Women in psychology are over-represented at the undergraduate level but under-represented at senior faculty levels. Despite growing representation, women continue to experience restricted access to scholarly opportunities; inequities in grant funding, publishing and citations; and pay gaps.

Women in psychology who are also mothers, or women with childcare responsibilities who do not identify as mothers, experience additional barriers. This 'motherhood penalty' includes loss of professional experiences or training because of discrimination (for example, not being invited to collaborate) or childcare responsibilities that limit participation, and failure to obtain tenure and wage growth owing to reduced or gaps in productivity. These experiences decrease the sense of belonging for mothers in psychology, which might influence their involvement in the field and the decision to remain in academia. Lack of belonging for mothers is likely to be greater among those who hold marginalized identities and is influenced by culturally prescribed gender roles and biases. Many of these barriers have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To address the challenges faced by mothers in psychology, structural reform and advocacy by those who hold the most power within academia are needed.

Confront gender biases
A first step to supporting mothers is to reflect on gender biases about who should and should not be an academic and what is required to be successful in this profession. For example, some academic mothers report feeling that they needed to hide their pregnancies or pregnancy-related symptoms out of fear that they would be viewed as less professionally capable. Many expectations about what constitutes academic success were established and maintained by those who hold relatively homogeneous and privileged gender, racial and ethnic identities. Such expectations might no longer be applicable to or realistic for today's increasingly diverse academic workforce. For example, there is increasing recognition of the importance of community-engaged research, which requires considerably more time and effort than traditional lab-based research activities. This shift means it is no longer informative to judge research impact and productivity solely on the basis of the number of publications, citations or grant funding.

However, examining gender biases alone is insufficient in the absence of collective action. Institutions must engage employees in activities that encourage self-reflection, increase understanding of bias and offer tools to combat it (for example, teaching strategies to reduce bias in hiring decisions). These activities must be supported by institutional policies that prohibit and discipline bullying, harassment, and discrimination against mothers to demonstrate that self-reflective and educational activities are not simply aspirational and that harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated.

Offer sufficient accommodations
Paid parental leave, health insurance and affordable childcare are essential for mothers to thrive in psychology. Even in countries where these are universally available, mothers might face challenges in accessing these resources, such as stigma around taking full parental leave or gaps in research productivity because of parental leave. In the United States, paid parental leave of sufficient length is rarely a reality for academics, forcing mothers to choose between leaving their jobs, going unpaid or returning to work too early for their wellbeing or that of their children. Trainees might be especially impacted by a lack of maternity leave policies, which might be compounded by the stigma of being a trainee with children, lack of access to healthcare, and low wages. Failure to support mothers after the arrival of a new child conveys the message that women are unwelcome and cannot be both mothers and scholars. Institutions must offer paid leave of sufficient length (at least 12 weeks) to mothers — including birthing, adoptive and foster mothers — at all training and career stages.

Fathers or other parenting partners can support this reform by requesting and using paid leave themselves. This normalizes the use of parental leave for all people and promotes gender equity at home and in the return to work. Family leave can also be extended to include times...
when children are sick, to normalize challenges related to parenting and promote employee wellbeing by not requiring the use of paid time off to care for a sick child.

There should also be structural support for high-quality, comprehensive and affordable reproductive (such as abortion and egg freezing), fertility (such as in vitro fertilization treatments) and dependent care. Sufficient healthcare provides people of childbearing age with support for family planning, whether that includes having children or not, and communicates support for all family planning choices. For those with biological, foster or adoptive children, dependent care ensures access to the caregiver's institutional healthcare packages. Parents must also have access to affordable, high-quality and reliable childcare to ensure they can participate fully in the workforce. Waiting lists tend to be many years long in existing university-sponsored childcare facilities, making them a less viable option for many parents. Thus, new and innovative solutions are needed. For example, universities could provide stipends for childcare and treatments not covered by insurance.

**Comment**

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**Proactively tackle financial inequities**

There are well-documented pay gaps and financial gender inequities, particularly at the associate and full professor levels. These gaps are especially concerning because women tend to do more service than men, much of which goes unpaid and unrecognized in promotion and tenure. Institutions must implement policies that promote equity in pay and funding, including making salaries publicly available, providing training in negotiating salary and supporting gender-equity reviews with adjustments made as inequities are identified.

Equitable pay can support mothers who might need to outsource caregiving responsibilities. Institutions and organizations must also consider supplementary financial support for mothers, such as additional funds for professional conferences to cover the costs of transporting children and childcare during professional activities.

**Establish flexible systems**

The typical metrics of academic success, such as the number of publications and grant funding, might feel particularly unachievable to mothers, especially those with relatively fewer resources as parents (for example, single parents or parents of children with complex needs). These parents might have more restricted work hours owing to childcare responsibilities, creating a situation whereby they cannot fully participate in both work and caregiving. Because women spend more time in service, mothers might be spending more work hours engaged in service activities that go unrecognized by traditional standards of productivity. Thus, it is imperative for institutions and those in power to reflect upon perceptions of productivity for academic success and to establish flexible systems that embrace the multifaceted identities and roles of all people. This might include revising research productivity and impact criteria for promotion to be more holistic and less focused on productivity metrics known to exhibit gender inequities (for example, expanding these criteria to include community engagement and resource sharing), and providing service relief, course release or scheduling flexibility (for example, offering virtual teaching options) according to a person’s specific needs. Such changes would reflect an institutional commitment to all people, but would especially benefit mothers and those with marginalized identities who might be overly penalized by traditional standards of productivity.

**The time for action is now**

Although structural reform is imperative to support mothers and help them thrive in psychology, it is often slow. Thus, mothers and their colleagues — particularly those in positions of power — need to take more immediate individual action in the interim. Support from colleagues is especially important for mothers with marginalized identities whose experiences are often overlooked and might be overshadowed by intersectional racist, homophbic or classist experiences.

For example, formal and informal mentorship programs could be established to increase a sense of belonging. Academics can also support mothers by collaborating with them and promoting their work on Twitter and scientific venues to increase their visibility.

Finally, academics can proactively consider and normalize the needs of mothers. For example, institutional leadership (such as department chairs) should not plan meetings outside of traditional childcare hours, should ensure that safe and clean spaces for breast/breastmilk expression and storage are provided, and should have flexibility when childcare problems arise or children get sick (for example by allowing mothers to bring their children to meetings or extending deadlines).

None of these are new or innovative ideas. Although some progress has been made, it has been slow and inadequate in resolving the challenges for mothers in psychology. It is time to take immediate action where possible as the collective pursuit of structural reform continues.

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**Acknowledgements**

The author thanks G. Rea-Sandan, A. Helle, C. Call and K. Musacchio Schafer for feedback on earlier versions of this article.

**Competing interests**

The author declares no competing interests.