

“A drop in the bucket”: Academic Librarian wellness during COVID

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What happened to your work-life
during COVID?

Wellness during COVID-19

- Stress
- Erosion of boundaries
- Wellness initiatives
- Real, actual, good, positive, hopeful, stress-relief feelings

Stress

It's Everything, it's COVID, and it's the world

“What pushed me to my limit was all the other stuff, right? It was caring for my children, just the stress of living in a pandemic.”

“I think about this as OK am I stressed out and feeling exhausted and just depleted because it's COVID and it's the world, or because all of this stuff is new and it's learning and it's screen time and it's exhausting and... so yeah.”

“...you're dealing with the stress of being in a pandemic, right, and the toll that it takes, and so you just don't maybe have the same kind of bandwidth to deal with your regular stress—it feels even more.”

Technically at work

“On a bad week I've got my work laptop in front of me and it feels like I'm just staring into the abyss and nothing happens. But I'm technically at work, so...”

“I hadn't really thought about that [before]: that emotional work was actually hard. It's hard.”

“I feel burnt out. Mostly on the motional level because of seeing things happen and not being able to do anything about it or seeing things not happen and not being able to have influence or power to affect positive change has been very challenging and it's taken a toll on me in a lot of ways and this is my own problem to deal with, but it has been a lot of emotional labor.”

Uncertainty

“It was like, okay, is this going to be for a couple of days? Is it going to be for a couple of weeks? And then of course, here we are a year later, still working from home. So yeah, there was just a lot of unknown and basically, you know, thoughts around, what do we prepare for. Yeah, just general feelings of not knowing what's going on and a little bit of dread and, you know, impending doom, you know (laughs).”

or, The double-edged sword of working from home

Erosion of Boundaries

Work! At home! (Yay)

“I can roll out in my sweatpants and sit down and just start working. I love that.”

“I pick my son up from school every day and so I have 1/2 hour blocked in my calendar...where I zip out and pick my son up and that's like, I'm considering that my lunch break.”

“I'm actually able to concentrate and work so much better at home...I'm home alone all day and it's glorious.”

“I've just gotten used to like not commuting, which is great. And, you know, being able to take the dog out during the day.”

“You know what? I've super enjoyed the privacy that comes from this. So, nobody else in the department is watching me come and go, and it's been part of this need for a cultural shift, in that it was pretty toxic...and I'm tired of that in the workplace.”

Home! At work! (Booooo)

“...it's not necessarily that I feel less productive, it's just that I get way more distracted, because my partner's also working from home and so he's coming in, and...my cat's around doing things and eating toxic plants. And just shit happening, right, like parents are calling me and because not a lot of people understand, I think, what academic librarians do to begin with but definitely not when they're working from home, so you just have a lot of distractions and interruptions in general.”

“First of all, I'm always at work, right? I mean, the laundry is right there, so... and I do the laundry in the house, and so, I'm never away from my desk or whatever. So, yeah, never being away from work, doesn't give you that transition, doesn't let you say ok, now I'm not at work anymore....I'm not doing that, I'm doing something else. And there isn't.... in addition to that there isn't that break, there isn't that interruption. I am always at work but also there is no transition from I'm at work, now I'm alone in my car or on a bike or in a bus, whatever. And now I'm at home. And now home is home. So, it's the fact that you never leave but also there is no transition to allow you even mentally to say, well I'm not doing that anymore, I'm doing something else.”

A drop in the bucket

Wellness Initiatives

BS Productivity and self-care stuff

“I'm less willing to buy some of the BS like productivity stuff and the self-care stuff that like I myself pedal [sometimes] because like a yoga at lunch, does not do a lot when you are scared for your health and the health of your family, like that's a drop in the bucket, right? And this constant imperative to, like, produce, produce, produce no matter what situation you're in, no matter what stress you're under. Like, I don't want to be part of that anymore, so. That's that.”

“And I was looking ahead at my schedule this week and I saw it said workload interview, and I thought for a second that my supervisor had booked me in for a conversation to talk about my workload and I felt like this immense relief, and like, 'oh, they care that's so nice for them to check in about this,' and then I realized what it was and I was like, oh, ha, that's funny (laughs). My supervisor checking in about workload... what a dream! (laughs).”

“And there are other initiatives like higher, upper level administration sending out dumb jokes regularly, telling us to let our feelings hang out and sending these motivational messages...and it was just... it's a pandemic; I'm not having an awesome time!”

BS Productivity and self-care stuff

“We would have things like “unstudy” spots or like maybe a therapy dog come in.... And so, it’s like, well how do you translate that into the online space? We just kind of found that, or at least what I’m finding along with some of my other colleagues—and then I’ll tell you what administration thinks—students are overwhelmed. And I think after spending your whole day or whatever it is online in classes, they might not really want to spend another hour, online, in a Zoom Room with people they might kind of know or might not...”

“I know exactly how burnt out they are and that they don’t want to go to, you know, a study hall or a stress free zone or whatever. I totally get it.”

Actual, real, good, positive, hopeful, stress-relief feelings

Acts of Wellness during COVID

it's almost like, not so much misery loves company but we're in this boat together and we're trying our best to keep each other afloat and have realistic expectations of our projects and I'm actually quite lucky that some of my colleagues live very close and so we, you know, back in the summer we could actually meet up at a park and maybe even discuss work it was actually very pleasant.

Now, being with the same team where we have a full team and we're seeing people that are, you know, able to work and stuff and just feeling the alleviation and relief of having [redacted colleague] yeah. She's kind of like a balm.

So, our team, like me and my...other colleagues, I would say we've grown actually much closer to one another. We were always close and like worked really well together and I think we all really enjoy each other as people. But they became some of the only people aside from my immediate family and like my mom and my dad that I talked to on a weekly or even more frequently basis...So like, I think it became like a real, like, lifeline for people, this team....We really leaned on each other and that was one of the things that like has been kind of good. I feel really like they're such wonderful colleagues. I feel really grateful to have them.

I feel like the thing that COVID has really heightened for me personally and what I've seen for some of my other colleagues as well is that, I think the last year has really shown how much of our work is, necessitates, like, elements of care and supporting people. So not only thinking about... supporting the folks in our community, faculty, students and stuff like that, but, like, supporting our coworkers and, and recognizing the people are...more than workers; people have complex and challenging lives; and I feel like too that so much of the work that I have found really gratifying, in the time of COVID but also challenging is because we're all virtual, that care work, or that care elements looks different and sometimes is more difficult to deliver.

Final Thoughts

And gratitudes

Questions?
Comments?
Story to share?

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