Never-ending repetitiveness, sadness, loss, and "juggling with a blindfold on:" Lived experiences of Canadian college and university faculty members during the COVID-19 pandemic

Abstract

We report on the lived experiences of faculty members during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring the broader experiences of faculty members as individuals living multi-faceted lives whose homes became their offices, their students scattered geographically, and their home lives upended. Using a phenomenological approach for data collection and analysis, we conducted twenty in-depth interviews with faculty holding varied academic appointments at universities across Canada. Experiences during the early months of the pandemic were described as being overwhelming and exhausting, and participants described as being stuck in a cycle of never-ending repetitiveness, sadness and loss, or managing life, teaching, and other professional responsibilities with little sense of direction. In keeping with phenomenological methods, this research paints a visceral picture of faculty experiences, seeking to contextualize teaching and learning during this time. Its unique contribution lies in portraying emergency remote teaching as an overlapping and tumultuous world of personal, professional, and day-to-day responsibilities.

Keywords: lived experience, higher education, remote teaching, remote learning, education during COVID-19, phenomenology.

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With nearly 1.6 billion students being affected by the closure of educational institutions around March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has been reported to cause "the largest disruption of education systems in history" (United Nations, 2020, p. 2). As instructors rapidly transitioned to remote teaching and learning approaches - a mode of teaching and learning that is qualitatively different from the intentional and well-planned approaches representative of online learning (Hodges et al., 2020) - they experienced not only a shift in modality, but also shifts in professional demands and their day-to-day lives (e.g., Nguyen, 2020).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, researchers have attempted to capture the experiences of faculty at institutions of higher education. Some academics have also described the impacts the pandemic had on them via various means, such as through public writing appearing in opinion-editorials, commentaries published in peer-reviewed journals, and social media posts and threads. In general terms, this body of work shows that even though faculty faced numerous challenges - ranging from feeling unable to balance all of their duties to expressing frustration or disappointment with how they were performing in their various roles whether it be parent, scholar, community member - they also responded with care toward their students and quickly made changes to their practice to ensure educational continuity. In this paper, we contribute to the existing literature by describing the lived experiences of twenty faculty members employed by institutions of higher education in Canada. Our goal is to add a layer of complexity and understanding to the existing literature by employing a phenomenological approach to develop vivid descriptions of academics' experiences. What was

it like to be a faculty member during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic? What was it like for faculty members, as individuals living multi-faceted lives? Following a review of relevant literature, we describe the methods used to answer this question, the study's findings, implications for research and practice.

Review of Relevant Literature

Experiences of tension, anxiety, and stress among faculty members have been a concern for decades (e.g., Austin & Pilat 1990; Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Jacobsen, 2018), and researchers have noted that important tasks and commitments related to the personal lives of faculty including, but certainly not limited to, parenting and caregiving for loved ones, heighten these tensions (e.g., Wilton & Ross, 2017). The early months of the COVID-19 pandemic which encompassed the widespread shift to remote work and concurrent extended period of working from home appear to have caused substantial disruption to the lives of academics. Educators' initial responses to the pandemic have been documented through feature papers in publications for faculty, special issues of journals, and faculty testimonials (e.g., Ferdig et al., 2020; MacDonald, 2020; Nguyen, 2020). Some of this scholarship presents case studies of higher education institutions' shift to remote teaching (e.g., Bao, 2020; Cuaton, 2020). Other efforts include reflections from individual academics (e.g., Bozkurt, et al, 2020). The series of testimonials by 84 scholars from 19 countries included in Jandrić et al., (2020)for example present a first-person account of academics' lives between March and May 2020. Yet other studies used rapid data collection techniques to avoid adding pressure to faculty who were already feeling taxed. For example, Kimmons et al. (2020) gathered publicly-available social media data finding that while faculty used social media to express care, concern, support and

encouragement for their students and colleagues, they did not always perceive the sensitivity of some of the information they were sharing.

Various researchers have surveyed faculty to understand their experiences during the pandemic to-date. These studies have generally focused on issues related to teaching and learning. Respondents to a survey of U.S. faculty and university administrators conducted by Johnson et al. (2020) during the initial weeks of the pandemic for example, identified resources and information to support students as the greatest need that faculty faced. In Canada, a large-scale survey of members of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT, 2020) and an institutional survey by the Dalhousie Faculty Association (2020) found that many faculty were

- working extra hours to support students and transition courses to remote teaching,
- experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety, and
- reporting significant negative impacts on their research activities.

Other surveys explored changes to course delivery and digital learning tool adoption (Fox et al., 2020) and instructors' concerns regarding their capacity to facilitate engaging learning experiences online (Top Hat, 2020). The majority of studies on faculty experiences during the pandemic highlighted the (un)sustainability of remote emergency teaching, needs for faculty training and preparation for the Fall 2020 semester, and the care and concern faculty directed toward student needs and inequities. While focused primarily on the transition to remote emergency teaching from an academic perspective, other concerns such as the demands of the new work environment, and non-instructional challenges emerged only peripherally in the aforementioned surveys.

During the initial months of the pandemic, we observed many academics discussing and sharing their experiences through blogs, social media posts, and responses to commentary pieces (e.g., Lederman, 2020a, 2020b; Morris & Stommel, 2020). These contributions addressed a significant gap in the literature described above, namely that early research, while capturing faculty experiences in broad terms, was lacking in-depth descriptions of faculty members' lived experiences. The writing that began appearing on social media and professional outlets focused on a variety of topics examined from faculty members' points of view. It was expansive and ranged from practical and technical recommendations on working and teaching remotely, to recommendations to address student wellbeing, to issues of university governance, and to the benefits to using pedagogies of care to frame faculty training, planning, and teaching (American Association of University Teachers, 2020; Bali, 2020; Campbell, 2020; Places, 2020; Taylor, 2020). Others described in some detail the challenges and anxieties that faculty faced during this time. For example, some authors noted the early and uneven impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on female academics, evidenced through such things as drop-off in journal submissions from women academics and barriers to their work due to traditionally facing greater family and child care responsibilities (e.g., Flaherty, 2020a; Minello, 2020; Viglione, 2020).

While the aforementioned literature begins to paint a picture of faculty members' experiences during the mass transition to remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to locate systematic and in-depth investigations of faculty lived experiences during the first few months of the pandemic. We address this gap here by asking: What was it like to be a faculty member during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methodology

We employed hermeneutic phenomenology to examine the nature and meaning of these experiences (van Manen, 1997). Many of the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology come from the work of Heidegger (1927/1962) and Gadamer (1976) whose scholarship informed van Manen's approach. We employed phenomenology because it seeks to understand the essence of participants' experiences through their natural "everyday" existence of phenomena in terms of bodily reactions, sense of time, sense of space, and relationships with other individuals (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology is an appropriate and necessary approach for investigating individual's experiences with technology (Cilesiz, 2011), and has been applied in numerous educational technology contexts such as the study of students' interactions with video lectures and chatbots (Adams et al., 2014; Veletsianos & Miller, 2008) or experiences of faculty teaching online (Conceição, 2006).

Participants and Sampling

We purposefully recruited and selected participants as prescribed by common qualitative approaches to research (e.g., Patton, 2015) sharing recruitment invitations via email and social media to faculty at higher education institutions across Canada. Notices directed potential participants to a consent form describing the aims of the study and our selection criterion that they must have been employed in their faculty role (any rank or appointment) in February/March 2020 at a Canadian university. We offered incentives of either a $25 Amazon Gift card or a $25 donation to Food Banks Canada. Those who consented were directed to a six-question online survey that collected demographic information. From there, we purposefully selected interviewees that reflected diversity in the demographic data they shared, the size of their home institution, and their academic appointment. Interviews proceeded in an iterative manner,

beginning with a few participants, adding to our pool of interviewees until we reached twenty

participants (Table 1). At that point we felt we had reached saturation; interviews were adding

little additional information to existing data.

Table 1

Participant demographic information

Pseudonym	Prov.	Age	Gender Identity	Degree	Faculty Position	Status	Discipline/ Subject area
Amir	BC	60+	Man	Doctoral	Adjunct	Limited term	History and Religion
Bentley	ON	46-59	Non-binary	Doctoral	Assistant	Tenure-track	Education
Brenda	AB	46-59	Woman	Doctoral	Sessional	Limited term	Nursing
Charlotte	PE	30-45	Woman	Doctoral	Associate	Tenured	Nursing
Caleb	ON	18-29	Man	Master's	Sessional	Part-time, Limited term	Psychology
Cynthia	PE	46-59	Woman	Professional *	Associate	Tenured	Pathology
David	PE	30-45	Man	Doctoral	Associate	Tenured	Kinesiology
Jeff	NL	46-59	Man	Doctoral	Associate	Tenured	Public health
Jessica	PE	46-59	Woman	Doctoral	Full Professor	Tenured	Nutrition
Lauren	AB	60+	Woman	Doctoral	Adjunct	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	Full-time	Engineering
Ryan	ON	46-59	Man	Doctoral	Associate	Tenured	Engineering
Samantha	PE	46-59	Woman	Doctoral	Associate	Tenured	Psychology
Simon	SK	46-59	Man	Doctoral	Associate	Tenured	Engineering
Stella	PE	30-45	Woman	Doctoral	Assistant	Tenure-track	Nutrition
Suyin	AB	46-59	Woman	Doctoral	Assistant	Tenure-track	Occupational Therapy
Travis	BC	46-59	Man	Doctoral	Full Professor	Tenured	Classics

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

**Director of Teaching and Learning Centre

Data Collection

One researcher conducted semi-structured interviews between June 23 and July 8, 2020. The interviewer's prior experience as a sessional faculty member helped facilitate trust and confidence in the researcher-participant relationship, establishing early rapport. The interview protocol focused on broad, open-ended questions pertaining to faculty lived experiences between March and June 2020 (Appendix A). In keeping with phenomenology, participants were encouraged to describe their emotions, environment, or physical sensations in concrete rather than analytic terms. Interviews lasted about 60 minutes and were conducted by videoconference or phone.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and lightly edited without changing the intent of participants' comments. Where relevant, notes from the interviewer were incorporated including tacit information generated from the interview, such as whether a statement was made with

conviction or hesitation. Four researchers independently read the transcripts to gain an overall understanding of the data. We then discussed participants' experiences in broad, general terms. Next, two researchers reviewed the transcripts to identify preliminary patterns. Using these patterns, everyone reread and discussed the transcripts multiple times and engaged in reflective writing exploring the phenomenon of being a faculty member at this time. After a few rounds of this process theme statements were developed. This cyclical process of analysis began with naive interpretations, which eventually led to deeper and more nuanced understandings as we read, reflected upon, wrote, re-read, and reflected further on interpretations.

Rigour

We took multiple steps to ensure quality and maintain congruence between the philosophical and methodological assumptions which underpin this work (Koch, 1996). First, we kept a researcher's journal as a record of decision-making, allowing reflection on our management of the study and ensuring consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, we documented our pre-understandings of the topic. During data analysis and writing, we took conscious steps to note our assumptions, biases and pre-understandings. Scholars of hermeneutic phenomenology (e.g., Gadamer, 1976; Heidegger, 1927/1962) argue that one's historicality, pre-understanding, and prejudices cannot be fully bracketed, noting that reflection and sensitivity are integral to interpretation. Third, in keeping with hermeneutic phenomenology, data analysis included ongoing and persistent engagement with the data, with several discussions of our interpretations which interrogated and checked our prejudices. Fourth, we present findings in detail, with contextual information allowing readers to determine the broader applicability of findings (Patton, 2015). Finally, we conducted member checks by emailing participants a summary of major findings, asking them to comment on whether the findings reflected their

experience. Twelve participants responded: ten confirmed that findings reflected their experiences and two noted additional points of consideration.

Limitations and Delimitations

While participants interviewed reflected diversity, we acknowledge regions of the country that are not represented in the data. Given common experiences between participants from different regions, we do not expect our results would have changed had we included individuals from other regions. Nonetheless, there may be value in research that examines and compares phenomenological experiences between regions as sociopolitical and socioeconomic realities in different regions vary. Another challenge was participants' tendency, at times, to reflect on their experiences as opposed to describing them. This is a typical challenge in phenomenological research, and we sought to account for it by prompting participants to share descriptions - rather than reflections - during interviews.

Findings

Faculty were in their fourth month of the pandemic by the time we conducted our interviews. For the most part, Canadian universities had made decisions about the fall semester in May-June and had communicated these to staff and faculty. Participants therefore knew that Fall courses (with a few exceptions made for hands-on courses) would be delivered remotely and much campus activity would be conducted online. But, what did it feel like at the time? What was it like to be a faculty member during the first four months of the pandemic? The essence of the experience centered around

- feelings of never-ending repetitiveness,
- juggling multiple responsibilities with limited sense of direction under pressure,
- sadness and loss.

These experiences are interdependent and overlapping, and no single one of them fully illuminates the phenomenon of being a faculty member during this time.

A cycle of never-ending repetitiveness and fatigue

In the movie Groundhog Day, the main character, a weatherman named Phil Connors, finds himself repeating the same day over and over (Albert & Ramis, 1993). Throughout the movie, every morning when Phil wakes up, he discovers that time has reset to the morning of February 2nd, Groundhog Day. Every day, he follows the same schedule and interacts with the same people in what appears to be a never-ending cycle. In describing their lived experiences during the pandemic, several participants specifically referenced the movie Groundhog Day remarking that they felt as though they were stuck in some sort of repeating existence. As David noted:

> [This time period] almost became like Groundhog Day. So every single day,
>
> we did the same thing. We met, we talked about COVID and we didn't have
>
> any answers and we kind of did this over and over and over.

Charlotte also referred to the idea of being stuck in a Groundhog Day experience, one compounded with the fatigue of going from meeting to meeting at the click of a mouse, without a break. She highlighted the toll on her well-being saying:

> I was exhausted, I was mentally exhausted, physically exhausted. I was just...
>
> [pause], I was spent and it never ended... I feel like my life is like a groundhog
>
> day... And it's this loop of just the same thing, every day, in the same place, in
>
> the same way.

Repetition accompanied by high stress made the cycle all the more difficult to endure as participants described feeling driven from one urgent task to another with no immediate relief in

sight. When recounting her experience of the first weeks on lockdown, Cynthia said: "The

exhaustion. It was... [pause] hard... I was on this treadmill, I just gotta keep going, you know, the

hamster on the wheel." References to repetition interwoven with fatigue illustrate the different

ways that faculty experienced this aspect of the pandemic. Ryan described it this way: "The

drain that I feel right now is just from this sort of persistent having to do stuff over a long period

of time, manage the communication and the endless stress." In contrast, Simon said "There's sort

of waves of fatigue that come and go. Just you know, our weekends aren't particularly distinct

from our weekdays sort of thing and it just gets to be somewhat monotonous."

Such quotes reveal that faculty felt as though they were trapped in the same day, living

the same day over and over, without having the time, capacity, or resources to address all the

needs and challenges they were facing. These experiences were accompanied by noticeably

higher levels of fatigue, and related to participants' sense of time and sense of physical body.

Juggling blindfolded under pressure

University closures, lockdowns, and curtailment of community services led faculty to

abandon their carefully crafted plans and processes, forcing them to juggle both new and many

more responsibilities, and to do so without having a clear sense of direction. Participants

described putting substantial efforts into meeting expectations, maintaining high standards, and

doing what they needed to do to support those in their personal and professional circles. At times

they succeeded, but this wasn't always the case. The adrenaline that accompanied the first weeks

of the pandemic in March and April sustained them for a short while, but just like a game of hot

potato, as time goes on fingers start to get hot and begin to burn. Can the current player hold on

for just a tad longer? That's when players start looking for somewhere to toss the hot potato. But,

who to toss it to next? Who is ready and able to take a turn? Who's been burned? In this context,

faculty were sensitive to the myriad demands colleagues and students were encountering and described wanting to avoid adding to the burden of others. They were coping with the intensity and stresses of many new or unfamiliar activities knowing that they were helping others, but coming to the realization that sustaining this for months on end was not going to be feasible.

Participants with children living at home often spoke of challenges encountered in home-based work spaces as they juggled parental and work responsibilities. Samantha said: "I have my 10 year old daughter at home, trying to balance her needs with doing my own work and all of a sudden there were a lot more distractions to be had." Others described how they were tag-teaming with partners as they alternated work with childcare (Jeff: "We were splitting days and sometimes, maybe I get two hours in the morning and then two hours in the afternoon and then some time in the evening)" or helping their kids with schoolwork (Preston: "My son is in grade two... We couldn't leave him with an assignment or a worksheet necessarily and come back and it be done)." On the other hand, there were participants who described being unable to organize obligations that would enable them to support a child as much as they wanted to during this time.

> I found it frustrating, feeling this split of, Oh, you know, I have to do my work
> here 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.... and it wasn't, [pause] it wasn't a nice
> feeling, this feeling of, you know, Okay, I have to do my responsibilities at work,
> I can't let the students down and I can't dump more work on my colleagues either.
> So I need to do my part. But then,...our kids have both parents who were in
> essential services who were not home most of the time. (Cynthia)

Juggling attention and time around children wasn't the only family-related pressure that participants described. The pandemic has brought to light other aspects of invisible

work that has often been the purview of women. For instance, Amir talked about how

he has assumed additional support roles for extended family: "So I've got a very elderly

mother just a couple of minutes away from me and I see her every day now, which I did

not before, I physically go there every. single. day. No matter how busy I am."

Bentley described their experience of working from home during the pandemic as

"juggling kind of with a blindfold on," noting that they confronted a lot of their own lack of

knowledge around teaching remotely, even if they had experience in online learning prior to the

pandemic. Several participants spoke of going from one urgent task to the next, flying by the seat

of their pants, putting out fires as they dealt with immediate issues and crises, where day-to-day

life became "kind of a blur of keeping stuff going" (Ryan). Cynthia spoke of the challenges

managing rival demands for her attention this way.

> It was hard because I knew I'd finish [a work task] and have a lunch break and
>
> then it's like, Oh, now I have to go to the diagnostic lab, or Oh, now I have to try
>
> to get ready for the next teaching session, because I haven't finished getting all
>
> that ready. ...So there wasn't a whole lot of reflection or... it was just sort of like,
>
> Oh, what's next on the list?

Feeling minimally prepared and exposed was noted by some participants.

Bentley referenced an instance where they were only able to do minimal preparation

learning a new technology:

> I hadn't had the chance to try [Zoom] out and so I felt both like a dork for not
>
> knowing, but also kind of like, Okay, well here I'm gonna model the process of
>
> learning because we're all gonna feel like this at some point this year and this is
>
> what you do, when you realize you don't know how to do...So, anyway, we'll take

it as you know, good modeling, but it was... [pause], it was very confronting, and

kind of embarrassing, too but that's the reality of working with online tools...if

you're learning it with an audience, you are going to be hanging in the wind.

There are gonna be times when you feel very exposed, because that learning curve

is visible.

Stella also spoke about feeling unprepared and exposed under stress when using

unfamiliar technology, especially during the initial pivot to remote learning. She

described feeling like "the sky was falling.. it's almost like your work, your books and

your things become that security blanket that you grab from your office to hold close to

you, so that you can figure out how to deliver your content in a very different way."

Participants also referenced adapting their plans and making difficult decisions

around rival priorities. Jessica described shuffling work to fit in additional professional

learning about online teaching, wanting to do a better job during the fall semester for

the sake of her students. Others, like Travis and Bentley, described hard decisions they

made around rival priorities, putting the needs of others such as family members and/or

junior colleagues first, often at the expense of their own needs. Bentley described taking

on webinars to help others teach online "because it felt important to do at the time" but

this meant "that again, pieces of my work kept getting punted down the road." Travis

also described prioritizing others at the cost of "time for research," and Ryan illustrated

the toll he faced in prioritizing the needs of others at the expense of his own self-care

when he said: "I have literally been sitting in this [couch] from 9am until about 8pm

every day for the last 13 weeks [working]... I'm not taking care of myself. I'm not

getting out. I'm not doing any exercise." What emerged from these descriptions was a

bittersweet feeling: faculty noted that while they made personal sacrifices, others

benefitted from their loss, and while they acknowledged that they mostly felt good

about their decisions, they wondered about the costs of these sacrifices.

Sadness and Loss

Faculty members' experiences of sadness and loss emerged in two distinct ways: in

relation to themselves and their personal losses, and in relation to others and what they perceived

others to have lost as a result of the pandemic. Painful and uncomfortable experiences were

described, accompanied with silence, flippant comments about negative coping strategies that

were quickly qualified, and apologies for tears. Physical actions such as wiping hands over their

face, blinking rapidly while looking toward the ceiling, or long contemplative pauses

accompanied by deep sighs also signalled the depth of their emotions. Some participants' voices

wobbled or became strident while describing impacts from loss of predictable routines, support

structures or the restrictions limiting engagement in activities and relationships that were

valuable parts of their lives prior to the pandemic.

In Relation to Self

Participants expressed losses related to perceived identities, usual routines and schedules,

practical support in the form of childcare, in-person interactions with colleagues, friends and

family, and focused work time. In speaking about their perceived identity as a parent, several

participants noted how their parenting changed as a result of the pandemic lockdown and the

subsequent closure of child care facilities and schools. They expressed frustration that despite

being in constant, close proximity to their children throughout the day, they were not always able

to be cognitively and emotionally present. Along with sadness at the loss of structure and

caretaking support, these participants were also grappling with the ways that their parenting had shifted during the pandemic.

> My emotional state, I would say is hugely dependent on the agreeability of the child that I'm carrying with me. If he doesn't want to be there, I am... I am not great to be around, I probably correct him, am probably rude and snappish and there is a sense of failure. There's a sense of not being able to accomplish the basics. There's anger and resentment. …. And I don't want that to be the message that he takes away. I want him to know that he was in a loving family where we were cuddling all the time and things like this. (Travis)

In addition to struggling with self-efficacy in relation to personal roles, faculty spoke of sadness related to their reduced ability to perform in their professional capacities. Morgan, who spoke at length about these conflicts, became emotional in speaking about aspects of sadness and grief associated with their perceived identity as an educator. As an award-winning instructor at their university, Morgan shared concerns about measuring up to personal standards for teaching when shifting to online learning. They described fears about transitioning to online teaching, feeling overwhelmed by the amount of learning needed in order to feel competent teaching online. Others echoed these sentiments, speculating about the give and take nature of teaching and learning. For example, Samantha wondered, "How am I going to get what I need out of teaching?"

As participants related changes in their day-to-day lives, the substantial decrease in social interactions was mentioned by all of the participants. Different ways losses were described included feeling disconnected from their team of colleagues, "all of a sudden ... not being in a team, face-to-face" (Lauren), missing in-person interactions with colleagues, "My great friends,

[names three colleagues], we don't see each other anymore…. I've missed them" (Charlotte); as well as the serendipitous, unplanned encounters that happen throughout the day, "What I miss the most is those interactions with other people, other faculty, the impromptu 'Oh I see you, and I thought of this' and the chat about that" (Caleb). Participants talked about interactions being formalized as out of necessity, becoming more planned and instrumental. There was also notable mention of loss of participation and access to groups in the community that were a large part of the social fabric of their lives. "I was very actively involved just about every evening with community events" (Amir).

Conversation about loss included the rupture of work /life boundaries. Charlotte shared how she had worked hard to establish and maintain a separation between her personal and professional life: "I'm a person who works best when I can compartmentalize and I can have separation between my roles and responsibilities, when I have clear boundaries." Losing these limits impacted her mental well-being and ability to cope and work effectively. Many described how the pandemic threw familiar structures and processes out the window. Bentley "found that for the first probably three weeks at least, I felt fuzzy... I literally just could not dig into anything deeply" and similar sentiments were expressed by many other participants who voiced concerns around the effects on their productivity and capacity to focus on work-related tasks. To be clear though, this wasn't uniform: David shared his surprise that he had been able to work from home relatively effectively given the elimination of previously firm boundaries between work and home.

In Relation to Others

Faculty also described their sadness in relation to or for the losses of others. In particular, some participants appeared to grieve for students who were not receiving the instructional support they believed was needed for optimal learning, such as Travis who said: "The way that I [typically] engage with [student] questions is modeling part of the academic process and thinking through how we formulate an answer. All that is [now] lost." Participants for instance, vividly described how tough it was to be supporting students at the cusp of completing a substantial project when they could no longer work on elements that required in-person contact with others. As they talked about these lost culminating events, finales, or presentations of students' work, there was a sympathetic undertone denoting a sense of sorrow with comments such as the following: "[it was] a little bit trying on the heartstrings, because, you know, you feel for the students who really wanted to exhibit their skills and knowledge (Preston).

Participants also described a sense of loss in relation to typical rituals when individuals transition to new stages of life and career; the inability to gather with their colleagues, students, friends, and family; and the lost sense of closure or closeness that generally accompanies these occasions. For example, Suyin commented that,

> My good friend, she is leaving as well. Last week she told me she will go to
> another university and I just feel that we won't have a time to get together, to wrap
> up, say goodbye or have a farewell party within the department…just very limited
> opportunities to get together to continue promoting relationships.

Mariah expressed the disappointment stemming from lost family get-togethers to mark important family events. Sh said: "Our plan in January was to get together for Mother's Day, and our birthdays, and my uncle's, who turned 90. I wasn't able to go, you know,

so May was kind of hard for us (Mariah)." For Ryan, milestones such as these were important and even though he invested time and effort into creating alternative ways to mark these occasions, "that sort of lack of celebration has been difficult."

Discussion and Implications

Faculty members described how widespread closures of universities, schools, and local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic radically changed their daily routines and the nature of their interactions with others, along with their teaching practices, research capacity, and demands for service activities. Many faculty had to parent while working, support the learning of children, negotiate schedules and space with partners, provide care to extended family while spending much of their days restricted to home. Faculty described the enormous sense of pressure to manage their professional and personal roles, which had negative impacts on their mental and physical well-being. Faculty also demonstrated resilience in adapting to new ways of living/working and in how they provided support for others despite their own experiences of stress. They experienced sadness and grief in the face of lost opportunities, and while acknowledging their privilege, they noted that there will be continued hardship as the pandemic progresses.

While surveys reported patterns of faculty practices and experiences, revealing general feelings of anxiety, stress, and efforts to cope with transitioning to remote forms of teaching and learning (CAUT, 2020; Dalhousie University faculty association, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020), and crowdsourced reports provide individuals' snapshots of practices in their country or of their own life (e.g., Bozkurt et al., 2020; Jandrić et al., 2020), in this paper we described how Canadian faculty felt it was like to be in their role in the early months of the pandemic. The endless pressing tasks they faced, compounded by reduced social contacts and multiple losses,

amidst an uncertain environment, was taking its toll on faculty. Significantly, these findings seem to persist into the Fall 2020 semester. Gannon (2020, ¶10), reflecting Bentley's "juggling while blindfolded" comment, recently wrote: "I've been teaching college classes for 23 years, and there have been times this semester when I've felt less like a teacher and more like one of those circus performers spinning stacks of plates and cups on my arms and head."

When universities pivoted to remote online instruction in March 2020, some scholars argued that this was an opportunity to compare learning outcomes between in-person and online courses because the pandemic provided a "natural experiment" (Zimmerman, 2020). While many others responded with reasons why such a comparison would be shortsighted, unequal, and ignoring of the broader context (e.g., Lederman, 2020a; Veletsianos, 2020), this study provides empirical support to the notion that comparisons between in-person and remote education during the pandemic would be misguided, as they fail to take into account the broader environment and people's experiences during a global pandemic described herein. We urge researchers to avoid such comparisons.

There are some practical implications arising from the lived experiences described by faculty. As the pandemic passes its seven-month mark, the novelty of working from home with the accompanying collisions between work and personal worlds may be wearing thin and some faculty may be encountering limits to their ability to adapt in this highly stressful situation (Haelle, 2020). Participants spoke of loss and stress on multiple fronts with loss of competence in online teaching environments being one compelling concern. Analyses of research studies conducted prior to the pandemic reveal a variety of faculty tensions with online classes (Major, 2010; Wingo et al., 2017), and these concerns are still present.

As the higher education community continues to deal with the ongoing pandemic, we are grateful to see scholars consider trauma-informed and trauma-aware practices for higher education pedagogy and faculty development. We believe that these are useful to consider. These evidence-based practices can help faculty in supporting students, colleagues, and their own family members, in addition to benefiting faculty themselves (Berke & Ghabour, 2019). Recognition of ambiguous loss (Boss, 2000) and promoting effective coping strategies developed for similar situations may be appropriate for faculty self-care, professional development activities and when formulating pedagogical advances for students. Augmenting this form of support to faculty may lower levels of burnout predicted (Flaherty, 2020b). Creative approaches to reduce stress arising from too many online meetings, high volume of emails, limited connections with colleagues, lack of time, competing priorities, and so on may benefit from targeted responses (e.g., Mallon, 2020).

While many faculty participants acknowledged the privilege that came from having stable employment, income, housing and internet access, this study illustrates a holistic view of their lived experiences, one that is not limited to their teaching role. Importantly, it paints a picture of faculty members' lived experiences during this volatile time of remote teaching, illustrating some of the profound ways the pandemic has impacted them. Future research could further unpack these experiences. It may look at how faculty cope with the tensions they experience, how their institutions support or fail to support them, how these experiences impact teaching and research, and what roles technology plays in worsening or alleviating some of these experiences. Context is important in such studies, and we hope to see such research occur in non-Canadian contexts as well.

We wrote this paper in an attempt to paint a visceral picture of faculty members' lived experiences as individuals living multi-faceted lives, whose homes became their offices, their students scattered geographically, and their professional and home lives upended. In contextualizing faculty experiences holistically and looking beyond their teaching responsibilities during this time, we see that emergency remote education became an overlapping world of personal, professional, and day-to-day responsibilities and concerns.

Acknowledgements

Statements on data, ethics, and conflict of interest

Data: Researchers may contact the corresponding author for access to de-identified data.

Ethics: This study was reviewed and approved by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board

Conflicts of interest: The authors report no conflicts of interest

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Appendix A

Guiding questions for semi-structured conversational interviews

1) I want you to think back to mid-March. What aspects of the transition to working from home stand out for you?

    ○ Possible prompts
        i. Tell me more about [thing interviewee said]
        ii. Broad groupings to probe more into:
            1. Relationships with others (family, coworkers, children, parents)
            2. Work-life balance
            3. Working from home

2a) What has it been like to be a faculty member during this pandemic?

    ■ What did it feel like?
    ■ Prompt for details (e.g., tell me more about X)
    ■ Is there anything more you want to tell me about what it was like to be a faculty member at this time?

2b) Considering what you are doing now (- clarify what it is they are doing now, teaching? Preparing for fall? Focusing on research? Admin work?) what is it like?

    ■ What does it feel like?
    ■ Prompt for details (e.g., tell me more about X)
    ■ Is there anything more you want to tell me about what it is like for you at this time?

3) Tell me about one of the most memorable situations you encountered during this time.

    ● Tell me more about X [something interviewee said]
    ● Can you describe what was going on around you?
        ○ Are there other people there? What were they doing?;
        ○ What background sounds or smells were there?
    ● How did you feel when this was happening?
        ○ emotional state - worried, happy excited, etc.,
        ○ physical state - relaxed, tense, energized, tired...
    Tell me more about why this was a memorable situation.

4) Tell me about a second memorable situation you encountered during this time.

    ● Tell me more about this [something interviewee said]
    ● Can you describe what was going on around you?
        ○ Are there other people there? What were they doing?;
        ○ What background sounds or smells were there?

- How did you feel when this was happening?
  - emotional state - worried, happy excited, etc.,
  - physical state - relaxed, tense, energized, tired...

Tell me more about why this was a memorable situation.

5) Tell me more about your relationships with other people during the pandemic, both professionally and personally.

Potential prompts:
- Did you have to do things differently to stay connected with people who play important roles in the work you do as a faculty member//IDP? Can you tell me more about what this was like?
- students
- colleagues in your department,
- Colleagues and collaborators in other locations?

6) Can you tell me about a time when you really felt you did not understand, or know enough about something that you encountered during these past several weeks?

7) If you experienced a time when things were not going well, how did you manage that? Why?

8) In addition to the pandemic, we also seem to be living at a time of significant racial tensions. Could you tell me a little bit about how these events are impacting you as a faculty member?

Possible probes could be related to:
- Requests for additional service on particular committees?
- Concerns for colleagues, family, friends?
- Having/making time to listen and learn from BIPOC communities/colleagues/students?
- Pile-on effect in addition to the pandemic and other stressors?

9) Is there anything else that you want to tell me/us that we haven't touched on in previous questions or something that you want to elaborate on?