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# Zoomed Out? How Burnout was Associated with Affect, Personality, and Job Satisfaction Among Library Employees During the Pandemic

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## Introduction

We examined affect, personality, job satisfaction, and burnout among library employees during the transition to remote work due to the 2020-2021 coronavirus pandemic.

We defined these four constructs as:

1. **Affect:** emotions or feelings.
2. **Personality:** an individual tendency to think, feel, and act based on one's unique experiences.
3. **Job satisfaction:** self-perception of and feelings towards an employee's job and professional performance.
4. **Burnout:** a state characterized by a combination of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, alienation from work activities, and reduced job performance.

During the early days of the pandemic, the varied interactions previously occurring across classrooms, conference rooms, offices, staff lounges, and cafes transformed into endless Zoom sessions. Many library employees consequently noted feeling greater stress and fatigue, potentially leading to burnout.

We measured how burnout related to affect, personality, job satisfaction, and various characteristics among library employees during the initial transition to remote work.

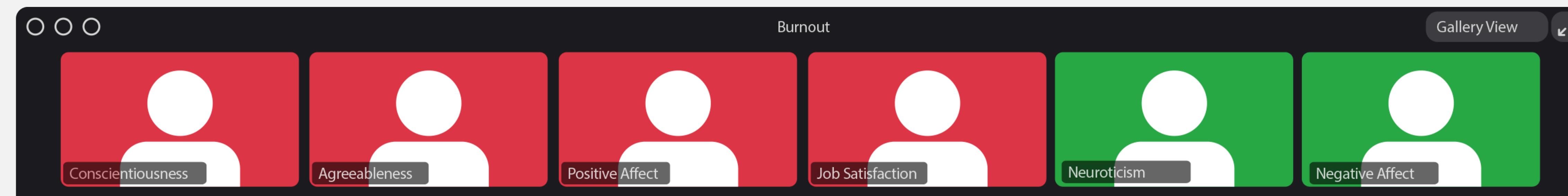
## Methods

All 130 library employees at a large, urban research university were invited via email to take a Qualtrics survey on how burnout relates to affect, personality, and job satisfaction in early 2021. The survey included the following established measures for the four constructs, presented in a random order:

1. **Affect:** the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), which measures positive affect and negative affect separately.
2. **Personality:** the Big Five Inventory (BFI), which measures introversion/extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness separately.
3. **Job satisfaction:** the Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (BIAJS), which measures job satisfaction.
4. **Burnout:** the Bergen Burnout Inventory-9 (BBI-9), which measures exhaustion, cynicism, and inadequacy, in combination providing a single burnout score.

We added a series of questions inquiring about the use of Zoom for both professional and personal contexts as well as a demographic questionnaire inquiring about the participants' employment status and department. Of all eligible employees, 54 participants (42% of the target population) completed the survey.

## Results



We conducted Pearson correlations and ANOVA analyses in SPSS to examine the associations between the four constructs and between Zoom use for remote work.

### Participant Characteristics

The 54 participants consisted of:

- 28 employees from public services departments.
- 21 employees from technical services departments.
- 5 participants did not specify their department.

A self-reported terminal library degree (e.g., MLIS, MLS, MIS) was used as a proxy for library faculty status, so that employees without a terminal library degree were categorized as library staff. By this measure, the participants included:

- 23 faculty.
- 27 staff.
- 4 participants did not specify their degree status or listed it as in progress.

### Time Spent in Zoom Meetings by Service Area and Employee Status

The participants spent approximately 1 to 5 hours in Zoom meetings each week for work purposes. Library faculty spent a significantly greater amount of time in Zoom meetings per week (averaging between 1 and 5 hours) than library staff (averaging less than one hour),  $F(1, 48) = 9.38, p = 0.004$ . Service area was not significantly correlated with time spent in Zoom meetings.

### Association between Burnout, Service Area, Employee Status, and Zoom Time

Burnout did not significantly differ based on service area (public services or technical services), employee status (faculty or staff), nor the amount of time spent in Zoom meetings.

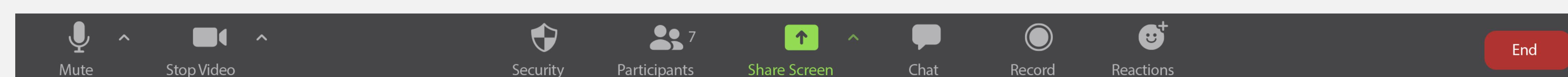
### Association between Burnout and Affect, Personality, and Job Satisfaction

Burnout was significantly negatively associated with the following variables, such that greater reported burnout was associated with reduced:

- Job satisfaction:  $r(54) = -0.35, p = 0.01$ .
- Positive affect:  $r(54) = -0.34, p = 0.01$ .
- Agreeableness:  $r(54) = -0.28, p = 0.04$ .
- Conscientiousness:  $r(54) = -0.28, p = 0.04$ .

Conversely, burnout was significantly positively associated with the following variables, such that greater reported burnout was associated with increased:

- Negative affect:  $r(54) = 0.35, p = 0.01$ .
- Neuroticism:  $r(54) = 0.40, p = 0.002$ .



## Discussion

Library faculty spent more time than library staff in Zoom meetings per week at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, suggesting the different experiences of library employees resulting from the transition to remote work, which was possible only in certain library roles. However, time spent in Zoom meetings was not associated with service area nor burnout.

Burnout was associated with both positive and negative affect, as well as the personality traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, but not introversion/extroversion or openness.

These results suggest employee anecdotes of feeling "Zoomed out" are not supported empirically. Since burnout is associated with personal characteristics, but not time spent in Zoom meetings, the results imply allowing employees to choose their preferred work modality may help them avoid burnout, thereby improving workplace culture and creating individually optimized, innovative work environments for "the new normal" and beyond.

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