, and resources and support around anti-racist and Indigenous practices. While many teaching and learning centres moved quickly to invest in new staffing in the form of instructional designers and technologists, efforts to embrace and support anti-racist education have not kept pace (Metivier 2020).

Programs and professional development around how to be an anti-racist faculty member must also incorporate learning which enables faculty well-being. Initiatives around Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and anti-Indigenous racism require intensive work, and we need to ensure we move toward sustainable long-term anti-racism efforts. These learning opportunities need to be more than one-time workshops or orientations for new faculty, and should include administration and leadership. While we recommend a series of workshops and/or facilitated discussions which integrate these topics across several months with the flexibility to allow faculty to engage at various levels to meet their needs, such work also requires institutional change.

Support Structures

Faculty shared stories of being overwhelmed by the convergence of shifts in their professional and personal lives and how they lacked a robust collegial support system. This finding draws attention to the importance of mentoring programs and communities of practice. Such structures can serve as trusted support systems faculty could reach out to in times of need, as well as offering guidance on how to manage emotional work or unexpected crises resulting from shifts in professional and personal lives (Sorcinelli & Yun 2010). In addition, collegial communities for sharing learning around digital pedagogy and educational technologies can be beneficial to reduce duplication of efforts. Making resources openly available to all such communities can also reduce the overall burden for individual faculty, departments, and institutions. Teaching and learning centres and libraries can support such efforts. Heightened awareness and sensitivity to the concerns and needs of faculty and students who are members of racial minorities or Indigenous communities presents opportunities for meaningful dialogue and action to integrate these perspectives into the portfolio of resources and activities offered by teaching and learning centres.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Beyond equity and diversity statements and training, institutions need to provide a vision and funding to support long-term strategies. In addition to hiring for diversity, they must be

intentional in creating an anti-racist culture on campus where a wide range of individuals can feel a sense of belonging. Anti-racism and anti-Indigenous racism are new terms for many and as such, we encourage administrators, as well as faculty, to explore readings to deepen their collective understanding of these topics (e.g., Dei 2012; Kendi 2019). Concrete actions might include adding terminology around what these terms mean at their specific institution, and implementing strategic plans and policies.

When it comes to institutional approaches for supporting faculty to cope with the emotional demands of their work, we see that some institutions offer employee benefits programs, as well as self-care and wellness support. Administrators must take quick action in supporting opportunities for respite and self-care, making sure all faculty can access all benefits, including mental health counselling at times of need. One suggestion of something that administration may do is building up programs to help faculty heal from the emotional impacts of racial tensions and those who have been impacted by the systematic racism of institutions. There also needs to be recognition that these resources aren't going to solve all challenges, and again, that some challenges are systemic, requiring action at the institutional level.

There must also be efforts to change perceptions around taking time for self-care. Institutions must recognize that burnout, secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma can emerge under a wide range of circumstances and while this is not a new or isolated issue (Stamm 1995), the propensity for potential trauma and burnout in light of current pressures is substantial. It would serve administrators to target these efforts towards women, caregiver, and Black Indigenous and People of Color faculty whose professional roles were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic (Calarco 2020). Institutions must prioritize environments of positive learning, trust, and reflection, as well as provide the appropriate resources to deal with the impacts.

Institutions should enable faculty in learning how to effectively support their students, and ensure that institutional supports are available. For example, ensuring that student service units are adequately staffed and resourced for the current circumstances means that faculty can feel confident in referring students to these professionals. Further possibilities may include but certainly are not limited to enhanced funding for scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), changes to the tenure and promotion process, or recognition of faculty efforts through teaching and service awards. Administrators who ensure appropriate and adequate supports are in place to aid faculty in effectively managing surges in emotional demands may find their institution is better positioned to cope with the pandemic in a resilient way that is apropos for institutions of higher education.

LIMITATIONS

The participants interviewed for this study represented diversity in various ways, however, there are regions of the country and faculty groups that were not represented. Given common experiences described by participants from different regions of the country, we do not expect that our findings would be substantively different had we included participants from other regions, though we urge others to expand on these findings with other populations. We do believe that there may be value in research to examine and compare the experiences of novice and experienced faculty, or faculty in specific regions of Canada, or Indigenous and racialized faculty, or studies in other countries. Our smaller sample was not fully representative of a large diversity of groups. Doing similar research that expands on diversity of various participants, and includes purposeful sampling of BIPOC faculty may have allowed for further insights into the findings. Such studies could shed light on differential aspects of the teaching, research and service roles of faculty, as well as how these roles intersected with their personal lives and/or the sociopolitical and socioeconomic realities in specific regions. Although this study focuses on the Canadian context, it is relevant for a diverse international audience. We see the addition of the Canadian context from this study adding another perspective to the literature which, if early research is an indicator, is quickly becoming saturated by research focusing on the United States.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Our study identified a few areas for future research. One of these areas of potential research is the investigation of educational technology developments that have the potential to support

faculty in the invisible emotional work that they do. We also see opportunity and need for research into emotional burnout, trauma, including vicarious trauma, arising from this time. Given that women scholars tend to assume a greater proportion of care-related tasks and roles, we suggest research which can inform us of how scholars who identify as women are impacted. Additionally, it could be helpful to know what provisions, if any, higher education institutions might put in place to support and retain faculty facing these difficult decisions of balancing professional and personal commitments.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic and racial tensions affecting global society in 2020 disrupted all facets of higher education. In contextualizing faculty experiences holistically to look beyond their teaching responsibilities during this time, we see that emotional impacts were felt at both personal and professional levels. By identifying sources of emotional impacts, including some of the most burdensome ones, individual faculty and institutions of higher education can be proactive in taking action to avoid significant negative outcomes.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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