CHAPTER 3

"I Just Feel Like I'm Not Doing Enough"
Experiences of Feminist Library Leaders

Martinique Hallerduff and Freeda Brook

ABSTRACT

Burnout is a prevalent experience in academic libraries, and in this chapter we look at a specific subset of that population: feminist-identified academic library leaders. We hypothesized that these leaders would indeed experience burnout, often through their work to empower those they supervise and to mitigate the burnout of others. In our literature review, we examine research on burnout generally, as well as research on burnout among academic and public librarians. We also review research on burnout among activists because of similarities between activism work and feminist leadership work, including being motivated by social-justice-related values. In our research, we surveyed 55 people and conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with library leaders focusing on how they enact feminist values in the workplace. We analyzed those interviews to look specifically at how participants contend with burnout. In this chapter, we explore several key themes present in those interviews: the strain of enacting feminist values and the

mental, emotional and physical toll this exacts, the self-doubt and isolation experienced as leaders work toward meaningful change based on their feminist values, and the way they wrestle with decisions to advance or to actively choose not to advance in their careers. These findings are troubling because they suggest that the people who could be enacting policies to prevent burnout among library staff are themselves experiencing burnout. It also suggests that individual library leaders may not be able to prevent burnout while operating within the traditionally hierarchical structures of academic institutions.

Keywords: feminist leadership, academic library management, burnout

Introduction

Academic librarians experience high levels of burnout, and the condition is especially prevalent among women and midcareer librarians (Wood et al., 2020). In this project, we interviewed library workers whose identities and values may put them at greater risk of experiencing burnout: library leaders who identify as feminist. This group is particularly worthy of investigation because many of the values and policies that they espouse may actually work to counteract and address the causes of burnout for academic library workers. In an earlier publication, we found that feminist organizational leaders in academic libraries are concerned with "advocating for work–life balance, meaningful work, and an affirming and equitable workplace culture" (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020, p. 50).

While feminist leaders promote practices that can address the problem of burnout in the profession, our research found that they also experience burnout as a result of these efforts. In this project, we asked feminist library leaders about their personal experiences in their workplaces and what challenges they face. Through careful analysis of the interviews, we learned that feminist leaders describe their work as time-consuming and exhausting, that they adapt to self-doubt and frustration in a variety of ways, and that many of them struggle with advancement or persistence in the profession. If feminist leadership might help address the causes of burnout through caring for library workers, who in turn is caring for feminist leaders? Furthermore, what are the implications for the future of academic library leadership and attempts to build a profession where burnout is not a threat?

Literature Review

In this chapter we focused on the experiences of burnout by feminist library leaders. Feminist leadership is relatively underaddressed in library and information science (LIS) literature, but it has been explored recently in our earlier work "Feminists at Work: Organizational Leadership in Academic Libraries" (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020) and in the 2017

edited volume *Feminists Among Us* (Lew & Yousefi, 2017). In their contributing chapter, April Hathcock and Jennifer Vinopal (2017) explored the question "What makes leadership feminist?" (p. 147) and eventually concluded that it is "the ability to acknowledge one's own power and use it to advance explicitly feminist values that benefit others" (p. 168). Our previous work found that feminist organizational leaders in academic libraries are concerned with "advocating for work–life balance, meaningful work, and an affirming and equitable workplace culture" (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020, p. 50). These leaders spoke to changing policies, practices, or culture in accordance with feminist values, for example higher pay, better work–life balance, control of one's own work, physical accommodations such as gender-inclusive bathrooms and accessibility, and recognition for work. While not exclusively designed in response to burnout in the profession, these actions are indeed similar to policies that have been associated with lower levels of burnout in library settings, such as worker autonomy, coworker support, and decreased work pressure (Salyers et al., 2019).

Because we were particularly interested in how feminist organizational leaders in academic libraries *experience* burnout, we looked at literature that addresses the causes of burnout at work generally, feminist critiques of burnout scholarship, and research into activism burnout. The combination of these areas helped contextualize the unique challenges faced by feminist leaders.

Christina Maslach, author of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, "the 'gold standard' measure of burnout" (Rupert et al., 2015, p. 168), along with Michael P. Leiter in their article, "Reversing Burnout: How to Rekindle Your Passion for Your Work," described burnout as a social problem at work and wrote that "when the workplace does not recognize the human side of work… , there will be a greater risk of burnout" (Maslach & Leiter, 2005, p. 44). This focus on the individual is in keeping with so-called "neutral" management theories, which suggest that

> stressed workers (or managers) must find ways to cope with the stress brought on by, for example lack of a work-life balance and care-giving responsibilities competing with work time, unclear expectations, low salary affecting the material circumstances of one's life, or the experience of overt or covert sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression enacted on individuals at work. The expectation for an individual to "cope" as opposed to the institution being revolutionized, is emblematic of a system that views the workplace, work in general, or the institution as natural and neutral and the individual as changeable. (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020, pp. 43–44)

Maslach and Leiter (2005) confirmed this when they explored the causes of burnout at work, which can be counteracted with the "opposite of burnout, engagement" (p. 44). They identified six areas related to burnout and presented these as an abbreviated assessment. The areas were workload, control, lack of influence, reward, community, fairness, and values.

Feminist critiques of burnout research point out that it often focuses on the individual as the locus for change to address burnout, rather than looking at systemic remedies. Janet Finn (1990), examining burnout in social services workers, argued that the "personal toll of burnout must be considered within a political context" (p. 60). She also addressed the challenges for workers in a feminized profession who attempt to address burnout on a systemic level: "A woman who makes demands for institutional change, rather than adaptation, may be called rigid and inflexible" (p. 64). Debra Meyerson (1998) suggested that "rather than being experienced as 'problems' of the individual, stress and burnout could be reconstructed as social experiences" (p. 114). Patricia Mooney Nickel and Angela M. Eikenberry (2006) suggested that these kinds of individual level responses signify "the subordination of the personal to the professional" (p. 360).

Research into activism burnout provides a useful analog when examining the particular challenges feminist leaders in academic libraries face. Feminist leaders are working to change culture and systems, much as activist work is driven by personal or community commitment to changing culture and systems. Organizations also suffer from activist burnout in that "most activists scale back when experiencing burnout" (Gorski, 2015, p. 697). Paul Gorski has written extensively about activist burnout. He noted that activists' "deep levels of emotional investment and the pressures of understanding the implications of injustice to marginalized communities" are strongly associated with emotional burnout (2015, p. 698). Marina Bernal, author of *Self-Care Self-Defense Manual for Feminist Activists*, in discussing feminist activism specifically echoed these ideas. She wrote:

> In seeking to transform social and gender inequalities, we are in constant touch with the pain and desperation of others. Frequently faced with situations of violence and injustice, we are stressed, angry, frustrated and anguished, which often makes us distance ourselves from our own pain. So we spend much less time dealing with our own problems and emotional issues. (Bernal, 2008, p. 60)

Both Bernal and Gorski described the physical, emotional and mental toll activist work requires. Maslach and Leiter (2005), too, wrote that the costs of burnout at work "include poorer health and strained private lives" (p. 49). There are a great many overlapping causes for burnout in activist work and a typical workplace: the social experience, including negative interpersonal relationships, isolation, and conflict (Gorski, 2015; Maslach & Leiter, 2005; McCormack & Cotter, 2013); workload and time commitments (Gorski, 2015; Maslach & Leiter, 2005; McCormack & Cotter, 2013); lack of influence; accountability without power (Maslach & Leiter, 2005); and large and overwhelming social problems (Gorski, 2015). Burnout causes that are unique to activism include emotional vulnerability, an organizational culture that discourages self-care and rest, and the emotional burden related to knowledge of suffering and oppression (Gorski, 2015). Some causes identified only in the general workplace literature include low pay, micromanagement, fairness and favoritism, and ethical conflicts and meaningless tasks (Maslach & Leiter, 2005).

We have discussed burnout as it relates to work generally and to activism, and yet there are causes of burnout that are specific to librarianship. These include the emotional

labor expected of librarians (particularly public-facing), role ambiguity, and inadequate resources (Christian, 2015; Salyers et al., 2019; Shuler & Morgan, 2013; Shupe et al., 2015; Simon, 2020). In citing *The Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Services Providers*, Sherianne Shuler and Nathan Morgan (2013) pointed out that emotional labor is a professional standard which includes, for example, that librarians should "make the patron feel comfortable in a situation that can be perceived as intimidating, confusing, or overwhelming" (Reference and User Services Association, 2013). They argued that there is too much "responsibility on librarians to control their own emotions without a recognition of the difficulty and harm that can come from these efforts" (Shuler & Morgan, 2013). Many scholars agree that there is a strong link between emotional labor and burnout: "The effect of constantly putting on these emotional displays is seldom considered, which contributes to the cycle of burnout and stress common in service-oriented professions" (Simon, 2020, p. 1); "Emotional labor… can be thought of as one stressor among many causes of burnout in librarians" (Shuler & Morgan, 2013, p. 121). Role ambiguity also exacts a toll and can be described as "the lack of clarity, certainty and/or predictability one might have expected with regards to behaviour in a job" (McCormack & Cotter, 2013 p. 42). Role ambiguity is often informally described as "wearing many hats" and it is sometimes a point of pride (Benjes-Small & Miller, 2017; Collerius, 2018), which can normalize being overextended rather than responding to role ambiguity and the emotional toll it requires. Another common cause of stress and burnout among librarians is inadequate resources (Shupe et al., 2015). Burnout is rarely addressed professionally, which compounds the causes of burnout in librarianship. Because of this and other systemic forces exacted on individual librarians (e.g., misogyny, patriarchy, racism, etc.), many librarians misunderstand burnout as "an individual problem (and) frequently hide symptoms of stress and burnout until these symptoms affect their immediate environment" (Christian, 2015, p. 5).

Methodology

Our research project involved two rounds: an initial survey, followed by in-depth interviews. The initial survey was posted to relevant professional e-mail distribution lists and through social media channels. Fifty-five people fully completed the survey, which consisted of ten questions, primarily self-described professional and demographic information regarding the individual's role in their institution and their leadership and management responsibilities (see Appendix A). It also included the open-ended question "In a couple sentences, please describe how feminism informs your organizational strategy or management style." We used responses to this question to identify 23 themes among practitioners, which in turn informed the questions we designed for the interviews.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with participants over videoconferencing or by phone. Interviews followed a basic set of questions with room to ask follow-up questions or explore certain topics in more depth and ranged from 25 to 60 minutes (see Appendix B). We transcribed and coded the interviews based on the themes that emerged from the initial survey and in the interviews. We assigned participants a two-digit

number and anonymized them in this paper to protect their privacy. We made this decision because we wanted participants to freely and safely discuss aspects of their institutions, relationships with colleagues, and other sensitive information.

Participants

For the interviews, we sought self-identified feminists who work or worked in leadership positions in academic libraries. We recruited participants from the survey respondents, professional e-mail distribution lists, and direct invitations to individuals who have published on this topic. We interviewed 23 individuals and asked them to self-describe their personal and professional identities. This was an open-ended question, and participants supplied a variety of descriptors, which are represented in Table 3.1.

TABLE 3.1
Self-Described Demographics of Interview Participants

Descriptor	
Race and ethnicity descriptors	***n* = 23**
White/Caucasian	19
African American/Black	2
Asian	1
Chinese descent	1
Gender and sexual orientation descriptors	***n* = 23**
Female	20
Heterosexual/straight	17
Cisgender	13
Bisexual	2
Genderqueer	2
Pansexual	2
Queer	3
Male	1
Religious affiliation descriptors	***n* = 4**
Jewish	2
Agnostic	1
Atheist	1
Buddhist	1
Non-Christian	1
Other descriptors	***n* = 10**
Able-bodied	2
Parent/Mother	2

TABLE 3.1
Self-Described Demographics of Interview Participants

Disabled	1
First-generation college graduate	1
Gen X	1
Has mental illness	1
Married	2
Middle class	1

Note. Participants were asked, "Briefly describe your age, race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and/or other salient identity information." Categories and descriptors were not predefined, and this should not be interpreted as comprehensive or fully representative.

Our respondents also work at a variety of institutions across the United States and Canada, including at least 10 public institutions and five private. Additional descriptors of institutions are noted in Table 3.2. As with demographic characteristics, these were self-reported and open-ended. The leadership positions of participants within their institutions are shown in Table 3.3.

TABLE 3.2
Institutional Characteristics of Interview Participants

Characteristic	*n* = 23
Research university/college	8
Large	6
Midsize	4
Community college	3
Comprehensive	3
R1	3
Master's granting	2
Urban	2
Commuter	1
Faith-based	1
Ivy League	1
Land grant	1
Liberal arts	1
Regional	1
Small	1

Note. Participants self-reported their demographic descriptors and could report more than one, so these numbers are greater than 100%.

TABLE 3.3
Position of Interview Participants

Position	*n* = 23
Department head	11
Dean or director	6
Other	4
Assistant/associate dean or assistant director	2

We used the data set from these interviews to produce our earlier publication on this topic, "Feminists at Work: Organizational Leadership in Academic Libraries" (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020), which focused on the policies and practices that feminist library leaders employ in their work. This chapter focuses on themes from the interviews that we did not include in the earlier work, namely, the individual burnout experiences of the leaders.

The participants in our survey pool disproportionately identified as women/females. While librarianship is a female-dominated profession, for a long time men were overrepresented in leadership positions (Howard et al., 2020; Rutledge, 2020). While recent trends show a move toward more gender parity, women are still underrepresented in management, and questions remain about how women are compensated and viewed as leaders (Olin & Millet, 2015; Rutledge, 2020). Because we were interviewing feminist-identified library leaders, and it is likely that more women than men identify as feminist, our pool of participants is not representative of the sex/gender ratio in academic library management generally.

Discussion

How do feminist library leaders experience burnout? We found a number of themes throughout our interviews that speak to burnout among these leaders. Our participants noted the ways in which enacting feminist values is especially difficult, sometimes leading to feelings of inadequacy or isolation in their work, and how they grapple with their decisions around being leaders or seeking further advancement in the profession.

Enacting Feminist Values Is Difficult

Many of the policies that our participants described as being central to their feminist values are in and of themselves time-consuming and often exhausting work. Consensus building and shared decision making, two strategies frequently mentioned by our participants, take more time than top-down decision-making models. One library department head noted "there's a lot of groundwork… before getting to the meeting or before developing some initiative" (29, personal interview, November 29, 2018). She described this work as "consensus building, providing clarity, developing a shared understanding, allowing

respectful disagreement" and noted that follow-up after meetings is equally important. Her process is attentive to individual concerns and critiques and aware of power differentials in the room and among staff members. She reflected that this kind of thorough work is "strangely missing" at her institution. Another participant echoed this sentiment: "It takes more work sometimes to do it in a way that isn't the way we usually do it" (21, personal interview, August 22, 2018). The additional time it takes to plan processes and allow for consensus building is in addition to regular performance expectations and job duties.

Other participants discussed the time and energy that goes into building and maintaining personal connections with colleagues and staff, something they do to create a culture at work that values the humanity of colleagues and staff, a tenet of feminist leadership. One library dean discussed her written and in-person communications:

> I think [communications]… consume so much of the energy of applying feminist values to… my work and with others. And those conversations are, I think, at the core for me emphasizing a culture of care and a culture of slowness, slowing down. (32, personal interview, December 6, 2018)

Another participant, an instruction coordinator, described how she makes time for "casual, warm, personal conversations" (34, personal interview, August 8, 2018) with staff across the organization. She explained why:

> I think that one of the ways that hierarchies are maintained is through segregation of people who have different sets of privileges. When we can connect, we understand each other more and are able to work collectively more effectively on behalf of each other's well-being.

An associate dean at a research university described several challenges of this work in terms of integrating it into the day-to-day requirements, having conversations with colleagues about social justice and feminist values, and enacting those values even in difficult work relationships. "You know, we're trying to… keep things running and at the same time we need to constantly be stepping back and saying, what is the social justice agenda here?" She noted a key tension:

> I'm working in the structure and yet trying to change the structure from inside.… Trying to bring about change in a way that's positive and challenging but not threatening for the people who actually need to make the journey. As you know it's not easy. (35, personal interview, September 10, 2018)

She went on to describe a person she supervised who had since left the organization:

> …the person was domineering and extremely disrespectful of me and considered me unqualified for my job.… The kind of person that

> wouldn't take responsibility for [their] own actions and had built a
> team [and] created a kind of a toxic work environment.

Yet she described this person with compassion and empathy, which guided how she worked with them. "What was particularly difficult was trying to think about this person as a person with feelings and you know emotions and concerns and probably fears.… this person was also a human being who needed to be given a chance.…" She concluded, "That was probably the hardest thing that I've ever done." Prioritizing the human side of work is a value of feminist leadership (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020; Nickel & Eikenberry, 2006).

The challenges of feminist leadership that often lead to burnout were a common theme throughout our interview, and we were curious how our participants deal with these challenges and the ensuing burnout. Several participants reported ways in which they adapted to protect their time and energy, including stepping away from projects: "Now that I'm older and have way more on my plate, I find myself saying no. Just because I think it should be done, doesn't mean I'm the person who does it" (21, personal interview, August 22, 2018). Another focused on positive impacts, however small: "I think for my own sanity and for feeling like I have a real impact on things, I try to again come back to, like: what I'm doing on a day-to-day basis, what is my daily practice, who am I impacting positively?" (30, personal interview, November 5, 2018). Sometimes the solution was self-preservation, which can come at the expense of professional duties or ambition. One participant, when asked about the challenges of applying feminism to her work, said: "finding the energy for all the fights that I want to fight" (42, personal interview, October 17, 2018). What is implied here is that she has not found "enough" of it. What do leaders, or workers, or librarians do when they identify oppressive structures and cultures, and have some organizational power to change them, and yet don't have the time or energy to do so?

Self-Doubt and Isolation

In the face of the challenging work of feminist leadership, often pushing against cultural and institutional norms, which is both high stakes and deeply personal, our participants experienced frustration, doubt, and sometimes regret that they can't do more—one of the chief causes of burnout among feminist-identified organizational library leaders.

A librarian in a middle management position at an Ivy League university described how this affected motivation: "I don't have a lot of complaints about where I work, but it's the culture that [I feel is] really problematic. Not just in terms of my values, but in terms of being able to work successfully and feeling motivated" (26, personal interview, October 5, 2018).

Another participant at a large public university explained that they feel that scholarship addressing feminist theory or critical race theory in LIS is undervalued: "I want to be doing more… with my scholarship… but… your work might not be weighted the same. You know, I feel like an article about [my functional area] might do more than an article about how to address your white fragility" (40, personal interview, November 27, 2018).

Several participants contended with stereotypes based around their identities as they wrestled with their feminist practices. An instruction coordinator described how she didn't fit the cultural norms around femininity and feminism: "I'm not naturally a nurturing person… am I not enough of a woman, because I'm not nurturing?" and wondered if "we have to be nurturing because we're feminist" (37, personal interview, December 3, 2018).

Other participants described how they encountered stereotypes about their own identities or are constrained by them. A department head contended with the negative stereotypes associated with women leaders: "I was actually pulled aside [for] trying to bring the student voice into [a discussion]" and told "[I] came off as shrill" (21, personal interview, August 22, 2018). Another participant dealt with color-blind racism and the suggestion that her identity implied bias or hyper focus, "when I have conversations there might be some sense that well we're not really talking about you being a black minority we're just talking about *this*" (29, personal interview, November 29, 2018). Others carried the additional weight of intersecting identities, "looking at how many librarians of color leave, it's not… it's not a fun place to be" (33, personal interview, December 6, 2018). Even in a female-dominated profession, women leaders experienced familiar stereotypes and struggles: "'Is this because I'm female?' Yes! Absolutely, you just *know*. And I was… very angry" and "I found that my approach to being a leader wasn't necessarily being read by others as a leader" (29, personal interview, November 29, 2018).

For others, the work of advocating for feminist, anti-racist, and other social justice values exacts a particular toll. A library dean sometimes disappointed herself as an advocate: "I feel like sometimes I interrupt [everyday sexism], sometimes I freeze… with anti-racist work, with anti-sexist work" (41, personal interview, November 20, 2018). Another used stereotypical language to emphasize how she was perceived: "I feel sometimes I'm looked at as that annoying person that's always harping on racism, sexism, whatever" (37, personal interview, December 3, 2018). A dean-level participant reported encountering "systemic racism" and "unconscious, implicit bias" and felt that she "can't call people on that because they get super defensive" and yet admitted "I am generally very shouty about these things. I do try to be nice, because I'm the boss, but you know" (42, personal interview, October 17, 2018).

The feeling of "not doing" or "not being" enough forced many leaders to contend with what appeared to be failure. "Making sure voices are heard and mostly, so much of it is just advocacy and constantly being the person who brings up issues. It's not always, and actually, more often than not, it's not successful" (33, personal interview, December 6, 2018).

Throughout many of the conversations, participants expressed both the urgency they feel to enact and embody feminist values in their work and the challenge, perhaps insurmountable, of working against the ingrained patriarchal, hierarchical systems of higher education. One participant expressed this poignantly: "I just feel like I'm not doing enough every day" (40, personal interview, November 27, 2018).

The other elements of human existence—parenting, commuting, personal health, and caring for family—also compete for energy with professional expectations and job duties in the library. A department head at a small, private college expressed these ideas:

> I'm super busy because I have two young children and I commute almost an hour each way to and from work. So, I feel like those, combined with all the hats that I wear, and probably being understaffed means that that I don't really have time to look at these big picture issues, to think about my feminist vision. Sometimes I think it's a privilege to think about these big picture issues when you're just trying to, like, keep your head above water. (27, personal interview, September 26, 2018)

Another participant described how health challenges and aging have impacted her work:

> I had a hysterectomy… and one of the things about having a hysterectomy that people try to warn you about, and I tried to not pay attention, and I had to, is how exhausting recovery is.… Really finding energy and not getting discouraged. I think those are probably my biggest challenges [now]. (42, personal interview, October 17, 2018)

Decisions to Lead or Not to Lead

Burnout and work-related stress sometimes caused people to step away or disengage from their work (Gorski, 2015). Participants spoke to similar causes of stress, but there was not a clear answer with what to do about burnout. We were curious about how burnout impacted the decisions feminist-identified individuals made related to advancement into library leadership positions and how well they persisted in those positions, particularly since we know from the literature on activism-burnout that leaving the work is one of the consequences of burnout. They cited feminism as both motivation to move into management and as a reason for intentionally stepping away from management, thus highlighting a dilemma around power and perhaps a central tension with their work.

The following participant highlighted her anger as a tool that moved her to management, despite an inclination, earlier in her career, to avoid it precisely because of her expectation that she would deal with more sexism and racism:

> I never wanted to be a library director. I knew it. Just dealing with the assumed sexism, the meetings that I took over when my second library director went on maternity leave and I took some of her job duties while she was gone, and sitting in a room with a bunch of middle administrators talking about how we use space on campus. I can't remember what we were talking about, but I made a comment and blah, blah, blah the conversation went on. The only other person in the room who didn't have a PhD, he was a man, but we were the minorities, he was also a person of color. He said, wait, did you just hear what _____ said? And they were like, no, what did she say? And so, I didn't want to deal with that professionally; I already dealt

with it enough. But then I kept getting angry about it. Excuse the language but a lot of my career progression can be summarized as "fuck it, hold my beer, I got this." So, feminism is what pushed me to pursue administration. (42, personal interview, October 17, 2018)

The following two participants, a department head at a public research university and an associate dean at a top research university, respectively, were eager to lean in to the power that comes with advancement in order to use that power toward feminist goals: "So stepping into my first [management] role… I rely on a lot of the things that were part of my pedagogy… to erode some of the power structures that were in place around decision-making and responsibilities in the department I was in" (21, personal interview, August 22, 2018).

Similarly, the associate dean said, "You know I want to have a pep talk with everybody so that people feel that leadership is not a bad thing. That it's actually a place from which you have power and can enact change" (35, personal interview, September 10, 2018). She openly discussed the dilemma posed by moving into management positions and expressed support for feminist leaders to advance:

> Academic libraries have traditionally been led by men… and even if there is higher level leadership among women… it's typically not at the top of the organization.… There have been a whole rash of director-level positions open in academic libraries the past couple years. I mean there've just been so many director-level positions open… as the sort of critlib, feminist leadership, intersectional femi-nist, anti-racist, critical librarianship advances in our profession, and the conversations have been going on for a number of years, but it's like a snowball. I think there are more and more people who are potentially prepared to move into leadership positions. And I say potentially because I think a lot of… people who feel like feminism and leadership are antithetical to each other, but I think that there are more and more people who recognize that leadership,… leadership is an opportunity to kind of break some of the structures.

Other participants expressed a desire to avoid management or a contentment with a middle-manager position. They were ambivalent about gaining power in a system that had oppressed them, others like them, or people generally, and they wondered if it was possible to use that system toward feminist goals.

A self-described "middle manager" department head at a private, midsize university described her resistance to moving up, but at the same time acknowledged the relative power she had that she could direct toward her feminist goals:

> I'm happy to be a middle manager in the sense that I'm doing a lot of the work that I want to be doing like being a middle manager allows me to still make hiring decisions and still be able to mentor

and work with grad students and early career folks.… I can be a fairly loud advocate… my job is very likely not going to be at risk if I make those statements… if I more aggressively advocate for those kinds of things. I'm in a position to maybe be able to say some things both because of the identities that I express and hold and because of the position, the literal like organizational position, that I have. (30, personal interview, November 5, 2018)

One participant described an intentional move away from advancement. Their rationale for stepping back included their own work–life balance as well as the pursuit of other professional interests. They stated that "stepping back… gives me much more flexibility to work in a different kind of leadership not in my institution but trying to do work in scholarship and service and having the time and flexibility to have those engagements in the kind of wider library land" (40, personal interview, November 27, 2018).

Another participant, a department head, grappled with how best to make change toward her intersectional feminist values and expressed a desire to avoid advancement, in part because it would take her out of the union and in part because there may be more effective uses of her energy or talent:

> I'm in middle-management and I'm thinking about where can I sort of exercise the most amount of power and I'm not convinced that is by climbing up high.… I'm becoming more interested in organizing like labor-wise; I belong to a union, it's really important to me be in the union, and moving anywhere beyond the position I'm in now would get me out of the union, and I've decided I'm not going to do that. There's been opportunities where I've been asked to put in my application, and I don't believe that being at those tables is effective. And I hope that it is, and I hope I've been able to do some things, but I've also been thinking about collective impact versus, you know, me at the table. (33, personal interview, December 6, 2018)

Conclusion

We found that academic library leaders who identify as feminist experience burnout due to the particular challenges involved in their work. Feminist leadership is time-consuming and exhausting, and the stakes feel higher for practitioners. Our participants faced challenges while pushing back against rigid institutional norms, attempting to build consensus and build personal bonds with staff, and integrating feminist and social justice values into their day-to-day work. They experienced self-doubt and even isolation based on their commitment to feminist principles.

We were motivated to examine burnout among this group of workers in part because it seems that the feminist policies and practices that they espouse could help reduce

burnout among library workers. Yet in our previous work (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020), we found that feminist leaders often struggled to implement policies focused on prioritizing the human experience of work, equity, and practices rooted in feminist principles in the midst of the hierarchical, patriarchal institutional cultures of their parent organizations and higher education in general. While some found success through advocacy, many also acted in ways that skirted or subverted institutional policies. Many of the interview participants spoke about their comfort in middle-management positions where they have relative power to influence the conditions of the workers who report to them, but more autonomy and less responsibility than would come with a more elevated or administrative position. The inherent challenge of feminist leadership in an academic library is that positions of leadership are part of the oppressive structure of the institution, and it is perhaps not possible or practical to challenge the system from within. We found that "many of our participants feel the culture and structure of their libraries are strongly influenced by their parent organizations, and none reported substantive, widespread changes in their library that ran counter to the rest of their campus" (Brook & Hallerduff, 2020, p. 61). In this context, it is not surprising to find that these leaders experienced burnout in their work, which at times appears almost Sisyphean.

Indeed, our findings point in a troubling direction. Feminist library leaders are working to enact policies that would help prevent burnout, and yet they themselves experience burnout. How, then, can we address this problem, which requires a structural solution, when structural change led by libraries has had little success for the leaders themselves? There is some hope in learning that leaders are enacting their feminist values and changing the work lives of library workers for the better in terms of mitigating burnout. However, until the structures and leadership practices of academic institutions change, leaders who value feminist principles and the humanity of workers will struggle personally and professionally and may not make long careers in leadership positions. This is a deep loss to the profession. Further research might explore feminist and anti-racist leadership and structural change in college and university boards and among college and university presidents, provosts, and heads of academic and student affairs.

APPENDIX A
Initial Recruitment Survey Questions

1. Are you filling this survey out for yourself or are you providing a recommendation?
    a. Who are you recommending for this research project?—Name
    b. Who are you recommending for this research project?—E-mail
    c. Who are you recommending for this research project?—Phone
2. Please provide your full name
3. Your preferred contact method—E-mail
4. Your preferred contact method—Phone
5. Describe your college or university (e.g., public, Master's granting, mid-sized university)
6. Approximately how many people work in your library? (Including librarians, support staff, administrators, not including student workers.)
    a. Fewer than 10
    b. 10–20
    c. 20–50
    d. 50 or more
7. What is your role within the Library?—Selected Choice
    a. Department Head
    b. Dean or Director
    c. Assistant/Associate Dean or Assistant Director
    d. Other (please describe):
8. How many people do you directly supervise?
9. How many people do you indirectly supervise?
10. Do you oversee any areas outside or in addition to the library? Please describe:
11. In a couple sentences, please describe how feminism informs your organizational strategy or management style.

APPENDIX B
Long-Form Interview Questions

1. What does being a feminist mean to you? Feminism is understood differently by different people. Can you tell me a little about how you understand feminism as a concept?

2. How do you practice feminism in your work?

3. What prompted you to begin applying feminist practices to your work?

4. We'd like to get concrete and specific examples of feminist practices applied in library leadership. This could be a program, a change in communication or decision-making structures, staffing decisions, hiring processes or anything else you think is relevant.

5. How do your feminist leadership practices function within your larger institution?

6. What challenges have you encountered in applying feminist practices to your leadership in the library?

7. In what ways do you think feminist practices can change the way libraries operate?

8. When has being a feminist leader been difficult and you pushed forward? Why?

9. How do you think feminist leadership differs from traditional leadership?

10. How do you resist or subvert hierarchical structures within your organization?

11. Is there anything else you'd like to add to the conversation at this point?

References

Benjes-Small, C., & Miller, R. K. (2017, November 1). The hats we wear: Examining the many roles of the new instruction librarian. *American Libraries Magazine*. https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2017/11/01/the-hats-we-wear-instruction-librarian/

Bernal, M. (2008). *Self-care and self-defense manual for feminist activists* (S. Bhushan, Trans.; 2nd ed.). CREA. https://www.genderit.org/sites/default/files/self-care-brochure_0.pdf

Brook, F., & Hallerduff, M. (2020). Feminists at work: Organizational leadership in academic libraries. In S. S. Hines & D. H. Ketchum (Eds.), *Critical librarianship (Advances in library administration and organization, vol. 41)* (pp. 41–64). Emerald.

Christian, L. A. (2015). A passion deficit: Occupational burnout and the new librarian: A recommendation report. *Southeastern Librarian*, *62*(4), 2–11.

Collerius, F. (2018, January 25). How many hats can a librarian wear? (No. 75) [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Librarian Is In*. New York Public Library. https://www.nypl.org/blog/2018/01/23/librarian-podcast-ep-75

Finn, J. L. (1990). Burnout in the human services: A feminist perspective. *Affilia*, *5*(4), 55–71.

Gorski, P. (2015). Relieving burnout and the "martyr syndrome" among social justice education activists: The implications and effects of mindfulness. *Urban Review*, *47*, 696–716. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-015-0330-0

Hathcock, A., & Vinopal, J. (2017). Feminist praxis in library leadership. In S. Lew & B. Yousefi (Eds.), *Feminists among us: Resistance and advocacy in library leadership* (pp. 147–169). Library Juice Press.

Howard, H. A., Habishi, M. M., & Reed, J. B. (2020). The gender wage gap in research libraries. *College and Research Libraries*, *81*(4), 662–675.

Lew, S., & Yousefi, B. (Eds.). (2017). *Feminists among us: Resistance and advocacy in library leadership*. Library Juice Press.

Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2005). Reversing burnout: How to rekindle your passion for your work. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, *3*(4), 42–49.

McCormack, N., & Cotter, C. (2013). *Managing burnout in the workplace: A guide for information professionals*. Chandos Publishing.

Meyerson, D. E. (1998). Feeling stressed and burned out: A feminist reading and re-visioning of stress-based emotions within medicine and organization science. *Organization Science*, *9*(1), 103–118. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.9.1.103

Nickel, P. M., & Eikenberry, A. M. (2006). Beyond public vs. private: The transformative potential of democratic feminist management. *Administrative Theory and Praxis*, *28*(3), 359–380. https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2006.11029537

Olin, J., & Millet, M. (2015, November 4). Gendered expectations for leadership in libraries. *In the Library With the Lead Pipe*. https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/libleadgender/

Reference and User Services Association. (2013). *Guidelines for behavioral performance of reference and information service providers*. American Library Association. https://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral

Rupert, P. A., Miller, A. O., & Dorociak, K. E. (2015). Preventing burnout: What does the research tell us? *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, *46*(3), 168–174. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039297

Rutledge, L. B. (2020). Leveling up: Women academic librarians' career progression in management positions. *College and Research Libraries*, *81*(7), 1143–1167.

Salyers, M. P., Watkins, M. A., Painter, A., Snajdr, E. A., Gilmer, L. O., Garabrant, J. M., & Henry, N. H. (2019). Predictors of burnout in public library employees. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *51*(4), 974–983. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000618759415

Shuler, S., & Morgan, N. (2013). Emotional labor in the academic library: When being friendly feels like work. *The Reference Librarian*, *54*(2), 118–133. https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2013.756684

Shupe, E. I., Wambaugh, S. K., & Bramble, R. J. (2015, May). Role-related stress experienced by academic librarians. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *41*(3), 264–269. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2015.03.016

Simon, K. (2020). Emotional labor, stressors, and librarians who work with the public. *SJSU School of Information Student Research Journal*, *10*(1), 1–9.

Wood, B. A., Guimaraes, A. B., Holm, C. E., Hayes, S. W., & Brooks, K. R. (2020). Academic librarian burnout: A survey using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI). *Journal of Library Administration*, *60*(5), 512–531. https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2020.1729622