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Structured with a plethora of research regarding faculty burnout in higher education, Rebecca Pope-Ruark's project reveals a fruitful conversation with her readers in a subject most educators would recognize these days as pervasive and, at the same time, wide-spread and challenging, but rarely investigated properly. The book is organized in two major sections, Chapter 1 (about cultural elements of faculty burnout) and Chapter 2 (about the four elements of faculty burnout: purpose, compassion, connection, and balance), plus Chapter 3 about purpose, Chapter 4 dealing with compassion, and Chapter 5 delving into the cultivation of connection to her peers, to which a coda is added with four appendixes. *Unraveling Faculty Burnout* strikes from the very beginning because of its freshness in the landscape of academia and the people who value their careers and share their views with anybody who might have the same feelings and opinions.

The rationale behind the considerable effort to assess faculty burnout is laid out in the first section of the book, where the author posits a question and tries to find an adequate explanation. Placing herself in the middle of disputes and arguing for "faculty vitality through meaningful productivity," Pope-Ruark returns to one of her previous books entitled *Agile Faculty: Practical Strategies for Managing Research, Service, and Teaching* (2017). Resorting to similar research done along the same lines, she finds reassurance in the faculty values found when teachers define themselves in the context of creativity, curiosity, motivation, optimism, as well as risk-taking productivity. The author acknowledges that her earlier book did not mention "the fact that constantly trying to live up all these ideals is exhausting, unrealistic, and potentially dangerous." (p. 5) And that is one of the main reasons why she continued and extended her research to understand and assess the phenomenon of burnout.

A careful and honest self-analysis brought the author to the realization that, what seemed initially very important and challenging work, in time turned out to be unfulfilling and meaningless. In other words, "Energy turn[ed] to exhaustion involvement turn(ed) to cynicism, and efficacy turn[ed] into ineffectiveness." (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter 2001, 416; quoted on p. 6) To be more exact, burnout, which education buffs use in their end-of-session friendly conversations with colleagues, is definitely treated here as different from exhaustion. A quick definition provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the International Classification of Diseases finds the profound influence of this "state of vital exhaustion" masterfully identified as a syndrome and caused by

> chronic *workplace stress* that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions: 1) feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; 2) increased mental distance form one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and 3) reduced professional efficacy. Burnout *refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context* and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life. (WHO 2019, emphasis added; quoted on p.8)

Various feelings of "worthlessness, excessive or inappropriate guilt" are considered part and parcel of the burnout experience, but are not deemed as inherent causes per se. According to Mayo Clinic (2021), depression and anxiety are thought to accompany burnout, and in time might lead to sleeplessness, drug and alcohol use, or serious physical health problems.

To put the matters succinctly, the author declares she was first diagnosed with burnout and that made her accept the reality, mostly because she also found similar burnout stories from her colleagues and trusted peers. Covid-19, with its devastating effect on all facets of teaching and learning, including higher education, is then brought into the conversation. Whether courses were taught in person or online, students and teachers found themselves stressed out by pandemic-related issues, which gradually exacerbated the situation and posed "real and serious risk for mental health challenges of unprecedented scope." (Gruber, 2020; quoted on p. 15)

A champion for and a strong supporter of "meaningful and realistic productivity" as part of the academic journey, Pope-Ruark is also ready to include a personal component in the narrative. The author finds herself on the other side of burnout because she was able to identify the issues and managed to overcome them by extolling the values of what she calls four pillars of burnout resilience: "knowing and following my *purpose*; practicing *compassion* for myself and others; deepening *connection* with peers near and far; and pursuing realistic life *balance*." (p. 19)

As analyzed in the above-mentioned section, the idea of self-analysis is incorporated into what the author calls "Reflection Opportunity," a set of questions she is asking herself and her readers to sum up the introduction. Among these relevant questions, we find some relevant examples that are self-explanatory:

- What were you most passionate about when you began your career in higher ed?
- What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of?
- What values and meaningful goals do you have for your academic career? Do you feel that you are honoring those values and goals currently? Why, of why not?
- If you could change anything about your current context, what would it be, and why? If such change magically occurred one night, how would you know it the next day? How would you feel? (pp. 23-24)

The professional and personal journey into the burnout territory makes up the main focus of Chapter 1, *Culture*. Admitting that she had reached a tipping point, the author found herself at a crossroads in her academic venture, with "two breakdowns, medical leave, years of therapy and a right combination of medications" that evidenced the need to talk openly about her experience. As such, the chapter presents a thorough analysis of "a few aspects of the higher ed culture that foment burnout." From her standpoint, the researcher looks at what she calls "playing the market," followed by "calling out culture," "competing to connect," and then "finding the way through."

Obsessed with productivity, Pope-Ruark realizes "that the culture of academic is one of supply and demand, product and service, faculty as cogs in the machine." (p. 31) This gives her a chance to eviscerate the public higher education and the neoliberal mentality in society as well. Based on the conviction that the academic environment is becoming dependent on outside funding, which, in its turn, leads to a fierceful fight for profit-generating sources of income. As the author points out, the final result is somehow related to efficiency, which expects people "to do more with less" and the teaching experience becomes unbearable, and therefore leading to burnout on campus.

According to Cardel et al. (2020), the academic culture includes the challenges and exploitation of women, especially the women of color, to which the author adds explicit and implicit biases, from sexism and sexual harassment, unfair teaching evaluations, to service loads and emotional stress. As pointed out in this respect, research and workshops have underscored that such challenges have a profound effect on job satisfaction, retention, and promotion fort women faculty.

The section dealing with competition gives the author a chance to theorize that "bullying and gaslighting can be masked as mentoring and support, which contributes to imposter syndrome, levels of intimidation, feelings of not being 'enough' in one's work, and ultimately isolation, as driven by external voices that lead to shame and vulnerability." (p. 43) However, the whole situation becomes clear when a way through is found in the new environment. Along the same lines, changing culture might be a solution, albeit massive and challenging. The notion of burnout itself became clearer after the author read an article written by Anne Helen Petersen in *Buzzfeed News*, and later on Jenny Odell's book *How to do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (2019). Looking at social media, advertising, websites and the like, Pope-Ruark comes to the conclusion that all these forms of media are meant to capture our attention, which then becomes a saleable commodity. What is the author's solution? "If you want to overthrow the system, withhold labor, withhold buying power. Marxism 101." (p. 51) Therefore, engagement is arguably more necessary than ever.

Academic identity and its relationship with exhaustion and stress are clearly delineated in Chapter 2. Using her own life and professional history, the author compounds valuable information from peers who had similar experiences in collected stories of faculty in various roles and career stages. Specifically, the reader is made aware of challenges associated with identities intersecting with higher education.

Although academic performance and achievements may lead to professional satisfaction, as the author reveals, such good results come with unexpected consequences. Psychotherapist John Dodes (2019) is quoted to comment that "*unhappy achiever* refers to a high performer with many accomplishments who pursues each achievement with the possibly subconscious goal of external validation of their personal and professional worth." (p. 58) Nevertheless, for many educators in the same situation, that does not seem to be enough. According to Lance Dodes (2017), "They feel that they have to achieve just to feel valuable or worthy. Achievements aren't a joy; they're a necessity… Stop achieving and they stop being lovable. It's a terrible burden." (ibid.)

In the same vein, recent findings in the academic field have pointed to personal satisfaction and contentment for a job well done being somehow intricately connected with identities, and more specifically with professional identities. To be more precise, Pope-Ruark resorts to Billot (2010, pp. 711-712), "who argues that an 'academic self' is constructed through a combination of one's idealized understanding of what an academic is and does as well as past and current interpretations of context." (p. 59). Furthermore, "The academic identity is 'intrinsically bound with the values, beliefs and practices held in common with others of that affiliation,' that is, the discipline, institution, or higher ed in general." (ibid., p. 72) In other words, self-compassion and human connection are obviously paths through burnout. While some look for strategies to confront stress and exhaustion in the working place, in the author's opinion, there are others who have "become adept at concealing problems from others and even from themselves." (p. 75)

Purpose is what drives most professionals, especially those who realize their potential and vie for competition, and purpose is intricately discussed in section 3 of the book. In the author's opinion, "being needed or relevant or productive is not a purpose for a career or a life." She strongly believes, or came to believe, that belonging in higher education was more important than supporting students, or than doing research that helped her fellow teachers do their job well. Step by step, all that only led to depleted energy and fatigue, which eventually showed signs of burnout.

To answer her own question regarding fulfilling work in higher education, the author postulates that, after sharing the opinion of one of her peers named Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, she found there are four elements that define and clarify the goals of those passionate and dedicated teachers: *Values, Purpose, Meaning,* and *Fulfilment.* Aristotle's value ethics are also tools that support the idea that "our purpose and motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, should be able to create our best selves." (p. 83)

Cultural values are therefore brought into the conversation, and deemed as prerogatives in the pursuit of knowledge and learning. As the author avers, striving for excellence on the way to discovery also stimulates a propensity for research and teaching, but with all efforts on deck, everything seemed to be all-encompassing and finally led to burnout. Consequently, when life and work are not found to be meaningful, burnout automatically appears, although educators continue their endeavors to write articles, to publish books, in other words striving to be useful and appreciated.

In a concerted effort to (re)find purpose, researchers like Schubert-Irastorza and Fabry (2014) define engagement to be characterized by "high levels of positive energy, determination, and dedication to getting the job done." (p. 91) Furthermore, Schaufeli and Baker (2004) add that work engagement can be defined as "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." (Quoted on p. 92)

Purpose, then, is correlated with other major components like working with students, committing to social justice, working outside academia, all contributing to a re-articulation of purpose in the context of burnout.

When compassion becomes the central point in Chapter 4, the author re-iterates what she felt was compelling about her own responsibilities, namely not only classes but also the articles, book projects, various service commitments, pilot program assessment and other activities that were absolutely essential. In her own words, she thought these issues were necessary if she was to get the attention, respect, prestige, and next-level leadership roles she deserved. (p. 106) Nevertheless, when she saw she was surrounded by peers and supervisors who cared about her, she was made aware of the magnificent power of compassion. In a comparison with students, who appreciate when a teacher exhibits empathy and understanding, Pope-Ruark finds herself in the position where she needed a similar approach to relieve fatigue, stress, and complete exhaustion. What initially was daily routine, including acknowledging and dealing with students' needs, soon "became debilitating and anxiety-provoking." (p. 113) A temporary but necessary solution was found in leaving academic for a few years. This gave her a chance to take a deeper look into what she calls compassion fatigue, which may very well be a warning sign of exhaustion. According to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001, p. 403), "Exhaustion is not something that is simply experienced – rather, it prompts actions to distance oneself emotionally and cognitively from one's work, presumably as a way to cope with the overload." (Quoted on p. 114) That moment she realized how demanding our culture can be, and theorized that "true exhaustion is to be hidden." (ibid)

Research on emotional exhaustion led the author to see that some of the underlying cultural values generate gaslighting, which according to Nagoski and Nagoski (2019, p. 89), is "designed to make you question your own credibility and competence.... The message is strong – whatever is wrong it's your fault…. You haven't tried hard enough. You haven't done the right things. You don't have what it takes. Eventually what can we do but believe them?" (Quoted on p. 117) Not being used to self-compassion brought the realization that a competent professional woman needs to be strong, but at the same time compassionate and soft on emotional issues. The hard lesson learned in this situation rekindled the concept of self-compassion and self-esteem. In better words, anybody can be a human being and accept flaws, as long as we all learn from our experiences and conduct ourselves accordingly. Anybody can become, as the author suggests, an inner critic:

> The inner critic is the voice inside your head that keeps your doubt and cognitive distortions, like catastrophizing, rumination, and all-or-nothing thinking, on a nonstop loop. Your inner mentor might be cheerleader, encourager, or voice of reason that can overcome the critic. (p. 129)

Various facets of compassion conclude the chapter with comments about showing empathy and listening to people who might be sharing the same feelings. In the academic world of these days, the author argues that women are more likely to experience burnout but also to help others to find a way out. The reader, if experiencing the same burnout symptoms, is also encouraged to try meditation or writing a journal jotting down positive thinking and relevant sets of activities that might lead to self-analysis for the real concept of meaningfulness. Strategies for well-deserved rest and relaxation, in the author's opinion, should deal with frustration and dissatisfaction and consequently bring encouragement and relief.

From self-care and self-compassion, the focus in Chapter 5 segues to connection, an obvious switch with multiple eye-opening venues for interconnection with colleagues, supervisors and mental health professionals. While attending a disciplinary conference the author had been committed to, the need for connection became even more obvious. Almost everybody in the audience "commiserated and either shared their own burnout experience or pointed to someone who was experiencing burnout and could use an ear." (p. 137)

Connection, competition, and outside observers make up the corollary of this chapter. A safe place in the higher education community, as outlined in this section of the book, returns full circle to the original four pillars of burnout resilience. Connection is definitely included in this context, where achievement, productivity, and efficiency are strongly guarded by higher education culture and its members. A veritable discussion ensues when Sarah Rose Cavanagh's book entitled *Hivemind* (2019) is brought into the conversation. As explained in the book, there is a contradiction between the importance of connection or belonging and the philosophy of American individualism. Social support is needed from those who "share a common understanding of how the world works and which values to uphold." (Cavanagh, 2019, p. 221; quoted on p. 138). Specifically, common goals and values are shared in communities where the workplace culture generates trust and inter-communication on issues that define the social support and mutual understanding. Such vibrant communities are made of individuals who "crave to belong and be appreciated." (p. 138) However, as elucidated in the book, that support is not inherently generated by social media and administrative staff in the academic culture.

A healthy workplace culture, as viewed in this context, should not lead to burnout as a social problem. In higher education, the idea that belonging is a key to mental health amplifies and augments the overwhelming climate of trusted relationship. When this basic concept is absent, it is less likely that educators would report feelings of burnout. As Malesic (2016) maintains, "academic culture fosters burnout when it encourages overwork, promotes a model of professors as insolated entrepreneurs, and offers little recognition for good teaching or mentoring. The persistent financial stress on colleges and universities only exacerbates the problem." (p. 139)

Connection, as an integral component in the argument, is followed by competition, another strong partner in the relentless fight to keep up the pace with peers. While connection unfortunately led to conflict, the feeling of regret is also felt because "conflict and competition cannot but help make resilience challenging." (ibid) When the author distanced herself from the main issues of excessive fatigue and burnout, she, however, found help, understanding, and compassion in what she calls "outside observers." The family wellbeing was kept alive because of her husband's support, which was in time supplemented by similar comments coming from colleagues who suffered the same impact. One such powerful example of commiseration mentions "One woman with whom I spoke realized how much conflict with her peers over job duties and grant money were affecting her home life when her 5-year-old daughter asked her why she was angry all the time." On the other hand, another's partner said they liked summer because they 'got her back.' (p. 143)

A well-supported source of inspiration and connection, as the author craftily argues, is found inside the institution. Sharing appreciation, praise, humor, and respect are all signs of well-needed support and over time they are crucial to connection and community. In some cases, though, some jobs may "isolate people from each other or make social contact impersonal." (p. 144) When the focus is switched to support coming from outside one's institution, research has led to the conviction that women in academic seek social support in the form of listening, offering advice, empathizing and resourcing. (Hutchins and Rainbolt, 2017, p. 206) A special touch is added when connection was found in an unexpected place – a barn. Looking for a hobby, the author discovered the advantages offered by horseback riding, which, complemented with alum and national social sorority events, became venues to engage and communicate with people who shared a common experience.

On a sabbatical in 2014, Pope-Ruark, who deemed herself a committed introvert, found horse riding events were not only reserved for camp and vacation, but also conducive to inner peace searching and this brings us to Chapter 6, where balance is plentiful and becomes a regenerative power. This section of the book reads like a soliloquy about the privilege of having a hobby and its soothing effect on burnout teachers. Relaxing changed its meaning for the author, and from shopping to driving or from a massage to a pedicure, a visit to Jamaica opened the door to another perspective. Not knowing how to turn her brain off, the author continued to think about work even after riding lessons – in an effort to get noticed and have people see that she was working hard. Caught herself in the daily routine with performance and efficiency on her mind, she soon realized she was caught in a vicious cycle because she did not know how to relax.

Many people she contacted, including people and coaches working with faculty, rarely spoke of balance, but that is the main point of the chapter. Celeste Headlee (2020, p. xvii) is quoted to say that "we've lost the balance between striving to improve and feeling gratitude for what we have. We've lost touch with the things that really enrich our lives and make us feel content." (Quoted on p. 164) The root cause of this lack of balance, as thee author digresses, can easily be detected in what is inculcated in the mind of teachers - the idea that "leisure" time is a waste of time. Covid-19 only added to the existing imbalance, and reliable information culled from research studies showed its negative impact on various facets of the academic environment, mostly on workaholism and its devastating impact on women academics, especially mothers with children under 5 and those in precarious faculty positions.

Self-care as a means to re-establish balance is viewed in the book as mental awakening to the harsh realities of everyday life in academia. Rest is not a gift, as the author argues, but a major component of self-care, and, if properly addressed, will allow the brain to recharge. In simple words, quality time with the family, longer hours of sleep, more time in fun activities all around would somehow mitigate the negative effects of burnout. Odell (2019) provides a welcome recommendation in her book *How to Do Nothing*, in which she captures the essence of doing nothing, as "a statement against a culture that judges

everything, including time and people, by economic measures." (p. 174) Consequently, culture norms continue to push faculty and students "beyond the edge of reasonable personal and professional investment," thus making people feel guilty if they ever take a break. Setting boundaries would be a good solution, with a limit on emails or watching Netflix, reading, writing, relaxing, although many people don't deserve to be accountable to other people for what they do all the time. "Boundaries are a function of self-respect and love." (Brown, 2017, p. 129; quoted on p. 176)

Another suggestion for self-care is highlighted by Coach Hillary Hutchinson, who underlines the value of cross-fertilization:

> Cross-fertilization is a way to avoid burnout and is far more active than relaxation. People suffering from burnout are often advised to 'get a massage' or 'give yourself a day off' to help them find their way to 'work-life balance.' My advice is to engage in a fun and interesting activity *away from* the demands of the academy. Cross-fertilization can make a huge difference in an academic's life and well-being, as the goal is to find a way to fill your well and feed your soul. (p. 185)

Cross-fertilization activities that help avoid burnout might include trying three things, no matter how far-fetched they are; starting something new that could bring fun and recreation would also be a good alternative. Prioritizing and setting boundaries might very well be further suggestions for a balanced life overall.

Self-awareness, research, and peer advice are finally praised for their intrinsic value and found worthy of writing a book. Being more connected to colleagues as well as other compassionate people have left an indelible imprint on the author's new perspective on life in academia after crossing the threshold of burnout and its unexpected effects.

When instructors find themselves in the engaging role of combining teaching, research, and service duties with overwhelming pressures and challenges, opportunities sometimes appear for reflection in later years of faculty careers. Part of the reflection moment would also generate a connection with people in the academic practice of teaching and learning.

The self-exploration journey empowered the author to voice her own frustration caused by the impact of burnout, which she shares in a highly politicized, anti-capitalist plea for awareness, which led to research that changed her life completely. After a thorough analysis of the root causes of burnout, Pope-Ruark's reflections led her to argue that they can only be found in the western culture of today. Very little, if anything, is mentioned about other places on earth where higher education might have similar requirements.

The capitalist culture is explored and its typical characteristics are spelled out. As postulated in the book, hard work, dedication, efficiency, productivity, and competition for tenure are some of the elements embedded in the minds of faculty, who worry about the lack of funds and administration support, or about stress caused by unfair evaluations and expectations, which can and will lead to fatigue, exhaustion, and eventually complete burnout. In her own words, the only remedy would be to destroy the whole system of academic capitalism. We combat capitalism - we eliminate burnout. Obsessed with perfectionism, job duties and grant money, she identifies women in general, and women of color in particular, to be the victims, but, as she admits, she mostly interviewed white women.

With outside perspectives and personal introspection, the whole project retraces useful steps necessary to unravel, address and mitigate burnout. Looking for purpose and empathy, the author has embarked on a journey of discovery, analysis, and treatment of renewal experiences that might engage readers in a variety of wellness activities focusing on re-directing our attention away from all-consuming work to searching for inner balance. What worked for Pope-Ruark may very well have a similar effect on all the aspects that make us human and bring back belonging and connection with our peers.

Anybody who works in academia and experienced similar feelings will also find solace and encouragement in this combination of memoir and collected stories dealing with collegial support and positive interaction in this rarely discussed topic: burnout. When diagnosis is clearly stated and thoroughly researched, there is always treatment. The message is clear: You only need to know where to look, keep a positive disposition, and you will not only thrive, but also find a meaningful purpose in everything you want to achieve.

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