Researching gender inequalities in academic labor during the COVID-19 pandemic: Avoiding common problems and asking different questions

Dr Maria do Mar Pereira

Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

Correspondence
Maria do Mar Pereira, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, Social Sciences Building, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK.

Funding information
Leverhulme Trust, Grant/Award Number: PLP-2017-169

Abstract
As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, a growing body of international literature is analyzing the effects of the pandemic on academic labor and, specifically, on gender inequalities in academia. In that literature, much attention has been devoted to comparing the unequal impacts of COVID-19 on the research activities of women and men, with studies demonstrating that women’s research productivity has been disproportionately disrupted, in ways that are likely to have detrimental effects in the short- and long-term. In this paper, I discuss that emerging literature on gender inequalities in pandemic academic productivity. I reflect on the questions asked, the issues centered and the assumptions made within this literature, devoting particular attention to how authors conceptualize academic labor and productivity, on one hand, and gender, on the other. I show that this literature makes major contributions to exposing old and new gender inequalities in academia, but argue that it also risks reproducing some problematic assumptions about gender and about academic work. Discussing those assumptions and their effects, I identify some important questions for us to consider as we expand this literature and deepen our understanding of the complex gendered effects of COVID-19 on academic labor.

Keywords
academic labor, COVID-19, gender inequalities, productivity
INTRODUCTION

It has been less than 1 year since the World Health Organization classified COVID-19 as a pandemic, but in that time thousands of articles have been written across disciplines and countries, both about the disease itself and about its complex effects on various aspects of life. The speed and intensity of that production, and the scientific responsiveness it demonstrates, would be remarkable and impressive even in the most “normal” of times. They seem even more astounding now, because all these articles have been researched, written, peer reviewed, and edited during a transnational period of widespread disruption of academic labor and profound upheaval in living and working conditions, physical and mental health, and professional and personal relationships. That vast body of literature contains hundreds of texts written specifically about the impacts of COVID-19 on individual and collective academic labor. These texts—some of them published here in *Gender, Work and Organization* (Özkazanç-Pan & Pullen, 2020)—draw on everything from autoethnography of personal experience or interviews with small groups of participants, to large-scale international surveys with thousands of respondents. A recurring finding in this literature is that during the pandemic many academics, and especially women academics, have been less productive, because they are finding it hard to do work and especially difficult to do research. But—and maybe ironically—the remarkable size of that literature also shows that many academics have been working very hard in the last few months to do some very productive research on those pandemic research difficulties.

As this valuable literature on COVID-19 in academia grows and settles, it becomes increasingly important to reflect on the questions it asks, the issues it focuses on, the assumptions it makes and the findings it offers. That is what I seek to do in this short article, focusing specifically on literature about the gendered and gendering nature of COVID-19's impacts on academic labor. In the pages that follow, I turn my attention to how that literature conceptualizes academic labor, on one hand, and gender, on the other. I argue that this literature makes a major contribution to exposing old and new gender inequalities in academia in pandemic times. However, in doing that vital work, it sometimes risks reproducing some problematic assumptions about gender and about academic labor. To fight those old and new inequalities in effective and inclusive ways, we must think carefully about how we frame our analyses and our demands regarding gender inequalities in academia during and after the pandemic. In this article, I offer some suggestions on how to do so.

THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON GENDERED INEQUALITIES IN ACADEMIC LABOR

Over the past months, we have amassed extensive evidence that COVID-19 has transformed and disrupted academic labor across the world (Pereira, 2020), and that those disruptions are disproportionately affecting particular groups of scholars—for example, those with children or other caring responsibilities, those who are precariously employed or more junior, those who are disabled, those who are from minority ethnic backgrounds, or those working in laboratory-based disciplines (Castela, 2020; Corbera et al., 2020; Dobusch & Kreissl, 2020; Guy & Arthur, 2020; Jenkins, 2020; Malisch et al., 2020; Myers et al., 2020; Nash & Churchill, 2020; Staniscuaski et al., 2020; Wright, Haastrup, & Guerrina, 2020; Yıldırım & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). In literature on the uneven academic effects of COVID-19, much attention has also been devoted to problematizing the *gendered* and *gendering* nature of those effects, that is to analyzing how the academic effects of COVID-19 are shaped by longstanding gender inequalities and themselves contribute to creating gender inequalities.

Scholars have used various methods to illuminate different dimensions, manifestations, and impacts of gender inequalities in the academic effects of COVID-19. Small and large-scale national and international surveys—like those by Myers et al. (2020), Staniscuaski et al. (2020), Jung et al. (2020), and Yıldırım and Eslen-Ziya (2020), for example—demonstrate that the pandemic has affected the time and conditions of academic labor, with women being, on average, more negatively affected than men. Smaller-scale interview-based studies, like those by Minello et al. (2020) and Aldossari and Chaudhry (2020), show how women academics’ work during the pandemic was
disproportionately constrained by nonacademic responsibilities distributed unequally in households (such as those that relate to care, education, and housework). More personal or autoethnographic reflections offer extraordinarily rich accounts of the actual embodied experiences of working amidst a pandemic and having to manage intense and draining clashes between one’s roles as a scholar and one’s (gendered) roles at home and in communities (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020; Boncori, 2020; Clancy, 2020; Clavijo, 2020; Couch et al., 2020; Guy & Arthur, 2020; Hall, 2020; Kelly & Senior, 2020; Miller, 2020; Motta, 2020; Plotnikof et al., 2020; Vohra & Taneja, 2020). These reflections offer compelling insights into the micropolitics of gender inequalities in pandemic academic labor. They illustrate how small day-to-day challenges—logistical, spatial, physical, emotional, intellectual—may accumulate over time to produce noticeable effects on a scholar’s individual work, effects which then aggregate to have immense implications on equality and diversity within the sector as a whole.

One notable example of this link between mundane individual challenges and broad structural inequalities can be found in one set of findings which has received much attention within and beyond academia: the fact that in the spring/summer of 2020 several academic journals reported reductions in the number and/or proportion of articles submitted by women (Andersen et al., 2020; Flaherty, 2020; Kitchener, 2020; Matthewman & Huppatz, 2020; Viglione, 2020; Wright et al., 2020; Zimmer, 2020). Commentators are concerned about this interruption, or deceleration, of many women’s academic publishing, because it might affect individual career progression in the short- and medium-term, and impact broader academic pipelines in the long-term. Concern about those risks is so high that this topic—differences between academic women and men in their publication productivity during the pandemic—has been one of the most frequently studied objects in empirical research on the relations between COVID-19, academia, and gender. It has also received significant attention within mainstream media and social media (Flaherty, 2020; Kitchener, 2020; Roy, 2020; Zimmer, 2020). Differences between women and men in terms of pandemic publication rates are, undoubtedly, a vital concern, and one that deserves sustained analysis. But what are the risks of treating it as the key manifestation, or the ultimate symbol, of pandemic gender inequalities in academia? That is the question I explore in the following section.

3 STUDYING PANDEMIC PRODUCTIVITY AND GENDER: THE PROBLEMS WITH OUR QUESTIONS

It is now obvious that COVID-19 has affected academic productivity in gendered ways, and that we must (1) monitor and analyze COVID-19’s impacts on academic inequalities and (2) implement policies to mitigate or offset new academic inequalities caused by the pandemic (Alon et al., 2020; Andersen et al., 2020; Cardel et al., 2020; Cui et al., 2020; Lopes & Coelho, 2020; Malisch et al., 2020; Stadnyk & Black, 2020). What is, I would argue, much less obvious is how exactly one should conceptualize academic work, academic productivity, and even gender, when analyzing these phenomena and making policy demands about them. It is important to interrogate that conceptualization because it makes a difference—it determines the issues we select for analysis and shapes how we approach them, and therefore it brings into the analysis particular assumptions, ideals, exclusions, or risks. In this section, I examine how this plays out in the literature on COVID-19 and gender in academia, asking first how that literature conceptualizes academic work and productivity, and second, how it conceptualizes gender.

3.1 Conceptualizing academic work and productivity: problems and risks

When analyzing inequalities in how the pandemic is affecting academic labor, much of the literature on COVID-19 and gender focuses on disruptions in productivity and achievements (or lack thereof) in the production of outputs. What is measured, compared, or discussed, usually, is how much academics have been able to work (often
measured in terms of time, or in terms of the quality of their working conditions) and how many outputs—and specifically research outputs—they have been able to produce. This focus on productivity, and especially research productivity in the form of published outputs, is not at all surprising. One reason for it is that it is relatively easy and quick to collect small- and large-scale data on publications which allows us to identify trends over time, and compare groups of people or periods. After several years of expanding metricization and audit of academic labor across many countries (Burrows, 2012; Pereira, 2017, 2018; Santos Pereira, 2020; Shore & Wright, 2000), academics (and academic managers) now have at the tip of their fingers a large array of bibliometric instruments to measure, rank, and analyze output productivity.

This points to a second reason why so many colleagues have found it urgent and important to analyze inequalities in publication productivity during the pandemic. As cultures of performativity became institutionalized in increasingly marketized higher education systems across various countries (Ball, 2000; Bebiano, 2020; Pereira, 2016, 2019; Sousa, 2020), publications have occupied an increasingly central place in academic life as an indicator of value, a symbol of “excellence” and a requirement for career progression (Burrows, 2012; Pereira, 2017; Santos Pereira, 2020). Because publications are so central, any changes, even if relatively small or temporary, to publication productivity are likely to have material consequences for individuals (e.g., their promotion, pay, chances of obtaining or retaining employment, access to research funding and other resources) and for institutions (e.g., their research ratings and funding). This means that COVID-19’s uneven impacts on publication productivity across different groups may further intensify the structural inequalities—namely those of gender or race—that already exist in academic careers (Cardel et al., 2020; Cui et al., 2020; European Commission, 2019; Ferreira, 2020; França, 2020; Minello et al., 2020; Staniscuaski et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020). As Cardel et al. (2020, p. 3) argue, domestic burdens and childcare responsibilities are being amplified during COVID-19 and their combined impact on career productivity and funding acquisition will result in a triple-threat to tenure and/or promotion for early career women. (...) Lack of support and resources for women scientists will lead to a secondary epidemic of lost early career (...) scientists, particularly among those already vulnerable to leaks in the academic pipeline (e.g., early career women and women of color). (2020, p. 3)

Publication productivity is a matter of such disproportionate consequence in contemporary academic labor that it always will, and should, occupy a central place in our thinking about that labor. But that centrality also generates a host of problems. One key problem is that an intense focus on productivity as the lens through which to analyze academic labor can end up reproducing the normalization of intense and constant work. That normalization is a broader societal trend (Weeks, 2011), which in academia has led to the institutionalization in many countries of cultures of overwork, often under the guise of seeking “excellence” (Jenkins, 2017). These cultures have been shown to have extremely detrimental effects on individual health, on working relationships, and on the practices of collegiality that enable knowledge production (L. D. Berg et al., 2016; Cactus Foundation, 2020; Gill, 2010; Gill & Donaghue, 2016; Loveday, 2018; Lynch, 2010; Pereira, 2017, 2019; Wånggren et al., 2017). When the literature focuses very closely on levels of productivity as an object of analysis or concern, it seems to assume that productivity is the key consideration in academic labor, and the default, ideal, or normal mode of work for academics. In other words, it seems to assume that maintaining regular research productivity is what we normally do, and what we always desire to do, unless something external or abnormal gets in the way.

This points to a second problem. In much of the literature on gender inequalities in pandemic academia, the main “something” that is considered to be getting in the way of research productivity, particularly for women, is the increased burden of caring and domestic responsibilities caused by the pandemic. There is an implicit assumption that the main obstacle to producing at one’s “normal” rhythm during a pandemic is the—gendered—obligation to take care of dependents and do other forms of reproductive labor. As Clancy (2020, p. 857) notes, “women’s academic productivity seems primarily to be discussed in relation to a different kind of productivity — motherhood.”
In other words, we assume that people (and especially women) cannot do as much academic work during the pandemic because they also have to do other work—particularly, caring, or housework. But as Corbera et al. (2020, p. 193) ask "[e]ven if the household conditions were more “favourable”, could someone be expected to conduct business-as-usual in the wake of a global pandemic and maintain the same pace of productivity and engagement with our job duties?" The authors think not, and I agree. Indeed, it is important to recognize the very unsettling and disruptive effects that the pandemic has had also on the academic work of those colleagues who have little or no caring work to do for others, and who—in this paradigm—supposedly have fewer reasons to be less productive (Utoft, 2020). This requires acknowledging that there are many factors that might affect one's capacity to do work, whether in pandemic or in normal times. Many of those factors do indeed relate to competing demands placed on our time and attention by other forms of work; but several factors—those relating, for example, to health, wellbeing, or leisure—cannot, and should not, be explained in terms of "work." Contrary to what neoliberal understandings of the self might lead us to believe (Gill, 2010; Hall, 2020; Lynch, 2010; Pettinger, 2019; Scharff, 2016; Weeks, 2011), there is life, and identity, beyond work and not all aspects of experience can be reduced to it. Therefore, our analyses of academic work must make space for disruptions to academic productivity that do not arise just from other forms of visible, measureable productivity (including those within the home). At any time, but especially during a pandemic, we must recognize that academic work might also be disrupted by other aspects of our experience as human beings with multiple interests, limited capacities, fluctuating energies, overwhelming emotions, vulnerable bodies, and fallible brains.

Another key problem in the literature arises from its intense focus on a narrow form of productivity—the publication of research outputs, and specifically, the publication of articles in academic journals indexed in particular ways. In many texts on the academic effects of COVID-19, academic work is implicitly or explicitly equated with the publishing of research. This normalizes the broader fetishization of these outputs as the ultimate aim of academic activity (Santos Pereira, 2020). It also reproduces the common side-lining of other important dimensions of academic labor, such as teaching and supervision; pastoral care and mentoring; academic administration; peer review, event organizing, and other forms of collegial work that sustain and grow fields of study; trade union activism and equality and diversity work; collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and communities outside academia; or sharing research through the media, in schools or with other social institutions. When we privilege analysis of the more quantifiable, individualized, fast and productive dimensions of academic labor, we risk reproducing the common devaluing of the more qualitative, collective, slow, and reproductive dimensions of that labor (Bebiano, 2020; M. Berg & Seeber, 2016; Branicki, 2020; Cardozo, 2017; Corbera et al., 2020; Guarino & Borden, 2017; Mountz et al., 2015; Pereira, 2017; Stadnyk & Black, 2020). Although not always formally valued by institutions, these other dimensions of academic labor are, of course, extremely important. They become even more important in a pandemic, and during an era of mental health crises among students, dismissal of scientific expertise, or backlash against feminist, queer, and antiracist movements. It is, therefore, vital that debates about pandemic and postpandemic labor in academia foreground an inclusive and holistic conceptualization of that labor, considering the impacts of COVID-19 on a wider range of types of academic work.

3.2 | Conceptualizing gender inequalities: problems and risks

It is also important to ask how the literature on COVID-19’s impact on academia conceptualizes gender and evaluates gender inequality. The existing research clearly shows that women academics have, on average, had their work disrupted more intensely and extensively than men because of old and new, macro and micro, gendered inequalities in the distribution of care, and of reproductive labor (Minello et al., 2020; Myers et al., 2020; Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). These structural, extra-academic inequalities have such disproportionate consequence for gender equality within academia that they always will, and should, occupy a central place in our thinking about academic labor. But, as I argued above in relation to publication productivity, the centrality, and centralization, of that particular issue in the literature also generates problems.
One key problem is that by conceptualizing gender equality in pandemic academic labor as an inequality that results necessarily or primarily from an unequal division of private reproductive labor between women and men, we can end up reproducing several potentially problematic assumptions and exclusions. In that conceptualization, we implicitly or explicitly center the figure of a woman academic responsible for a high share of her household’s caring and domestic labor, and contrast it with the figure of a male academic who does a disproportionately low amount of that same labor. These figures do exist in reality, and unfortunately in very large numbers; but the equation of academic gender inequality with this particular gendered dyad leaves out important nuances within this complex story. First, it risks conflating analysis of women’s experiences with analysis of mothers’ (or carers’) experiences, which involves imagining women, in general or by default, as mothers and carers (Roy, 2020; Saldanha, 2020; Utoft, 2020). That equation also assumes, for example, that people live in heterosexual households with two adults, and that all people have binary gender identities, that is identify either as women or as men. Thirdly, it assumes that during the pandemic all men academics with children or other caring responsibilities benefitted from the presence (and labor) of a woman at home able to do a large share of that caring and domestic work. This would not apply to all such men in “normal” times for all sorts of reasons—many academic men who are fathers or carers are gay, single, or widowed, for example. But during the pandemic that assumption will not even apply to many male academics who live with women partners, because some of these women may have been ill or will have been working away from home in the highly feminized key sectors which remained fully operational during lockdowns (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020; Hall, 2020; Lopes & Coelho, 2020). Finally, in centering the opposition between “interrupted woman (mother), achieving low productivity” versus “unconstrained man, achieving high productivity,” the literature risks another problem: it reproduces the idea that men academics, in general, have very high productivity rates and identify with a (sexist) ideal of academic masculinity that values and privileges competitiveness, overwork, individualism, and high self-confidence. Several men do, of course, approach their academic work in that way—unfortunately, in my view. We know, however, that this does not accurately represent the experiences, identity, aspirations, values, or professional practice of many men academics, both before and during the pandemic (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020; Alcadipani, 2020; Corbera et al., 2020; Hall, 2020; Kelly & Senior, 2020; Miller, 2020; Nash & Churchill, 2020; Pereira, 2018; Santos Pereira, 2020; Sparkes, 2007; Vohra & Taneja, 2020). Therefore, we must avoid framing and normalizing that model as the default or primary form of contemporary academic masculinity.

There is a second key problem that arises when we conceptualize gender equality in pandemic academic labor as an inequality that results from the unequal division of private reproductive labor. If we explain pandemic gender inequalities in academia as a consequence of asymmetries in private or personal labor, which are external to academia, we neglect the many gender inequalities that result from asymmetries in professional labor, which are internal to academia... and, some may even argue, intrinsic to academia. One example of COVID-19 gender inequalities internal to academia is the tendency to attribute primarily to women the material and emotional labor of caring for students and colleagues during the pandemic. This tendency has been observed in various institutions (Boncori, 2020; Flaherty, 2020; Guy & Arthur, 2020; Minello et al., 2020), and it disproportionately limits the amount of time that women have available for other forms of work, including those which bring the highest career benefits (such as publishing research outputs; Saldanha, 2020). This unequal distribution of academic care and “academic housework” (Heijstra et al., 2017; Macfarlane & Burg, 2019) on the basis of gender (and also race) is, of course, not pandemic-specific. It has for many years been identified as a crucial feature of academic workloads and hierarchies, and as a direct obstacle to equality in academia (Andersen et al., 2020; Cardozo, 2017; Guarino & Borden, 2017; Heijstra et al., 2017; Macfarlane & Burg, 2019; Pereira, 2017). Experiences of these invisible forms of academic work must, therefore, receive as much attention within our discussions of pandemic academic labor as is given to the rates of publication of research outputs.

There is much to gain in engaging explicitly with these and other pandemic gender inequalities that emerge from intra-academic labor dynamics, and not just those that result from the extra-academic, domestic labor dynamics more commonly foregrounded in the pandemic literature. First, by showing that gender inequalities...
emerge within the allocation of work inside universities, and not just in the division of work outside them, we can make universities more accountable for the pandemic gender inequalities enacted in them. Second, deepening our study of these intra-academic labor dynamics gives us a view of pandemic gender inequalities that is more comprehensive and more robust. It is more robust because it relies less on the pitfalls discussed in this section, such as conflating women with mothers, or making assumptions about academics’ family structures, caring roles, and their identification with dominant models of academic masculinity or maternal femininity. Third, extending the analysis beyond research productivity in order to explicitly engage with inequalities relating to academic housework helps us make that devalued academic housework more visible, recognizable, and appreciated. This can, in turn, contribute to the broader aim—which I argued for in the section above—of fighting the fetishization of publication productivity, expanding our ideas of what counts as valuable academic labor, and celebrating slow, caring, and collegial work in academia (Bebiano, 2020; M. Berg & Seeber, 2016; Corbera et al., 2020; Mountz et al., 2015; Pereira, 2017; Saldanha, 2020).

4 | CONCLUSION: ANALYZING--AND IMAGINING--ACADEMIC LABOR DIFFERENTLY

COVID-19 has generated an extraordinary range of complex challenges and difficult dilemmas for academics and for academic institutions. Analyzing the pandemic’s effects on academic labor and academic gender inequalities also brings its own challenges and dilemmas. We are not only having to adjust to a serious health threat, new regulations, and different ways of living and working; we are also having to very quickly develop nuanced analyses of extremely complex social phenomena which are changing rapidly and unpredictably as we write about them. In a period of such profound personal and professional disruption, it is extraordinary that so many colleagues, across so many countries, have already managed to produce such a vast body of published texts and new research projects on COVID-19 and gender in academia. They have asked essential questions, generated valuable insights, and offered extensive evidence, thereby giving us tools to better understand the present situation and to better plan actions for the future. This quickly produced, but carefully analyzed, research is inspiring and ground-breaking; but to continue breaking new and significant ground, it is important to reflect on how we might readjust that research as the pandemic unfolds.

Considering that as I have argued here, analysis of pandemic gender inequalities in academia has generally been framed in ways that carry certain risks, it is important to consider how we might minimize those risks, or engage explicitly and reflexively with them. I noted above that much attention has been devoted in the literature to understanding how pandemic-heightened gender inequalities at home have negatively affected women academics’ labor by disrupting their concentration, sanity, creativity, and research productivity. Because of the sheer scale of this problem, and its potentially significant effects on careers, I argue that it is crucial to continue recording and analyzing those effects. Indeed, as an academic mother of two very young children, who spent the COVID-19 lockdowns in England desperately yearning for a quiet room of my own (Woolf, 2002 [1929]), I wholeheartedly support that collective effort to study the consequences of a sudden, but uneven, loss of the conditions and capacity for research, due to changed caring responsibilities. For many people, producing research is not just a professional requirement, but also a form of expression, a passport into employment and financial security, an act of activism, or a space of autonomy. Therefore, we are right to be concerned when structural and contingent inequalities conspire to disproportionately disrupt some people’s capacity to produce research, over a short or longer period of time. But in thinking and writing about these processes, it is crucial to avoid simplistic binaries and to question harmful norms, in order to build a nuanced analysis that recognizes more explicitly the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, issues at stake.

There are several challenging questions to consider in our individual writing and collective debates. How do we measure the academic labor that people are doing during the pandemic, without reproducing the idea that it is
possible and desirable to continue to do academic labor in these exceptional conditions of increased anxiety, illness, and mortality? How might we recognize the disproportionate impact of caring responsibilities on women academics’ working conditions without reproducing the idea that all women academics have such responsibilities? How can we denounce the threats to women’s publication productivity during the pandemic, and demand better conditions of pandemic productivity and promotion for them, without reproducing the idea that the worth of an academic is measured by their productivity, and that this productivity must be maximized at all costs? And having collected considerable evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on research productivity, how can we now expand our analysis to consider its impact on reproductive aspects of academic work which do not lead to visible or measurable outputs, and are therefore harder to analyze?

Asking these critical questions when analyzing academic labor in pandemic times is crucial. It is crucial because such analyses should not, in my view, be focused on restoring the prepandemic status quo. Studies of that status quo over many years demonstrated that prepandemic academic cultures did not actually promote, or enable, inclusive, sustainable, healthy, caring, and collegial academic work (Gill, 2010; Loveday, 2018; Mountz et al., 2015; Pereira, 2017; Saldanha, 2020; Wånggren et al., 2017). Therefore, the focus of our current analyses must be on revolutionizing that status quo, that is transforming exploitative academic labor, toxic academic cultures, and entrenched academic hierarchies. To be transformative, our analyses of current disruptions to so-called “normal” (i.e., prepandemic) academic work cannot take the norms of that work for granted. We must question the supposed “normality” of past work, interrogate the intensifying calls to return to it (Kelly & Senior, 2020; Motta, 2020; Vale de Almeida, 2020), and propose new norms of academic labor, driven by an ethics of care (Bebiano, 2020; Corbera et al., 2020; França, 2020; Saldanha, 2020).

Transforming academia is no small task at the best of times, and it may seem impossible to achieve now, in such overwhelming times... but pandemic experiences may actually help us imagine and enact a different academic “normal” (Pereira, 2020). We can draw, for example, on experiences of generating new forms of care and solidarity with one’s colleagues and communities (Boncori, 2020; Matthewman & Huppatz, 2020) or on experiences of using technology to create forms of academic exchange that are more accessible and less carbon intensive (Bacevic, 2020; Corbera et al., 2020; Shelley-Egan, 2020). We might draw, for instance, on our enhanced awareness of the relations of interdependence that connect us to others (Clavijo, 2020; De Coster, 2020; Dobusch & Kreissl, 2020) or the more widespread recognition of the fact that doing academic labor relies and impacts on physical and emotional health (Bebiano, 2020; Clavijo, 2020) and on private reproductive labor (Couch et al., 2020; Motta, 2020; Saldanha, 2020). Transforming academia during and after the pandemic will not be easy or quick. But if we approach academic labor differently in the texts we are writing about it now, we can hopefully contribute both to reimagining that labor and to fighting the inequalities at the heart of it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This study was supported by a Philip Leverhulme Prize (The Leverhulme Trust, PLP-2017-169), and a Warwick Academic Returners Fellowship (University of Warwick). In the midst of a pandemic, it would not have been possible to secure the conditions to work on this article without the support of these funders, which I am very grateful for. Many of the ideas developed in this paper were inspired by animated discussions with Thais França, Virgínia Ferreira, Lígia Amâncio, Beatriz Padilla, Tiago Santos Pereira, Luísa Winter, and other colleagues during the conference “Velhas Desigualdades, Novos Desafios: Género, COVID-19 e Academia” (September 15, 2020). I would like to thank the organizers for the invitation to contribute to this event, for the generous sharing of their own analyses of the impacts of COVID-19 in academia, and for the pioneering work they are doing to develop research on these themes in Portugal. The writing of this text also benefitted from many conversations—some face to face, most through screens—with Jonathan Dean, Liliana Azevedo, Mia Liinason, Lena Wånggren, Srila Roy, Rachel O’Neill, Nickie Charles, Caroline Wright, Liz Ablett, and Rose Ernst. I never meant to write about COVID-19 but
was convinced to do so by Renato Miguel do Carmo, Inês Tavares, and Ana Filipa Cândido. I wish to thank all three for their encouragement.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

ORCID
Dr Maria do Mar Pereira https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3745-6266

REFERENCES
Abdellatif, A., & Gatto, M. (2020). It’s OK Not to Be OK: Shared reflections from two PhD parents in a time of pandemic. Gender, Work and Organization, 27(5), 723–733. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12465
Alcadipani, R. (2020). Pandemic and macho organizations: Wake-up call or business as usual? Gender Work and Organization, 27(5), 734–746. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12466
Aldossari, M., & Chaudhry, S. (2020). Women and burnout in the context of a pandemic. Gender, Work and Organization. https://doi.org/10.1111.gwao.12567
Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). The impact of covid-19 on gender equality. NBER Working Papers, 1–39. https://doi.org/10.3386/w26947
Andersen J., Nielsen M., Simone N., Lewis R., & Jagi R. (2020). COVID-19 medical papers have fewer women first authors than expected. eLife, 9, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.7554/elife.58807.
Bacevic, J. (2020). Unthinking knowledge production: From post-covid to post-carbon futures. Globalizations, online before print, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1807855
Ball, S. J. (2000). Performativities and fabrications in the education economy: Towards the performative society? The Australian Educational Researcher, 27(2), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03219719
Bebiano, A. (2020). Academia e Ética do Cuidado. In J. Reis (Ed.), Palavras para Além da Pandemia: Cem Lados de uma Crise (p. 13). Coimbra, Portugal: Centro de Estudos Sociais.
Berg L. D., Huijbens E., & Larsen H. (2016). Producing anxiety in the neoliberal university. The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien, 60, (2), 168–180. https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12261.
Berg, M., & Seeber, B. (2016). Slow professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Boncori, I. (2020). The never-ending shift: A feminist reflection on living and organizing academic lives during the coronavirus pandemic. Gender, Work and Organization, 27(5), 677–682. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12451
Branicki, L. J. (2020). COVID-19, ethics of care and feminist crisis management. Gender, Work and Organization, 27(5), 872–883. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12491
Burrows, R. (2012). Living with the H-index? Metric assemblages in the contemporary academy. The Sociological Review, 60(2), 355–372. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02077.x
Cactus Foundation. (2020). Joy and stress triggers: A global survey on mental health among researchers. https://www.cactusglobal.com/mental-health-survey/
Cardel M., Dean N., & Montoya-Williams D. (2020). Preventing a Secondary Epidemic of Lost Early Career Scientists. Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on women with children. Annals of the American Thoracic Society, 17, (11), 1366–1370. https://doi.org/10.1513/annalsats.202006-589ip.
Cardozo, K. (2017). Academic labor: Who cares? Critical Sociology, 43(3), 405–428 https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920516641733
Castela, T. (2020). Emprego académico. In J. Reis (Ed.), Palavras para Além da Pandemia: Cem Lados de uma Crise (p. 57). Coimbra, Portugal: Centro de Estudos Sociais.
Clancy, A. (2020). On mothering and being mothered: A personal reflection on women’s productivity during COVID-19. Gender Work and Organization, 27(5), 857–859. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12486
Clavijo, N. (2020). Reflecting upon vulnerable and dependent bodies during the COVID-19 crisis. Gender, Work and Organization, 27(5), 700–704. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12460
Corbera E., Anguelovski I., Honey-Rosés J., & Ruiz-Mallén I. (2020). Academia in the time of COVID-19: Towards an Ethics of Care. Planning Theory & Practice, 21(2), 191–199. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2020.1757891.
Couch, D., O’Sullivan, B., Malatzky, C. (2020). What COVID-19 could mean for the future of “work from home”: The provocations of three women in the academy. Gender, Work & Organization, online before print, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12548.
Motta, S. C. (2020). F*** professionalism: Or why we cannot return to ‘normal’. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 27(5), 868–871. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12490

Mountz, A., Mountz, A., Mansfield, B., Loyd, J., Hyndman, J., Walton-Roberts, M., & Curran, W. (2015). For slow scholarship: A feminist politics of resistance through collective action in the neoliberal university. *ACME*, 14(4), 1235–1259.

Myers K., Tham W., Yin Y., Cohodes N., Thursby J., Thursby M., & Wang D. (2020). Unequal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on scientists. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(9), 880–883. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0921-y.

Nash, M., & Churchill, B. (2020). Caring during COVID-19: A gendered analysis of Australian university responses to managing remote working and caring responsibilities. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 27(5), 833–846. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12484

Özkazanç-Pan, B., & Pullen, A. (2020). Gendered labour and work, even in pandemic times. *Gender Work and Organization*, 25(5), 675–676. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12516

Pereira, M. d. M. (2016). Struggling within and beyond the performative university: Articulating activism and work in an «academia without walls». *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 54, 100–110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2015.06.008

Pereira, M. d. M. (2017). *Power, knowledge and feminist scholarship: an ethnography of academia*. London, UK: Routledge.

Pereira, M. d. M. (2018). Em Defesa da Pesquisa Lenta numa Época de Ciência Acelerada. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 116, 197–202. https://doi.org/10.4000/rccs.7548

Pereira, M. d. M. (2019). ‘You can feel the exhaustion in the air around you’: The mood of contemporary universities and its impact on feminist scholarship. *Ex Aequo*, 39, 171–186. https://doi.org/10.22355/exeaequo.2019.39.11

Pereira, M. d. M. (2020). A academia na pandemia: Fazer e transformar, o trabalho científico em tempos de Covid-19. In R. M. d. Carmo (Ed.), *Um Olhar Sociológico sobre a Crise Covid-19* (pp. 199–232), Lisboa, Portugal: Observatório das Desigualdades (CIES-ISCTE).

Pettinger, L. (2019). *What's wrong with work?*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Plotnikof M., Bramming P., Branicki L., Christiansen L., Henley K., Kivinen N., … Amsterdam N. (2020). Catching a glimpse: Corona-life and its micro-politics in academia. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 27(5), 804–826. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12481.

Roy, S. (2020). Parents versus non-parents is the wrong productivity battle to fight *Times Higher Education*. Retrieved from https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/parents-versus-non-parents-wrong-productivity-battle-fight

Saldanha, G. (2020). *The post-pandemic university and the caring gap*. Retrieved from https://postpandemicuniversity.net/2020/11/22/the-post-pandemic-university-and-the-caring-gap/

Santos Pereira, T. (2020). Publicação científica. In J. Reis (Ed.), *Palavras para Além da Pandemia: Cem Lados de uma Crise* (p. 86), Coimbra, Portugal: Centro de Estudos Sociais.

Scharff, C. (2016). The psychic life of neoliberalism: Mapping the contours of entrepreneurial subjectivity. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 33(6), 107–122. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276415590164

Shelley-Égan, C. (2020). Testing the obligations of presence in academia. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 27(5), 833–846. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12490

Shore, C., & Wright, S. (2000). Coercive accountability: The rise of audit culture in higher education. In M. Strathern (Ed.), *Audit cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy* (pp. 57–89), London, UK: Routledge.

Sousa, S. B. (2020). Conhecimento, Ciência e Mercado. In J. Reis (Ed.), *Palavras para Além da Pandemia: Cem Lados de uma Crise* (p. 33), Coimbra, Portugal: Centro de Estudos Sociais.

Sparkes, A. C. (2007). *Embodying academics, and the audit culture: A story seeking consideration*. *Qualitative Research*, 7(4), 521–550. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794107082306

Stadnyk, T., & Black, K. (2020). Lost ground: Female academics face an uphill battle in postpandemic world. *Hydrological Processes*, 34(15), 3400–3402. https://doi.org/10.1002/hyp.13803

Stanisic Guèzevi, F., Knetzsch, L., Zandonà, E., Reichert, F., Soletti, R., Ludwig, Z., … de Oliveira, L. (2020). Gender, race and parenthood impact academic productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic: From survey to action. *bioRxiv Preprints*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.07.04.187583

Utoft, E. H. (2020). ‘All the single ladies’ as the ideal academic during times of COVID-19? *Gender Work and Organization*, 27(5), 778–787. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12478

Vale de Almeida, M. (2020). *Não compliquem*. Retrieved from https://medium.com/@miguelvaledaalmeida/n%C3%A3o-compliquem-559dd48731a

Viglione, G. (2020). Are women publishing less during the pandemic? Here’s what the data say. *Nature*, 581, 365–366. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-01294-9

Vohra, S., & Taneja, M. (2020). Care and community revalued during the COVID-19 pandemic: A feminist couple perspective. *Gender, Work and Organization, online before print*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12507
Wånggren, L., Murray, O., & Crowley, M. (2017). Feminist work in academia and beyond. In R. Thwaites & A. Pressland (Eds.), Being an early career feminist academic: Global perspectives, experiences and challenges (pp. 215–235). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Weeks, K. (2011). The problem with work: Feminism, Marxism, antiwork politics, and postwork imaginaries. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Woolf, V. (2002 [1929]). A room of one’s own. London, UK: Penguin.

Wright, K. A. M., Hastrup, T., Guerrina, R. (2020). Equalities in freefall? Ontological insecurity and the long-term impact of COVID-19 in the academy. Gender, Work and Organization, online before print, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12518

Yildirim, T. M., & Eslen-Ziya, H. (2020). The differential impact of COVID-19 on the work conditions of women and men academics during the lockdown. Gender, Work and Organization, online before print, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12529

Zimmer, K. (2020). Gender gap in research output widens during pandemic. The Scientist Retrieved from https://www.the-scientist.com/news-opinion/gender-gap-in-research-output-widens-during-pandemic-67665

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Maria do Mar Pereira is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick and the Deputy Director of Warwick’s Centre for the Study of Women and Gender. She is also an Associate Researcher in CIEG (Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies) at the University of Lisbon. She is the author of two books—Fazendo Género no Recreio: a Negociação do Género em Espaço Escolar (2012, Winner of the ICQI Award for Best Qualitative Book in Spanish or Portuguese) and Power, Knowledge and Feminist Scholarship: an Ethnography of Academia (2017, Winner of the Feminist Studies Association Annual Book Prize).

How to cite this article: Pereira, M. do M. (2021). Researching gender inequalities in academic labor during the COVID-19 pandemic: Avoiding common problems and asking different questions. Gender, Work & Organization, 28(S2), 498–509. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12618