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**ACADEMIC LIBRARY LEADERSHIP AND MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

A dissertation submitted to
Marshall University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in
Leadership Studies
by
Sabrina Nicole Thomas
Approved by
Dr. Eugenia Lambert, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Bobbi Nicholson
Dr. Kelli Johnson

Marshall University
May 2023

APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION

We, the faculty supervising the work of **Sabrina Thomas**, affirm that the dissertation, **Academic Library Leadership and Mental Health During the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis** meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the EdD Program in **Leadership Studies** and the College of Education and Professional Development. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

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Abstract

Prior to the pandemic academic library leadership faced a host of challenges, such as budget shortfalls, serials crisis, shifting and evolving technologies and patron expectations. These long-term obstacles were compounded by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic which required library deans and directors to implement ever evolving safety measures while balancing the needs of library employees, students, faculty, and staff. The mental health of academic librarians and staff has long been the subject of research; however, few studies focused on the mental health experiences of academic library deans and directors. The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis is to describe the experiences of academic library deans and directors through the early months of the pandemic and to utilize those data to help library leadership manage their own mental health while assisting their employees' well-being during future crises.

Chapter One: Introduction

Cascading hardships over an extended period can be more than endured; they can be opportunities to learn, grow, and prepare for the future. The global pandemic COVID-19 presented academic librarians and workers with multiple challenges, including the shift to an online format, new and ever-changing safety practices, and draconian budget cuts (Dixon, 2020; Fernando & Jayasekara, 2020; Louderback, 2021). Library deans and directors faced particularly daunting issues, such as balancing the competing demands of workers, students, faculty, and staff, while staying true to maintaining their mission. Considering the scope of this emergency, it is clearly important to study the effects that this crisis had on library deans and directors. The purpose of this dissertation is to describe the experiences of academic library deans and directors through the first 12 months of the pandemic. Specifically, this research explores how these deans and directors supported the mental health and well-being of their employees, how their own mental health and well-being were affected and managed, and their perceptions of how they balanced their duties with that of their employees' mental health.

Academic libraries function within higher education as either a student support unit, in which the most senior leader is referred to as a director, or as an academic affairs unit, in which the title of dean is used (Fagan, 2012). While these two terms might be used interchangeably by a layperson, the target audience of this dissertation will both understand and appreciate the difference. Academic libraries have utilized a staffing model that has often encompassed large numbers of professional staff, student workers, and often librarians who hold faculty status, yet who may or may not be in tenured positions (Fagan, 2012). Library deans and directors are responsible for more than the mission of the library; they also oversee the implementation of the library's resources to ensure that its services align with the overall mission of the university that

it serves (Harland et al., 2017; Wheeler & Holmes, 2017). Ultimately, the overarching mission of academic libraries is to support and facilitate the educational and research goals of their parent institution (Evans & Schonfeld, 2020).

Well before the pandemic, library leadership oversaw rapid and constant change due to the adaptation and evolution of information technology, dwindling budgets, and the rising costs of print periodicals and research databases (Ashiq et al., 2021). These challenges compounded with the advent of COVID-19 because library deans' and directors' responsibilities shifted to include strategies for responding to the health, safety, and security of library employees, students, faculty, and community members (Louderback, 2021). While the evolution of libraries over the decades along with related mental health challenges, such as burnout among academic librarians, is well documented (Christian, 2015; Kane, 2018; Matteson et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2020), the emotional well-being of library leadership is not specifically addressed in the existing research. This study explored how senior library leadership perceived the mental states of both themselves and their library workers during the pandemic while maintaining day-to-day operations during multiple crises.

Background

Prior research in mental health within academic libraries revealed several key areas worth exploring. Before the pandemic, stress and burnout were among the top areas of concern among academic librarians and staff members (Lowe & Reno, 2017; Nardine, 2019; Salyers et al., 2019). Among these sources, the evolution and expansion of leadership traits confirmed opportunities for those in leadership to respond more assertively to mental health and wellness among library workers and for themselves. The foundation of this study was established from

these sources. Studies centering on the exacerbation of pre-existing problems within academic libraries led to the final category of expansion of leadership opportunities.

Academic librarians and other personnel experienced substantial stress due to unexpected and swift changes early in the pandemic (Dixon, 2020; Fernando & Jayasekera, 2020; Louderback, 2021). The techniques library deans and directors adopted to manage their mental health and safety and that of their employees during the pandemic were a primary focus of this investigation. In previous studies, burnout and stress were linked to library employees' workload requirements, lack of control, and ill-defined work requirements (Christian, 2015; Geary & Hickey, 2019; McHone-Chase, 2020; Nardine, 2019; Salyers et al., 2019).

From the pandemic's onset, however, case studies about the mental health of library employees revolved around how employees prioritized the safety of their library users and themselves while continuing to provide the same level of services despite the enormous shift in how libraries functioned in the day-to-day (Fernando & Jayasekera, 2020; Garner & Logue, 2020; Louderback, 2021). Case studies were common when reviewing publications on academic libraries and COVID-19 due in part to the enormity of the pandemic crisis and the need for librarians to share what they were doing in response to the emergency. These case studies noted the practical aspects of rapidly shifting the bulk of library resources, services, and employees to a more online environment as quickly as possible (Garner & Logue, 2020; Louderback, 2021; Fernando & Jayasekera, 2020). A common theme throughout these case studies included the balancing of safety concerns with the libraries' mission of supporting research for faculty and students. For example, published in the first summer of the pandemic, Fernando and Jayasekera (2020) provided safety procedures for a "post-pandemic" academic library reopening by keeping

the workplace clean and healthy and forming a pandemic prevention team for the library (Fernando & Jayasekera, 2020).

Published one month after Fernando and Jayasekera's case study, Dixon's University of Connecticut study intended to frame all decisions around principles and priorities that included the safety, health, and well-being of everyone in their libraries during the pandemic (2020).

Although the bulk of the studies acknowledged health and well-being as priorities, they did not directly address mental health (Dixon, 2020; Louderback, 2021; Fernando & Jayasekera, 2020).

Notable exceptions included a quantitative survey by Salvesen and Berg (2021) that focused on the experiences and emotions of academic librarians during the pandemic. With both open-ended and closed-ended survey questions, the authors sought the narrative experiences of academic librarians during the pandemic and their conclusions were stark, reporting that academic librarians felt, "overworked, overwhelmed, and underappreciated while also fearing for their health and their jobs" (p. 5).

Garner and Logue's case study on the management of access services included the emotional health of academic librarians while managing their rapidly shifting work responsibilities during the pandemic (2020). This case study noted the stress due to uncertainty, rapid change, and the constant evolution of safety concerns that occurred during the pandemic (2020). Additionally, Garner and Logue (2020) included strategies for coping with stress at work during the pandemic, noting that those in leadership need to take personal time to both process what was happening as a result of COVID and to take care of their own mental health. Further, when leadership held regular virtual meetings and specifically acknowledged the enormity of the situation and stress facing employees, this helped employees feel seen and reduced work-related mental health problems experienced by the employees.

Stressors on librarians and library workers were compounded because of the pandemic; however, these hardships affected librarians and library workers at varying rates (Todorinova, 2021). Library administrators oversaw a shift in policies and procedures, while at the same time adopting ever-evolving safety processes. Yet, no current studies explore exclusively the mental health of library deans and directors and their perceived management of their employees' mental well-being during the pandemic, even though mounting evidence does indicate that expectations were expanded to include a deeper understanding and support of holistic well-being (Mohr et al., 2021). This study explored the extent to which library deans and directors perceived the need to mitigate employee stressors while managing their own mental health during the evolving crisis. Understanding library leaders' experiences is fundamental to helping library leaders assist employees' mental health and wellness needs in potential future crises.

Stress and Burnout

Bodies of research detailed stress and burnout experienced prior to the pandemic among librarians. One of the earliest studies published on low morale and burnout within academic librarianship noted the health issues tied to stress (Smith & Nelson, 1983). Subsequent literature varied on burnout predictors. One study by Smith, Bazalar, & Wheeler (2020) posited excessive workload as a common cause of burnout while another publication indicated the lack of clarity within job duties (Salyers et al; 2019). Nardine's study (2019) argued the root cause of burnout within academic libraries was the lack of personal agency. Understanding the stressors prior to the pandemic is essential because subsequent literature published during and after the pandemic demonstrates that these themes (i.e., excessive workload, a lack of clarity in job duties, and a lack of personal agency) worsened due to COVID-19 (Dixon, 2020; Fernando & Jayasekara, 2020; Louderback, 2021). The literature published during the pandemic included case studies

and conceptual papers that focused on policies and procedures, as well as quantitative studies on libraries' responses to COVID-19 (Garner & Logue, 2020; Kasa & Yusuf, 2020; Mazure et al., 2021). A thread running throughout each of these publications was the mental health of the librarians, with a few, such as Salvesen and Berg, providing quantitative snapshots of the mental health of academic librarians (2021).

Exacerbation of Pre-Existing Problems

Todorinova's survey investigated the effects of the pandemic on public service librarians, supervisors, deans, and directors and found that the pandemic had intensified preexisting problems to a "critical state" and that not all workers were affected by the stress of the pandemic equally (2021). Much of the literature published on library leadership during the pandemic highlighted perceptions of the exigencies that the crisis created (Erickson, 2021; Martin, 2020; Welsh et al., 2021). Overall, studies demonstrate that the pandemic exacerbated preexisting problems of budget shortfalls and limited staffing as it added new stressors, such as keeping up with evolved safety protocols (Todorinova, 2021; Welsh et al., 2021).

Expanded Leadership Expectations

The investigation of the emotional well-being of library deans and directors, as well as how they supported their library workers' mental health, was vital to the overall functioning of libraries. Multiple studies demonstrated that supervisors at all levels were key to workplace mental health, both prior to and during the pandemic. In multiple studies, the focus was on improving employee well-being and effectiveness, which the authors tied to supervisor actions or inactions (Adams et al., 2021; Bovopoulos et al., 2016; Kirsh et al., 2018; Mohr et al., 2021; Warszewska-Makuch et al., 2015).

The level of emotional support from supervisors and colleagues and the improved mental health and well-being of employees were significantly correlated based on the odds ratio of a multivariable self-reported survey (Oh, et al., 2021). Skills, such as educating leadership on how to support employee mental health, were important specifically because supervisors played such a large role in stress management within organizations (Bovopoulos et al., 2016; Czeisler et al., 2020; Tsutsumi et al., 2005) and played a crucial role in the development of workplace culture on mental health. Therefore, the development of training, policies, and procedures encouraging emotional well-being within an organization were directly under the purview of academic library deans and directors. By lessening challenges, library deans and directors might foster mental health in their library workers while maintaining their own mental health. The intent of this study was to explore the experiences of library deans and directors during the pandemic to find opportunities to prepare for future crises. Researchers must first understand the lived experiences of library deans and directors in order to help library leadership better manage the mental and emotional wellness of librarians and staff.

Research Problem

Library leaders' and employees' mental health and well-being faced multiple, proliferating obstacles because of the initial COVID-19 emergency. These hardships in addition to preexisting stresses compounded as the pandemic-related challenges evolved over time. Three examples included financial insecurity, rapid changes in work life, and a general sense of uncertainty, all of which led to increased mental health and wellness difficulties. Additionally, the pandemic placed new financial austerity on libraries, with the result that many experienced funding reductions within the 2020/2021 academic year (Frederick & Wolff-Eisenburg, 2020). These cuts occurred when librarians rushed the rollouts of new services, ultimately creating rapid

change and uncertainty as well as health and financial concerns that negatively affected the mental health of the library workers (Garner & Logue, 2020; Salvesen & Berg, 2021).

This study was vital because mental health and wellness have long been connected to organizational health and productivity, including within libraries (Birnbaum et al., 2010; Coralane et al., 2017; Martin et al., 1996; Ping & Pang, 2020). As of June 2020, a nationally representative survey of the general population found that 40.9% of 5,412 people in the U.S. reported having experienced adverse mental or behavioral health symptoms. These included anxiety-based or depressive disorders (30.9%); trauma- and stressor-related disorders (TSRD) attributed to COVID-19 (26.3%); the start of and/or increased substance abuse (e.g., alcohol, legal or illegal drug, or prescription drugs taken in a way not recommended by a doctor) to cope with stress or emotions related to COVID-19 (13.3%); and having seriously considered suicide (10.7%) (Czeisler et al., 2020). Moreover, due to the pandemic crisis ripple effect, academic library deans and directors faced unprecedented hardships that exacerbated preexisting stressors. The multiple and evolving challenges these leaders managed included shifting resources, services, and workers online during dire health and financial insecurity (Dixon, 2020; Louderback, 2021; Newman, 2021; Risley, 2020). How library leaders supported their employees' mental health during these often-competing problems while preserving their own mental health was explored in this study. The ongoing pandemic demonstrated that prolonged global crises are possible; hence, exploring how library deans and directors experienced the multifaceted mental health challenges within their leadership position may prove vital to future leaders.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of academic library deans and directors through the early months of the pandemic and to utilize those data to help library leadership manage their own mental health while assisting their employees' well-being during future crises. To do this, library deans and directors explored their own mental health, their perceptions of their library workers' mental well-being, and their reflections on their actions, if any, to alleviate library workers' stress. This study explored if library deans and directors perceived that they performed effectively, and reveal potential themes of perseverance despite multiple challenges, including frequently changing and indeed conflicting directives from health agencies, inconsistent support from university administrators, and concerns about the physical and mental well-being of library workers. Other topics included listing obstacles to successfully supporting library workers' emotional health and well-being. Through a series of semi-structured questions in open-ended interviews of library deans' and directors' emerging themes were explored.

Research Questions

To examine library deans' and directors' experiences of mental health and well-being support of librarians and library workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and their perceptions of that assistance, the following research questions guided the execution of this study.

RQ1: What kinds of mental health challenges did deans and directors perceive that they personally experienced during the pandemic, if any?

RQ2: What kinds of mental health challenges did deans and directors perceive their employees experienced during the pandemic, if any?

RQ3: In what ways, if any, did deans and directors feel they were successful or unsuccessful in helping their employees alleviate stress?

RQ4: To what extent did the mitigation of library employees' stress increase the library deans' and directors' stress?

Participant Selection

To date, the literature has not agreed on a set sample size for phenomenological studies. The goal for this study, however, was a minimum of three or more participants; in accordance with Smith et al., this is an acceptable sample size for an Interpretive Phenomenological Project (2009). Due to time constraints, the goal of this study was to interview no more than ten academic library deans and directors.

Within phenomenological studies, the sample must be homogeneous, for as Creswell (2007) observes, "The more diverse the characteristics of the individuals, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to find common experiences, themes, and the overall essence of the experience for all participants" (p. 153). To obtain a homogeneous sample that ensures each participant experienced the phenomenon, only public university deans and directors active in their leadership positions during the initial year of the pandemic were asked to join the study. Because this was a large sample to choose, selection will be refined to include one participant from each of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) geographic locations within the United States, and representatives from Carnegie Classification of Research 1 and Research 2 institutions were used. Using purposeful sampling, the deans and directors who met the criteria were identified through referral or snowball sampling, and their email addresses collected from publicly available library directories. Within phenomenology, appropriate samples must be selected because this type of research project provided insight into a particular experience; therefore, standard probability methods are inappropriate (Smith et al., 2009). After a careful explanation of the study as part of an IRB-approved approach, those deans and directors

who were willing to participate were interviewed. Due to time constraints, no more than ten sample participants were interviewed. After the sample was refined, interviews were set and informed verbal consent was obtained at the beginning of each meeting.

Data Collection and Analysis

Individual interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams for three main reasons. First, this software allowed for meetings and transcriptions to be recorded, and second, it permitted for interviewers and interviewees to be seen; hence, body language and visual cues could be interpreted, thereby enriching the meaning of interviewees' words (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Finally, Teams enabled interviews without the cost of travel. Demographic information was gathered after verbal consent was authorized, followed by semi-structured interview questions. Each of these interviews were recorded and transcribed within Microsoft Teams and saved within a secure database. The Otter AI application was used as a backup to Microsoft Teams for two reasons: to check for irregularities in the Microsoft Teams Transcript and to function as a backup should the Teams file become corrupted.

Each interview was bracketed and summarized per LeVasseur's (2003) suggestion that bracketing is a technique that "attempt[s] to hold prior knowledge or belief about the phenomenon under study in suspension in order to perceive it more clearly" (p. 409). Bracketing prior to interviews was also vital because, as Tufford and Newman explain, cumulative effects of emotionally challenging material over time can skew results and interpretations, but bracketing helps alleviate this problem (2012). To further increase the validity of this study, participants were given an opportunity to review and validate the summaries of their interviews. Through coding and brackets, larger themes were noted, then shared with participants to review and validate.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were largely those inherent in all qualitative research. The quality of the research was heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and may be easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Likewise, the researcher's presence during interviews, which can affect participants' responses, was unavoidable in qualitative research design (Anderson, 2010). Further, issues of anonymity and confidentiality may be problematic, and as Althubaiti notes, data collection may be influenced by recollection bias and/or the inclination of participants to provide socially desirable answers (2016). This is particularly true if the research topic is of a potentially sensitive nature or participants feel their behavior, choices, and beliefs are under scrutiny. The final limitation was the lack of representation, given the necessity of the small sample size.

Significance

The body of research prior to the pandemic concerned itself primarily with the inherent stress and burnout associated with academic librarianship in general (Heady et al., 2020; Nardine, 2019; Shupe et al., 2015). Recent publications have indicated that the pandemic exacerbated those stresses within librarianship, causing mental health and wellness concerns (Heady et al., 2020; Salvesen & Berg, 2021; Todorinova, 2021). While research dealing with the pandemic's effects on academic libraries has continued to be published, it was predominantly focused on the management of the myriad of challenges that came with continuing to support research services and maintain safety. Thus far, there are no studies focusing on the mental health and well-being of academic library deans and directors during the pandemic. This phenomenological study will add to the literature on the mental health of library leaders, how

administrators perceived the stressors on their library employees, and to what extent those hardships affected deans' and directors' mental health.

While at least one survey during the pandemic demonstrated that the presence of administrators who practice providing emotional support to their employees generally leads to perceptions of a safe and welcoming environment (Adams et al., 2021), the literature has been less forthcoming on the effect of the novel virus specifically on the library deans and directors struggling to support a frightened population of workers. Adding to the body of literature on library leadership during the pandemic, this study investigated the experiences of library deans and directors during the pandemic to note which issues that were potentially most detrimental to their own mental health while supporting the well-being of their library employees. To date, there are no previous qualitative studies on the mental health of academic library deans and directors during a global crisis. By exploring the lived experience of library deans and directors through the pandemic themes for future research, potential best practices were ascertained for the future academic leader.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter is a review of literature on the mental health experiences of academic library deans and directors during the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, challenges faced by academic libraries and leadership within libraries were well documented in systematic reviews (Ashiq et al., 2021; Delaney & Bates, 2015). Numerous case studies were published that explored the ways in which academic libraries could meet these challenges, creating innovative ways to continue the mission of libraries (Vandale & Minchew, 2014; Virgil, 2013; Walker & Keenan, 2018). Discussions on mental health and burnout in academic librarianship began in the early 1980s and continued with several empirical studies published before the pandemic (Chambers, 1980; Hatfield, 1986; Kendrick, 2017; Rathbun-Grubb, 2009). The pandemic compounded the problems that academic libraries faced (Kasa & Yusuf, 2020) while new and ever-evolving obstacles arose over time (Ayeni et al., 2021).

Leadership and Mental Health

Various psychological studies, including a systematic review, indicated that leadership could improve the mental health and well-being of employees (Bovopoulos et al., 2016; Coralane et al., 2017; Mohr et al., 2021). Despite this, much of the focus of library leadership research centered on case studies (Holland, 2021; Newman, 2021) that do not directly address the mental health. To date, no articles have explored the complex mental health experiences of library deans and directors during the pandemic nor their perceptions of the mental health and wellness of their library workers. There are examples of researchers who explored leadership characteristics that emphasized emotional intelligence as a key factor in crises (Bell, 2019; Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Martin, 2020) and investigated the characteristics that leadership must demonstrate. Nevertheless, a clear gap still exists in the literature on the lived experiences of

leaders, particularly in relation to their mental health and their perceptions of the mental health of their library employees.

The existing literature was collected by a search of Marshall University's subscription databases and the open internet. Key terms utilized included: Academic Library Director Deans and Directors, Leadership, Mental Health, Pandemic, COVID-19, and Burnout. These terms were searched in multiple databases with a focus on peer-reviewed articles, books, and dissertations. The list of databases and aggregators used included EBSCO, ProQuest, Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA), Library Science Database, and ERIC. The search terms were used to create a timeline of challenges and changes that took place in libraries prior to the pandemic, to examine the scholarship surrounding library leadership and to consider the state of mental health of library workers as a whole. The focus then shifted to finding articles on how library workers fared during the pandemic, and on the mental health of library leadership and workers throughout the crisis. This literature review aims, first, to summarize the current literature as it relates to this study's topic and, second, to demonstrate the need to study the lived experiences of academic library leadership's mental health experiences during the pandemic.

Academic Libraries Prior to the Pandemic

The topic of academic library challenges prior to the pandemic was extensively discussed in scholarly literature. These challenges occurred due to ever-evolving information and media technology beginning in the mid-1970s (Virgil, 2013). These challenges reflected changes to scholarly communication which directly impact libraries' collections and ultimately their processes for maintaining collections (Bullis & Smith, 2011; Virgil, 2013).

Virgil's dissertation analyzed the differences in media use in academic libraries between 1975-2012 as they related to educational issues (2013) by documenting the changes and subsequent challenges of academic libraries. Within this document analysis, Virgil demonstrated that every aspect of librarianship experienced continuous shifts due to technological advances, and concluded, in part, that academic libraries would continue to adapt as the needs of the students and university shift due to emerging technology (2013). Some of these "shifts" as Virgil described them were not sustainable. Using document delivery as either a supplement or replacement for serial subscriptions, Murphey and Buckley reported on the complexities and expenses that change in technology produced for the process of scholarly communication (2018). The researchers noted that between 2013 and 2018 serial pricing increased by an average of 6% and was particularly high for peer-reviewed science journals, while most academic library budgets have not increased enough to cover these costs (Murphy & Buckley, 2018). The increased cost of subscriptions was one specific example of technological changes that directly threatened the mission of academic libraries to provide access to scholarly articles.

Broader overviews of these challenges other than Murphy and Buckley's study were reported in Bullis and Smith's systematic review of collection development and management literature from 2004 to 2008. Themes of stagnant budgets and tension over the near constant technological change were echoed in both qualitative and quantitative studies published in the decade prior to the pandemic. Examples of these themes were included in Le's survey of library leadership challenges facing academic libraries (2015) and case studies (Michalak, 2012; Walker & Keenan, 2018). This survey indicated that two large stressors for academic libraries included flatlining or declining budgets and near constant technological change.

Bullis and Smith found that these challenges were reported in earlier systematic reviews, such as Phillips and Williams's (2004) literature review covering 1997-2003. Specifically, the researchers noted an increased demand for both electronic and print titles which resulted in an increased demand on budgets with continued concern about collection sustainability, particularly with Open Access and serial bundling (Bullis & Smith, 2011; Phillips & Williams, 2004). Phillips and Williams concluded their literature review with several questions about the future with much uncertainty. Ultimately, Bullis and Smith concluded from their systematic literature review that the reevaluation, and even the redefinition of collection management responsibilities, was a clear theme in the literature due to an uncertain and ever-evolving digital age (2011). Uncertainty prevailed and the deep reevaluation of processes due to technological change, combined with budget shortfalls, limited academic libraries services and holdings, which ultimately affected their leaders, and their employees' ability to carrying out their mission. Neither the Bullis and Smith or Phillips and Williams research discussed the implications of these challenges on library workers.

There were examples of how library leadership responded to some of these challenges. Le's survey investigated library leadership's perspectives on major issues that faced academic libraries, the skills needed by leaders to meet those obstacles, and the development of those skills (2015). Le noted the top five challenges facing academic library leaders. These included explaining and conveying the role of the library's worth, while faced with shrinking budgets in outdated facilities, and building the libraries' virtual presence while maintaining the physical collections (Le, 2015). Further challenges discussed reflect how the evolution of technology required staffing to remain flexible and open to change due to ever shifting demands. This study did not include an exploration of the ways in which library leadership intended to encourage

their staff to maintain flexibility and openness to change in near continuous technological change. It is important to note that respondents in the survey list embraced continuous change. Le ultimately concluded that due to shrinking and/or flatlined budgets, outdated physical spaces, and the high cost of material collection and storage that libraries effectively felt the burden of an “existential crisis” (2015). Le labeled these challenges as such in order to point to the need to understand the ramifications of this reality on library leadership and library workers.

Much of the published literature on the challenges facing academic libraries, prior to the pandemic, were case studies. These studies offered more detail into how librarians, staff, and leadership identified rising problems and the creative ways in which those challenges were met or mitigated. Two case studies, one from the Mansfield Library, at the University of Montana and the other from the Wyndham Robertson Library, demonstrated how libraries who experienced similar budget constraints and technological challenges attempted to meet the challenges by utilizing two different methods.

First, Walker and Keenan’s case study of the Mansfield Library illustrated how researchers used new methods to restructure the workflow to include volunteers and staff to continue expanding and organizing their repositories (2018). Walker and Keenan’s central claim was that there were benefits and challenges to using volunteers to mitigate the loss of staffing due to budget shortfalls (2018). Libraries whose budgets needed to pay more to keep up with the evolution of technology could choose to replace employees with volunteers. While the use of volunteers ensured that progress continued, training and maintaining these volunteers placed an added burden on librarians and staff while simultaneously devaluing the full-time library workers (Walker & Keenan, 2018). Ultimately, Walker and Keenan’s case study concluded that remaining adaptable and open to opportunities, despite enormous challenges, meant scaled-back

operations and the use of volunteers (2018). Walker and Keenan made no reference to the overall mental health and well-being that such working conditions manifested, despite the fact that the author noted the devaluation of full-time library workers.

In similar fashion to Walker and Keenan's case study, Vandale and Minchew's work centered on the re-framing of challenges as positives and finding solutions to move forward. Finding of opportunity through adversity was the theme for the study on the Wyndham Robertson Library. Cuts to the collection budget spurred the small staff to review print periodical usage, review existing collection management policies, and rethink the library's physical space simultaneously (2014). With a small staff, replacing workers with volunteers was problematic. To save money, the researchers embarked upon a large project where they surveyed which print periodicals were used the heaviest and tracked which print journals were used throughout February-May 2012-2013. As predicted, print journal usage was low with the exceptions of some poetry and literary journals, as well as prominent newspapers (Vandale & Minchew, 2014). Within this case study, the researchers noted that librarians contacted university faculty directly to explain the budget shortfall and subsequent periodical print cancellations. This encouraged faculty to list resources that were no longer needed. Vandale and Minchew concluded that these efforts saved \$40,000 from the library's budget through the careful cancellation of print journals. In turn, this allowed for increased reading room space for students and an opportunity to subscribe to more electronic databases (2014). Day and Davis noted that serials reviews and reduction were not a novel approach, particularly since the Great Recession had placed greater hardship on academic libraries' budgets and subsequently their workforce (2009). Day and Davis discussed the hard conversations that librarians must have with university colleagues on what to keep and what to eliminate due to economic hardship (2009).

Even when an academic library was financially supported, technological changes increased users' needs and expectations, requiring librarians and staff to still undertake massive change. For example, Michalak's case study highlighted the change in expectations of library users, both faculty and students, due to various technological advancements (2012). Michalak analyzed five characteristics of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries after a significant reorganization reflected an ever-evolving academic library. These five characteristics were described as outward-faced, de-siloed, technology diffused, collaborative, and staff empowered (Michalak, 2012). Notably, this reorganization occurred after the library received significantly more funding, but the changes occurred to reflect the shifted expectations of library users due to, "...networked technologies, powerful search engines available to all, social technologies, and the digitization of everything" (Michalak, 2012, p. 413). Prior to the pandemic, academic libraries were rethinking, reinventing, and rebranding their collections and physical spaces. This was primarily due to rapid and constant technological advances. They did so while they worked to remain true to the mission of providing library users with access to research.

Burnout and Low Morale Within Academic Libraries

The published literature about the state of libraries prior to the pandemic illustrated that library workers and leaders grappled with challenges that included continuous advancements in technology, stagnated budgets, rising costs of serials, evolving expectations of library users, and antiquated and shifted library space. The mental health and burnout of library workers who worked through these challenges were chronicled in numerous studies (Christian, 2015; Geary & Hickey, 2019; Kendrick, 2017; Rathbun-Grubb, 2009). However, research studies noted gaps in the literature regarding academic library administration burnout and their perception of their own mental health (Christian, 2015; Corrado, 2022; Wood et al, 2020). Academic library leadership's

relationship to burnout, and their perception of burnout, were vital to understanding; as scholarly literature suggested that administration had a direct effect on the components that made up the overall wellness of library employees (Wood et al., 2020).

Literature about burnout in academic librarianship began in the 1980s and stretched up until this current year. The first mention of burnout was a short article published in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* and focused on the exhaustion of instruction librarians (Chambers, 1980). More recently, Corrado noted this year that there was no easy fix to the demoralization and burnout experienced by librarians, especially due to the pandemic (2022). After a review of the extensive literature published on librarians' burnout prior to the pandemic, Corrado provided evidence of a protracted issue that was only exacerbated by the pandemic. Corrado was not alone in this conclusion. An investigation that focused mainly on library support of the mental health and well-being of students during the pandemic also surveyed the mental well-being of library workers (Brewster & Cox, 2022). The survey noted the increased role that librarians were taking in supporting the mental health of students during the pandemic, such as waiving fines, changing borrowing policies, and increasing material support for the mental health of students. Library workers' own mental health suffered and yet they felt responsible for the mental health of students (Brewster & Cox, 2022).

Corrado asserted that based on the published literature, many of the factors that led to librarian burnout occurred outside of the library leadership's control (2022). Corrado offered several steps to improve the emotional and mental well-being of library workers (2022). This was a stark contrast to Wood who noted that factors directly related to morale and burnout were directly under the purview of library administration including the overall culture of the library (Wood et al., 2020). Wood noted, "Gender disparities, work-life imbalance, differences in

generational expectations of work culture, and the unrelenting pace of change in academic libraries may be the contributing factors to work-related burnout syndrome” (Wood et al., 2020, p. 528). The perceptions of what mental health and well-being factors were controllable by library leadership were not fully understood because of the gap in the literature.

Multiple researchers including Wood, Christian, and Corrado noted the gap in the literature on burnout regarding library administration. However, Corrado’s literature review centered on proven ways that other organizations increased morale, including transparent communication, public recognition of workers, giving library workers flexibility, prioritizing library workers’ well-being through limiting overwhelming responsibilities, and encouraging collaboration in decision making (Corrado, 2022). These assertions were based on the findings within the literature review. Other findings to improve morale included empathetically encouraging and modeling a sustainable balance between work and life while helping to encourage and advance library workers’ careers. These were all important in the creation of a culture where burnout and low morale are lessened (Corrado, 2022). While Corrado’s conclusions were supported by evidence from other scholarly fields, like psychology, there was no mention of library administrations’ perceptions of their own mental health during the pandemic.

With little focus on academic library leaders’ own experiences, the bulk of burnout-related literature focused on librarians and library workers. Of those articles, the burnout focus was on instruction librarians, rather than technical services positions or managers and library administration (Lowe & Reno, 2017). Further, the authors noted that research published about the emotional well-being of library administration was grossly limited. However, library leadership was noted for *causing* stress as well as ignoring stress and burnout in libraries (2017).

Conclusions in this study argued that there were gaps in the research concerning burnout and academic librarianship across varying types of librarians and library administration. Furthermore, there was a gap in the literature on library leaderships' perspectives on their own stress and burnout (2017).

Bartlett was one example where the authors focused solely on librarian and library worker burnout, ignoring library administration (2018). The author listed multiple published articles defining and describing the topic and noted that it was not just the changing nature of librarianship, budget cuts, and increased workload, but the position within the helping professions that ultimately made librarians susceptible to burnout (Bartlett, 2018). Corrado and Bartlett agreed that the causes of burnout in librarians were complex. Wood went a step further and argued that the causes were complex and not uniformly felt (Bartlett, 2018; Corrado, 2022; Wood et al., 2020). Librarianship and library work was not uniform, but researchers, such as Corrado and Bartlett, noted some threads throughout the profession that could lead to burnout.

Matteson, Chittock, and Mease seem to agree with Bartlett that the nature of the work as a "helping profession" carries "emotional labor" (Bartlett, 2018; Corrado, 2022; Matteson et al., 2015). Researchers' conclusions of what caused burnout were complex, with varied differences in root causes. The prevention of burnout, according to Bartlett, involved emotional intelligence and the providing of library employees with shared decision-making and learning opportunities to mitigate the phenomenon (2018).

Two qualitative research articles were published on academic library burnout and proved insightful. First, Matteson, Chittock, and Mease investigated the emotional labor of academic librarians through an exploration of journals that twenty-three librarians wrote over five days. Second, Kendrick conducted a phenomenological study of 20 participants and investigated the

low morale of academic librarians. These two studies' conclusions overlapped, which provided insight into the power of library leadership on the mental health and well-being of their library workers.

For example, the conclusions of the Matteson study found that most emotional labor occurred when librarians interacted with library users, colleagues, or supervisors, and that library managers mitigated some emotional labor through the creation of a climate where employees were encouraged to use deep acting techniques, show authentic emotions, and employ mindfulness techniques (2015). Kendrick concluded that academic librarians who experienced low morale often feel it due to long-term abuse including emotional, verbal, written, and negligent abuse perpetuated by library leaders and/or other campus administrators. Recommendations from this study included library education and professional development of ethics, leadership, and mentoring skills (Kendrick, 2017).

Burnout was an important topic to study because of its relationship to turnover within the profession. Two examples of research studies focused on factors that contributed to turnover more than dissatisfaction over salary. Rathbun-Grubb's dissertation on the determinants and consequences of occupational turnover in librarianship sought to understand why librarians and archivists left the profession for reasons other than retirement (2009). This mixed methods study concluded that career satisfaction and professional identity were not determinants of organizational turnover within librarianship or archivists. Rather, the researchers found that most were satisfied with the profession as a whole. Lack of job satisfaction, strained relationships with colleagues, low salaries, and a dearth of career opportunities were listed as reasons for turnover (Rathbun-Grubb, 2009). A later study on library turnover agreed that career satisfaction and salary were not main contributors to library turnover. In their mixed method study, Heady, Fyn,

Foster-Kaufman, Hosier, and Weber investigated the factors that contributed to academic librarians leaving their academic institutions within a five-year period. The leading factor that contributed to turnover was dissatisfaction with aspects related to their work environment (2020). Lesser factors included unsatisfactory compensations, lack of benefits, little variety in job duties, or other personal factors (Heady et al., 2020). Specifically, the survey results suggested that low morale, a culture of criticism, and poor leadership from administration and direct supervisors were some of the top factors for librarian turnover (Heady et al., 2020).

In both studies, library administration controlled some of the factors that contributed to library turnover. Previous studies on burnout argued that library leadership directly affected burnout and was common among library workers (Corrado, 2022; Kendrick, 2017; Wood et al., 2020). The studies on academic library turnover and burnout suggested that library deans and directors had a clear influence on library workers' mental health and well-being. Therefore, the study worked to explore the experiences of academic library deans and directors through the initial months of the pandemic, specifically how they managed the mental health and well-being of their library workers and themselves, and library leadership's perceptions of that management.

Academic Library Challenges During the Pandemic

After a review of the literature on academic library challenges during the pandemic, one could note that virtually all libraries and librarians were affected by the crisis. However, these challenges were not uniformly felt. The type of academic library, geographic location, type of library worker, and race were just a few of the differences in libraries that affected how challenges of the pandemic were met (Peet, 2020; Todorinova, 2021). Specifically, Frederick and Wolff-Eisenberg noted that non-unionized staff and student workers felt the brunt of personnel reductions within academic libraries (2020). Todorinova's conclusions echoed the findings of

Frederick and Wolff-Eisenberg and noted that the financial challenges were not directly felt by professional librarians who were majority white, but by the more diverse paraprofessionals who experienced the most layoffs and furloughs (Todorinova, 2021). While the effects of the pandemic were not felt uniformly across library workers, every academic library faced a protracted crisis that included not just health and safety, but deep financial burdens as well (Martzoukou, 2021). Uncertainty due to evolved safety guidelines and the stresses of maintaining library services while implementing health guidelines were all challenges to academic libraries during the pandemic (Fernando & Jayasekera, 2020). To what degree academic libraries enacted safety measures was not uniform. For example, academic libraries with Republican governors used fewer safety precautions than those with Democratic governors (Heady et al., 2021).

These challenges affected the mental health of library workers. In Salvesen and Berg's mixed method study on the emotional effect of the academic librarians during the pandemic, the authors surveyed New Jersey librarians and investigated their perceptions, which included how they coped (2021). Many of the respondents reported feeling overworked, overwhelmed, and underappreciated, while also fearing for their health and their jobs (Salvesen & Berg, 2021, p. 5). This survey was similar to Todorinova's report, which argued that communication and productivity suffered because of the pandemic, with respondents who were library administrators noting that though they were in positions of leadership, they still felt excluded from the decision-making process within the library (Salvesen & Berg, 2021).

In Garner and Logue's case study about access services within the Henderson Library at Georgia Southern University, gave insight into both the challenges and emotional toll that the pandemic created within academic libraries. Within it, Garner and Logue noted that varied challenges required rapid implementation of new procedures and policies while remaining

dedicated to the safety of library workers (2020). These new procedures and processes were more difficult to create during the initial months of the pandemic, as documented in Rand and Shepard's case study, which reported on the experience of their main library in which numerous technological challenges, including divisions within the library of workers who used cloud-based storage versus hardware and desktop computing, were addressed (2020). The authors noted that simple communications became difficult for those accustomed to using Google Docs for projects versus those who only used Microsoft Word. The library did not initially have one specific communication technology for interlibrary communications; some library workers, for instance, used varying chat software (Rand & Shepard, 2020). The pandemic exposed other differences due to telecommuting. For example, not all library workers owned home computers, smart devices, phones, or reliable internet service that they could utilize for work (Rand & Shepard, 2020). The initial push for new learning in the pandemic focused on equipping and training library workers with new technologies (Rand & Shepard, 2020). In Martzoukou's conceptual paper based on the author's experiences as a Library and Information Science educator, the pandemic revealed a drastic shift in acceptance of technology within academic libraries due to the logistical, operational, and bureaucratic challenges that existed prior to the pandemic that stymied technological acceptance (2021). Ultimately, Martzoukou argued that institutions that invested in adopting new technological infrastructures and training, and who developed successful online pedagogies prior to the pandemic, fared better than those that did not.

Technological differences were only one way in which the pandemic affected library workers unequally. Those librarians deemed essential workers continued to work within libraries. In Garner and Lougue's case study, access services returned to the library after the initial shutdown even while the rest of the university closed because they were considered

essential staff. Neither full nor partial re-openings of libraries were done uniformly over all academic libraries, nor were they completed with pre-pandemic staff levels (2020). One researcher, Dixon, offered a snapshot of reopening amongst furloughs and staffing shortages that varied according to the location with shifts to policies changing with the pandemic (2020). This case study underscored that the pandemic affected academic library workers differently, with the stresses being unevenly felt.

Overall, this continued flexibility centered on fulfilling the mission of libraries while prioritizing the health and safety of workers and library users. Ayeni, Agbaje, and Tipper conducted a systemic review to find out how libraries met the needs of their users during the pandemic (2021). The conclusions noted that all libraries worked diligently to provide remote digital access to their libraries' resources. Collaborations between libraries jumped due to increased demand for electronic resources. Virtual education and teaching support increased due to the pandemic as well. Librarians assisted teachers with tasks from uploading content to learning management systems. Despite the initial lockdown circulation, efforts have continued, but with creative safety measures added in, including scanning, inter-library loan, and the long-term lending of technology, such as laptops (Ayeni et al., 2021). As noted in the Brewster and Cox article, libraries across the spectrum have increased their efforts on mental health and well-being support services (2022). This systematic review was a vital snapshot of the published literature on the libraries and the pandemic.

Library Leadership During COVID-19

Research on how library leadership managed during the twin crises of the pandemic and subsequent financial catastrophe included numerous case studies. Holland wrote a case study on servant leadership that was adopted by the library management team (2021). The author noted a

list of principles essential to servant leadership and emphasized the importance of listening, empathy, awareness, healing, conceptualization, persuasion, and stewardship. Empathy was listed as particularly important during times of high stress (Holland, 2021). The author concluded that through the leadership team's adoption of servant leadership the library employees remained engaged, productive, and supportive of one another through the pandemic, despite multiple, ever-evolving challenges over the elongated crisis (Holland, 2021).

Another case study, written by Newman, was highly self-reflective while recounting the lessons learned throughout the pandemic, including both successes and failures (2021). Unlike other case studies, Newman highlighted the need for library leaders to act quickly while also prioritizing the safety of library workers and users (2021). As mentioned in other articles on academic librarianship during the pandemic, communication was key, particularly the honest communication of a crisis strategy that must constantly evolve to meet the unpredictable nature of the pandemic (Newman, 2021). As mentioned within Garner and Logue's case study, Newman's included leadership's increasing of virtual meetings, noting that communication was an absolute priority. Newman concluded that the pandemic provided an opportunity to increase the pace of change within academic libraries, highlighting the adaptability of academic libraries and leadership which must continue to develop the skills for building resilience within their library employees (2021). Notably, Newman also highlighted two items that could be contradictory, in that leadership must be both continuously truthful *and* positive. Was this balancing act a possibility during a global pandemic? If so, how did library leadership balance these seemingly conflicting requirements without burnout?

To date, few scholarly articles explored the lived experiences of library leadership, particularly library deans and directors throughout the pandemic. Case studies and conceptual

papers are rarely published anonymously or use pseudonyms. Since the positions of library dean or director have traditionally been highly visible, gathering the authentic views on the mental health of academic library leaders and their perceptions of the mental health of library workers might be easier through interviews using pseudonyms, thus encouraging more open discussion.

Library Leadership Traits

The leadership within academic libraries was well researched in scholarly literature. For several decades, academic libraries underwent rapid and continuous changes with a decline of resources that necessitated an investigation into the type of leadership needed to successfully propel and sustain libraries (Renaud & Murray, 2003). In Weiner's literature review of leadership in academic libraries, she attempted to synthesize the leadership styles of university librarians, academic library directors, and deans (2003). After reviewing the literature published on academic library leadership in the United States from 1980-2003, key authors were identified and analyzed. Weiner then concluded that effective leadership styles include collaborative skills, such as consensus building and consultations to take informed risks (Weiner, 2003). Personal traits of leadership included the ability to handle stress while being honest, comfortable with ambiguity, energetic, and intelligent. Weiner concluded that many aspects of library leadership had not been addressed in the literature at that point, including the effects of different leadership styles on employee productiveness and job satisfaction, which directly related to the mental health and well-being of library workers (2003).

A systematic literature review of academic library leadership occurred twenty years later when researchers investigated library leadership challenges that were reported in the literature and considered which major skills were necessary for success as a library leader. Noting the continued rapid change that academic libraries operated under, the literature review sought to

answer which library leadership development strategies were most important when the pace of technological evolution was considered (Ashiq et al., 2021). Conclusions mirrored Weiner's results in that the top challenges library leadership faced included continuous fast paced technological evolution coupled with deflated budgets. Interestingly, the conclusion that the researchers concluded as the biggest challenge to library leadership was human resources, in that library workers must also be adaptable to continuous change (Ashiq et al., 2021). The skills needed to meet these challenges included leadership that was effective in communication and collaboration, all while being innovative and visionary. Development of future library leaders came almost exclusively from professional development and the researchers established that the development of future leaders needed more attention, especially early to mid-career librarians (Ashiq et al., 2021).

Gilstrap's historiographical analysis of major leadership and organizational development theories in academic library leadership intended to reveal a strong theoretical framework based on previous scholarly research (2009). Due to the increased pace of technological change, Gilstrap proposed that because academic libraries were moving away from the traditional organizational dynamics of slow and linear transitions, it has become increasingly difficult to obtain a more complex understanding of library leadership (Gilstrap, 2009). By embracing academic libraries as complex organisms which required constant growth, academic library leadership must embrace an adaptive framework that encourages constant learning and engagement to meet each new challenge (Gilstrap, 2009).

Library leadership traits and challenges were well researched. However, which of these traits is most difficult to develop had not been well explored until Harris-Keith surveyed academic library directors and asked which skills are the most difficult to develop and which

library positions enabled the development of those skills (2016). A survey was conducted on 297 respondents, who identified five leadership skills that were the least likely to be developed. They included fundraising and donor relations, school safety issues, legal issues, compliance issues, and facilities planning (Harris-Keith, 2016). As for which position/s best prepared future library deans and directors to practice these skills were investigated, but none were identified. Harris-Keith then concluded that library leaders were left to learn on the job because they were critically unprepared for these aspects of leadership (2016). The stress of learning on the job was not explored in this publication.

It should be noted that during the pandemic, school safety, compliance, and facilities planning were all critical to decision making as seen from previous case studies. Wong explored academic librarians' understanding of leadership and the development of leadership within the library through a literature review which noted that scholarship on "leadership as headship" focused on succession planning or career progression and that professional development for leadership should be tailored to the specific type of role needed (2017). Library deans and directors lead complex, technologically driven organizations which require multiple skills that are not necessarily developed prior to obtaining their position. Few articles discussed the stress inherent in these positions and fewer discussed how library leaders mitigated the stress that is inherent within the positions.

Workplace Mental Health During the Pandemic

Workplace stress increased during the pandemic because workers were anxious over their physical and mental health and financial well-being (Adams et al., 2021). Leadership has had a direct effect on the emotional well-being of employees (Bovopoulos et al., 2016; Carolane, 2017; Mohr et al., 2021; Oh et al., 2021). Far less studied was the influence of a leader's mental health

on their leadership behaviors, with most scholarship focused on the effects of leadership on subordinates' well-being (Byrne et al., 2014). Leadership does not happen in a bubble; the stresses of the pandemic affected everyone, including leadership.

Researchers reviewed the initial mental health challenges of the pandemic through grim surveys on the topic which noted that in June 2020, 40% out of 5,412 American adults surveyed reported experiencing adverse mental or behavioral health symptoms due to the pandemic (Czeisler et al., 2020). The pandemic was stressful, both for those who have contracted the virus, and for those grappling with its secondary effects, such as bereavement, social isolation, loneliness, uncertainty, and socioeconomic distress (Czeisler et al., 2020). In *Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges, Populations at Risk, and Implications, and Opportunities*, researchers cited reports which highlighted that the effects of negative mental health were not felt uniformly and tended to be felt more heavily on “young persons, Black persons, Hispanic persons, essential workers, unpaid caregivers for adults, and those with pre-existing psychiatric conditions” (Czeisler et al., 2020, p. 303). A key conclusion from this report included prevention efforts such as employee assistance programs and workplace health promotion programs (Czeisler et al., 2020). Whether or not these types of programs were explored or implemented by library leadership is currently unknown.

The initial stress from the first year of the pandemic stretched into the following year. A work health survey of over 5,000 employees within the United States measured perceptions of financial insecurity and employee burnout. While supervisor support noted that one in three respondents could not afford healthcare costs, 83% of respondents reported experiencing early signs of burnout, and most respondents agreed that they had not received adequate emotional support from their supervisors to manage their stress at work (Adams et al., 2021).

Researchers have explored the cost of poor mental health within the workplace due to loss of productivity in both paid and unpaid work (Greenberg et al., 2003; Birnbaum et al., 2010). One comprehensive study used a subsample of a survey on mental health disorders in the workforce within the United States. They then interviewed a subset of workers who experienced major depressive disorder and analyzed their workplace performance. Afterward, they conducted a cost analysis which revealed that compared to non-depressed respondents within the workforce, depressed patients had a significantly higher prevalence of disability and unemployment (Birnbaum et al., 2010). Of those employed, certain groups of depressed respondents worked significantly fewer adjusted monthly hours than non-depressed respondents, “mildly depressed workers are estimated to miss 13.7 additional hours per month, while moderate and severely depressed respondents did not show any significant decrease in monthly hours worked” (Birnbaum et al., 2010, p. 82).

How supervisors perceived and managed employee mental health was investigated using a qualitative approach by Kirsh et al. who interviewed eleven supervisors about their participation in anti-stigma programs and explored their feelings on mental health in the workplace (2018). Among their findings, they noted that a supervisor needed to take care of their own mental health while also supporting the mental health of their employees (Kirsh et al., 2018). Research demonstrated that supervisory education improved the positive mental health in work environments as demonstrated by the quasi-experimental study which measured how supervisors play a key role in managing the stress within their organizations (Tsutsumi et al., 2005). Researchers concluded that psychological distress decreased among employees where one-third of supervisors attended education sessions on mental health (Tsutsumi et al., 2005).

Most organizational interventions for mental health in the workplace focused on subordinates and not administrators. There were a few exceptions, such as St-Hilaire, Gilbert, and Brun's qualitative study which interviewed 70 public service workers, including managers and subordinates in Quebec, Canada. The focus of the study was to explore the actions in the work environment stressors for managers with interview questions, such as, "In general, what do your subordinates do to make you feel good at work?" Concluding that subordinates do have influence over the mental health and well-being of managers and that all employees are important to promoting a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility for workplace mental health (St-Hilaire et al., 2019).

Multiple articles in this literature review pointed to a lack of qualitative scholarship on the mental health of academic library deans and directors. Low morale and burnout were noted challenges within academic libraries prior to the pandemic. The complex and protracted nature of the crisis exacerbated the existing challenges within academic libraries and created new hardships. This study will thus focus on the mental health of academic library deans and directors during the pandemic and how it related to their decision-making. I will investigate academic library deans' and directors' perceptions of their library workers' emotional well-being during the pandemic and what, if any, measures they took to provide emotional stability during the crisis.

Chapter Three: Methods

This chapter provides a detailed justification for my method, including a description of the research procedures and an explanation of why they were chosen. In addition, the chapter presents comprehensive information on how the data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted; validity concerns are addressed, and best-practice strategies are indicated. Research both prior to and during the pandemic focuses on burnout, low morale, and mental health of librarians and staff but little research has been conducted on the mental health experiences of library deans and directors. The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of academic library deans and directors through the first 12 months of the pandemic and to explore the perceptions of how library leadership managed their own mental health while assisting their employees' well-being during future crises.

Research Questions

During the global pandemic, academic libraries experienced rapid and ever-evolving challenges. Academic library leadership faced unprecedented decisions that included the safety and well-being of themselves and their library workers. This study sought to add to the literature on the mental health of library workers by centralizing the experiences of library leaders during the pandemic. The focus was on library deans' and directors' management of their mental health and their perceptions of how they supported the mental well-being of library workers. The research questions that guided this study were these.

- RQ1: What kinds of mental health challenges did deans and directors perceive that they personally experienced during the pandemic, if any?
- RQ2: What kinds of mental health challenges did deans and directors perceive their employees experienced during the pandemic if any?

- RQ3: In what ways, if any, did deans and directors feel they were successful or unsuccessful in helping their employees alleviate stress?
- RQ4: To what extent did the mitigation of library employees' stress increase the library deans' and directors' stress?

Method

This study explored the experiences of academic library deans and directors and how they made meaning of mental health during the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic. Quantitative research is considered unsuitable for exploring in-depth complex human experiences (Darawsheh, 2014), and for that reason was a less-desirable choice for this study. The extended nature of the pandemic and the mental stress that accompanied the multiple-pronged crisis are not adequately handled by the limited data outcomes of quantitative research and cannot reveal why the sample populations think, feel, or act the way they do (Goertzen, 2017). Since this study's focus was precisely on the experiences of academic library leaders, this limitation would make quantitative research incongruous with the goals of this study.

A qualitative research approach was an appropriate method because this study's primary focus seeks a deep understanding of the experiences of library deans and directors during COVID-19. The research topic focused on library deans' and directors' mental health and their perceptions of the mental health of their library workers, making it vital to understand their feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptions—all of which can best be investigated through qualitative analysis (Marshall et al., 2022). The complexity of mental health is not easily measured by quantitative methods because it is filtered through one's perceptions and experiences. A qualitative approach employing both inductive and deductive logic allowed for reflective interpretations of the sample's multiple perspectives. Ultimately, a qualitative

approach allows for a holistic and nuanced picture (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of these perceptions and experiences in the subject population. Since the goal of this study was to explore the experiences of library deans' and directors' mental health and their perceptions of the mental health and well-being of their library workers during the pandemic, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate.

From an analytical perspective, a phenomenological examination will be the most logical:

The purpose of a [phenomenological study] is to explore what a particular experience means for people who have experienced a shared phenomenon so that the structure of the experience can be understood, and the essence of the experience can be abstracted (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 27).

This study was an investigation of an experience; thus, it was important to use a research method that allowed for the understanding of library deans' and directors' feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptions (Darawsheh, 2014; Goertzen, 2017; Marshall et al., 2022). This phenomenological study explored the senior library leadership's experiences during the pandemic and investigated any perceived declines in mental health due to increasing COVID difficulties. Both challenges are best understood experientially.

Data Collection

Interviews were the primary method of data collection with the goal of uncovering and exploring the essence and meaning of the experience (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Within these interviews, the focus was on the "lived experience" of each of the study participants: utilizing a holistic approach to phenomenology that seeks to encompass both initial impressions and lasting perceptions of the experience, as well as the meanings the participants draw from their experiences (Frechette et al., 2020).

The interviews encouraged each participant to establish the context of their experience while reconstructing and expounding on details of their experience (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Participants were asked to review transcripts and initial codes, and summaries pulled from their own interviews to build validity.

Because this study focused on the mental health experiences of participants and their perceptions of their employees' mental health and well-being during the pandemic, it was essential that all participants understood the nature of the study prior to the beginning of data gathering. Therefore, once the sample of participants was set, I emailed a brief explanation of the study, and organized a meeting. I obtained verbal consent prior to gathering any demographic information or beginning the semi-structured interview questions.

The standard Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method is to gather first-hand experiences of the phenomenon through semi-structured interviews that are designed to be in-depth (Barton, 2020). Thus, the open-ended questions began broadly, by asking participants to recount their mental health experiences as library leaders during the pandemic, with follow-up questions to gather more details from previous comments. I used a question bank and interview schedule to provide consistency. I conducted these interviews via Microsoft Teams due to time constraints and because this platform automatically generated transcriptions. I utilized the Otter AI app for transcriptions for two reasons: first, as a backup file so that if the transcription or any audio recording of the meeting failed, another copy would be available; second, an additional transcription resolved any transcription errors that occurred during the Teams meeting. To maintain the privacy of each participant, each participant chose a pseudonym with all locations redacted from publication, thus removing the chance that participants could be discovered using deduction.

Participant Selection and Sampling

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used because the study aims to make sense of library deans' and directors' mental health experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and their perceptions of the mental health of their library workers (Miller et al., 2018). For this approach, participants must have experienced the phenomenon, and the sample needed to be relatively small and homogenous (Miller et al., 2018). There is not a recommended optimal sample size for IPA, with suggestions ranging of three to six participants or more (Barton, 2020; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). My goal was to recruit and interview participants who had lived experiences working as library deans and directors of Carnegie R1 or R2 degree granting public universities. The sample included one participant from each of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) geographic locations within the United States. Recruitment occurred through a snowball sampling technique in which I consulted library deans, directors, and librarians that I knew and sought out referrals.

To ensure a homogeneous sampling, I recruited participants who were deans and directors within an academic library or libraries during the first year of the pandemic. In keeping with the IPA model, which states that the topic being explored in the study must matter to the lives of the participants so that the sample will offer valuable perspectives (Larkin & Thompson, 2012), I included broad information on the study prior to scheduling a meeting.

Demographic questionnaires were important because academic libraries vary greatly in funding, size, and geographical location. The number of academic libraries could relate to the size of the print and physical collection as well as the physical space(s) of the building. Academic libraries also vary greatly in the number of library workers, including staff and librarians. Through the collection of demographic information on the institutions, I was able to

compare experiences based on context thus providing a richer data set from which to pull themes.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This study's focus was on the lived experiences of library deans and directors during the pandemic with a particular emphasis on their mental health and their perceptions of the mental health of their employees. Therefore, the IPA analysis was employed to gather patterns or "themes" that are informed by a detailed analysis of the data or "codes" (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). To do this, I printed all transcriptions and read through them numerous times, making a list of all possible codes. Each line of the transcripts was reviewed and grouped under one or more of the codes. These themes were then organized into sub-themes using the Nvivo qualitative database which would eventually culminate into overarching themes. Guiding this analysis was Larkin and Thompson's (2012) suggestion for IPA analysis:

In IPA we are interested in identifying what matters to participants, and then exploring what these things *mean* to participants. Once we have some understanding of this, we can develop an interpretive synthesis of the analytic work. The process for reaching that point in IPA is *iterative* and *inductive*, cycling and recycling through the strategies. (p. 105)

For this study, after a thorough reflection and review of patterns and themes within the data, relationships between those themes were explored (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). The goal of the data analysis and interpretation was to provide meaningful insights into the lived experiences of library deans and directors during the pandemic, eventually creating an explanation of the phenomenon to provide a more complex and better understanding of library leadership during extended periods of hardship both within and outside of the work environment.

Limitations

Phenomenological studies face numerous threats to validity. To increase validity, I adopted several tactics. First, I utilized an independent audit developed by Yin (1989) that included keeping a database of all information that leads to the final report. To do this, I kept electronic and print records organized and available for review, when and if needed. Second, I asked participants to review my interpretations and initial codes from their interviews. If I made an error in interpretation, participants were given the opportunity to clarify their point of view.

Interpretive qualitative research is subjective. To increase the reliability of this study I was transparent, open, and reflexive about my mental health experiences during the pandemic, including my experiences with the dean of MU Libraries. Through the practice of this reflexivity as a conscious and continuous self-reflection, conducting my research and analyzing data helped increase the validity of the study (Darawsheh, 2014). I added to the ability to internally audit this study by first bracketing my experiences prior to the interviews.

According to Tufford and Newman, the definition of bracketing is “a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process” (2010, p. 80). The purpose of this *epoché* or self-examination was to gain insights into my own preconceived notions and to limit personal bias from the study (Marshall et al., 2022). My experiences of working within an academic library throughout the pandemic place me at risk of projecting my own experiences onto the participants. Therefore, prior to interviewing, I detailed a full description of my mental health experiences during the pandemic to bracket those experiences, separating them from my participants’ experiences.

Addressing potential threats to validity strengthened my proposed research study. The main threats to validity within this study were researcher bias and reactivity. To mitigate these

threats, I acknowledged my biases through bracketing and remained open to multiple points of view. I also included member checking throughout my study to limit the any misinterpretations.

Chapter Four: Findings

This study adds to the research of academic library leadership during the initial years of the global COVID-19 pandemic, specifically how deans and directors supported the mental health and well-being of their employees, how their own mental health and well-being were affected and managed, and their perceptions of how they balanced their duties with that of their employees' mental health. This phenomenological study explored the experiences of academic library deans and directors to extract the essence of the shared phenomenon (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of academic library deans and directors through the early months of the pandemic to assist library leadership in managing their own mental health while guiding their employees' well-being during future crises. In this study, library deans and directors explored their own mental health, their perceptions of their library workers' mental well-being, and their reflections on the actions they took to alleviate library workers' stress. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews that focused on the experiences and perspectives of the library deans and directors. Each interview was conducted through Microsoft Teams and lasted from 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Participants were given the opportunity to check the themes pulled from the full transcript of the interview. All participants chose a pseudonym for the study, and their feedback was utilized for the final themes generated.

In keeping with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the ten participants in this study experienced the phenomenon and were homogenous in their leadership position within their respective institutions (Miller et al., 2018). All academic library deans and directors were in the top leadership positions within their R1 or R2 universities during the initial years of

the pandemic. The participants' supervisors were either the university provost or of similar rank as provost, and each was either a dean or associate dean within their prior position. Differences among the participants included years of experience within their current position when the pandemic hit, with the range including one month to 13 years. Other differences included the ages of the participants who ranged in age from 42 to 66 at the time of the interviews. This information is included to demonstrate that those who had less years of experience were not necessarily younger.

Table 1

Participants' current ages and years in leadership position as of March 2020

Participant	Years in leadership position at the start of the pandemic	Age
Henry	<1	66
Raine Gayle	<1	42
Amelia	<1	46
Jerry	<2	47
Kim	<5	65
Soz	<5	59
George	<5	56
Jim	<5	50
Edith	>10	57
Marsha	>10	56

Data analysis used to guide this study followed the approach of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, which allowed the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of research participants through initial coding (2009). After close line-by-line reading of each transcript, codes were identified. Each code was then uploaded to NVivo software, where patterns of understanding across the cases emerged. The initial codes from individual cases were analyzed within the software, where macro patterns of themes emerged. The themes identified were mentioned by more than three participants, with less frequently mentioned details marked and collected into

larger topics. For example, most participants mentioned self-care habits they adopted but varied greatly in what those habits included.

Themes

After multiple thorough readings of transcripts and initial pithy codes developed, patterns of meaning or themes across each interview emerged. These themes include uncertainty, loneliness, communication, intersecting hardships, burnout, and coping.

Theme 1: Uncertainty

All participants noted the uncertainty that prevailed throughout the first year of the pandemic as they tried to lead their libraries through periods of shifting information and messages and ambiguity in channels of decision-making. Uncertainty, which increased fear and anxiety, was noted among participants who were unable to provide clear answers on subjects, including safety and work arrangements. Further uncertainty developed during periods when participants worked from home and relied solely on technology for communication, thus losing the ability to read nonverbal communication that many participants relied on when gathering information to make decisions.

Participants noted the difficulty of providing definitive answers during the pandemic. Henry stated, “I think part of what people really wanted, which is really hard to do is, they want to firm answers about everything. And so much of the pandemic was learning to live with ambiguity.” Henry and many other participants noted that employees, students, and community members all wanted ‘real answers’ to vital questions regarding safety. Questions, such as whether it was safe to come back to work in the library or who, if anyone, is allowed to work from home, did not have concrete answers because safety protocols continuously shifted. Providing concrete answers to questions was incredibly challenging for many participants.

Ultimately, most participants recalled providing assurances where they could. Henry said, “I did my best to assure them that we would get answers when we had them, but you know. I would say that was a big part of people’s struggle is they want a certainty and the pandemic didn’t lend any certainty to people’s lives.

George stated, “It’s about being comfortable with the unknown, and that’s difficult for people.” George focused on communication, stating, “It’s all right to not know the answers for everything, but it’s not all alright to not try to get the answers and then helping.”

Kim stated that this was the most anxious and challenging time in her career, “There was just not [a] pathway. There tend to be pathways for recessions and layoffs and floods... and fires, things like that. This had absolutely no pathway.” Uncertainty reached across entire campuses, with routes for decision-making unclear. Jim said, “It’s not that I wasn’t being supported by campus leadership, that support was there, but nobody knew what to do. You had being in that position of it’s not really a panic situation but feeling that burden of sole responsibility.” Many noted the fear that resulted, in part, from the uncertainty. Edith stated

I remember we did an all-staff meeting probably like the Friday before the shutdown... that was in person, and I think... the level of fear was so high... among, the staff [and] among my leadership team... because we didn't know... what was happening. We didn't know... how are you going to catch this?

This uncertainty continued during the shutdown. When library leaders tried to make decisions, they and their teams were isolated in their homes. George remembered his uncertainty due to a lack of nonverbal cues likening it to “driving with your headlights off as a leader.” George stated

I’m never sure if people feel like it’s the right thing, especially when you’re online and most of the people aren’t showing their faces. So, you lost that ability to, to judge how you’re doing by all that nonverbal communication cues, which I think people often forget that there’s a ton of communication happening non-verbally. And, and even when we have our cameras on I think some of it gets lost. But especially when the cameras are there, you’re in large settings [the cameras] aren’t on it’s difficult. So, I was just adding a

new feeling in there that there was just insecurity always feeling like I hope this is the right thing for everyone. Because you weren't getting a lot of instant feedback.

The first theme of uncertainty was discussed at length by all participants who related this as permeating throughout the initial first months of the pandemic. Many participants noted the burden of responsibility for providing answers during an elongated period of time where answers either did not exist yet and/or were constantly shifting. Fear and uncertainty were further complicated during lockdown when participants were isolated and reliant on technology as their sole means of communicating. The lack of nonverbal cues, such as body language and eye contact, further complicated participants' leadership during the first months of the pandemic.

Theme 2: Isolation and Mental Health

Isolation during the pandemic was discussed by all participants who described either their own loneliness as the sole decision makers and/or the deep concern over the isolation and subsequent loneliness of their employees. As noted, uncertainty due to unanswerable questions and the lack of direct in-person communication with employees compounded these feelings. Noting the isolation and potential loneliness of their employees, participants relayed strategies for connecting employees. These strategies varied among participants, but all noted the need to address feelings of isolation among their workers.

Academic library leaders spoke of the isolation and subsequent loneliness they experienced. Amelia noted, "that said I don't think that there was any real acknowledgement of like, how lonely that was, for me sitting there in my house all by myself trying to manage all of this. And that's, you know, that's hard." Raine Gayle also spoke of the isolation when she stated

It was more the isolation I think of the role and feeling that the burden of trying to take care of folks that was where my mental health would run into issues where I was spending so much time trying to take care of everybody else. I wasn't necessarily checking in on my own mental health, and that did start to catch up with me but not in the

first 12 months. That would take a little longer. But you know, I was working so hard to figure out what I could do, what structures I could put into place, all that sort of stuff, taking something that's home that I probably shouldn't have that that that was hard for me, but it definitely was after that first 12 months. I was just going, going, going.

Library leaders noted the isolation, uncertainty, and unprecedented nature of the pandemic affected their employees. Raine Gayle went on to note, “One of the other things that kind of came out that first year is we ended up realizing a lot of people were just feeling isolated.” Several participants spoke of identifying isolated or lonely employees. Soz said

Most people that work in libraries are super introverted, but introverted people still need interaction with other people. And so, you take a bunch of introverted people and make them stay at home by themselves. A lot of them live by themselves. They freak out, right? Because there's so much ambiguity, there's nothing normal. And so, I worked really hard with my organizational director of organizational effectiveness and my other senior leaders and my communications person to come up with ways to help people feel connected.

Edith also identified people who were not just isolated from their previous workspaces but their support system

Well, I think maybe just dealing with folks. I think the people who were alone, you know, I think, I think that became harder. You know, I, I think I maybe didn't have the concept of just how many of our people might be single people living in a small apartment by themselves. And when, when this pandemic happened and, they lost their, you know, they lost in-person contact with their support networks. I think I didn't have a sense of how quickly that could impact some people.

Most participants recognized how hard the pandemic was on their employees and increased communication, including checking in on people one-on-one, sharing mental health resources, facilitating morale, and helping employees connect on a more personal level. Amelia related, “My first two months were me drinking from a firehose and trying to mitigate the anxiety of everybody who was working for me by being their filter. But it did require me to talk to them almost daily.” Soz stated she systematically checked on each employee individually

I also sent individual direct messages by email and by slack to every single person that works in the libraries. I actually kept a spreadsheet, so I could see who I sent something to just asking them how they were, and I did that once a week for like the first six weeks.

Kim stated, “We spent a lot of time... checking in on individuals... We’ve pushed out [mental health] resources for students, for our employees, and their student workers because our student workers, we know that they’re anxious... so we push those constantly out.” Soz said, “We talked about it [mental health] a lot. In fact, almost every debrief.” Raine Gayle also noted, “I think that really the biggest shift for us was on that kind of over-communicating that was meeting more often just to check in more often with folks in general that those kinds of things.” Beyond increased communication, the type of communication shifted to foster community and boost morale, Raine Gayle later notes

We added things like parents and caretaker channel because I probably wouldn't have added that, but because of the pandemic, we've so we added that one, and I also let people, which I probably would have done anyway, but I let people add their own channels or, you know, propose one... and they're active, so there's like a gardening one and coffee and fun. There is a channel for self-care was another one that we added for the pandemic. I added a thank you channel early on.

Participants noted numerous tactics to boost morale and foster communication. Marsha notes, “We also had a few morale boosting type meetings that were kind of stupid. But you know, things like wear your funny sweater...bring your pet to, you know, the staff meeting.” Marsha later explained, “We did some of those just to stay connected.”

Strategies for combating isolation and loneliness differed among the participants; however, each library dean or director noted the need to combat these feelings among workers. Participants noted these feelings among themselves either within the first year or culminating from the protracted crisis. Overall, participants developed strategies to mitigate isolation through numerous techniques, including checking in individually with employees, developing a common community online, and openly discussing loneliness to highlight mental health resources.

Theme 3: Communication of Care: Prioritizing People

A majority of participants stated that they shifted priorities to be more empathetic and people-centered during the pandemic. Of the participants, several communicated those priorities to all employees. To focus on employees and managing leadership teams, library deans and directors communicated their values, such as kindness, empathy, and giving people the benefit of the doubt early during the pandemic. Participants often encouraged employees to take care of themselves first, describing work as important but secondary to well-being. Raine Gayle noted

I tried to really focus with my management teams on different ways of being flexible for employees, really trying to give them space and having grace for each other. So, we focused on that a lot as a way of trying to deal with the mental health issues. And we adopted during that first year, kind of if you don't know what to do, the first thing you do is be kind, the second, be flexible, and the third, be reasonable. And so, we've had that kind of kind, flexible, reasonable thing now is carried on past a pandemic. But that was a real way that we tried to have people try to figure out how you deal with the struggles that other folks might be having or that you might be having yourself during the pandemic.

Amelia stated that this prioritization was not a strategic plan but a consistent reminder, “The thing that I just kept trying to push with my leadership team was like radical empathy, just radical, radical empathy.” Later stating, “Every single time I sent an email out I would basically end it by saying, you know, assume goodwill, you know, basically practice kindness. Like, you know, like assume people are struggling and that was literally how I ended.” Like others in this study, Amelia prioritized mental well-being over work output. Amelia said, “70% from somebody you know, three weeks ago is, is now, is now 30 and that's fine, right? You sort of have to like take a deep breath and understand that this will all cycle through.” Amelia goes on to say, “work did not diminish in any real way.” All participants who reported prioritizing the mental well-being of employees over work output did not speak of regretting doing so. George

stated that his prioritization of people was part of a larger university push. George said, “We have been intentionally talking about a culture of care. [Our university] does a lot of work around this as well, which we piggyback on.” Later, George stated, “We're headed in that direction, trying to create that culture of care. That is about us, each taking care of each other and realizing that if we don't we won't be able to do to fulfill our mission.” Other participants specifically prioritized well-being early in the pandemic and communicated it consistently. Soz stated

One of the things I did really early, like even before we shut down, this was on March 12. I pulled all of my unit heads and AULs and senior leaders and facilities people together, and I decided that I knew that things would be changing really quickly. And so, I wanted to create a situation where people could make decisions on their own really quickly without having to check with a lot of people. And so, we came up with two guiding principles. And then we said that anyone who followed those two guiding principles who needed to make a decision, then they could just make the decision, and they did. And the two guiding principles were the first one, health, safety, and wellness of our staff and those people that we serve, so faculty, students, anyone else at [our library], and then, the second one was make sure that students and faculty get what they need. That was it. Those were our two guiding principles. So, if you could meet those two guiding principles, and you could make a decision, you were, you were golden, and people really ran with that. And they just, they were super responsive, and they made excellent decisions. So, that was really key. And the first one is health, the safety, health, and wellness of, of my staff, was very important to me, especially because I could tell that people were especially during that first year. People were really well they like, they were unmoored.

Jim noted that early in the pandemic, he prioritized “taking care of your life first.” Later Jim stated, “We launched strategic planning as a way to like build momentum for coming out of the pandemic, even though the pandemic is not over... one of our pillars like have like a key strategy is people-centered leadership.” Jim described this as a shift in leadership when he stated

I can think of just a lot of examples where my colleagues were making empathy-centered, principle-based decisions about how to lead as opposed to power-center decisions about how to lead, and I think that's a, that's a shift. Absolutely, absolutely. So much more empathy.

Participants described communicating to their employees an emphasis on caring for others and themselves during the protracted crisis. Whereas prior to the pandemic, empathy was valued, during the crisis, participants noted systematically communicating a people-centered approach to decision-making. Whether these values will carry on past the pandemic could be the subject of future research.

Theme 4: Intersecting Hardship

Participants related intersecting hardship that complicated leadership during the pandemic. These included the racial tensions that arose from the murder of George Floyd and related stress from Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) issues that the pandemic and Floyd's death brought to the forefront. Participants noted that these intersecting hardships did not have a simple solution and would require long-term strategies to mitigate.

Practical decisions on who was allowed to work from home and who was forced to return back physically to libraries exposed DEI issues that were further complicated by overall social issues, such as the murder of Floyd. George stated

One of our employees died... the person was attending her family caring for her family, who COVID was ravaging her family. So, she was supporting them. And then, she already had health issues. So, it was heart failure. But you can say it was the pandemic indirectly right. And so, we need, you know, we had to, well, we needed to have some, we had a specific, you know, and then George Floyd died at the same time. So, we had several special meetings around the death of an employee, and the employee who died was a person of color, as well. And we had a lot of discussion. We had some large town halls about really DEI, which was overlapping into this COVID pandemic time. So, those were all stressful things to lead on. That's when I felt very stressed. You know, you know, getting out to some of these spaces where you know, when you look at our news doesn't even feel safe to talk sometimes. So, doing the right thing, but at the same time, at the end. It was gratifying because it gave voice to my colleagues, and they needed to say these things. We needed to hear these things be spoken.

Edith noted that conversations about mental health within the libraries at the time of Floyd's murder. Edith stated

Then, on top of the pandemic, then I think it became really hard as soon as the George Floyd issues started. And, you know, we did have, I mean, there were serious protests in our community. There was, there was an evening of really, really horrible vandalism to our main campus building. There was, you know, a time when the police used tear gas on protesters who were approaching and trying to shut down an interstate. So, I think the complication of, you know, trying to get through this pandemic, and then trying to work through the challenges of, you know, how do we fight racism...

Participants noted DEI issues became more apparent because of the pandemic. In many of the libraries, some employees were required to come physically into the building while others were able to remain in their relatively safer environments. Jim said

The real equity problem we've had, and this just relates back to a comment I made earlier, is that there's a group of people in the library who are commonly your lower-paid employees who were asked to be here every day.

Henry said, "So, I had some staff who were coming in every day. And some people who didn't, you know, ended up not coming back to the building for two years." Later, Henry noted, "So that was its own sort of level of mental stress for everybody because there was sort of this feeling is, you know, why are some of us had to come in and other people getting to stay home." These inequities often overlapped with race and class. Jim stated

Let's think about everything else that's happening was think about who's obligated to be here every day of the week versus who gets to work at home every day of the week. And so, I think that discord has is an organization we've had to really be mindful of how we approach those situations because equity plays into it. Obviously, I mean, racial equity, socioeconomic equity, all sorts of things. And then, I think people's emotional state definitely has gotten pushed.

Later, Jim noted, "Parents have to manage a school-aged children while they tried to keep up with their job and like all that's happening on the Zoom window." All of these issues added to the tension. Kim spoke about the conflict that arose when bringing all employees back to campus full-time. Kim said

Early on in the pandemic, all employees were working on solutions to this, we're all remote. We're all in this together. But once we opened up for students, then we had some

employees that had to be fully on site, some hybrid, and some could be fully remote. And so, bringing those three groups back together as one proved to be more challenging, and so, those who were on-site the entire time that the individuals who were fully remote and who were complaining about working on site. And this is their terminology. They felt as though they were privileged, and they were spoiled. And they tended to be the ones who were paid the most in the organization and had more flexibility. So, there was, there was that conflict and managing that conflict among the three groups and trying to bring them all together. So early on in the pandemic, we were all in the same situation pulling together, but as a pandemic wore on, you could see these three groups that had to navigate their relationships across what they could or what they were about to do.

Kim went on to say that the most diverse and lowest-paid individuals were considered hourly-wage workers who were physically in the building.

Race, class, gender, and family responsibilities all complicated work life and the sense of equity among library workers. These tensions, combined with larger social issues occurring around the murder of Floyd, further complicated the continuing uncertainty and fear surrounding the pandemic. Nearly all participants discussed the multiple intersecting hardships that further challenged their leadership decision-making. Over time, these issues compounded, leading participants to feel a sense of burnout.

Theme 5: Burnout

Most participants discussed burnout of themselves and/or their employees. When speaking of burnout among themselves, some participants described initial burnout within the initial months of the pandemic, while the majority refer to burnout occurring later after multiple hardships occurred over the elongated crisis. Some hesitated to use the word burnout, but described feelings associated with the term. For example, participants described feeling trapped and wishing to retire or planning their retirement. Feelings of entrapment or desire for retirement are important to mitigate for the retention of top academic library leadership. Boundaries, support networks, and an overburdening set of responsibilities all led to burnout.

Library deans and directors described working intensely with very few boundaries during the initial months of the pandemic and then hitting a wall. Amelia noted that she worked from when she woke up straight through till late at night until, “It was that like, my body was like, you don't need to have the 6:30[am] meetings anymore. Take a break.” During the summer after the first lockdown, participants saw an opportunity to reset. Amelia said, “I would say gosh, it must have been around June when I just kind of lost it. [laughs] So I had I had tried really hard now it was later on that. I tried.” George said moments of burnout helped him to set boundaries. George stated

I felt, I would say, moments of feeling burnout. You know, when you, you know, I had a lot more of these off days, where I didn't do anything like complete veg out days. And I used to not give myself permission for that, but I just felt like there was no choice. I just need to let it all go away and kind of not focus on everything. So, yeah, some of the rules I had made. Like I just reiterate this, if you gotta give me a phone call during the weekend, if there's an emergency because I'm not looking at that email. And if I miss your text, give me a call. You know, I have to create space to have some work/life balance. I used to work long into the evenings, and I've stopped doing it largely, you know, knowing that the work will just be there when I get back...

Later, George stated, “I never thought about retirement until the pandemic, and then, I thought a lot about retirement. Now, I'm not exactly in my mind close to retirement, but I never even thought about it.” Jerry seemed uncomfortable with the word burnout stating, “I guess it's burnout. I, I don't... I've never really known that or... known what that is.” Later Jerry said

I don't know if it was burnout. I just felt so trapped and, and like there was nothing you could do to untrap yourself, I mean. I couldn't. It was a whole university. I couldn't let down right on one hand, have all these people in the library who are counting on me and, and I could tell like nothing was gonna be good enough or the right thing.

Jerry went on to later state, “A few days where I was, I just felt trapped. I just felt like I couldn't. Like I couldn't see how I was gonna get through the next, you know, day or week or whatever.” Finally, Jerry stated, “I could get emotional thinking about it now. I don't wanna go back to that

place ever again. It was tough. It was terrible.” Jim also discussed burnout and retirement. Jim stated, “I think burnout is something we've been grappling with for the last year, maybe. Maybe just for the last eight months. Recalling the national conversation on quiet quitting, Jim said, “Quiet quitting... we were talking about that, and I think that's still an issue. I think, you know, like to this day, as leaders, you have to be mindful of kind of where people are mentally and emotionally issue.” Jim later noted

But I've seen like there's been so many people who have decided to retire from library director roles. And so, I, I can only think that a lot of us have kind of said that was 15 years' worth of leadership. I'm done. Yeah, I'm not old enough to do that.. I'm just focused on like what the next ten years looks like, but I have been in that emotional space a few times over the last couple of years.

Kim also spoke of wanting to retire. Kim stated

I just felt as though that we would get our hopes up like we're turning the corner, and then boom, another wave would come. Or, you know, we're returning to full on-site work. I think the most overwhelmed that I felt was in the summer of '21. I really was like, I can retire. I don't have to do this. But then, my focus really became, I've got to get the organization through this. I have to get individuals through this, really helping them through as the pandemic was shifting.

Later, Kim described the initial year to two years of the pandemic, “The workload was just intense and relentless, and just one thing after another.” Marsha’s described burnout due to being short-staffed and taking on additional duties beyond her role as Dean of University Libraries.

Marsha stated

But there was no way that I was going to be able to continue to do that job anymore. I don't want to say that I was ready to leave [the university], but I was absolutely ready to leave this position because I was just done. Money is not everything. Titles are not everything.

Jerry tied burnout to multiple additional responsibilities beyond the Dean of Libraries. When Jerry attempted to tell his provost that he could not sustain the role, he was given further responsibilities. Jerry related this story to describe his levels of stress

So, I went to go get a crown placed and my aura ring. I just left work. So, I, you know, I left work at that point for an afternoon crown visit, and they're grinding my teeth and all this stuff. And I checked my phone afterward. And my aura ring thought that I was taking a nap. So, my stress level was so high at work that laying in the dentist chair while there, and I'm, and I hate going to work, I find it very stressful but, but all and my watch thought I was resting too, but my stress level was so high at work that getting dental work was a step down for me, and that's when I that's when I told myself I gotta get off this carousel for a while with the provost, and that's why I reacted so poorly in October when, when more work came back to me because that was scary to me that. You know my, my levels were so elevated that getting a crown was relaxing. It was like the highlight of my week as far as my watch could tell me.

Learning the causes of burnout, such as lack of clear work boundaries, lack of support from university leaderships, and an overload of additional responsibilities, resulted in feelings of burnout or a desire to leave either through retirement physically or a slowing down by mentally leaving work commitments. Of all participants, only one left their position during the pandemic due in part to burnout. Exploring how participants were able to mitigate and, at times, alleviate burnout was explored in this study.

Theme 6: Boundaries, Self-Care, and the Future

Participants reported their coping mechanisms for protecting their mental health and well-being throughout the pandemic. How participants coped with the unrelenting and protracted crisis differed greatly; however, all included detailed strategies for protecting their personal mental health. Creating and maintaining boundaries was vital to most participants with exercise and other self-care strategies, such as video games, baths, and gardening, mentioned as ways of alleviating some of the stress during the pandemic. Despite describing their personal mental health strategies and listing numerous approaches to improving their employees' well-being, nearly all participants described a desire for more mental health training in the future. This may be due to the many lessons learned during the pandemic that they wish to keep and perhaps improve upon in the future.

For example, Amelia noted a lack of boundaries between work and home life as well as a lack of work/life balance within the first months of the pandemic. Amelia stated

I would say at the beginning, it was I wake up at 6:30 in the morning, and I'm on my computer until, you know, 11 o'clock at night when I'm off my computer. And it kind of didn't matter what I was working on, whether it was the schedule, or the ordering of something, or the groceries, or you know, like all of those things, right? Like, it didn't matter; it was like either I'm, you know, I'm doing this or I'm doing that. It's all just one big hodgepodge.

Edith maintained boundaries stating, "I really stuck pretty close to Monday through Friday schedule and tried to turn off on the weekends. You know, I tried, I try not even to go into that room [home office] on the weekends just to stay away." While Edith maintained boundaries, it was still difficult, stating

I have noticed that if I don't really intentionally stop and take time, I can tell that it's time, and I need to just, I just need to let it all go and well as much as I can because I can never completely let it go.

Jerry realized that he did not keep clear boundaries nor model them to his employees. Jerry said

We were worried about an awful lot, and they [library employees] felt like if they weren't doing everything they could do [to] kind of earn their place in the organization... They're watching people get laid off, or if they couldn't rationalize that I'm being effective working from home. So, they overdid it, and I was overdoing it, and they would see that too. And so, it was very difficult. It was very difficult to say one set of things and not necessarily be modeling them, which I always try to do.

Recognizing boundaries needed to be reset, George said, "One of the indicators of how I was managing my work life is that I had maxed out the allowable vacation, I'm allowed to have... [the] university was about ready to start taking it away from me." Later, George stated, "Well, you should take more of [vacation days]. Even if it's just a day or half day here and there to create that space." Jim said personally he "won't take credit for modeling boundaries" to protect mental health; however, he did say, "as an organization we've done a good job of talking about how to have [a] kind of a work/life balance." Later, Jim said

I don't send email to anybody after 5 pm or before 8 am unless it's an absolute emergency, and you know, certainly no email on the weekends. I take that as a sign of success because I don't get any email from anybody during this time periods either.

Soz said

I'm really strict about no email before eight in the morning or after 5 pm or on the weekends. And really try to hold people to that if my only if my senior leadership team breaks that, I will chastise them. I don't scold people very often, but I must chastise them for that.

When asked whether she was able to set up boundaries for normal working hours, Kim said, “[shakes head no, and smiles laughing] It's pretty much you know, trying to step away on weekends more than anything else. No, my boundaries are terrible. But I also really enjoy my job. So and it also comes with the territory.” Raine Gayle mentioned learning to prioritize her mental health. Raine Gayle said

Unfortunately, last month, I had two, two losses, and my aunt and one of my best friends from college in a week... So I took two weeks off at a bereavement leave, and I took everything, and actually, that was a good example of one of the things I really intentionally did there was set my boundaries, delegate stuff off, prioritize myself, talk about it with folks. Talk about when I was ready to come back, that sort of thing as well. And I do think that is they learned that from the pandemic, I don't know that I would have had that same... I would have stepped away in the same way had we not had the pandemic.

Participants reported self-care as important to their mental health during the pandemic.

Soz stated that she began to combine exercise with work to avoid going stir-crazy, stating, “I also started an exercise bike in my home office that has a laptop shelf, so I started riding my bike during meetings I'm not in charge of.” Later Soz stated, “that made a huge difference.” During non-working hours, she increased her painting. Both Geoge and Jim noted the importance of staying active as a way of coping throughout the pandemic. George stated

I did a lot of outdoor walking. I couldn't run, as I mentioned, but I can walk, so we did a lot of walk, my wife and I did a lot of walking. And I have a teenage daughter who is almost 16 right now, and she was going through all sorts, you know, she had major

anxiety and borderline probably depression and, and that was really another mirror for me to remain aware of everyone's mental health issues. And to remind me that I gotta take care of myself so I can take care of my daughter, right? So, I take care of my wife. And my wife and I had a lot of conversations like that.

Jim said, "I've always been big into fitness and so, but I was able to preserve my fitness time that was a that was like a mental health strategy that I employed throughout which is highly effective for me." Other hobbies Jim used to cope during the pandemic include playing his musical instruments and backpacking off the grid. Jim said, "I think something I love now, and this is maybe connected or it totally is connected. It's just being off the grid entirely. So, no cell connection at all." Later Jim stated, "It's actually shaped a lot of what my like, how I've approached this personally how I've approached the last year so that's been very gratifying." Marsha would share how she coped with friends and co-workers, often including them. Marsha said

I bought a Nintendo on a Nintendo Switch. And I loaded Animal Crossing, and so did like a dozen other people that work in the library. And we visited each other's islands and gave each other tips, and you know, we played that a lot. And so, that was one thing that I disclosed to more than one person who was stressed out... I can say, oh my god, if I didn't have Animal Crossing, I would just die. And so, people, you know, I got in it.

Because someone told me that they were playing it because it was soothing.

Amelia stated, "I take a ludicrous number of baths, I'm not kidding, like scalding hot baths with fancy bath bombs and candles." Amelia also said, "snuggling and hugs from my kids to just make me feel like it's fine. It'll be fine." Edith liked to garden, stating, "...I could start my email, and I could go outside for an hour in the morning and deadhead flowers, and just really care for the garden... this is my part of my mental health and taking care of myself." These strategies for taking care of one's personal mental health were well-developed in nearly all participants.

Despite participants' ability to describe in detail their personal coping skills and their perceived successes in helping employees lessen stress, many stated the need for more training in these areas.

Participants noted the need for more preparation and to hold on to what has already been learned. Jim stated, "I think it's a skill [crisis management] we need to hold on to." Amelia noted

From my perspective, it's like, I want the training to be on how do we help people build an organization that allows them to feel comfortable to ask for the flexibility that they need to support themselves better, rather than sort of turning it around and saying, how does the workplace change itself to like to help these people with their immediate acute problems?

George stated more mental health training is needed, "We all have our different ways of approaching [mental health], or how we talk about [it], and I think that's one of the difficulties is developing our vocabulary so we can talk about it together." Later, George said, "because there seems like there is a vocabulary that I haven't mastered that would make it easier to talk about that." George went on to state

We need leadership training, and we need, you know, just staff to be given an overview of what's available and then everyone kind of like that body system. Somebody next to you may need your help someday. How do we prepare ourselves to do to be those types of wellness, mental health and wellness advocates? And, and feel like it's alright because I did not feel again did not feel prepared for those types of wellness check-ins interventions about serious matters that can be perceived as to be being highly private, but at the same times, weighing that against that someone may injure themselves or harm themselves. It seems like you had to lean in and do it.

Kim stated a need for more specific mental health training that could include role playing.

I think possibly recognizing early signs of mental health [struggles] and then also the ability to have a conversation with an individual about how they are feeling. So, to be more attuned to earlier in a situation before it kind of, it's really big or what questions to ask and how to support that individual who's going through a situation where they might need some mental health assistance or how do I refer them gracefully to an employee assistance program? I have some really good advice from a friend, another friend was going through a situation, and I was saying things like, let me know how I can help. My friend said, "Stop asking if they want a meal," you know, because I would say,

”hey, I can bring you...” They would be like I'm fine. You don't need to bring anything over and my friend said... “Just tell him because they don't want to ask you... ‘Hey, can you go out and get some food for me?’ Tell them I'm bringing dinner is this day of the day for you.” So, I think some of those coaching skills would have been helpful earlier on in the pandemic. What should we be looking for and how can we help an individual and to get them to resources that they might? Marsha stated the need for ongoing training. Marsha said

Managers [need] to be aware of how to support their faculty and staff during a crisis situation. And if they need also support for their own anxiety or stress levels that, that universities pay attention to that and provides a mechanism for managers to have coping mechanisms too.

Participants described a need for further training to support mental health and wellness among both them and their employees. This may be because of the feelings of burnout that participants reported feeling after the uncertainty, isolation, and multiple hardships complicated the protracted crisis. As participants noted, there were no guidelines or preparation for the pandemic, which left many leaders uncertain of how to proceed. Gathering lessons learned and sharpening their skills through mental health and wellness training is reasonable, considering the magnitude of the crisis.

Summary

The ten participants in this study shared their mental health experiences, their perceptions of their employees’ mental health, and their perceptions of that management. Each of the transcripts was coded, and the resulting six themes were uncertainty, loneliness, communication, intersecting hardships, burnout, and coping. The participants’ experiences provide a fuller picture of the mental health challenges that library deans and directors faced during the pandemic. These insights can be used to help leaders better manage and lead during future crises. This is vital because mental health and wellness are tied to organizational health and productivity (Birnbbaum

et al., 2010; Coralane et al., 2017; Ping & Pang, 2020; Martin et al., 1996). Learning from the lived experiences of leaders during the pandemic could help navigate future crises.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Discussion

The global COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to learn about library leadership during a protracted multifaceted crisis. Those in top academic leadership positions led librarians and workers through a time period of rapid change with multiple changes, including the shift to an online format, and the uncertainty of shifting safety practices, amid harsh budget cuts (Dixon, 2020; Fernando & Jayasekara, 2020; Louderback, 2021). This research explored the extent that these deans and directors supported the mental health and well-being of their employees, how their own mental health and well-being were affected and managed, and their perceptions of how they balanced their duties with that of their employees' mental health.

Prior to the pandemic, library deans and directors experienced leading through hardship, including constant technological change amid budget crises due to lagging financial support and the rise of costs of collection management (Ashiq et al., 2021; Bullis & Smith, 2011; Michalak, 2012; Phillips & Williams, 2004; Walker & Keenan, 2018). These challenges continued and compounded because of safety and mental health concerns brought on by the pandemic (Ayeni et al., 2021; Kasa & Yusuf, 2020; Louderback, 2021). The emotional well-being of library leadership is not specifically addressed in existing scholarly literature; however, the mental health of academic librarians, including burnout, is well documented (Christian, 2015; Kane, 2018; Matteson et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2020). This study explored the experiences of academic library deans and directors working during the pandemic to investigate how they perceived the mental health and well-being of themselves and their library workers.

This study is important because mental health and wellness are linked to organizational health and productivity, including within libraries (Birnbaum et al., 2010; Coralane et al., 2017; Martin et al., 1996; Ping & Pang, 2020). Future global crises are more than possible; they are

probable; therefore, future leaders will benefit from research exploring how library deans and directors experienced mental health and wellness challenges, both in themselves and in their workers. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the mental health and wellness experiences of academic library deans and directors early in the pandemic, particularly through the first year. These interviews generated possible pathways to assist library leadership manage their own mental health while assisting their employees' well-being during future crises. In addition, this study is evidence of the need for future studies on mental health and leadership.

To conduct this study, I gathered data using semi-structured interviews that focused on the experiences and perspectives of the library deans and directors. These interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams over a period of five weeks. Each of the ten participants in this study experienced the phenomenon and were homogenous in their leadership position within their respective institutions. All interviews were anonymized to ensure participants' anonymity. Several participants belong to a national peer group, and the nature of these interviews included sensitive information; therefore, extra precaution was used to protect participants from identification. Certain passages were redacted and summarized to prevent identification using deduction. Each transcript and the initial themes were checked by the individual participants. Analysis of each transcript included codes that were then analyzed and developed into themes.

Chapter V includes the major findings and conclusions and is organized according to research questions. I included themes developed from the initial analysis, implications of the study, and recommendations for future studies. I conclude this chapter by summarizing the notable points, including lessons learned.

Major Findings and Conclusions

In the following section, major findings and conclusions for each of the research questions are presented. I combined several themes to offer an integrated and more holistic discussion. The discussion is centered on empirical literature and interview responses.

Research Question 1: Personal Mental Health Challenges

The initial question of the semi-structured interviews included what kinds of mental health challenges deans and directors perceive that they personally experienced during the pandemic, if any. Overall, library deans and directors noted high degrees of stress, anxiety, and fear due predominantly to uncertainty. The theme of uncertainty was identified early within the findings because all participants noted this as a trigger for their mental health and wellness concerns and that of their employees. Understandably uncertainty about the personal health and safety of family, friends, colleagues, and community created fear. In addition to this, library deans and directors expressed long-term uncertainty due to ever-shifting safety guidelines and reported elevated stress of maintaining library services while implementing unclear health Heady guidelines (Fernando & Jayasekera, 2020; Garner & Logue, 2020; Heady et al., 2021; Todorinova, 2020). Henry noted these conflicting messages when he stated

Everything went sort of crazy. Uh. We certainly got mixed messages as I think most people did both from university administration, from the State Department of Health, from the federal government. So, you know, that was certainly a level of anxiety both for me and for my staff, and I think there was sort of or some staff of level of disbelief that this was happening.

Multiple participants described anxiety due to uncertainty because routes of decision-making were ambiguous, and ultimately, the person responsible for making health-related decisions was the library dean or director. This led to feelings of loneliness, as Raine Gayle noted

It was more the isolation, I think, of the role and feeling that the burden of trying to take care of folks that was where my mental health would run into issues, where I was spending so much time trying to take care of everybody else.

These mental health challenges are not necessarily surprising, but it is important to note because as the pandemic extended over time, multiple hardships converged to increase burnout.

Various participants noted that at the beginning of the pandemic, a high level of comradery and high levels of activity kept library leaders focused and getting through the tasks of each day. Specific studies on early camaraderie early in the pandemic are limited; however, research does demonstrate that the type of academic library, geographic location, type of library worker, and race were just a few of the differences in libraries that affected how challenges of the library were met (Peet, 2020; Todorinova, 2021). As the pandemic wore on, these differences became more apparent. For example, financial challenges were not directly felt by professional librarians who were majority white; however, younger and more diverse paraprofessionals experienced more layoffs and furloughs (Frederick & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2020; Todorinova, 2021). These differences between library workers seem to have become more noticeable over time to the participants.

During the first summer of the pandemic, many participants noted they needed a mental health reset to provide quality leadership. Participants described a slow down or pause and realization that firmer boundaries needed to be set to protect mental health. Initial research noted that the early months of the pandemic caused significant psychological distress and impaired mental health (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2021; Varma et al., 2021). A review of high-quality research on earlier psychological studies conducted within the first year of the pandemic seems to reflect the experiences of the participants in that mental health mostly improved after the first few months of the crisis (Aknin et al., 2022). Despite this marked ‘breather’ during the first summer of the pandemic, the effects of the pandemic were not felt equally. Socioeconomic, race, gender, age, and primary caregiver differences all impacted people’s ability to cope with negative mental

health and well-being during the pandemic (Aknin et al., 2022; Kapović et al., 2022; Freibott et al., 2022;). Furthermore, George Floyd's murder combined with the ongoing pandemic, highlighted racial, social, and health inequities (German, 2020; Toure et al., 2021) that many participants remarked on during their interviews.

Participants noted that during the first summer, they began to notice racial tensions from George Floyd's murder, and subsequent protests created further leadership challenges. Many participants described struggling with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues stemming from minority and low-paid staff required to come physically to work while professional faculty worked from the relative safety of their homes. DEI issues have long been of interest to academic library leadership but have increased since the pandemic (McKenzie, 2021).

For those deans and directors who noted DEI issues, they perceived the in-person staff members were frustrated, while those working remotely became angry and anxious when required to come back physically into the library. Other DEI issues included concerns about the mental health and wellness of employees living alone without support systems. Still, others noted the inequality of requiring some employees to work while parenting and homeschooling young children. The pandemic compounded preexisting problems, such as stagnating budgets and rapidly changing technology (Kasa & Yusuf, 2020), while highlighting inequities (Frederick & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2020; Todorinova, 2021). Nearly all participants included aspects of DEI complicating leadership during the pandemic, and many referenced aspects of these issues as ultimately affecting their own mental wellness.

Overall, the participants described burnout due to relentless stress caused by intersecting hardships which compounded and exasperated uncertainties caused by the pandemic. Burnout among library administrators is not well-researched (Christian, 2015; Corrado, 2022; Wood et

al., 2020), with the bulk of research focused on instruction librarians (Lowe & Reno, 2017). This is problematic because of the relationship between burnout to turnover within librarianship (Christian, 2015; Wood et al., 2020), which could include library administrators.

Several participants noted the desire to retire due to a mix of reasons resulting from the pandemic. Despite these feelings, nearly all stayed in their positions and described how they managed to cope despite high levels of stress and anxiety. Participants described how they managed their mental health and wellness by setting boundaries, adopting self-care techniques, and building peer support groups. Work/life boundaries ebbed and flowed throughout the pandemic, with most describing a need to model boundaries for their employees to emulate. Self-care ranged from implementing various exercise routines both during and outside of work, gardening, video games, and long baths. Participants noted the importance of support at home, from partners to childcare assistants. According to multiple studies conducted during the pandemic, these behaviors are associated with lower psychological stress, reduced levels of anxiety, and greater life satisfaction (Aknin et al., 2022; Costa et al., 2021).

All participants described peer support groups as essential to their mental health and well-being. This is in keeping with the most recent qualitative studies investigating the experiences of higher education leadership during the pandemic, which also emphasized the importance of peer dialogue during the elongated crisis (Liu et al., 2022). The vital nature of these groups is apparent; however, what is less known is how they were established. For this study, peer groups varied among the participants, with several noting that close relationships with other academic library deans and directors were vital and offered a great deal of comfort, direction, and mental health support during the pandemic. Other participants noted a peer support group that grew organically from within the same organization and included deans and directors

from across campus who met virtually. Still, other participants described peer groups that included professionals who held similar interests and experiences. These peer groups were often described as enabling deans and directors to gravitate from a position of surviving to flourishing.

Edith stated

And you know, thinking about [Academic Research Libraries], you know, my colleagues [redacted], library directors around the country were also a huge support network through this. You know, we set up drop-in meetings for deans and directors of [Academic Research Libraries], just to talk about the issues that was going on. Because, you know, in my role as a Dean of the Library, my role is very different than the Dean of the College of Medicine or the Dean of the College of Engineering... you know, my other colleagues on campus... but the people who have jobs like mine are elsewhere. And it's my peers in the other [redacted] libraries that were also really, really important. So, I didn't rely just on my local network here in [redacted]. I also relied on my [redacted] network.

Participants described the importance of finding support from others who were in similar situations and/or positions because of the ability to share notes and learn what had worked and what had not. This aided in the decision process and lessened feelings of isolation. The value of peer relationships due to the pooling of knowledge, psychological support, and shared learning has long been established (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Kroll, 2016; Mullen et al., 2020) with a more recent study of higher education leaders seeming to concur that peer consultations were essential throughout the pandemic (Liu et al., 2022). In this study, many participants described peer support as positively impacting their mental health and wellness.

All participants described mental health challenges that they personally experienced during the pandemic. These challenges often resulted in burnout to varying degrees but were mitigated by implementing work/life boundaries, self-care, leaning on family support, and developing close peer group relationships. Those that developed these coping strategies tended to fair better overall throughout the pandemic. Of these participants, many described sharing their

coping strategies with employees either in all staff meetings or one on one with an employee who was perceived to be struggling.

Research Question 2: Perceptions of Employee Mental Health

Participants described the mental health challenges they perceived their employees experienced during the pandemic ranging from stress and anxiety to profound mental crises which required immediate and sustained professional care. Mental health studies conducted on the pandemic note a large increase in anxiety and depression during the initial months of the pandemic, with a marked return to pre-pandemic rates after this initial burst (Aknin et al., 2022; Kok et al., 2022). Less studied is the pandemic's effect on those who had prior mental health conditions before the advent of the pandemic (Penington et al., 2022).

Uncertainty and hardships stemming from the pandemic were noticed by participants, Henry said

...[Employees] just felt sort of mentally exhausted. They didn't feel they had the mental bandwidth to think creatively. They felt they were in kind of survival mode. You know, some of that comes from the stress of the job, but a lot of it, I think, came from the stress of the pandemic as well as their own personal lives, you know, many of them had aging parents that they were trying to deal with or they had young children, you know, so there's a whole lot of that, personal stuff going on that became much more important than the library or the university, or moving things forward.

Numerous participants described noticing that those who suffered from mental ill health prior to the pandemic seemed to get worse as the crisis continued. This phenomenon is currently under researched (Penington et al., 2022); however, this study noted that mental health deteriorated for those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Perhaps the nature of the previous mental health condition indicated to some participants that these library workers needed additional care. For example, one participant described an employee who struggled with hoarding, and this increased and became much worse during the pandemic. The employee began

sneaking into the library during lock-down to hoard items in her office and in her colleagues' offices. Helping these employees virtually from a distance was much more difficult. Some of the participants describe watching employees struggling through deeply challenging mental health experiences as both humbling and difficult. The majority of participants described concern for those struggling with mental health and wellness led them to share mental health resources routinely, both one-on-one and in all staff meetings. Marsha noted a deep concern for her employees' mental well-being stating

I did fear for individuals' coping mechanisms and support networks in their households. And so, I worked hard to make sure they knew what was available to them because some of them did have to seek professional health. Some of them did get on medications, some of them did, you know, really have to attend to their mental health and their stress levels and, and work was secondary to that.

Several participants described intervening during an employee's mental health crisis, an experience that left each stating that they needed additional training. One example included a participant who conducted a wellness check on an employee in a mental health crisis who was identified as someone who could likely hurt themselves. The participant described this as a deeply uncomfortable conversation but one that was needed to get the problem "out in the open" and connect the employee with help directly.

Participants perceived the mental health struggles of their employees often from a distance during the pandemic. Identifying who was struggling was challenging, with some library deans and directors relying heavily on the tone of voice in emails, lack of appearance on video, reports from other employees about concerning behavior, and unusual outbursts during regular meetings. To better identify those who were mentally struggling, participants employed varying tactics, including checking in on each employee individually. This was challenging because some organizations included hundreds of employees. Other participants worked with

their senior leadership team and deployed them to individually check on employees. Still, others did both in hopes of identifying any employees who may need additional help or resources. All participants recognized the need to be ‘seen’ whether this was in person or virtual and to communicate support as part of an overall ethic of care (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021; Liu et al., 2022).

Participants spoke in generalizations about their perceptions of their employees’ mental health but tended to cite specific examples of employees who experienced a mental health crisis during the pandemic. Identifying employees who were struggling took a great deal of effort, and several participants described detailed plans for checking in on employees and connecting employees with resources to help them. This overall ‘ethic of care’ was demonstrated by other higher education leaders who developed these types of tactics as part of their crisis response (Liu et al., 2022).

Research Question 3: Successful or Unsuccessful in Helping

Participants described what they perceived as successful ways they helped their employees alleviate stress and boost morale. These included increased communication to keep employees informed and fostering peer communication to build a sense of community and lessen isolation. Many participants openly shared a new prioritization that encouraged a people-first goal by adopting empathy-based decision-making and flexibility. Other strategies included holding morale-boosting virtual events and modeling boundaries and coping strategies. Research on librarian burnout, library culture, and morale was robust and well known (Christian, 2015; Geary & Hickey, 2019; Kendrick, 2017; Rathbun-Grubb, 2009). Low morale was listed among the top reasons for librarian turnover (Heady et al., 2020) and the concerns over morale continued throughout the pandemic. Listed within Corrado’s literature review are examples of

organizations that tried to increase morale, including transparent communication, public recognition of workers, giving library workers flexibility, prioritizing library workers' well-being through limiting overwhelming responsibilities, and encouraging collaboration in decision making. Other findings to improve morale and lessen burnout among library workers included empathetically encouraging and modeling a sustainable balance between work and life while helping to encourage and advance library workers' careers (Corrado, 2022). Despite participants describing multiple of these types of initiatives to increase communication, bolster morale, and increase mental health and well-being, most participants stated the need for additional training to preserve and expand on what was learned.

All participants described increased communication to meet the demands of quickly shifting employees to a virtual work environment. Most participants noted the need to increase communication to mitigate anxiety, increase morale, and foster a sense of community. Soz describes working to achieve this through multiple strategies

Most people that work in libraries are super introverted, but introverted people still need interaction with other people. And so, you take a bunch of introverted people and make them stay at home by themselves. A lot of them live by themselves. They freak out, right? Because there's so much ambiguity, there's nothing normal. And so, I worked really hard with my organizational director of organizational effectiveness and my other senior leaders and my communications person to come up with ways to help people feel connected. I like for the first, for the first month and a half of lockdown. I would email people; I emailed the whole library every day and just said things like, yes, we're locked down, but you can still find joy. Tell me you know, tell me something beautiful that happened to you today. Or and then I also sent individual direct messages by email and by Slack to every single person that works in the libraries. I actually kept a spreadsheet, so I could see who I sent something to just asking them how they were, and I did that once a week for like the first six weeks. I also at the suggestion of my administrative assistant and our communications director. They came up with this idea that I should do a weekly, we call it the Dean's debrief. It took us a while to come up with a name. And it's just 30 minutes every Wednesday it's on WebEx. And I decided I would wear a different hat every week. And so, I would give people an update on all the meetings that I went to and give have people do shoutouts if they wanted to.

Not all participants took a hands-on approach. Several increased communication but provided space away from library leadership to foster online connections amongst peers. For example, Raine Gayle stated, “I generally set up resources and backed away.” Thus, freeing people to have direct routes for communication with the administration while allowing employees separate spaces to communicate. Raine Gayle described utilizing Microsoft Teams a few months prior to the pandemic as fortuitous as librarians and staff increasingly used these spaces to share coping strategies, recipes, and a space for parents and caretakers to share information.

Morale-boosting to help mitigate mental health struggles and foster well-being took numerous forms. Soz stated

We really thought people needed something physical that they that would arrive in the mail and remind them of work. So, we created a postcard that had our values on it and sent that to people. We also got some swag couple months later. We got these all hand those strength balls really stressful, stressful. It's like the virus; yes, we are your virus shape. So, we sent those to everybody as well as some pins and some other swag. And we did that like every six months we'd send people a swag packet.

Increased communication included most participants actively shifting the culture of their organization to prioritize people over work. Amelia stated that this prioritization was not a strategic plan but a consistent reminder, “The thing that I just kept trying to push with my leadership team was like radical empathy, just radical, radical empathy.” Later stating, “Every single time I sent an email out I would basically end it by saying, you know, assume goodwill, you know, basically practice kindness. Like, you know, like assume people are struggling and that was literally how I ended.” Soz also openly communicated and prioritized empathy first. She stated

And I also reminded everyone pretty regularly that everyone's stressed, be really thoughtful. Be really patient. It's okay if people freak out you know, so really kind of not being you know, like given if people had a meltdown in a meeting not freaking out about it just saying maybe you should get off the meeting and go sit quietly and have there be no repercussions because everyone was super stressed.

Prioritizing people during the crisis was often connected to a desire to improve the overall culture of the organization. Participants described either previously working in libraries that were toxic or noted that they were brought into the library leadership position to foster a healthier culture. Raine Gayle stated

I would say [mental health and wellness] is a huge role for us in which we can create the structures and the ability and spaces for those things to happen. I have worked in toxic work environments. And a lot of that was set up at the dean/director level. So, I really do believe in the shadow of the leader and how that gets reflected through the organization. And that is one of the reasons I wanted to become a dean. So, I wanted to have I wanted to control culture or influence.

Research reflects that leadership plays a key role in influencing workplace climate and employee attitudes toward mental health, which is vital to promoting overall employee well-being (Kent et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2021). During the pandemic, Provost & Robey noted that Human Resources emphasized the connection between workplace resilience and leadership fostering both mental and physical health (2021). While the literature notes the importance of leaders on mental health within an organization, participants recalled challenges. For example, George revealed that modeling good mental health is important for work culture, particularly for student workers, but because of the culture where he was raised, talking about mental health can still be a challenge. George stated, “If we model these behaviors, I think naturally we begin thinking about them for ourselves and those we work with.” Several participants noted generational differences in how mental health and well-being are discussed in the workplace and the need for more training. Kim stated

I am a Boomer, and how I approach work and how I think of work and support is very much its job, this is what you do, this is your personal life... and working with our younger employees, how they merge both work and personal life, and they have high expectations of an employer for their value of being fulfilled. And so, what I have seen is that you know, as I'm dealing with my own, it's also I can't separate out how what our employees are thinking. And I think that is the most difficult aspect of being a leader is

that you take on the cares and the worries and the anxiety of your employees. So, it's really hard for me to kind of separate out my own well-being and our employee well-being so if our employees are really struggling, that does definitely impact my own personal well-being. What can I do? How can I solve that?

George discussed generational differences in perceptions about talking about your feelings.

George stated, "I felt like the Gen Xers are kind of being tough but more apt to talk about it, the baby boomers don't want to talk about it at all." Later, George went on to say, "The millennials and Gen Z's seem more apt or it's more part of their world that discussing their mental state is not an indicator of weakness." George's concerns are reflected in the medical literature, which indicates that older generations do equate mental health issues as a weakness (Lima et al., 2013) while there are documented increases in the numbers of college students self-reporting mental health issues (Oswalt et al., 2020).

Most participants said that they felt successful in helping their employees lessen stress; however, many stated the need for additional training. All participants felt comfortable sharing mental health resources that their workplace provided, and several conveyed gratitude that their universities invested heavily in additional mental health resources throughout the pandemic. Several participants noted the need for additional training on how to have conversations surrounding mental health and well-being. Participants noted that they were checking in frequently with their employees but struggled with how to have one-on-one conversations and to what extent they should convey their own mental health experiences.

Differences in what personal information to share and to what extent varied among participants. Soz stated that she spoke honestly about when she struggled with mental well-being in order to provide an opportunity for other employees to feel safe to share when they also struggled. Others expressed a reticence to share about their mental health, citing the need to keep a professional separation. Still others, like George, stated that he felt comfortable sharing

his personal struggles with those he perceived to be struggling as a way to get them to share about their own mental health difficulties. Later, George stated that he would hesitate to discuss his past mental health struggles in a large group but admired younger generations who could. Generational differences between mental health communication are limited; however, a variety of factors that include stigma and attitudinal and evaluative barriers to seeking treatment are documented (Mojtabai et al., 2011).

In all, despite participants' perceptions that they managed to lessen employees' stress, there is a need for more training to be better prepared for future crises. The successes that participants described included increasing communication from the beginning of the crisis both to keep employees informed and to foster peer communication. To further lessen stress, participants described prioritizing people and encouraging empathy. Most participants described intentionally fostering a better culture amongst their employees as one of their duties. Strategies to foster a more resilient work environment included holding morale-boosting virtual events, modeling boundaries, and sharing coping strategies.

Research Question 4: Extent of Stress

The final research question, to what extent to which mitigating the library employees' stress increased the library deans' and directors' stress, was investigated. Responses to how managing strategies to lower employees ranged from challenging to approaching burnout. All participants described mitigation of employees' stress levels as taking additional work. This work included creating new routes of communication, such as newsletters or additional all-staff meetings. Other participants described creating virtual spaces that encouraged employees to foster a sense of community around a particular stress point, such as parenting or caregiving. Many participants sought to create morale-boosting virtual events or spaces. These could include

moments during an all-staff meeting where the participant highlighted an employee's work and expressed gratitude. Other morale-boosting incentives included mailing out items directly to employees. Many participants discussed managing their own feelings of grief and isolation while their focus remained on caring for others. This work was both technical and included a large amount of work. For example, Raine Gayle said

One of the things that I did during the pandemic was that every about four months or so, I pull all the names of people who have either been thanked or have thanked someone else. Put it through a random number generator, and then I give them a form where they can select their random gift made by the dean. And so, it's things like vegan granola, and I'm such a dork and like knitted bookmarks or [made] ice cream. I make ice cream. There's just like a random thing that I would make anyway that is kind of small. That they get as a, as a gift. I did a lot of rice; flaxseed neck pillows that COVID year that's a lot of people wanted that. So, I sewed a lot of those up for folks. But that was the other thing I was trying to do in these kinds of technical environments, realizing that there's still a connection right so and so that thank you channel is, and we still do it today, but it was something that was really important for me to get going during the pandemic.

This increased amount of work, on top of leading the day-to-day operations, often virtually increased many of the participants' stress levels. Henry noted this about attempting to mitigate his employees' stress during the pandemic, "So, you know, it was sort of an extra layer of responsibility in a more intense way than you normally feel." Increased communication in large groups and fostering communities online was one aspect of lessening employees' stress.

Participants described managing employees' stress as overwhelming. For example, Marsha described feeling empathy overload. Marsha stated

Being very present as much as possible, providing strategies for coping to connect them to the appropriate office and opportunities for counseling, etc., but it was also exhausting, and I did catch myself having often empathy overload that I hope I did not convey to the staff and the faculty nonverbally...

Several participants noted that this leadership during the pandemic over time led to feelings of burnout. Overall, participants cared for their employees and were concerned for their mental health and well-being as well as their physical safety throughout the pandemic. Multiple

strategies for improving the general well-being of employees were implemented with varying perceptions of success. Determining to what extent mitigating employees' mental health and well-being over an extended period of time leads to burnout is beyond the scope of this study. The extent to which mitigating library employees' stress increased the participants' stress varied. Further investigation into this topic is needed to provide greater detail on this subject.

In all, library deans and directors within this study recalled an unprecedented, prolonged crisis that included momentous challenges. Beyond safely carrying out the mission of their libraries, library deans and directors navigated uncertainty due to ever-evolving guidelines. Participants described the complexities of civil unrest due to long-standing systematic inequities that were reflected within their own libraries. Ultimately, these challenges led to exhaustion and at times, burnout. Those participants who enacted work/life boundaries, self-care, leaning on family support, and developing close peer group relationships were more resilient over time. All participants expressed caring for the well-being of employees and the culture of their organizations, creating multiple strategies for communicating and encouraging mental health wellness. Most of the participants described the deep challenges that they experienced while caring for and leading their employees through the pandemic and expressed a need to learn from the experience to be prepared for future mega crises.

Implications of the Study

This is likely the first phenomenological study to explore the extent that academic library deans and directors supported the mental health and well-being of their employees, how their own mental health and well-being were affected and managed, and their perceptions of how they balanced their duties with that of their employees' mental health. It is one of the few studies that

focus solely on the mental health experiences of academic library deans and directors during the pandemic.

The implications of this study are for academic library deans and directors. Learning from experiences during the pandemic can inform better ways of leading during future crises. This study can help inform a larger conversation about how to better support leaders during a crisis and what support leaders should give an organization during a crisis. For example, participants from this study experienced less burnout when they reported strong work/life boundaries, established coping strategies, and strong administrative support. Caring for others' well-being as the pandemic extended and encompassed further hardships led to exhaustion. Library deans and directors need to prioritize themselves in order to sustain leading their library employees.

The findings in this study are also important for administrators in higher education, particularly to provosts who typically supervise library deans and directors. Participants in this study who described their provosts as understanding the value of libraries, communicated effectively with the participants, and placed them on vital campus committees reported less levels of burnout. Conversely, participants who described their provosts as unresponsive, or missing described more burnout. Lack of administrative support from the provost's office was listed in several studies as one of the top stressors impacting the well-being of a sample of deans from university libraries (Coll et al., 2019; Gmelch et al., 1999). Even though demonstrating the value of academic libraries to university libraries has long been one of the primary duties of academic research library deans and directors, many struggle with the best way to communicate with university leaders (Murray & Ireland, 2018). It may be this pre-pandemic tension that became exasperated during the crisis due to multiple factors.

Recommendations for Future Study

This phenomenological study described the mental health experiences of library deans and directors and their perceptions of the employees' mental health during the pandemic.

However, there is still a need for additional research to fill in several gaps which future studies could illuminate. I have four recommendations for future study:

1. This phenomenological study focused on the perceptions of academic library deans and directors. To investigate whether their perceptions were shared by more library leaders, more rigorous quantitative and mixed-method studies are needed.
2. Within this study, participants described different techniques for mitigating employees' stress. Future studies are needed to explore to what degree these techniques helped lessen stress in employees' and which techniques worked the best.
3. Burnout rates of academic library deans and directors need to be studied using a large-reaching quantitative survey. A mixed-method approach to this could provide a more enhanced description of the causes of burnout among academic library deans and directors.
4. To understand the experiences of other campus leaders during the pandemic, further studies of departmental chairs and deans using rigorous mixed-method studies are needed.
5. Participants in this study noted perceived generational differences in ease when speaking about personal mental health issues. To what degree different generations perceive mental health challenges in themselves and others could be the subject of a both qualitative and quantitative studies.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis study was to explore the experiences of academic library deans and directors working during the pandemic to investigate how they perceived the mental health and well-being of themselves and their library workers. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews given to ten R1 or R2 academic research library deans or directors who led their respective institutions during the first years of the pandemic. Participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts and initial themes from their interviews to provide corrections. After careful analysis and coding, overarching themes emerged from the transcripts. These themes were used to inform the four research questions to provide insight into how these deans and directors supported the mental health and well-being of their employees, how their own mental health and well-being were affected and managed, and their perceptions of how they balanced their duties with that of their employees' mental health.

This study is important because mental health and wellness are connected to organizational health and productivity (Birnbaum et al., 2010; Coralane et al., 2017; Martin et al., 1996; Ping & Pang, 2020), and this study adds to the body of research. The uncertainty of continuously shifting safety protocols converged with multifaceted hardships to increase the stress and anxiety of both library leadership and employees. Library deans and directors implemented numerous strategies to lower the stress levels of employees. These strategies took effort and time, and participants perceived that their efforts helped their employees feel more connected and less isolated. Participants noted that those who experienced mental health challenges prior to the pandemic appeared to get worse over time. Most participants felt comfortable sharing mental health resources and increasing communication during the crisis but expressed the need for more mental health training to close gaps in skills on mental health and well-being conversations.

In conclusion, this study is a start to a broader conversation on how to better support leaders during a crisis and what practices add to their resilience over time. The perceptions of library leaders' efforts in supporting their employees' mental health and wellness add to the literature on cultivating beneficial workplace culture. Future studies on the extent of help that library leadership needs and the type of mental health training needed would be useful. Lessons learned in the global pandemic today could lay a pathway for best practices in future crises or simply foster more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and mentally healthy libraries.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

-----Original Message-----

From: Lindsey Taylor <no-reply@irbnet.org>

Sent: Tuesday, September 13, 2022 3:25 PM

To: Thomas, Sabrina <sabrina.thomas@marshall.edu>; Lambert, Eugenia
<webb24@marshall.edu>

Subject: IRBNet Board Action

Please note that Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [1917136-1] Academic Library Deans and Directors Experiences and Perceptions of Mental Health: Phenomenological Study Principal Investigator: Eugenia Lambert

Submission Type: New Project

Date Submitted: August 29, 2022

Action: APPROVED

Effective Date: September 13, 2022

Review Type: Exempt Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Lindsey Taylor at l.taylor@marshall.edu.

Thank you,

The IRBNet Support Team

Appendix B: Consent to Participate in Research – Verbal Presentation

Hello, my name is Sabrina Thomas, MA, MIRLS. The principal investigator of the study is Dr. Eugenia Lambert. You have been selected to be in a phenomenological study about the mental health of academic library leadership during the pandemic. This study involves research. The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of academic library deans and directors through the early months of the pandemic. The focus is on how library leadership supported the mental health and well-being of their library workers and themselves. This will take 2 hours or less of your time. The Marshall University Institutional Review Board has approved this study. After the interview, I will ask you to read over my themes taken from your interview to correct them if needed.

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to you for participating in this study. There is no cost or payment to you. If you have questions while taking part, please stop me and ask. Your responses will remain confidential. I will link your answers to you by a pseudonym of your choosing and this will be used in order to protect your identity. Each interview will be recorded and once transcribed, I will delete the recording. All backup recordings will be deleted upon the study's conclusion.

If you have questions about this research or study related problems, you may call me the co-investigator, Sabrina Thomas at 304-696-3627 or email me at sabrina.thomas@marshall.edu. You may also contact Dr. Eugenia Lambert the Principal Investigator at webb24@marshall.edu. If you feel as if you were not treated well during this study or have questions concerning your rights as a research participant call the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at (304) 696-4303.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to stop. May I continue?

Appendix C: Interview Schedule and Questions

After reading verbal consent, obtaining the affirmative, and obtaining a pseudonym, begin recording.

State: We will begin with basic demographic questions. If you prefer not to answer any of these questions, you can simply ask that I skip the question and we will move on to the next.

Demographic Questions

- 1.)What is your institution's Carnegie Classification?
 - a. R1
 - b. R2
 - c. Other _____

- 2.)Were you in your current position at any time during January – December 2020?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- 3.)What is your job title?
 - a. Dean
 - b. Director
 - c. Other _____

- 4.)How many librarians, associate deans and staff do you supervise directly?
 - a. Less than 10
 - b. 10-19
 - c. 20-29
 - d. 30-39
 - e. 40-49
 - f. Over 50
 - g. Over 100

- 5.)How many employees work within your University Library or Libraries overall?
 - a. Less than 10
 - b. 10-19
 - c. 20-29
 - d. 30-39
 - e. 40-49
 - f. Over 50

- g. Over 100
- 6.)What position does your direct supervisor currently hold?
- 7.)Years as a director/dean/or top leadership position at your current institution?
- a. Less than 2 years
 - b. 2-5 years
 - c. 6-10 years
 - d. 11-15 years
 - e. More than 15 years
- 8.)What was your previous position?
- a. Interim director
 - b. Director at another institution
 - c. Associate university/college librarian
 - d. Department head
 - e. Other position in higher education
 - f. Other position outside of higher education
 - g. Other
- 9.)What is your age?
- a. 22-34
 - b. 35-44
 - c. 45-54
 - d. 55-64
 - e. 65 and over
- 10.)What is your gender identify?
- a. Man
 - b. Woman
 - c. Transgendered
 - d. Non-binary
 - e. Another option not listed
- 11.)What race and ethnicity do you identify with, you may choose whichever apply. (Read only if needed).
- a. White
 - b. Black or African American
 - c. Asian or Asian American
 - d. Of Hispanic origin
 - e. Middle Eastern
 - f. American Indian or Alaska Native

- g. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- h. Other

State: I am going to ask questions about mental health but I'm not looking at this from a strict diagnosis point of view but rather a generalization of mental health concerns that may include things like distress due to uncertainty, confusion, panic, stress, anxiety, aggravation, fear, or tension.

Ask Main Questions- Ask other banked questions as possible.

Main Questions

- Tell me about your experience in library leadership during the pandemic. Specifically, the first 12 months.
- Tell me about your mental health experiences while you led your library or libraries during the pandemic.
- What was it like to lead library workers who were mentally struggling throughout the pandemic?

Interview Question Bank

- Were there any tactics that you used to comfort or improve your employees' frame of mind?
- How could you tell that employees were struggling? Can you give me examples?
- Tell me about how mental health or wellness came up in conversation? (Get details of conversations surrounding mental health, if possible).
- Describe any mental health challenges you experienced during the pandemic? In what ways did this- if any- help you relate to your staff?
- How did managing the welfare of your staff affect your own mental health?
- Is there anything else that you can think of that you want to tell me?
- How was leadership during the pandemic different than leadership during non-pandemic times?
- What (if any) mental health issues arose that you hadn't experienced prior to the pandemic?
- Tell me more about that _____

- You said _____ can you give me more details on that?
- How did that make you feel?
- What (if any) in your training or experience prepared you for the mental health challenges you faced during the pandemic?
- How do you feel about the way you responded?
- Reflecting back on that time, what training did you wish you had had?
- How qualified did you feel to take on this responsibility?

To end the interview, state: Thank you for meeting with me today. I truly appreciate your time.

Stop recording and exit interview.

Appendix D: Sabrina Nicole Thomas' CV

Sabrina Thomas

Marshall University
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, West Virginia 25755
(304) 696-3627
sabrina.thomas@marshall.edu

EDUCATION

Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) Leadership Studies ABD 2023

Marshall University, Huntington, WV

Department of Leadership Studies

Academic Library Leadership and Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Eugenia Lambert

Master of Arts in History, December 2010

Marshall University, Huntington, WV

Department of History

Thesis Title: Marriage vows and economic discrimination: The married teacher problem

Thesis Chair: Dr. Kat Williams

Master of Arts in Information Resources and Library Science, May 2006

University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

School of Information

Bachelor of Science in History, December 2001

Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

Head of Research and Instruction Services 2022-

Marshall University Libraries

Lead a team of dynamic academic research and instruction librarians who provide quality liaison relationships, research consultations, information literacy instruction, and reference assistance in-person and online.

Research and Instruction Librarian, August 2006-2021

Library liaison for the College of Health Professions and College of Arts and Media which included updating faculty on library budgeting, trial databases, and selection of materials. This includes providing exceptional instruction via synchronous online or in-person sessions and asynchronous modules for information literacy.

WVROCKS/HEPC, August 2012-2020

Adjunct professor who developed and taught multiple information literacy classes online, primarily nontraditional students seeking to finish their secondary education.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Plan, delegate, and facilitate departmental goals and provide leadership in setting and communicating priorities. Responsible for overall operational efficiency of the department.
- Mentor, motivate, supervise, and evaluate library faculty and staff as they provide instruction, information services, student engagement, and liaison activities.
- Guide and foster professional growth, development, and retention of departmental faculty and staff.
- Provide pedagogical guidance and support for all information literacy initiatives delivered online, high-flex and through face-to-face sessions.
- Explore and evaluate new and existing trends in research and best practices for instructional technologies.
- Head liaison to the College of Arts and Media and the College of Health Professionals updating faculty on libraries' budget, materials, and initiatives. Includes holding multiple workshops for faculty on elements of information literacy in order to empower them in their own classrooms.
- Lead and coordinated the Drinko Libraries Display Committee, which coordinates special events and receptions such as the MU Women's Exhibition of 2018, *Nevertheless, She Persisted* and our latest exhibition of spring 2020 was titled, *Optimism in Appalachia: Reclaiming Hope Through Artwork, Crafts and Poetry*.

COURSES DEVELOPED AND/OR TAUGHT

ITL- 302- Ethics and Information in the Digital Age

This course is an examination of ethical use and misuse of information, predominantly focused on intellectual property, copyright law, and plagiarism.

ITL 406- Strategies for Digital Citizenship: Tools for navigating the information ecosystem.

This course is an introduction to digital citizenship and information literacy skills that will help students learn the cognitive, social and technical skills for navigating the digital information ecosystem.

ITL 455- Pedagogy of New Literacies and Applied Critical Thinking

This course is an introduction to information and new literacies instruction in a variety of libraries and other information-related organizations and for a variety of patrons (including K-12, ESL, special needs learners, and adult learners).

ITL 410- Information Literacy and Critical Thinking

The purpose of this course is to expose students to the technological resources that hold the most current and cutting-edge scholarly information.

PLT 280-Public Library Marketing

This course will expose students to advanced marketing skills and implementation processes.

UNI 102- Strategies for Academic Success

Within this course students developed strategies for academic success by learning university support systems, developing goals, and outlining strategic plans for their academic success.

FYS 100-First Year Seminar

Students will develop intentional critical thinking skills integral to lifelong learning through inquiry, discussion, interaction, discovery, problem solving, writing, research, reflection and examination of complex multicultural/global ideas and themes.

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Publications

Journal Articles

Thomas, Sabrina, Kacy Lovelace, and Lindsey Harper. (2021) Generating professional best practices to combat dis- and misinformation, resist burnout, and empower our communities. *College & Research Libraries News*, 82, 385-386.

Thomas, Sabrina, Kacy Lovelace, and Lindsey Harper. (2020) Librarians' experiences with social media and COVID-19 misinformation, *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy*. 5(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.5860/jifp.v5i1.7391>

Thomas, Sabrina, Kacy Lovelace. (2019) Combining Efforts: Libraries as mental health safe spaces. *College & Research Libraries News*, 80 (10), 546. Doi: 10.5860/crln.80.10.546

Thomas, Sabrina, Kacy Lovelace. (2019) Ending the silence: Utilizing personal experiences to enhance a library mental health initiative." *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy*, 4(2), 3. Doi: 10.5860/jifp.v4i2.7079

Thomas, Sabrina. (2017). Promoting Digital Citizenship in First Year Students: Framing information literacy as a tool to help peers. *College and Undergraduate Libraries* 24, 1-13.

Thomas, Sabrina, Teresa Bean. (2010). Being Like Both: Library Instruction Methods that Outshine the One-Shot. *Public Services Quarterly* 6 (2010): 237-249. Print

Book Chapter

Thomas, Sabrina, Eryn Roles, and Kat Phillips. (2019). "IF I APPLY: a New Recipe for Critical Source Evaluation for the (Dis)Information Age." In *Critical Thinking About Sources Cookbook*.

Other

Thomas, Sabrina, Eryn Roles, and Kat Phillips. (2020) "Navigating the Information Ecosystem: Getting Personal with Source Evaluation, IF I APPLY" which is a LOEX conference paper.

Thomas, Sabrina. (2010). *Marriage vows and economic discrimination: The married teacher problem* [Master's Thesis, Marshall University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <https://go.exlibris.link/CDSStYRFk>

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

Thomas, S.& Roles, E., West Virginia Library Association Annual conference, "Navigating Information Literacy During a Pandemic/Political Adversity: Orienting Our Students and Ourselves," WVLA, Canaan Valley, West Virginia. (October 6, 2022).

Thomas, S., Lauer, H., Titus, R. WVLA Annual Meeting, "Promoting Intellectual Freedom Through Displays," WVLA, Davis, WV. (October 6, 2022).

Thomas, S., & Mollette, S., WVLA Fall Conference, "Levels of Cranky: Policies for Problem Patrons," West Virginia Library Association. (October 5, 2022).

Thomas, S., Lovelace, K., Harper, L., American Library Association's Annual Conference, "Generating Professional Best Practices to Combat Dis- and Misinformation, Resist Burnout, and Empower Our Communities," Association for College and Research Libraries, Virtual. (June 2021).

Hollis, D. W. (Panelist), Thomas, S. (Panelist), Dean Bookwalter, R. B. (Moderator), OneJohnMarshallU, "Finding Truth in the Post-Fairness Era," Marshall University, Huntington. (March 24, 2021).

Thomas, S., TEDx, "Bridges of Hope: From Foster Care to College. March 20, 2020.

Thomas, S., Roles, E., Phillips, K., LILAC, "I'm not calling you a liar, but don't lie to me: getting personal with source evaluation," Nottingham, England. April 24, 2019.

Thomas, S., Lovelace, K. J., Tolliver, L., Alford, M., Phillips, T., American Library Association Annual Conference, "Bolster Academic Libraries as Integral Safe Spaces

- for Mental Health," American Library Association, Washington, DC. June 22, 2019.
- Thomas, S., Western Counties Regional Library System Annual Conference Key Note Address, "Source Evaluation in the Misinformation Age," Cabell County Public Library. May 2, 2019.
- Thomas, S., Lovelace, K., Alford, M., Leah, T., Connect & Communicate, "Creating Safe Spaces," Pennsylvania Library Association, Office. (November 8, 2019).
- Thomas, S., & Mollette, S., Coalfield Development Training, "Information Literacy Workshop," Coalfield Development. (October 25, 2019).
- Thomas, S., & White, K., Mental Health Initiative Panel Presentation, "Trauma and Resiliency Discussion: Finding Hope," Marshall University, Huntington WV. (November 8, 2018).
- Thomas, S., Western Counties Regional Library System Annual Conference Key Note Address, "Working Together: Making Information Literacy Outreach a Priority," Cabell County Libraries, Huntington WV. (October 8, 2018).
- Thomas, S. (Moderator), Mental Health Initiative Panel Presentation, "Anxiety and Depression Panel Discussion: Finding Help," Marshall University, Huntington WV. (September 27, 2018).
- Thomas, S. (Panelist), Roles, E. D. (Panelist), Titus, R. (Panelist), iPED: Inquiring Pedagogies, "Librarians: Motivated by Your Successes - Collaborative Skills, Tools, and Resources at Marshall University," Center for Teaching and Learning, Huntington WV. (August 14, 2018).
- Roles, E. D. (Other), Thomas, S. (Presenter Only), Kentucky Library Association Library and Instruction Round table Retreat, "IF I APPLY," KLA, John Grant Crabbe Main Library, Eastern Kentucky University. (July 20, 2018).
- Thomas, S. (Presenter & Author), Roles, E. (Presenter & Author), Library Instruction Round table Retreat, "IF I APPLY," Kentucky Library Association, Richmond. (July 20, 2018).
- Kinghorn, B., Krutka, D., Gurjar, N., Thomas, S., SITE 2018 International Conference, "Using Social Media in the Classroom in the Age of Fake News," Society for Information Technology in Teacher Education, Alexandria, VA. (March 28, 2018).
- Thomas, S., Phillips, K., Roles, E., Connect & Communicate Series, "IF I APPLY: Updated CRAAP Test for Evaluating Sources," Pennsylvania Library Association, Web. (February 16, 2018).

- Thomas, S., West Virginia Library Association Fall Conference, "All Hands on Deck: Making Information Literacy Outreach a Priority," WVLA, White Sulphur Springs WV. (November 9, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E., Phillips, K., WV Center for Teaching and Learning iPed Conference, "Encouraging Source Credibility through the IF I APPLY Test," MU Center for Teaching and Learning, Huntington WV. (August 15, 2017).
- Thomas, S., WV Center for Teaching and Learning iPed Conference, "Navigating the Information Ecosystem: Finding Scholarly Overviews of Complicated, Controversial Topics," MU Center for Teaching and Learning, Huntington WV. (August 15, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Cabell County Teaching Institute, "Information Literacy and the Digital Age," Cabell County Board of Education, Huntington WV. (August 2, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Cabell County Teaching Institute, "Protecting Students from Internet Dangers," Cabell County Board of Education, Huntington WV. (August 2, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Cabell County Teaching Institute, "The Craft of Research, Credibility, and Current Events," Cabell County Board of Education, Huntington WV. (August 2, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E., Phillips, K., WPWVC/ACRL 2017 Spring Conference, "Making the CRAAP Test Less Crappy," WPWVC/ACRL, Potomac State College, Keyser, WV. (August 2, 2017).
- Thomas, S., WPWVC/ACRL 2017 Spring Conference, "Understanding and Teaching Google's Algorithms and Fake News," WPWVC/ACRL, Potomac State College, Keyser, WV. (August 2, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Cabell County Teaching Institute, "Information Literacy and the Digital Age," Cabell County Board of Education, Huntington WV. (August 1, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Cabell County Teaching Institute, "Protecting Students from Internet Dangers," Cabell County Board of Education, Huntington WV. (August 1, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Cabell County Teaching Institute, "The Craft of Research, Credibility, and Current Events," Cabell County Board of Education, Huntington WV. (August 1, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Cabell County Teaching Institute, "Information Literacy and the Digital Age," Cabell County Board of Education, Huntington WV. (July 31, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Cabell County Teaching Institute, "Protecting Students from Internet Dangers," Cabell County Board of Education, Huntington WV. (July 31, 2017).

- Thomas, S., Cabell County Teaching Institute, "The Craft of Research, Credibility, and Current Events," Cabell County Board of Education, Huntington WV. (July 31, 2017).
- Thomas, S., West Virginia Women's Studies Biennial Conference on Rural Women, "The Princess Panel: A Discussion of Disney Princesses and the Environment," Women's Studies, Huntington WV. (April 8, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E. D., Phillips, K., West Virginia Library Association Spring Fling, "Making the C.R.A.A.P. Test Less Cappy," WVLA, Summersville, WV. (April 6, 2017).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E. D., Phillips, K., West Virginia Library Association Annual Conference, "25 in 50: Delve into the wonderful websites for instruction and literacy for all libraries," WVLA, Daniels, WV. (October 7, 2016).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E. D., Phillips, K., West Virginia Library Association Annual Conference, "25 in 50: Delve into the wonderful websites for instruction and literacy for all libraries," WVLA, Daniels, WV. (October 7, 2016).
- Thomas, S., West Virginia Library Association Annual Conference, "Information Literacy Learning Activities that Incorporate the Frames," WVLA, Daniels, WV. (October 5, 2016).
- Thomas, S., 2016 iPed Conference on Teaching and Learning, "Encouraging Digital Citizenship through the Framework for Information Literacy," Marshall University Center for Teaching and Learning, Marshall University. (August 16, 2016).
- Thomas, S., Faculty Learning Community: Pedagogy of Undergraduate Research, "Introducing the new Framework for Information Literacy," Center for Teaching and Learning. (November 20, 2015).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E., 2015 iPed Conference on Teaching and Learning, "It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's a Research Superhero!: Librarians Can Help Save the Community Learning Experience," Marshall University Center for Teaching and Learning, Marshall University. (August 18, 2015).
- Thomas, S., Library Faculty In Service Day, "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," MU Libraries. (August 13, 2015).
- Thomas, S. (Discussant), American Library Association Annual Conference 2015, "Clio App," American Library Association, San Francisco. (June 2015).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E., Mollette, S., Durst, Z., Kelli, J., Vinson, L., Minik, J., West Virginia Library Association Spring Fling, "Mountwest-to-Marshall Degrees Pathway," WVLA, Flatwoods. (April 9, 2015).

- Thomas, S. (Presenter Only), Lewis, C. P., Beach, G. R., WVLA 2014 Annual Conference, "MU Reads 150: How to Get the Ball Rolling," West Virginia Library Association, Snowshoe Resort. (October 8, 2014).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E. D., Marshall University iPed Conference, "Making Research Relevant: Information Literacy in the Classroom," Marshall University Center for Teaching and Learning, Huntington. (August 19, 2014).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E. D., Marshall University iPed Conference, "Making Research Relevant: Information Literacy in the Classroom," Marshall University Center for Teaching and Learning, Huntington. (August 19, 2014).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E. D., 37th Annual Appalachian Studies Association, "Researching Appalachian History on a Budget," Appalachian Studies Association, Huntington. (March 29, 2014).
- Thomas, S., Roles, E. D., 37th Annual Appalachian Studies Association, "Researching Appalachian History on a Budget," Appalachian Studies Association, Huntington. (March 29, 2014).
- Thomas, S. (Presenter Only), Research and Instruction Services Retreat, "Creating Lesson Plans," MU Libraries, Marshall University. (July 25, 2013).
- Thomas, S. (Presenter Only), Roles, E. D., WVLA 2013 Academic Summer Division Retreat, "Information Literacy Arsenal," West Virginia Library Association, Marshall University. (June 25, 2013).
- Thomas, S. (Presenter Only), Roles, E. D., WVLA 2012 Annual Conference: Be the Change, "Appetite for Instruction," West Virginia Library Association, Stonewall Resort. (October 11, 2012).
- Thomas, S., Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way: Setting Your Pace as a Library Leader, "Information Literacy: Fresh Ideas and New Learning Activities," Western Pennsylvania/West Virginia Association of College & Research Libraries Conference, Waynesburg University - Waynesburg, PA. (June 1, 2012).
- Thomas, S. (Presenter Only), Roles, E. D., West Virginia Library Association Spring Fling Conference, "Digging Deeper: Teaching Information Literacy as a Life Skill," West Virginia Library Association, Flatwoods, WV. (March 22, 2012).
- Thomas, S., TECI Training Presentation, "TECI Training," Marshall University Information Technology, Marshall University. (October 7, 2011).

Thomas, S., Interprofessional Development, "Developing Innovative Collaborative Information Literacy Sessions with Faculty," West Virginia Library Association, Charleston, WV. (October 5, 2011).

Thomas, S., Marshall University iPed Conference, "Channeling Students' Needs and Remaining Flexible in FYS," Marshall University Center for Teaching and Learning, Huntington, WV. (August 16, 2011).

Thomas, S., West Virginia Statewide Technology Conference, "No Computer Lab? No Problem! How You can Teach Without a Lab," Morgantown, WV. (August 3, 2011).

Thomas, S., 34th Annual Meeting of the Appalachian Studies Conference, "The History of Economic Discrimination Against Married Women Teachers in Huntington, West Virginia," Appalachian Studies Association, Richmond, KY. (March 11, 2011).

GRANTS AND SPONSORED RESEARCH

"Birke Fine Arts Symposium 2023: Making the Unseen, Visible," Sponsored by Birke Symposium, Marshall University, \$370.00. (September 26, 2022 - May 5, 2023).

"Ethics and Information in the Digital Age Course," Sponsored by West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, State, \$3,000.00. (January 2019 - August 2019).

"INCO Foundation Grant," Sponsored by Marshall University, Marshall University, \$600.00. (April 2019 - July 2019).

"Quinlan endowment fund for Faculty travel," Sponsored by Marshall University, Marshall University, \$181.00. (April 2019 - July 2019).

"Digital Citizenship," Sponsored by West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, State, \$3,000.00. (May 2016 - December 2016).

(Co-Principal), Johnson, K. (Co-Principal), "Pedagogy of New Literacies and Applied Critical Thinking," Sponsored by West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, State, \$3,000.00. (October 5, 2015 - 2016).

"INCO Foundation Grant," Sponsored by Marshall University, Marshall University, \$600.00. (January 2015 - August 2015).

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- John Marshall Fellowship Presentation, "Creating a University Environment that Improves Faculty and Staff Diversity and Inclusion," Academic Affairs, Huntington WV. April 23, 2019.

- Women of Marshall, Women's Center and the Women's Studies Program, Service, University, University. (May 3, 2017).

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS

American Library Association (ALA)

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

Appalachian Studies Association (ASA)

West Virginia Library Association (WVLA)

Western Penn/WV Chapter of the Association of College and Research Libraries (WPWVC/ACRL)