Boundaries and Breakthroughs:

A Conversation on Maintaining Engagement and Avoiding Burnout in Reference and Instruction

Sophie Leveque and Eamon Tewell

Introduction

This chapter puts one early- and one mid-career academic librarian together in conversation about issues and strategies related to engagement with their work and careers. Sophie Leveque is an early-career subject specialist librarian. Eamon Tewell is a mid-career middle manager with a reference and instruction background, and he is Sophie's supervisor. We will compare engagement and related questions from our differing backgrounds and shared workplace. Through our dialogue, we will bring in the perspectives of other authors and thinkers on similar issues of work and labor in academic libraries and higher education in order to draw connections between our experiences and broader contexts and systems. We will examine the tensions between engagement and self-care, share strategies for avoiding burnout, complicate the concept of service in reference and instruction work, and discuss the interests and types of work that keep us sustained and fulfilled.

Before we begin, we provide additional information about ourselves, including how our identities shape our experiences, perceptions, and careers. Librarianship suffers from a default orientation toward, and presumption of, whiteness as the norm. By reflecting on our positionalities, we bring attention to the aspects of our identities we see as influencing the ensuing dialogue, which is a dimension that is too often neglected.

Sophie: I am a white cis woman with chronic pain. I was raised by a single mother and maternal grandparents, all college graduates who implicitly expected that I and my younger sister would also go to college. Despite growing up in a financially strained household, I have experienced a lot of privilege as a white person in the United States. I am an abolitionist and believe most evils are tied to colonization and capitalism. My radicalization is very much tied to the book writing process behind *Trans/Active: A Biography of Gwendolyn Ann Smith,* which I wrote shortly after graduating from college.[1] As I began to understand how transphobia is a result of not only our patriarchal capitalist systems but also colonization and white supremacy, I realized my own ignorance and complicity in violence against people of color in America. When I went to graduate school in Ireland, at University College Dublin, I witnessed how Ireland is still healing from British oppression as they wrestled with the one-hundred-year anniversary of the Irish War of Independence. I was able to compare classism and sexism to that of the United States, which heightened my understanding of systematic oppression. I struggle with the reality that higher education is just another system that perpetuates violence and inequality. It is difficult to sit with this complicity while also enjoying parts of my job.

As the social work and social science research support librarian at Columbia University, I love teaching students information skills. I teach workshops on research fundamentals such as "Reading Difficult Texts" and "How to Literature Review & Why." I am the selector for anthropology, international and public affairs, and sociology and social work; the budget I manage is a huge institutional privilege given to Columbia affiliates. Unfortunately, this perpetuates a lack of engagement with open access resources and obstructs necessary discussions on academic publishing as yet another system that oppresses humans who do not have access to academia. I also manage a semi-processed special collection, the Social Agency Collection, which contains publications of major local, national, and international social welfare agencies and were previously in possession of the libraries of the Charity Organization Society and the Russell Sage Foundation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using this collection, one could study food insecurity, the development of anti-poverty, criminal justice and child welfare laws, as well as the histories of other groundbreaking social movements, including the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Rights Movement. This is my first professional librarian position; however, it is not my first job. Through college, I worked as a resident advisor to eliminate housing costs, worked in a battery packing factory one summer, cleaned houses, babysat, worked as a lifeguard another summer, and worked at a theater concession stand while also serving as a library fellow at my alma mater, Wake Forest University. In graduate school, I worked two unpaid internships, including one at Marsh's Library, the oldest public library in Ireland, and one as a library assistant processing glass lantern slides at The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.

Eamon: I am a white, straight, middle-class, able-bodied man, which means I benefit from pretty much every type of privilege there is and from living in a society founded upon and structurally oriented to uphold white supremacy, patriarchy, and ableism. I grew up in a supportive lower middle-class household with parents who received master's degrees and taught or did social advocacy work, and they introduced me to principles of social justice that have been formative in my life. I have worked as an academic librarian for eleven years, first in Philadelphia and then in New York City. I'm now a department head in the Science, Engineering, and Social Science Libraries at Columbia University, where I supervise four subject specialist librarians and provide programmatic direction and support for reference and instruction activities across the libraries. I have also actively published and presented on topics mostly related to reference, instruction, and critical librarianship, beginning a couple of years after graduating from my MLIS program. My position in the profession includes a considerable degree of job security and allows me to be more transparent with far fewer risks than if I were precariously employed. At the same time, the first several years of my career were defined by precarity and temporary work, so this informs how I view my role. I am a beneficiary of the glass escalator, which refers to the way that straight white men are more easily fast-tracked to leadership positions in feminized professions, including higher pay and more career mobility.[2] I also benefit from the increased spending on administrators that has been taking place in US higher education over the past three decades, also known as administrative bloat, which my role is part of. Neoliberalism and market-driven decision-making in universities have resulted in more administrators and poorly compensated adjuncts, while the presence and power of full-time faculty are increasingly diminished. I enjoy my job and I couldn't be happier to have years ago made the decision to become a librarian, but it's important to consider the ways we are all implicated in larger systems.

Sophie: Even as an early-career librarian, I've been surprised by just how different library jobs can be from one another, and I wonder if that has to do with the type of institution. Of all the different places you have worked, do you have a favorite?

Eamon: I have worked at a few different types of libraries and academic institutions, all of which have very different and distinct work cultures and expectations. After being a work-study circulation desk assistant at my large state university for a couple of years during college, and then throughout library school having a series of short-term paid internships in large universities and small college libraries, I have been a librarian at a small women's arts college, a selective private liberal arts college, a mid-sized private university, and a large elite private research university. Each workplace has its own advantages and disadvantages, and these are due largely to the specifics of that particular place, including how the library has developed over time to respond to users' needs. Just describing them as I have above doesn't get into the details and nuances that really shape the experience of working there. For example, the mid-sized private university's student population was largely international, first-generation, and/or students of color who enrolled to gain credentials for and entry to a particular professional field like nursing or business, and it was often very enjoyable to work with them in navigating their assignments and the library. Meanwhile, the library spaces suffered from decades of underfunding and

neglect that was apparent in the uncomfortable furniture, recurring leaks in classrooms and offices, and regular pest problems. The small private liberal arts college had a strong emphasis on roundtable seminars for classes and weekly meetings with one's professor, which translated to very frequent research consultation requests since students were familiar with that way of learning, and it was rewarding to guide students through the research process for their very interesting projects. At the same time, I was paid less annually than the cost of tuition for a single student and had limited ability to change library policies and procedures. In short, workplaces are complicated.

Probably more important to my preference in an institution is, instead of the type of institution, what status the librarians have there. That's really what determines what the day-to-day work looks like in a given job and is also a better indicator of whether a job is the right fit for a person's interests. For the mid-sized private university I worked at, librarians have faculty status, which was hard-won in the 1970s and is too uncommon among private colleges and universities. This meant a lot of publishing and presenting was required, and after five years librarians were evaluated on whether they were to be granted tenure or their contracts were to end. That added pressure, but it also resulted in a lot of autonomy and the ability to control my time to a considerable degree, which is essential for being content in any job. The support to contribute to the literature and profession was there, and that was a big bonus. Being in a union was also extremely important for ensuring our voices could be heard at the university level and by upper administration and was responsible for securing the benefits and advantages I had. My other jobs have not been unionized or tenure-track. At my current institution, there are expectations to contribute to the profession to move up our system of professional ranks, but there is not the same level of support, and that is due at least in part to not having faculty status. Having a library job that's unionized and tenure-track, which is most often seen in public universities, doesn't solve everything and certainly isn't without issues, but to me, it presents the most ideal balance of contributing to the field and one's workplace at the same time while having a say in collective governance of the institution.

Sophie: Is there anything you wish had been normalized as an early-career librarian now that you are managing an early-career librarian?

Eamon: Thinking back on my first few years as a reference and instruction librarian, one thing I would have benefitted from is hearing, "There is no such thing as a bibliographic emergency." This can sometimes feel trite or condescending, especially to an early-career librarian who is often the one dealing with students or faculty to whom their situation can feel like an emergency, but it's true. Library work is important, but it's really not worth stressing yourself out over. In practical terms, that means it's not worth taking on a last-minute instruction request to prove your worth to a professor or department or working off-hours to track down the perfect source for a student's research topic. These are things that can be fulfilling on occasion, but making sure your time is respected is essential, and if you can't fit everything into your workday, that's on your manager or director to figure out how to address.

Secondly, something I wish was normalized early in my career is to trust your knowledge and what you bring to your role, even if it can feel like there's so much you don't

know. It's common for librarians to doubt their abilities and even their worth, especially when serving as liaisons for multiple subject areas and teaching people about resources in their particular field. This is commonly known as "impostor syndrome," but as Nicola Andrews points out, there are many factors at play that are often misinterpreted as imposter syndrome, which are in fact the result of systemic issues such as precarious labor, racism, and sexism.[3] The thing is, librarians know about information and how it's organized and made available better than most people, so understanding the ins and outs of a discipline isn't necessary most of the time. It's ok to know a little about a lot, and, more importantly, feeling like you're not measuring up or underappreciated is not the result of a personal shortcoming and won't be remedied by working harder—it's because of a lack of adequate support and facing structural barriers.

Eamon: I want to bring up this question of engagement, which is central to this section of the book. What types of work keep you engaged as an early-career librarian? Do you see these types of work continuing to sustain you, or will you need other sources of inspiration?

Sophie: Simply put, I am still in the process of discovering what inspires me in my day-to-day work. Sometimes, I finish a task or an interaction with a student and I am surprised at the warm and fuzzy feeling in my chest. Joy, is that you? I love working with people new to research—seeing someone curious and advocating for themselves and learning something new fires me up. Also, the very rare, somewhat mythical "thank you email" I receive makes my heart explode with pride. When students write, "I feel less overwhelmed, thank you!" that's the biggest win. I want every student to feel more confident and at ease with research after meeting with me. Often, I work with students in the social sciences who are also radicalized and hope to challenge existing systems, which makes me feel very engaged in my work and hopeful about the ripple effect of information literacy skills.

I think most early-career librarians would agree that much of beginning a career is finding workflows and boundaries in order to mitigate burnout. It has been a painful process in some ways because I have had to exceed my limits to truly understand where I have to draw the line. I had a day with eight one-hour consultations, and halfway through that day I realized, "I can never do this again. This is painful." I then adjusted consultations to all be a half hour; and through trial and error, I realized that I should only have up to four consultations a day regardless of length because after the fourth interaction I'm exhausted by the social aspect of the intense one-on-ones that are usually in combination with meetings and classroom instruction. I am an introvert who loves to teach; I have to protect some time each day to recharge to bring my best to my students.

During the pandemic, it has felt very difficult to focus on workplace engagement. It seems unimportant, which is frustrating when so much of our field's rhetoric seems to have moved past the pandemic already. I have seen so many conference themes or calls for papers with taglines like, "What will things look like post-COVID-19 pandemic?" or, "Lessons from COVID-19." When I see these, I feel very frustrated. COVID-19 isn't over; the lessons are still being learned, and the grief is still heavy. We're still in the throes of this global crisis. I find these discussions insensitive at best—some people won't survive

to see the post-COVID-19 world—and dehumanizing at worst. The impression these conversations give me is that we should stop dwelling on the experience we're living through, but as of this writing, it's not over. Our humanity is far more than just our work. We shouldn't gloss over the loss, sadness, anxiety, and heaviness that we've experienced. However, because I don't have the experience in my career yet to know what to expect or what is expected of me during times of change or crisis, I can't know what can happen next. If leadership in an organization decides to prioritize alleviating burnout, the first step would be to ask us what we need or find helpful. Send a survey. Hold a Zoom town hall. Solicit emails. Ask and then listen.

Sophie: Now that I've answered, I'd like to ask you the same question. How do you stay engaged as a mid-career librarian?

Eamon: Defining engagement as interest in my day-to-day work as well as being active in the profession more broadly, through publishing, presenting, service, and so on, there are a couple of things that keep me engaged. One of those is spending as much time as I can on work that I like doing. All jobs involve some work that isn't appealing, feels like a waste of time, or just is not something one wants to do; that's totally normal, and it's just the nature of work. For me, the problem is when I spend time worrying about those tasks and they take up more mental space than they need or deserve. Writing an annual report for a committee I chair, for example, is not something I enjoy or find particular value in doing. So that I can be actively engaged with other things that I do enjoy, I spend as little time as possible thinking about and working on it—I do whatever is required to get it done and leave it at "good enough." That allows for more time and energy to plan new initiatives with colleagues, focus on things I do less frequently but still really enjoy, like doing consultations or chat reference, and in general reorient my daily work toward other tasks. Finding the things that I like to do, however small they might seem, and especially finding ways to work with people I appreciate, inside and outside of my library, go a very long way toward keeping me engaged at my job. Part of this is a function of my job level and duties. Not all library workers have the option to minimize some aspects of their jobs and pay more attention to others, and it is undoubtedly a privilege I benefit from. That is why it's important for supervisors to foster this possibility for the people who report to them and create the room necessary for interests to grow and new challenges to be taken on.

As for professional engagement, this can be more complicated because it may take many forms as well as require time outside of usual working hours. Because I typically do any "extra" professional things on my own time, it's that much more essential that it is meaningful to me in some way. For any professional opportunity, especially something that I know will take up some of my personal time, such as presenting at a conference, writing a paper, serving on a committee, or even contributing this chapter to this book, I weigh a few different factors to decide whether to agree to it: How much of a time commitment will it be? What benefits are there to me personally, tangible (like a speaker's fee) or intangible (like an opportunity later on that might come about as a result)? Lastly, and most importantly, is it something I am excited about and feel that I have something worthwhile to contribute to? If it's something I'm excited about, there's a good chance I will take it on.

I have noticed, though, that being mid-career has caused me to choose more carefully where and how I become involved in professional opportunities. I have added questions to ask myself when an opportunity comes up, which are: Am I the right person to do this? Is there someone else who might not get this chance to speak or publish who would benefit from it more, especially given that I am in a privileged and relatively secure position? As one example, for every other keynote invitation I receive, I politely decline and offer to recommend other knowledgeable and excellent speakers who are BIPOC and/or early-career. The event organizers will often take me up on this, and it's really a win-win-win—the event attendees have a fantastic speaker, someone who is great for the opportunity and is connected with the right people, and I can look forward to working on something else in the future. In this way, engagement can mean not doing things and redirecting opportunities to the right people.

Eamon: You mention that engagement has been particularly difficult during the pandemic, in no small part because we need to care for ourselves and each other during this extraordinarily challenging time. Is career engagement at odds with self-care?

Sophie: Yes! As an early-career librarian, I feel pressure from all sides to do more. Make goals for the yearly assessment. Create new workshops. Develop new skills. Submit proposal after proposal, for articles, chapters, or posters. Update LinkedIn. All this is on top of being a human who needs to sleep, cook meals, grocery shop for those meals, walk my dog, do something fun, and replenish my energy reserves with "self-care." I often wonder how everyone else fits everything in. I am on so many listservs that advertise amazing-sounding panels for 7 p.m. on a weeknight. At 7 p.m. on a weeknight, I am living my life, and I don't want to give that time up. I am *not* my job or career, and I don't want to be. Toni Morrison said, "You are the person you are. Not the work you do."[4] I try to say this to myself every day when I start to feel overwhelmed. That panel was recorded, but now I have to schedule time to watch it. Do I take time away from the students? From my to-do list? From my lunch break? If I think about it too hard, I start to wonder how those panelists had the time to prepare for a panel in the first place. What did they cut from their schedules? Is the expectation that librarians will work outside their normal business hours an example of widespread job creep in the profession? I am striving greatly to create space for myself as a human, but it is a deeply uncomfortable process for me due to norms in the field. I can say no, but I hate saying it, even if I realize that by saying no I am holding space to say yes to different things that are just as important as my career.

In 2020, while the pandemic was at its beginning stages, I decided to prioritize self-care by returning to therapy after a long break. I am learning how to manage my time and protect fledgling boundaries. These are two skills I wish we all valued more, beginning with creating a better vocabulary for what workplace boundaries are. Some things are easier than others. Nine a.m. to 5 p.m., or whatever your set hours are, should be the time in which you think about work. But then, how we spend those working hours carrying out the responsibilities of the job versus engagement in the field at large leaves lots of room for reimagination. Especially in higher education, it is deeply ironic that our workdays mimic corporate America, despite the fact that we don't have to do that. We make the rules and enforce them, right? I am daydreaming of shorter workdays.

Eamon: Following up on this theme of creating necessary boundaries, the idea of the librarian providing and being of "service" to users is often a double-edged sword— we want to be as helpful as we can to patrons, but that comes with the risk of stretching ourselves too thin. Do you think being of service is a useful thing to emphasize as part of your job, or are there too many drawbacks to it?

Sophie: I believe interactions with all patrons should be positive, if possible. One of the most important things I learned in graduate school for my MLIS is that people are bad at asking questions. The articulation of what they need often gets lost. Our job is to figure out what they need and to do so in a kind way. There *are* dumb questions. But often, those questions aren't what the patron means, they are just what they could articulate. That being said, people can be rude, entitled, and cranky. This is unavoidable in any service industry. We pretty much expect this in our day-to-day because we work with humans. The variation in crankiness is separate from the toxicity of the service "double-edged sword" you refer to, which is explored thoroughly in the excellent book *Deconstructing Service in Libraries: Intersections of Identities and Expectations*.[5] Vocational awe is a real thing; we believe our work is critical, so we often bend over backward to the detriment of our own well-being.[6] Our labor in libraries is very easily obscured because people don't see us doing it. They see one person at a circulation desk, and that's usually it.

I wish people in higher education generally understood how libraries worked. My first library job at Wake Forest University's Z. Smith Reynolds Library painted a picture for me that everyone loved the library. Faculty requested instruction, tours, and collaboration. Students loved the space and for the most part understood that librarians could help them with research and citation (which, in retrospect, is a stunning victory). When I started to work at Marsh's Library in Ireland, I started to learn that other communities have different ideas of libraries than Wake Forest. Marsh's is an eighteenth-century gem and the very first public library in Ireland, and it still functions as a research library and museum. But every week, a tourist popped in to ask if they could print a boarding pass. They were confused when we explained that we were not a public library where you could print a boarding pass. They would show us their smartphone and say, "But it says library!" as if we didn't know. At my current workplace, there are tenured faculty who don't understand why course reserves deadlines are set before the semester begins. Some students resent having to wear masks inside the library during a pandemic. Some researchers don't understand why it can take up to two weeks for an interlibrary loan request to arrive. Don't get me started on explaining scanning restrictions due to fair use. They don't understand our labor, and it is frustrating. When I think of the double-edged sword of service, this lack of understanding is the crux of the frustration. In any job, overextension happens when the other person doesn't respect you enough to try to understand your work. The emotional labor on top of the explanation of services is exhausting.

This is a two-part problem. The university can provide a bigger bridge for faculty and administrators to understand how the heart of the university works—the library provides so many extraordinary services and resources, but we are not a restaurant where you can order a menu item and get it delivered in a half hour or less. At Wake Forest, I saw this bridge clearly illuminated. There is very little staff turnover. People stay because they

love their jobs and their work. The second part of this comes from the library's end. We need clear policies that can be easily shared with patrons. We need managers to protect their staff from rude or abusive patrons. We need relationship-building so that bridge can work for everyone—librarians, circulation staff, students, researchers, alumni, and on and on. Meeting expectations is acceptable; we need permission and encouragement to stop going above and beyond. So much of the toxic service mentality is that if we don't do it, then it won't get done. But on the flip side, if it doesn't get done, what is the worst that will happen? Excellent service at the cost of personhood is bleak. The work being done should not be at such a great personal expense (over-extension, working beyond set hours, sacrificing time with family or sense of work-life balance, not taking vacation days, etc.), and I think staff turnover is a reasonable indicator of how seriously an institution takes these perennial issues.

Sophie: As a mid-career librarian with experience balancing daily responsibilities and ongoing professional activities, what advice would you give someone to avoid burnout? What self-care strategies have you cultivated?

Eamon: First, it's essential to understand that one's institution benefits from workers' lack of boundaries. It shouldn't be on anyone to find ways to "avoid burnout," since that's extra time and effort to prevent something that shouldn't be happening in the first place. It should be on the institution to create working conditions that prevent it from happening because that's largely who sets the expectations. I have found it extremely useful to reckon with the fact that while individual people can and do care about me and my work, the institution is completely indifferent to me as a person and will gladly take as much as I am willing to give—that is the nature of an employer/employee relationship at a fundamental level. For example, we know how essential but undervalued work, such as pursuing diversity and equity in our libraries and universities, is too often seen as "extra" in addition to making libraries run, and it is unevenly distributed and primarily falls to people of color. This amounts to what Sara Ahmed describes as "the physical and emotional labor of 'banging your head against a brick wall,'" and institutions actually benefit from this in many ways.[7]

More specifically regarding self-care, there are some things I make sure to follow and that we can all apply, like taking vacation time, taking a full lunch break, putting up out-of-office messages, only sending email within work hours, or, if you have the ability to do so, reducing the number of meetings or designating meeting-free days. In terms of caring for myself within the workplace, I have found there is always someone around who is doing good work that I appreciate in some way, so I look for those people at my library, university, and other institutions, and work with those people whenever I can. I also find it useful to focus on the work I enjoy and pursue that whenever possible and minimize or spend as little time as possible on things that don't sustain or interest me. Maintaining interests outside of work is also essential for self-care and tending to oneself. This is the most important self-care practice I know of, and it has been the most difficult one for me to consistently maintain.

Ultimately, when we talk about burnout or work-life balance, it's on the employer. For directors and managers, it is important to model the behavior of maintaining necessary

boundaries, but that's not a substitute for working toward policies and concrete support for staff. When we talk about what's preventing self-care and what leads to burnout, we should understand it as exploitation by an employer. Burnout doesn't just happen—it's due to unrealistic demands and ultimately taking advantage of someone who gives too much time and energy to their job.[8] Calling it burnout, or even work-life balance, makes it about worker feelings, whereas exploitation draws our attention to employer practices and policies that require larger solutions. Self-care should not be about helping you be productive again. Self-care should be a reminder that you are more important than productivity. It can be an important self-preservation tactic, but it's also not a solution in itself because it's an individual solution to a collective problem. The way to stop burnout is to disrupt systems, and anything short of that means that in an understaffed or dysfunctional organization, one person after another will be subjected to burnout.

Eamon: Support from one's manager is essential, at any career level. What can managers, like myself, do to better support people who report to them, like yourself?

Sophie: You've coached me a lot! My skills have grown tremendously in the almost three years you have managed me. My skills to do my day-to-day job are solid. But now I want to do more things to keep my day-to-day work dynamic. You guessed it—now I need more coaching. I really appreciate when you tell me explicitly what I am good at and where I need to improve. Then we decide if the things I need to improve are more big-picture skills or something that needs to change quickly so I can do my job better. When you suggest publications I apply to or conferences to look at, I feel your investment in me and it makes me want to push past my comfort zone. I wouldn't know what to try if you didn't help direct my energy toward something specific. It's hard to know what opportunities exist when you are new to a field, and almost three years in I feel like my regional network is well-developed, but I don't know how to push forward. I want to contribute to the field through publications and events, but it's a bit scary. I like meeting one-on-one every week, even if the meetings have gotten shorter as I become more independent. Checking in allows me time each week to ask you for advice or feedback or to troubleshoot a problem. Because my problems used to be, "I don't know how to do this at all. Please show me," and now they are, "How can we make this better?" Less functional and more about optimizing and learning new things. Ultimately, you always make me feel very validated. So, when you give me feedback that is about how to improve, I know it's not about me as a person.

If I could magically make all managers of early-career librarians do one thing? Recognize what an employee does well, and what they can build upon or change to improve. As an example, Eamon might say something like, "Sophie you did great with the workshop today *and* I think that next time we could alter the order of the slides so that it flows with patron questions." I focus on the fact that you think I did great, *and* (my favorite Boolean operator) there's a way to improve. The fact that you think it can be better also shows me that you are paying attention and want me to be the best that I can be. I'm in my early career; I know I don't know how to do everything, but I really want to learn. Thanks for always teaching me!

Conclusion

Reflecting on this chapter and the takeaways we hope readers will glean from it, it's clear to us that the qualities essential to thriving as a librarian, whether mid- or early-career, include identifying healthy boundaries, distinguishing between what's important and what can wait (hint: 99 percent of things can wait), and focusing on the types of work that we most enjoy and finding the people we want to do that work with. Creating connections within our libraries, but also outside of them, is key to maintaining perspective. As white librarians, we recognize that BIPOC librarians face many of the labor issues we do, but these issues are compounded by oppressive systems and practices that we simply do not face or are required to respond to in the same way. For this reason, it is important to continue to find ways for library staff of all backgrounds to thrive and find meaning in their work, if they wish to. In this chapter, we also identified some challenges to career engagement while recognizing that career engagement might not always be possible or desirable, especially when pursuing it sacrifices self-care or a sense of work-life balance. While there isn't a single answer to what keeps us engaged, there are aspects of reference and instruction work that sustain us, and receiving acknowledgment for our efforts from patrons as well as supervisors are important reminders that our often invisibilized labor is seen and appreciated.

Most of all, we want to convey that whenever you are having difficulty at work, be kind to yourself and don't automatically blame your decisions. Libraries can be great places to work, and we believe what we do is important, but the surest way to burn out is to transfer systemic and organizational issues onto yourself. During the pandemic, academic libraries have made many changes to support remote learning while also continuing services patrons have traditionally enjoyed. At the same time, there has been very little recognition that this labor is provided by workers who are also surviving a pandemic. Many necessary boundaries and the breakthroughs they enable have yet to come because we need to collectively reexamine the labor we are willing to do for an added personal cost that an institution does not recognize.

Notes

1. Gwendolyn Ann Smith and Sophia Cecelia Leveque, *Trans/Active: A Biography of Gwendolyn Ann Smith* (Winston-Salem, NC: Library Partners Press, 2017).
2. Christine L. Williams, "The Glass Escalator, Revisited: Gender Inequality in Neoliberal Times, SWS Feminist Lecturer," *Gender & Society* 27, no. 5 (2013): 609–29.
3. Nicola Andrews, "It's Not Imposter Syndrome: Resisting Self-Doubt as Normal For Library Workers," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (2020).
4. Toni Morrison, "The Work You Do, the Person You Are," *The New Yorker* (May 29, 2017).
5. Veronica Arellano Douglas and Joanna Gadsby, *Deconstructing Service in Libraries: Intersections of Identities and Expectations* (Sacramento. CA: Library Juice Press, 2020).
6. Fobazi Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (2018).
7. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 175.
8. Sarah Jaffe, *Work Won't Love You Back: How Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps Us Exploited, Exhausted, and Alone* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2021).

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