



**Using
Design-thinking**

to **EXPLORE
BURNOUT**

among **DESIGNERS
IN THE WORKPLACE**
and Propose Solutions

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Abstract

Burnout is an occupational phenomenon and is defined as a “psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, p. 399; World Health Organization, 2019a; World Health Organization, 2019b). Job turnover, excessive absenteeism, and numerous physical and emotional symptoms have been linked to burnout and have significant financial implications on the organizations where those who suffer work. Workplace burnout has been widely researched and associated among human service occupations. Burnout interventions have been implemented by organizations as a way to assist employees suffering with or prone to burnout, with mixed results. Creative industries, particularly the designers who create visual designs, products, and experiences, according to the needs of clients, consumers, and application of products are among occupations who may be prone to burnout. However, there was a lack of empirical research on burnout as it pertains to designers and the organizations and conditions in which they work. Using design-thinking strategies, the purpose of this research study was to explore burnout among designers in the workplace and propose solutions.

The study was divided into three parts and used a purposive sample of designers. Participants included web designers, graphic designers, animation designers, interior designers, motion graphics designers, industrial product designers, fashion designers, UI/UX designers, instructional designers, design educators, and architectural designers working full-time in private- and public-sector companies and institutions. Part one involved implementing strategies for looking and exploring burnout among designers in the workplace. The following strategies were implemented in sequential order: online survey, interviews, affinity clustering findings from the interviews, journaling, affinity clustering findings from journaling, and creating Persona Profiles to summarize research findings. Part two consisted of a design-thinking workshop with a group of designers to further understand and receive feedback on the results of the findings and develop solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout. Part three involved interviews with designers working for a company or institution for over 20 years to gain insight on their success of and experiences with burnout to help inform future research. Results from qualitative design-thinking strategies found that the majority of designers in the study had experienced burnout at some point in their careers. Solutions proposed for alleviating and preventing burnout in the workplace were focused on better communication, leadership support, managing workload and expectations, and establishing company fit within an organization.

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Introduction

On May 28, 2019, the World Health Organization recognized workplace burnout as an “occupational phenomenon” in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (World Health Organization, 2019a; World Health Organization, 2019b). Workplace burnout was initially recognized in and associated with the human services profession, but has expanded to include all occupations in high-touch customer service roles (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Maslach, 1998; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Herbert Freudenberger (1974) first introduced and coined the term “burnout” to describe the disengagement and emotional exhaustion displayed by his colleagues (Byrne, 1991; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; McCormack, 2014). Christina Maslach further explored and conceptualized burnout as “a psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 399). Three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and reduced efficacy or accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Maslach et al., 2001).

Burnout not only affects the individual, but also has serious ramifications on the organization (Hätinen, Kinnunen, Pekkonen, & Kalimo, 2007; Maslach, 1998; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Maslach et al., 1996). Organizations with individuals suffering from burnout are faced with decreased commitment, increased absenteeism, and high turnover rates (Maslach, 1998). As a result of burnout, employees tend to experience physical, mental, and behavioral health challenges (de Looff, Cornet, Embregts, Nijman, & Didden, 2018; Heaney & Ryn, 1990; Leiter & Maslach, 2009; Maslach, 1998; Sandstrom, Rhodin, Lundberg, Olsson, & Nyberg, 2005). Researchers at the Harvard Business School and Stanford’s Graduate School of Business found that American workplaces spend \$125 to \$190 billion annually on healthcare alone due to work stress and more than 120,000 deaths each year may be attributable to how U.S. companies manage their work forces (Goh, Pfeffer, & Zenios, 2015). Historically, organizations have put more effort in treating the symptoms of burnout instead of fixing the source of the problem, typically utilizing low cost measures to reduce stress (McCormack, 2014).

Burnout research has primarily focused on human service occupations. Creative industries, particularly the designers who create visual designs, products, and experiences according to the needs of clients, consumers, and application of products, are among occupations who may also be prone to burnout (i.e., web designers, graphic designers, animation designers, interior designers, motion graphics designers, industrial product designers, fashion designers, UI/UX designers, instructional designers, architectural

designers, etc.). There is a level of pressure associated with creating that many outside of the design industry are unaware. Designers are subject to long hours and work-life boundaries are often blurred (Crack Staff, 2019). When the pressure gets too great, creativity diminishes (Eckert, Stacey, & Wiley, 1999). Designers resign from their corporate jobs or leave the profession entirely, resulting in high job turnover and excessive absenteeism, which have significant financial impacts on organizations (Hill, Hegde, & Matthews, 2014a).

Good design is imperative for profitable businesses, as it greatly influences a customer's perception and trust of a brand, impacting revenue (MDG Advertising, 2019; Merchant, 2018). While there have been YouTube videos, blogs, and website articles posted by designers seeking help and giving guidance on ways to cope with burnout, there was a lack of empirical research on burnout as it pertains to designers and the organizations and conditions in which they work (Hill et al., 2014a). Using design-thinking strategies, the purpose of this research study was to explore burnout among designers in the workplace and propose solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout.

Definition of Terms

Affinity clustering

“A graphic technique for sorting items according to similarity” (LUMA Institute, 2012, p. 40).

Brainstorming

A method for generating ideas to solve a problem.

Burnout

A type of “prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998, p. 64).

Critique

“A forum for people to give and receive constructive feedback” (LUMA Institute, 2012, p. 24).

Design

“A plan or specification for the construction of an object or system or for the implementation of an activity or process, or the result of that plan or specification in the form of a prototype, product or process” (“Design,” n.d.).

Design-thinking

A human-centered and collaborative approach to problem solving that is creative, iterative, and practical; this interdisciplinary methodology involves empathy and developing a deeper level of understanding about people in order to inform innovative and creative solutions.

Designer

For the purposes of this study, a designer is defined as a person who plans and makes functional designs for an intended purpose or action, according to the needs of clients, consumers, and/or application of product.

Interviewing

“A technique for gathering information through direct dialogue” (LUMA Institute, 2012, p. 4).

Journaling

“An activity that invites people to record personal experiences in words and pictures” (LUMA Institute, 2012, p. 18).

Persona Profile

“An informed summary of the mindset, needs, and goals typically held by key stakeholders” (LUMA Institute, 2012, p. 34).

Rough & Ready Prototyping

“A rapidly built model of a new idea that approximates its appearance and behavior” (LUMA Institute, 2012, p. 72).

Visualize the Vote

“A quick poll of collaborators to reveal preferences and opinions” (LUMA Institute, 2012, p. 46).



Literature Review

Burnout

“Job burnout is a psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 399). It is defined by three dimensions: exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and reduced efficacy or accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993). Exhaustion can be exhibited by a depletion of energy, and feelings of debilitation, and fatigue (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 1993). Depersonalization/cynicism can be displayed by negative or inappropriate attitudes towards clients, irritability, loss of idealism, and being excessively detached to various aspects of one’s job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 1993). When one is experiencing reduced efficacy or accomplishment, he or she have a low morale and an inability to cope, feelings of incompetence, lack of achievement, poor productivity at work, and tend to evaluate oneself negatively (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 1993).

The primary themes in burnout research, often referred to as the six areas of worklife, are workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Maslach, 1998; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach, Leiter, & Jackson, 2012; Maslach et al., 2001; McCormack, 2014). The greater the job-person mismatch is within these areas, the higher is the likelihood of burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Maslach, 1998; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Examining burnout through these six domains puts focus on the relationship between the person and the organization (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). According to Leiter and Maslach, “Burnout is shown to be a major sign of dysfunction within an organization and says more about the workplace than it does about employees” (2001, p. 48).

Designer burnout

Design has evolved from its traditional role of improving visual appearance and function of information to a work process that propels the development of products and experiences, with a keen focus on the end-user (AIGA, n.d.; Merchant, 2018). A designer’s work greatly influences customer experience and one’s perception of an entire brand and drives profit for businesses that also impact people’s lives (Merchant, 2018). Designers are approached with a problem to solve and typically go through a series of iterative steps to ensure the creation of the best design for the end-user (Brown, 2009). Understanding the problem, people, and systems involved are crucial to a successful design. Designers are among those in the creative industry charged with the task of creating innovative, functional designs, and experiences that shape the way in which people live (Merchant, 2018). Yet, they are among the many creatives who are not set up financially to succeed or receive real acknowledgment of their contributions to the economy (Nixon, 2020). The process one goes through for the development of an impactful design can be taxing and stressful, especially under high-stakes work environments, negatively affecting creativity and ability to produce (Crack Staff, 2019; Lazarus, 2018).

Antecedents of burnout

There are many antecedents of burnout that have been identified in various industries that could contribute to burnout in designers. A lack of community in the workplace can leave one feeling isolated and conflicted (Barkhuizen, Rothmann, & Vijver, 2014; Brewer & McMahan, 2003; Charchar, 2015; Ju, Lan, Li, Feng, & You, 2015; Manju, 2018; McCormack, 2014; Sabagh, Hall, & Saroyan, 2018). Work overload and a lack of proper resources to produce can be frustrating to manage (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Byrne,

1991; Charchar, 2015; Helou, Nabhani, & Bahous, 2016; Iancu, Rusu, Măroiu, Păcurar, & Maricuțoiu, 2018; Manju, 2018; McCarthy, Lambert, Lineback, Fitchett, & Baddouh, 2016; Rothmann & Barkhuizen, 2008; Sabagh et al., 2018; Schnaider-Levi, Mitnik, Zafrani, Goldman, & Lev-Ari, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Watts & Robertson, 2011). A toxic work environment and poor working conditions lead to low morale and reduced productivity (Helou et al., 2016; Ingersoll, May, & Collins, 2019; Jamaludin & You, 2019; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019). A loss of control can happen when one is micromanaged (Charchar, 2015). Favoritism, discrimination, inadequate pay, and a lack of recognition have been shown to be contributors to burnout (Charchar, 2015; Helou et al., 2016; Manju, 2018; Sabagh et al., 2018). Ethical conflicts and meaningless tasks can be dehumanizing (Charchar, 2015). Lastly, burnout has been seen as a result of job-mismatches with the organization and/or job duties (Brewer & McMahan, 2003; Helou et al., 2016; Manju, 2018; Sabagh et al., 2018).

In addition to the items noted above, there are also personality antecedents that may contribute to burnout, including low levels of hardiness, poor self-esteem, an external locus of control, and avoidant coping style (Maslach et al., 2001). Those with less years of experience are more at risk of experiencing emotional exhaustion (Manju, 2018; Sabagh et al., 2018). There have been mixed reviews on whether job attitudes are a significant factor of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

Consequences of burnout

There are alarming ramifications to burnout affecting the individual and organization. Three studies (de Looft et al., 2018; Heaney & Ryn, 1990; Leiter & Maslach, 2009) found burnout resulted in cardiovascular disease, muscular skeletal problems, and an increased vulnerability to infections and diseases. Significant reductions in nonverbal memory, auditory, and visual attention were found in patients treated for chronic burnout (Sandstrom et al., 2005). Impaired physical and mental health, increased substance abuse, and marital and family conflicts have also been found (Maslach, 1998).

Another consequence from burnout is job withdrawal, which is associated with decreased commitment, job dissatisfaction, turnover, and absenteeism (Maslach, 1998). There have also been reports of people leaving the profession entirely due to burnout (Ingersoll et al. 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019). Organizations also suffer financially from burned out employees, due to healthcare spending increases, re-staffing, and low productivity of employees (Goh et al., 2015; Maslach, 1998).

Review, analysis and interpretation of burnout interventions studied in research

Burnout interventions have been implemented through organizations as a way to assist employees suffering from or prone to burnout. Burnout intervention programs are typically geared towards the individual, organization, or a combination of both (Awa, Plaumann, & Walter, 2010).

Individual-approach interventions

Individual-approach interventions are often described as coping skill strategies (Horan, 2002; Yip, Rowlinson, & Siu, 2008) focused on instilling resilience and self-reliance (Crowder & Sears, 2017; Hart, Paetow, & Zarzar, 2019; Maslach et al., 2012; Rushton, Batcheller, Schroeder, & Donohue, 2015). Individual focused intervention has a shorter time span of reducing burnout (Awa et al., 2010), yet it is the most utilized method implemented for alleviating it (Maslach et al., 2001).

Cognitive behavioral therapy, for example, is the most popular of the individual-approach intervention methods (Iancu et al., 2018). Most suggest improvement to one's social-emotional skills, through building resilience, instilling self-preservation, and practicing stress management (Crowder & Sears, 2017; Eschelbach, 2018; Horan, 2002; Rushton et al., 2015; Siu, Cooper, & Phillips, 2014). Professional development, rational problem solving, and constructive thinking are other approaches that imply individual reactions to situations can change and lessen burnout (Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers, 2005; Iancu et al., 2018; Yip et al., 2008). van Dam, Keijsers, Eling, and Becker (2011) researched whether motivational intervention could reverse reduced cognitive performance in burnout and found that it failed to enhance performance in burnout patients to normal levels. Piven and Derakhshanrad (2017) conducted a study with mental health practitioners to see if the establishment of a reciprocal, interactive relationship between the client and a mental health practitioner would avoid burnout, yet found neither sufficient information nor measurable evidence for documenting the alteration of staff burnout. Narváez, Tobar, Lopez, and Blobel (2016) created a mobile application featuring coping mechanisms for managing stress, including physical exercise routines, relaxing music, information about burnout, and a reminder to take breaks. Although the results from the study were positive on usability and perception of the app, burnout levels were not measured. A limitation with this approach is that it only focused on coping mechanisms. Along those same lines, Jonas, Leuschner, and Tossman (2017) created an internet-based module of guided interventions. After three months, intervention users had significantly lower values in depression and cynicism and significantly higher values in the professional efficacy subscale. However, the

intervention did not have an effect on emotional exhaustion, the core component of burnout, and failed to address the root cause of burnout. Other suggestions for alleviating burnout targeted at the individual, include practicing meditation (Schnaider-Levi et al., 2017); mindfulness (Crowder & Sears, 2017; Guidetti, Viotti, Badagliacca, Colombo, & Converso, 2019; Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018; Schnaider-Levi et al., 2017; Vella & McIver, 2019); music-imagery and mandala drawing therapy (Brooks, Bradt, Eyre, Hunt, & Dileo, 2010); physical activity (Freitas, Carneseca, Paiva, & Paiva, 2014); reiki (Rosada, Rubik, Mainguy, Plummer, & Mehl-Madrona, 2015); and wellness programs (Balch & Shanafelt, 2011; Munn-Giddings, Hart, & Ramon, 2005). Overall, the approach of these studies fail to involve the organization in addressing the problem and instead put the focus on the individual.

Research findings are mixed on the effectiveness of individual-approach burnout interventions and are often found to be ineffective and unsuccessful in solving the problem. Studies have shown that stressful conditions are not easily influenced or controlled by the individual. When given coping mechanisms to implement as solutions to burnout, individuals have experienced an increase in stress, because of the pressure put on them to alleviate burnout on their own (Bagnall, Jones, Akter, & Woodall, 2016; Heaney & Ryn, 1990; Iancu et al., 2018; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Maslach et al., 2001). Organizations, whose primary goal is profit-making, lean more toward individual-approach interventions, because they cost less to implement and have minimal organizational disruption (Heaney & Ryn, 1990; Horan, 2002; Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; McCormack, 2014). When burnout is perceived to be more of a personal issue, coping skills to alleviate burnout are most often utilized (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Overall, research has shown individual-approach interventions are not favored alone as a long-term solution, but may be effective when combined with organizational approaches (Awa et al., 2010; Bagnall et al., 2016; Maslach et al., 2001).

Organizational-approach interventions

Organizational-approach interventions tend to engage multiple perspectives for problem-solving and incorporate group decision-making (Awa et al., 2010; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Jackson, 1983; Maslach et al., 2012; Munn-Giddings et al., 2005). Focus is put on strategies for changing work procedures to alleviate burnout (Awa et al., 2010). Participatory action research and participatory decision-making are common organizational approaches implemented to engage stakeholders in the development of shared solutions (Halbesleben, Osburn, & Mumford, 2006;

Munn-Giddings et al., 2005). Jackson (1983) conducted a study where participatory decision-making was implemented as a strategy for reducing job-related strain and found decision-making to be an important factor of role strains. Although this study was not aimed to address burnout, it demonstrates the importance of involving the individual in decision-making as it has proved to be important to organizational effectiveness.

Research studies have called for the development of more organizational-approach burnout interventions because they are believed to be most effective at solving and preventing the source of the problem associated with burnout (Bagnall et al., 2016; Cox, Tisserand, & Taris, 2005; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Heaney & Ryn, 1990; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Maslach & Jackson, 1984; McCormack, 2014; Yip et al., 2008). Due to a lack of empirical research and well-designed cost-benefit studies, implementing programs on this level is met with resistance (Bagnall et al., 2016; Heaney & Ryn, 1990; McCormack, 2014). Most organizational-level interventions demand large commitments of time and resources (Heaney & Ryn, 1990), yet organizational-approach interventions have a longer time span of alleviating burnout (Awa et al., 2010; Bagnall et al., 2016).

Awa et al. (2010) conducted a review of intervention programs aimed at preventing burnout and found that combined interventions—individual and organization-directed—yielded the best results. Härtinen et al. (2007) utilized both approaches to decrease burnout; however, the goals were set to alleviate the symptoms of burnout, instead of solving the source of the problem. Overall, studies have suggested combining organization- and individual-approach methods for a more effective burnout intervention (Awa et al., 2010; Bagnall et al., 2016).

Research studies with designers who experience burnout

There have been a few studies conducted that have recognized and researched burnout among designers. The majority of the research has been conducted in interior design. Hill, Hedge, and Matthews (2014a) noticed an increase in job turnover among practicing interior designers, prompting research into this population. In this milestone study, researchers sought to understand the reasons behind why there was such a high turnover rate in the industry and burnout was suspected to be a key factor. No empirical research at that time documented burnout among interior designers. Therefore, Hill et al. conducted a study to assess levels of burnout among practicing interior designers and to identify both individual and situational factors relative to its existence. Researchers utilized the Maslach Burnout Inventory-

General Survey (MBI-GS) to measure burnout and a locally developed Job Satisfaction survey to gather basic demographic and situational, job-related information. The MBI-GS found interior designers to experience burnout at moderate levels. However, compared to other professions most associated with burnout, interior designers scored highest in levels of cynicism and second highest to nurses in levels of exhaustion. This is important to note, because interior design is not a profession one would associate with burnout, which suggests the need to further explore burnout among the design discipline. Results from the Job Satisfaction survey were consistent and similarly aligned to what has been found across burnout literature with regard to demographic factors. This implies that demographic variables do not significantly differ across job professions.

Further exploring the issue of burnout among interior designers, a subsequent study was conducted by Hill, Hedge, Matthews, and Reed (2014b) to determine if discernible differences exist on the burnout subscales—exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy—based on the demographic factors of age, gender, relational status, parental status, and hours worked. The study revealed that burnout among interior designers could be underreported, due to the historical hesitancy of American workers to report dissatisfaction with their work in social surveys (Hanson & Sloane, 1992; Hill et al., 2014b). Researchers stated that underreporting may be due in part to a notion of self-reliance instilled in the American work culture or a fear of seeming ungrateful for one's job when others are unemployed or underemployed (Hill et al.). This supports the idea that burnout could be experienced among different types of professions. The study found there to be a sense of pressure within the industry to work faster and cheaper, in order to keep financially solvent and profitable, which contributes to a highly stressful work environment. This is significant, because designers, in general, regardless of design discipline, often work within the confines of these restraints, which suggest the probability of burnout. It was stated that prolonged feelings of cynicism have been shown to translate to reduced energy to perform work tasks effectively and diminish capacity to think creatively (Maslach et al., 1996). This was important to point out, because creative thinking is an important component of design and can impair one's ability to do his or her job effectively. The study also revealed that roughly 27% of designers declared frustration with the way they were treated by their peer disciplines and public perception of the profession. This suggests the importance of bringing the topic of burnout among designers across the design discipline as a whole, to foster collective understanding and better working relationships. Researchers called attention to the emotional investment interior designers have in their creative product that is often subsequently diminished by tight budgets or construction

constraints and noted feeling devalued by unappreciative clients (Hill et al., 2014b, p. 20). This was a profound statement as this is an issue the student researcher, a graphic designer for 15 years, has often experienced in her design career and seen among colleagues in the design industry.

Burnout has also been explored in the fashion industry. Also prompted by the issue of rapid job turnover, Eckert, Stacey, and Wiley (1999) examined designer burnout among knitwear designers, looking at the causes for designer burnout and how it can be alleviated. Researchers stated the reason behind the high turnover was due to the staleness of work and pressure to develop fresh ideas. The foundation of this research study was based primarily on observation. Researchers studied the relationship between expertise, efficiency, and creativity in knitwear design and found that those who are most experienced in the field tend to get into routine tasks of production that stifle their ability to innovate and be creative. Burnout was looked at through the lenses of expert designers and novice designers, stating that expert designers are getting more burned out due to a lack of creativity in the work they are producing. It was suggested that knitwear designers develop skills in innovative thinking by seeking out advanced design projects that challenge their customary approach to solving design problems. Additionally, proactive management and support within the companies in which knitwear designers work were also proposed as solutions for increasing retention and maintaining designers' creativity to prevent burnout. The limitations with this study were that burnout was not clearly defined and the three dimensions of burnout were not addressed, which would have been helpful in fully exploring the issue of burnout and identifying solutions. Also, observations were the only method utilized in exploring designer burnout. The findings would have been more useful if other exploratory methods were utilized to fully understand the problem.

Gaps in the literature and purpose

Recommendations for future research have called for the development of burnout interventions that are designed to meet specific organizational and individual needs as well as offer opportunities for collaborative work-related problem-solving and support (Bagnall et al., 2016; Balch & Shanafelt, 2011; Cox et al., 2005; Guidetti et al., 2019; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Iancu et al., 2018; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Maslach et al., 2001; Rothman & Barkhuizen, 2008; Yip et al., 2008). Various studies have provided viable ideas for interventions; however, “the logistics of funding, designing, implementing, and evaluating these ideas remain the primary obstacles to better knowledge about the best solutions for burnout” (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, p. 109). After an exhaustive

literature review, there was no empirical research found proposing or implementing design-thinking as a strategy to understand burnout, which presents a gap in research. Hill et al. (2014a, p. 57) stated, “A more comprehensive study of burnout that included representation from a wide range of design disciplines (e.g., architecture, graphic design, landscape design, etc.) may reveal unique commonalities and struggles for those working in creative fields.” Furthermore, the problem of burnout appears to exist widely among designers due to the numerous articles and blog posts found seeking guidance and help with coping (Anderson, 2019; Bond, 2016; Charchar, 2015; Cowan, 2012; Cousins, 2019; Crack Staff, 2019; Desamba, 2012; Field, n.d.; Henryson, 2018; Lazarus, 2018; McGuinness, 2009; Starnes, 2017; Zhuo, 2014). Designers typically work for large organizations with intense pressure to innovate for societal demands, customer needs, and corporate goals. If they are burned out, the aesthetic, functionality, and safety of products, spaces, and processes that consumers rely upon may be in jeopardy. Using design-thinking strategies, the purpose of this research study was to explore burnout among designers and propose solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout.

Methodology

Purpose

Using the process of design-thinking, the purpose of the research study was to explore burnout among designers in the workplace and propose solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout.

Sample

The study was quantitative and qualitative in nature and employed design-thinking strategies. It was divided into three parts and used a purposive sample of designers. Participants included web designers, graphic designers, animation designers, interior designers, motion graphics designers, industrial product designers, fashion designers, UI/UX designers, instructional designers, design educators, and architectural designers working full-time in private- and public-sector companies and institutions. There was no demographic limitation to this population as there have been several burnout studies conducted that have identified demographic traits and characteristics of those who are prone to and suffer from burnout, with consistent findings across professions (Byrne, 1991; Hill et al., 2014a; Hill et al., 2014b; Helou et al., 2016; Jamaludin & You, 2019; Koruklu, Feyzioğlu, Özenoğlu-Kiremit, & Aladağ, 2012; Lazarus, 1991; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Maslach & Jackson, 1985; Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach et al., 2001; Rothmann & Barkhuizen, 2008; Sabagh et al., 2018; Watts & Robertson, 2011). Specific years of experience was not a stipulation for participation in the study, as research has shown burnout among varied years of experience (Helou et al., 2016; Jamaludin & You, 2019; Sabagh et al., 2018).

There were five phases of the study for collecting data that utilized five different sample groups. Those phases consisted of an online survey, two different interview

Design-thinking Strategy

PART ONE (looking and exploring)

1. Online Survey (n = 150)

2. Interviews (n = 18)

*Affinity Clustering**

3. Journaling (n = 4)

*Affinity Clustering**

*Persona Profile**

PART TWO (understanding and prototyping)

4. Design-thinking Workshop (n = 11)

- Critique/Discussion
- Brainstorming
- Visualize the Vote
- Rough & Ready Prototyping

PART THREE (looking and exploring)

5. Interviews with over 20 years of service (n = 2)

**Implemented by student researcher*

sessions, journaling, and a design-thinking workshop. The student researcher, a graphic designer for 15 years, had a network of designers who were contacted to participate in the study.

To seek participants for the online survey, an electronic message was sent to contacts in the student researcher's network, local design agencies, companies and institutions who employ designers, as well as professional design organizations. A public LinkedIn announcement was posted with the link to the online survey. One hundred fifty designers participated in the survey ($N = 150$). Designers were contacted for participation for the remainder of the study through electronic messages to recruit a sample of 18 ($n = 18$) designers to interview; four ($n = 4$) designers to journal; 11 ($n = 11$) designers to participate in a design-thinking workshop; and two ($n = 2$) designers to interview who hold design positions with private- and public-sector companies or institutions for over 20 years. Designers from various specialties/fields were purposefully recruited to represent a diverse range of designers.

Instrument and Procedure

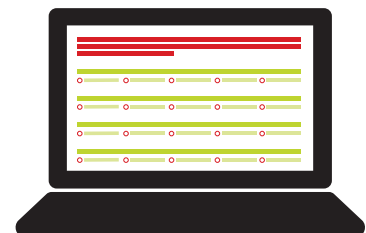
Part one involved implementing strategies for looking and exploring burnout among designers in the workplace. It consisted of an online survey, interviews, and journaling. The instruments utilized to collect data from participants in part one never used the term “burnout” initially, as recommended by previous burnout researchers, as to not bias respondents (Hill et al., 2014a; Maslach et al., 1996; Rosada et al., 2015). Part two involved a design-thinking workshop with a group of designers to further understand and receive feedback on the results of the findings and develop solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout. Part three involved interviews with designers who had worked for over 20 years at a company or institution to gain insight on their success of tenure and experiences with burnout to help inform future research.

PART ONE

Online survey: The survey consisted of a questionnaire examining designers' engagement with work (see Appendix A for survey questions).

Survey questions were inspired by the Maslach et al. (1996) MBI-GS. The survey link was sent through electronic messages via email, Facebook messenger, LinkedIn direct message, and a public LinkedIn post (see

Appendix B for electronic message solicitations for survey and Appendix C for LinkedIn post). A cover letter for internet research was included at the beginning of the online survey (see Appendix D for cover



letter for internet research). The survey comprised of 18 questions and was divided into two parts. Part one consisted of three demographic questions to understand participant population and part two included 15 questions about designers' engagement with work. A Likert style rating system was used to assign value to statements ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The online survey took less than five minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to provide their name and email if interested in being contacted for further participation in the study.

Interview: An individual interview was conducted to gain direct information from the designer about his or her engagement and satisfaction with work. Eighteen ($n = 18$) designers working full-time in the private- and public-sector were recruited from the online survey and referral via electronic message and individually interviewed in-person, over the phone, or through Zoom (see Appendix E for electronic message for interview and Appendix F for interview questions). Interview questions were inspired by the six areas of worklife and the Job Satisfaction survey, developed by Hill et al. (2014a) to assess burnout and job satisfaction. There were 29 interview questions. The first six interview questions are geared at understanding designers' demographic background in relation to their job. Questions that follow assessed job satisfaction and engagement with a wide range of situational variables and aligned with Leiter and Maslach's (1999) proposed worklife themes of workload, control, community, reward, fairness, and values, and direct questions about attitude and thoughts of burnout. Interviews lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. Prior to commencement of the interview, the student researcher gained informed consent (see Appendix G for informed consent form for interviewing). All participants were emailed the consent form and permission was obtained prior to the interview. Before beginning the interview, the researcher inquired if the participant had any questions related to the consent form. The student researcher recorded audio of the interview on a password-protected iPhone.

Affinity Clustering: The purpose of this strategy was to identify and organize issues and insights of burnout in designers from the interviews conducted. The student researcher examined interview responses and wrote each issue or insight discussed on a sticky note. Sticky notes were arranged into groups and labeled to determine common themes and patterns, building a shared understanding about the problem.



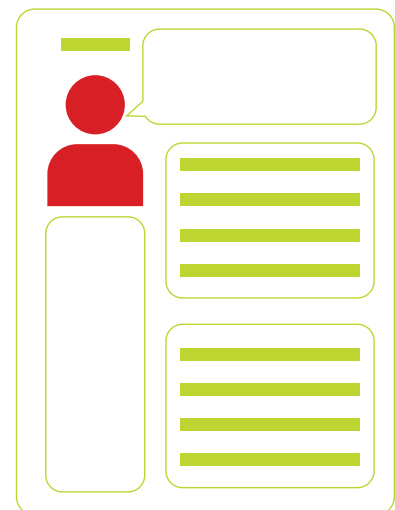
Journaling: Four ($n = 4$) designers were recruited to journal feelings associated with burnout from the online survey and by referral (see Appendix H for electronic message for journaling). Journaling took place over the course of one work week, Monday-Friday. The purpose of this strategy was to determine if designers experienced the feelings associated with those who suffered from burnout, based on previous burnout research studies, and identify triggers. The writing prompt given stated the following: “Immediately submit a journal entry if you experience any of the following while at work: exhaustion, fatigue, cynicism, irritability, helplessness, lack of productivity, incompetence, or feeling overwhelmed. Discuss and describe triggers in detail.” The student researcher created a personalized password-protected Tumblr blog for each participant to journal. The password-protected Tumblr blog link was emailed to each participant along with the directions for the activity (see Appendix I for journaling instructions email). Prior to commencement of journaling, the student researcher gained informed consent (see Appendix J for informed consent form for journaling). The consent form was emailed prior to sending the link to the journaling instructions email. A mid-week email reminder was sent to participants to encourage participation (see Appendix K for reminder email for journaling).



Affinity Clustering: The purpose of this strategy was to identify and organize issues and insights of burnout in designers from the journaling activity. The student researcher examined journal entries and wrote each issue or insight discovered on a sticky note. Sticky notes were arranged into groups and labeled to determine common themes and patterns, building a shared understanding about the problem.



Persona Profile: The student researcher created Persona Profiles of designers at risk of or experiencing burnout to summarize research findings from the survey, interview, and journaling activity. The LUMA Institute Persona Profile Activity Template was used to conduct this method (see Appendix L for LUMA Institute Persona Profile Activity Template). The profile consisted of a one-page summary of a designer at risk of burnout. The summary included a personal description of the designer, a realistic name, representative portrait, description of distinguishing characteristics, needs and goals, and a summary of his or her mindset with a memorable quote.



PART TWO (Design-thinking Workshop)

Utilizing the data from part one, the student researcher conducted a virtual design-thinking workshop with eleven ($n = 11$) designers. Participants were recruited from a global enterprise company via electronic message (see Appendix M for electronic message for design-thinking workshop). The design-thinking workshop served to further explore burnout among designers in the workplace and to generate solutions. The workshop was conducted over Zoom. An email with the date, time, and Zoom details for the workshop was sent out to participants along with the consent form to be signed and returned back to the student researcher prior to the workshop (see Appendix N for design-thinking workshop confirmation email and Appendix O for informed consent form for design-thinking workshop). On the day of the workshop, the student researcher explained the study and workshop format and gave participants the opportunity to ask questions. The workshop lasted approximately one hour and forty-five minutes.

During the workshop, participants conducted the following strategies: Critique, Brainstorming, Visualize the Vote, and Rough & Ready Prototyping. Participants were divided into Zoom breakout rooms to collaborate in teams, and Stormboard, an online collaboration workspace, was utilized to implement strategies.

Critique/Discussion: Participants were asked to critique and discuss the Persona Profiles created of designers at risk of burnout. These profiles were presented to the group for critique to receive feedback and build alignment on the issue of designer burnout. The critique was guided by directions outlined in the LUMA Institute Handbook (2012, p. 25).

- 1) The student researcher described the development of the Persona Profiles, explained its importance to the research, answered questions, and provided clarification before starting the critique.
- 2) The student researcher requested feedback to open the discussion.



Design-thinking Workshop Schedule

Introduction & Questions	5 min.
Critique/Discussion.....	20 min.
Brainstorming.....	30 min.
Break	5 min.
Visualize the Vote.....	10 min.
Break	5 min.
Rough & Ready Prototyping.....	30 min.



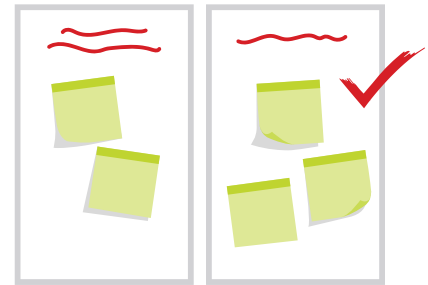
- 3) The student researcher observed and facilitated discussion (20 minutes).



Brainstorming: The student researcher asked participants to generate solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout in designers. Participants were divided into two teams. Teams collaborated in Zoom breakout rooms and separate storms, online Stormboard workspaces.

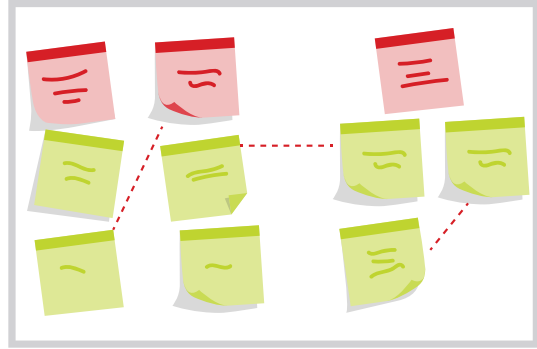
- 1) Teams were instructed to brainstorm solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout among designers by posting notes onto their storm for five minutes.
- 2) After five minutes, teams were instructed to cease brainstorming.
- 3) The student researcher informed participants that all ideas generated were not to be considered.
- 4) The student researcher denoted teams as having magic or unlimited funding as resources to brainstorm new solutions. Using another storm, participants were instructed to brainstorm ideas. At least five solutions were requested from each team.
- 5) After five minutes, teams were instructed to come up with ways to implement those ideas within the confines of their place of work (15 minutes).
- 6) After 15 minutes, teams were instructed to share at least five solutions with the group.

Visualize the Vote: The student researcher clustered ideas from the brainstorming activity on a separate storm and asked participants to vote on the best solutions proposed in order to rate and rank preferences from the brainstorm. The activity was guided by directions outlined in the LUMA Institute Handbook (2012, p. 47). Each participant was asked to cast one vote on the solution that was most favored.



- 1) The student researcher directed participants to cast their vote on the solution proposed for alleviating and preventing burnout among designers.
- 2) Participants were directed to vote simultaneously.
- 3) After voting, participants were asked to discuss what they voted for and why.

Rough & Ready Prototyping: The student researcher asked participants to create a rough and ready prototype of the solution voted on in the Visualize the Vote strategy in order to promote a shared vision for the future. Participants were divided into two teams to develop concepts. The activity was guided by directions outlined in the LUMA Institute Handbook (2012, p. 73). Participants were instructed to design a plan for the selected solution. They were assigned a storm to visually articulate the plan for implementing the proposed solution.



- 1) The student researcher instructed teams to propose realistic solutions by considering stakeholders and a plan for implementation.
- 2) After 15 minutes, teams were instructed to discuss the proposed solutions with the group.

PART THREE

Interview: An individual interview was conducted to gain direct information from a designer who has worked for a company or institution for over 20 years. Two ($n = 2$) designers meeting those requirements and working full-time in the private- and/or public-sector were recruited via electronic message and individually interviewed over the phone (see Appendix P for electronic message for interview and Appendix Q for interview questions). Interviews lasted approximately twenty to thirty minutes. Prior to commencement of the interview, the student researcher gained informed consent (see Appendix R for informed consent form for interviewing). All participants were emailed the consent form and permission was obtained prior to the interview. Before beginning the interview, the researcher asked if the participant had any questions related to the consent form. The student researcher recorded audio of the interview on a password-protected iPhone.



Results

PART ONE

Online survey: The online survey examined designers engagement with work to gauge burnout. A total of 150 ($N=150$) designers participated. The demographic profile (see Table 1) reveals that 74.7% of the respondents were professionals with over 5 years of experience while 26.3% had under 5 years of experience. Respondents worked in various industries in the private and public sector, with the majority working in corporations and universities (see Table 1). Respondents specialized in 20 different areas of design with one in the area of photography, and many working within multiple subfields of design (see Table 2). The majority worked in graphic design ($n = 92$), UI/UX design ($n = 37$), and web design ($n = 37$). Respondents indicated some level of exhaustion with work and high levels of engagement with coworkers, productivity, accomplishment, and value (see Table 3). When participants responded to the statement, “I feel worn out by the end of the day,” the majority of respondents agreed ($n = 116$). At times they experienced negative thoughts and attitudes towards clients. Respondents sometimes distrusted the motives of leadership and the company/institution they worked for, yet felt supported at other times. Respondents also experienced low morale at work sometimes. Most felt supported and enjoyed engaging with their coworkers. They were productive at their jobs and believed they made a significant contribution at work, feeling accomplished and valued at their jobs.

Interview: The student researcher conducted 18 ($n=18$) one-on-one interviews with designers from various sub-fields to gain information about their engagement and satisfaction with work. To study the level of engagement and satisfaction with work in their current positions, responses were analyzed relative to the six areas of worklife (workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values), as well as the three dimensions of burnout. Attitudes and thoughts of burnout were noted and compiled. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality.

Questions 1-6 of the interview questions inquired about respondents’ demographics. Respondents specialized in instructional design, graphic design, web design, commercial design, exhibitor design, architectural design, UX design, building information modeling design, fashion design, and design education, and worked for small- to large-sized businesses, corporations, firms, agencies, higher education institutions, design houses, and large global enterprises in the private- and public-sector. Respondents had

Table 1. Demographic profiles of respondents (N = 150)

Demographic profiles	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Years of experience		
Professional with under 5 years of experience	112	74.7
Professional with over 5 years of experience	38	25.3
Type of organization^a		
Corporate	59	39.6
University/ Polytechnic	46	30.8
Agency	15	10.1
Non-profit	7	4.70
Freelance	5	3.36
Small Business	3	2.01
Startup	2	1.34
Government	1	0.67
Parent construction company with four subsidiary construction divisions	1	0.67
Family Owned Apparel Manufacturer	1	0.67
University Health System	1	0.67
Design Showroom	1	0.67
Health Insurance	1	0.67
Contractor	1	0.67
S-corp privately-owned design firm	1	0.67
Software Consultancy	1	0.67
Small entrepreneur; 6 employees (1 designer)	1	0.67
Studio	1	0.67
Newspaper/media company	1	0.67

Note: N's range from 149–150 due to occasional missing data.

^an =149.

Table 2. Respondents' sub-fields of design (N = 150)

Sub-field(s) of design	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
1. Graphic Design, Print, Production	92	41.2
2. UI/UX Design	37	16.6
3. Web Design	37	16.6
4. Industrial Product Design, Prototyping	8	3.59
5. Interior Design	8	3.59
6. Motion Graphics, Animation	8	3.59
7. Architectural Design	7	3.14
8. Instructional Design	5	2.24
9. Design Research	4	1.79
10. Business Design	3	1.35
11. Fashion Design, Visual Merchandising	3	1.35
12. Service Design	2	0.90
13. Content Design	1	0.45
14. Creative Management	1	0.45
15. Embedded Design	1	0.45
16. Design Management	1	0.45
17. Design Strategy	1	0.45
18. Digital Product Design	1	0.45
19. Game Design	1	0.45
20. Experience Design	1	0.45
21. Photography	1	0.45

Note: Respondents had the option to choose multiple subfields of design

been working in the design field from 2 to 21 years and in their current positions from 6 months to up to 20 years.

Questions 7-9 examined designers' *Workload*. Most working in the public-sector said they worked a standard 8-hour workday. However, the majority of those working for private-sector companies stated they were scheduled to work 40-hour work weeks, but were working well over that. Their responses indicated that they had the option to work flexible hours or the ability to adjust hours as needed, but although offered, it was difficult to nearly impossible to do, because of high workloads.

Table 3. Respondents' engagement with work (N = 150)

Question	N	O	S	F	A	M
1. I feel exhausted and worn out from work.	2	32	62	42	12	3.2
2. I feel depleted at the end of a workday.	10	27	48	50	15	3.2
3. I have low energy at work.	9	64	48	24	5	2.7
4. I am energized to go to work. ^b	11	29	49	51	9	3.1
5. I feel fatigued at work.	7	51	54	32	6	2.9
6. I find myself having negative thoughts and attitudes towards clients.	28	56	40	22	4	2.5
7. I feel supported at work by my coworkers.	3	19	23	57	48	3.9
8. I enjoy engaging with my colleagues at work.	3	9	25	57	56	4.0
9. I distrust the motives of leadership and the company/institution I work for. ^b	32	44	29	26	18	2.7
10. I feel supported at work by leadership.	9	33	39	38	31	3.3
11. I am productive at my job.	0	4	23	75	47	4.1
12. I believe I make a significant contribution at work. ^a	1	7	19	65	56	4.1
13. I experience low morale at work.	20	53	41	27	9	2.7
14. I feel accomplished at my job.	2	11	37	73	27	3.8
15. I am valued at my job.	5	15	37	54	39	3.7

Note: n's range from 148–130 due to occasional missing data.

^an = 148

^bn = 149

n = Never; O = Occasionally; S = Sometimes; F = Frequently; A = Always; M = Mean

1 = Never; 2 = Occasionally; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Frequently; 5 = Always

“They expect you certain hours, but I work with people that are Pacific Coast. So, sometimes I shift my schedule to the Pacific Coast Time. . . . I was at 34 hours the beginning of last Thursday. . . . I definitely feel burned out this week.”

—Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

“It was very, very stressful. We worked more than 40 hours a week. In this industry, it is definitely a fast-paced industry, and honestly I believe everyone in my department is burned out the most. So, it is . . . a lot all pressure for the designers, just because we have to accomplish deadlines. Crazy deadlines that are virtually impossible!”

—Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation

“When you look at a 40-hour work week and it's literally only 10 hours left for all of your grading, and prep, and research, and university service. The math doesn't add up. So, my normal workweek far exceeds that.”

—Paul, design educator, university

“ *They let me choose my schedule, but I have to stick to it. Currently my team is very, very flexible, which I think is a rarity, from what I’ve heard from other coworkers. My previous job, which was in the design field was very strict.”*

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

Additionally, most stated they had the basic resources necessary to do their jobs, but it could be improved. Respondents spoke of a lack of specific software, access to technology, finances, and time and support to effectively do their job and/or produce the best product.

“ *[T]his company sometimes struggles with getting the right technology at the right time to us.”*

—Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

“ *We don’t have the support from the top, particularly financially. . . . We’re trying to hire qualified college-educated people to do these jobs. [The upper management] really don’t understand . . . that daily battle to keep quality. That’s the biggest thing and we don’t get support that we need on that end.”*

—Brice, night shift manager/graphic designer, design house

“ *For the most part, yes, I have Adobe software, which is oddly enough, something that they don’t like to buy for. [T]he biggest thing that I would like to have is a file-sharing system that works for me, because they use Microsoft products and that doesn’t really work for me. I like to use Dropbox. They don’t provide that to me. I give that to me. I pay for it myself. And the other thing is, stock imagery that I had access to . . . for a long time and then they just decided they didn’t want to pay for it anymore and, so, dropped it. [A]s much as I like to draw my own stuff, it’s not always feasible given the timeline. So, I’m kind of out of luck and I have to look for free resources, but that’s not always available for the type of things that I’m looking for.”*

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

“ *What I am lacking is time. . . . [W]e don’t have enough people. . . . I teach a software class . . . and I don’t have that software on my computer. . . . [W]e don’t have . . . department tech support.”*

—Paul, design educator, university

Questions 10-13 examined designers' *Control* in the areas of decision-making, workload, and tasks. Respondents stated clients can be challenging when not respecting design expertise. Many have opportunities to contribute to the decisions being made on their projects and around general operations within their department that affect them. Most feel their opinions are respected, but are not sure if they are fully considered or acted upon. A few stated they previously or currently did not have any decision-making opportunities in their role, which has been demoralizing. There were also many who felt micromanaged and made to feel that they were not trusted. Respondents also spoke of a lack of understanding of expectations and/or time it takes to design from leadership. Many contribute this to the lack of design knowledge and experience of their managers. The need for better leadership and direction was also expressed.

“ *We don't get a lot of say in processes, but I usually get design freedom. . . . I've had managers that don't understand what goes into design and will completely dismantle things. . . . My manager doesn't respect other people's designs and wants to put input in a non-timely manner, and she doesn't understand that what she's asking for takes time.”*

—Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

“ *I believe at times I do feel micromanaged. . . . I don't mind being micromanaged, as some might at this point.”*

—Taylor, production lead, advertising agency

“ *In my previous job I was more on the client side and I had zero input, and it was very dissatisfying to be considered one of the creative team, but to not be able to actually . . . have an input . . . or voice an opinion. . . . I have been micromanaged in my previous position, which is the biggest reason I think I left my previous position. I was very undervalued. . . . They wanted to know every movement I did regularly. They had me time each and every project to see how fast it would take me. And then . . . tell me how they thought I should do my job to make it go even faster without any input from me. . . . I had created my own process for my projects and then when I got relocated to a different team. That team was very heavily micromanaging and every move I made got rearranged to what they felt they wanted.”*

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“ *In my early years there, I did not. Decisions were made for me without my input at all. . . They allow me more now with, I guess maybe seniority, . . . I get a little more say in what I do and how I do it.”*

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

“ *Oh, I definitely wish I had more of a say, because the people who are leading this, . . . they don't know what we do on a daily basis and they've admitted that. I've been in a meeting where . . . our direct boss . . . told us face to face, he said, 'I don't understand what you guys do day to day.' And, to me, . . . that's the biggest problem with . . . our group. . . The person who's leading us and who is making those bigger picture decisions, . . . he's never designed anything and he's the one making that decision. . . It would be great if me or my boss were in a position where we have more [of a say] in the direction of where we go. . . I don't really feel managed at all. . . Our boss . . . has no leadership whatsoever over [me and my boss]. . . [T]hat's the problem. . . I would actually like some management, sort of semblance of direction.”*

—Brice, night shift manager/graphic designer, design house

“ *No one's around. Ever. . . Sometimes I would love that quick feedback. . . It's very frustrating.”*

—Debra, graphics/digital designer, healthcare institution

“ *[My clients] are kind of needy and a little nit-picky about things. . . For a while, I had to . . . send [my boss] . . . proofs of everything that I was doing, which gets a little tiresome, because it's something new every day. . . I'm sure it wasn't enjoyable for her. It definitely wasn't enjoyable for me.”*

—Marcy, graphic design coordinator, university

“ *It upsets me because it makes me feel like I'm not competent enough to be able to do my job right, or [my manager] doesn't trust me enough to handle the client and what not.”*

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

“ *[It]’s micromanaging that makes me feel incompetent. It’s a micromanaging that makes me feel unvalued. And it’s a micromanaging that is well-meaning, but at the same time . . . it doesn’t build me up at all.”*

—Paul, design educator, university

Questions 14-17 examined *Community* in the workplace. Most were fairly engaged with members of their internal team and enjoyed working with them. Many were also satisfied with the decisions being made within their department.

“ *Our team is a very close knit one, because we consider ourselves the troops in the trenches.”*

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“ *To answer your question directly . . . no, not satisfied at all, but there are other teams where, yes, I’m very satisfied with them. We work well together. So, it really...depends on which team.”*

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

“ *My . . . immediately adjacent coworkers, in terms of engagement, is pretty good. Very positive. It’s really what’s helps the mood kind of be . . . tolerable . . . We do have our different areas and teams with our different focuses and so, . . . the farther you get away from . . . where my focus is, the engagement does get a little bit less and less.”*

—Emma, graphic designer, university

“ *There’s definitely a sense of the every day battle . . . ‘We’re in it together’ and we’re helping each other out.”*

—Brice, night shift manager/graphic designer, design house

There were a few unsatisfied with the level of engagement with others, due to location, personality, age, and/or conflicting mindsets. Some also lacked sense of community in the workplace, due to structure of departments and lack of cross-functional collaborations. Many expressed limited engagement with leadership if not a member of the leadership team, resulting in indifference, confusion, division, and distrust.

“ *I'm not super satisfied with my job right now. So, that makes it difficult. . . . [The process in which I work] is broken, because there's a team that makes the content that hands it off to us, and we do this, and then there's an assessment team, and there's no evaluation feeding back. Because things are so siloed, it is harder I think to feel that sense of community.”*

—Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

“ *At my current job I have . . . mixed communication with my leadership and my team. . . . I regularly meet and discuss projects with team management, . . . but then on the other side. . . [The CEO is] a bit more distant. He thinks . . . he's really on the same page with everybody in the company but really he isn't. . . . In my previous job . . . there was a huge . . . social disconnect of . . . 'Here, you do this work, but I'm not going to communicate a lot of things that might be helpful.' . . . Because I was lower in the food chain, I wasn't given as much information, but was still receiving orders from them anyway. . . . My previous organization, I was satisfied with the direction, but not the decisions. And my current organization . . . I think there's issues with . . . senior leadership not recognizing . . . what we do. So, they don't make smart decisions in that regard. We've lost some very good designers, because someone didn't like one thing, but in reality that designer brought 10 times more to the table.”*

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“ *I am a little bit unique in [my company's] eyes, which is both good and bad, because they don't understand me, in what I need and what I do, which is why they don't provide some of [the tools I need]. . . . They kind of just treat me like the redheaded stepchild and they're like, 'Do whatever you want and don't bother us.’”*

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

“ *There is a lack of engagement for several reasons. One, I'm one of the very few remote workers. . . . Only very recently have they started adopting and adding into communication apps like Slack, . . . Trello board, and a few other things. . . . So, I've felt very isolated and alone. . . . I can't just get up and walk down the hallway to someone else's cubicle. Whereas, everyone else that I'm working with does have that ability.”*

—Heather, remote presentation specialist, vice president, small business

“ *I definitely don't like majority [of the decisions being made by my organization]. If it wasn't for my manager and how he treated me, I probably wouldn't be there, much longer. . . . I am not . . . super engaged with my coworkers, especially, since most of our offices are remote. . . . It's a different mindset with the Northern team versus the Mid-Atlantic team. . . . I'm okay with it. Again, it has to do with a lot of age differences.”*

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

Questions 18 and 19 examined *Reward* offerings in the workplace. Most believed the overall rewards, raises, and incentives offered by their organization could be improved. Many also desired more vacation days.

“ *I think it could be better, because the level of knowledge that we have in terms of software and everything to accomplish the job that we deliver. . . . I think it could be much better and could be shared with the designers, not just to staying with the senior level and the sales.”*

—Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation

“ *At my current job I'm not very satisfied [with the vacation allowances]. I think it's about average for what the United States offers, but I currently receive 18 days of paid time off, which [include sick days].”*

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“ *There's no rewards offered. There's no incentives offered. . . . [R]aises are extremely hard to get to push through HR and payroll.”*

—Emma, graphic designer, university

“ *Terrible! We don't have matching 401K contributions. Raises are almost non-existent. . . . Upper management just doesn't understand that we need qualified people. [They do not] understand staff retention. . . . I think their solution is to let people walk, instead of investing in them.”*

—Brice, night shift manager/graphic designer, design house

“ *We're not good at acknowledging people. We certainly don't do it publicly in my department. I don't think we really do it that well at the university either. . . . Duration is hard and if your only milestones are a pay increase and a position change, title change, after you worked so hard for it. .*

. . . There needs to be other little milestones of [celebration]. . . . I think that leadership should have an understanding of our individual personality types. . . . [T]here is a level of just understanding people, that is really important to understand how people should be rewarded. . . . [N]ot everyone wants the pomp and circumstance. Some people say that would be the worst thing you could ever do for them and I think . . . the variety of rewards is also important.”

—Paul, design educator, university

“*They’re really non-existent, which is another, . . . downfall about this, but that’s why . . . [I] make myself more valuable by doing so many things. . . . it’s best [if] people . . . can’t . . . define what you do. . . . [W]ith incentives and rewards, in doing that, it gives me more leverage in asking for it.”*

—Monica, technical design assistant, design assistant, sales assistant, sportswear manufacturer

Questions 20 through 22 examined *Fairness* in the workplace. Most felt underpaid and believed their compensation should be more aligned with their experience and expertise. There were some who did not feel that they had an equal opportunity to advance within the company/organization, primarily due to company structure, lack of clear paths to promotion, or being a minority. Most were fairly satisfied with the ethical standards and employment policies in place at their organization, but there were a couple who conflicted with company standards and practices as it pertains to nepotism, equity, and equality.

“*I feel better compensated at my current job than I did before. . . . I was working very hard [in my previous job]. It was very, very stressful. A bit psychologically damaging actually. But then, I was only getting paid \$20 an hour, and yearly, they would do reviews and . . . despite having excellent reviews, each time I only got the minimum increase in my paycheck for inflation. My current job pays me a bit better, more standard for what the position offers.”*

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“*[Yes, I feel fairly compensated], but . . . across the organization compensation is not equal. [For example], someone in my similar type of role, in a different department, may be compensated differently. . . . I don’t think there is enough equality amongst creative roles at this institution.”*

—Anna, graphic designer, university

“ [I do not see an opportunity for me to advance, because I am] . . . a woman . . . [and] . . . have English as second language. And even though [the company respects] that, . . . I don't see a lot of tangible ways; opportunities to grow.”

—**Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation**

“ There was one position for me to move into, and they pulled me off that track. So, I think it definitely just depends on the company.”

—**Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm**

“ I just created the organizational chart about a month ago, and there's no place for me to go in my position. . . . To me, I think you need to see that you have an opportunity to move up within the department or within your organization.”

—**Debra, graphics/digital designer, healthcare institution**

“ [With regard to ethical standards, the company I work for hasn't] been 100% stellar, but they haven't been awful either. . . . I have very little respect for [the ethics of the previous company I worked for].”

—**Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm**

“ While I am graphic designer II, there is no senior designer or assistant art director. . . . It goes from graphic designers to the art director. . . . So long as the art director is there, there is no advancement. . . . [With regard to satisfaction of ethical standards and employment policies], I'm pretty satisfied and it's improving. There is a tendency to hire for a little bit of nepotism . . . [T]hat is the one area that has not improved.”

—**Emma, graphic designer, university**

“ I probably have to go back to college and get business management training if I want to take a higher position to lead.”

—**Brice, night shift manager/graphic designer, design house**

“ I definitely think that where I'm at with my position within the company . . . would not change. . . . There's definitely a wall.”

—**Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm**

“ *I do believe when it comes to ethics, standards, morals and values, that's when HR becomes more of an importance in a company. Working with a smaller company, it's definitely diverse, I don't feel . . . discriminated against beyond race too much, but sometimes they'll be certain comments where . . . you should just have thicker skin, but in reality . . . this isn't okay.”*

—Monica, technical design assistant, design assistant, sales assistant, sportswear manufacturer

Questions 23 and 24 examined alignment of *Values* with their organization. Almost everyone believed they were doing meaningful work and felt they were making an impact. The majority supported the mission, values, and vision of the companies they worked for. A few admitted to not knowing what the core ideals were for their company, but did not see an obvious conflict with it. However, a few felt dissatisfied in the jobs they were doing and believed their organizations were not authentically fulfilling their publicized purpose.

“ *I don't feel that [the work I do is] meaningful or has impact. Most of the things I do at this job and at my previous job were to help further the clients' profits. . . . [N]one of the work I do helps society in any way. Nothing I do is helping somebody. It's only helping this company take someone else's money. . . . And it just does not feel satisfying, especially when I don't have any creative outlet or any opportunity for creative outlet. . . . My previous job shut off all routes to that kind of position for me. So, it feels very selective and not very satisfying at all.”*

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“ *According to their website, it's something about quality journalism. . . . We'd be foolish to actually believe it. . . . I guess that's . . . putting it bluntly. No one really believes that mission statement. . . . It's just lip service—let's just put it that way. They know they have to write something as a mission statement that's positive. Knowing that it's not being practiced.”*

—Brice, night shift manager/graphic designer, design house

“ *In terms of the mission and the vision of the company . . . it's going south and something kind of needs to change. . . . I'm not exactly sure what the mission or the vision is within the company.”*

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

“ *I don't know what [the mission, values, and vision] are for our company. . . . In the past, I've worked on things that were against my values. . . . I don't know what we're for, but I'm not against it.”*

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

“ *I think that we have really good intentions. . . . I think we do some things that are totally backwards, but I think we do a lot of things really well, and I think that we really do try to support our students the best we can.”*

—Paul, design educator, university

Questions 25-29 examined designers' attitude, thoughts, and experiences with burnout. Of the 18 participants ($n = 18$) interviewed, 16 ($n = 16$) expressed currently experiencing burnout or being burned out in previous design positions held. Contributing factors said to have caused their burnout were heavy workloads and long work hours, monotony of projects, lack of support and community in the workplace, a toxic work environment, feeling unappreciated or devalued, poor leadership, being micromanaged, and a lack of rewards, raises, and promotion opportunities. Additionally, a couple stated their burnout was attributed to stressors associated with being an empath and/or a minority. The majority of those who conflicted with any of the six areas of worklife stated they were currently burned out or had experienced burnout at the time.

“ *It's not even so much job related than it is like mental dealing with a lot of the changes in the energy within the company . . . that burns me out more than my actual position itself. . . . [M]y position does burn me out a decent amount too, just depends on my workload. . . . My burnout is more culture related.”*

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

“ *Just being a positive influence and being an empath and not being as good as I'd like to about . . . leaving things where they are. . . . I guess their negativity or their sadnesses. . . . Being amongst them, their views, and ideologies and being from the south and . . . a God-fearing woman, and . . . amongst others that aren't is also a toll.”*

—Monica, technical design assistant, design assistant, sales assistant, sportswear manufacturer

“Constantly micromanaged. And you always had to go-go-go. . . . [We] would be there until 1- 2 o'clock in the morning. . . . Everybody always wanted something between the sales people and their managers, and the press room and other newspapers, because we build stuff for them. . . . [E]verybody thinks their stuff comes first and you're always being watched.”

— **Jessica, senior graphic designer, private sector business**

“Workload for sure; that's probably the main thing. The other thing is just the monotony of it sometimes.”

— **Brice, night shift manager/graphic designer, design house**

“I work often. This will be the first Saturday that I have had off in 2 months. . . . It's people that shouldn't have a say in anything that I do, . . . a say in what happens with design, causes frustration and therefore I get burned out.”

— **Marcy, graphic design coordinator, university**

“There was this project I worked on in my old job where for . . . two months solid we were working about 60 to 65 hours a week. . . . [I]n instructional design, . . . there's always these people who are driving it, and they've set these deadlines, but the people who are driving it aren't getting you what you need in time. . . . I had a coworker . . . that got so burned out and so stressed out that she had to take six weeks of leave, which then gave us . . . all of her work, on top of the work we already had . . . and so, we all got stressed out and burned out.”

— **Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency**

“I felt burned out at times. Sometimes more than others. . . . The amount of hours that we have to work . . . because of the nature of the work that we have to deliver. . . . The creative work. The deadlines are too harsh. . . . We're working to be creative under pressure and . . . you can burnout everyone from that.”

— **Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation**

“In my current position, I have felt burnout in a couple of different ways. And one of them might be a little bit backwards, but for a while at my current job, I was almost bored to tears because . . . I was just doing basic field-verifying models of stores that would take a couple of

weeks to create, but it was just so repetitive that I was daydreaming about different jobs. And then, on the other side, now that I've where I've switched to different projects, I felt burned, . . . because I had so many projects to do that hard deadlines and I had to make those deadlines. . . . In my previous job, the burnout was very intense. . . . It was a stressful . . . company to work at. . . . Very toxic environment. . . . Very micromanaged to the point of breaking under the stress and leaving work in tears every day. . . . I felt very under-appreciated and overworked and I burn out very fast on that."

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“I’m burned out often. . . . I get to the point where I just want to quit and leave, because I can’t stand things. . . . [W]hen they were making decisions for me without asking me it just made me so angry that I would go out in my car and cry, because . . . I can’t take it. . . . They would come back with all kinds of changes that I need to make and it is frustrating me to need to no end. . . . One day they told me my work does not look like eight hours worth of work . . . I called my manager and [told her I am] quitting. . . . [In my previous design job], I started seeing a therapist . . . because of [my manager]; nitpicked everything that I did. Even if something wasn’t my fault. . . . The workload was crazy and I did have issues with . . . my attention to detail, but I think it was because of my burnout. Because I was so tired of being stressed out. From being called out on other problems that it just continuously got worse. It never had a chance to get better.”

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

“I have felt burned out. On top of my outrageous teaching load, I wasn’t given the support that I asked for. . . . I was getting more dumped on me and it started costing my health. . . . I’m not married or have a partner. I don’t have children. . . . [I seem to be] the one in the department [that] can be the most flexible, because no one’s dependent on me at home . . . or no one gives me an excuse to not be here. And so there is an element of feeling a little bit of abuse, but I guess incredibly undervalued that comes along with it. . . . But, when it really comes down to it, it’s disparity and then looking at my schedule and thinking, I am one person doing the job of two and I’m not being recognized for it and more so, being expected to just do it. And that acknowledgment would go a long way.”

—Paul, design educator, university

Those who experienced burnout stated feeling fatigue, exhaustion, depression, sadness, grief, anxious, panic, extreme stress, irritability, cynical, anger, and rage. A few experienced low morale and felt undervalued.

“ Emotionally, I'd say I'm on edge more. I feel more panicked in a way, and definitely short-tempered.”

—**Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm**

“ Burnout generally feels exhausting. Not feeling as creative. When I am feeling burned out, I just kind of slap something together to just get it done. Not as focused. Thinking about other opportunities, not my job.”

—**Anna, graphic designer, university**

“ I'm tired. I have shorter fuse. . . . I get lethargic a lot and then I become less motivated.”

—**Marcy, graphic design coordinator, university**

“ I definitely wasn't feeling like myself. I had a lot of anxiety.”

—**Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise**

“ When I get burned out, I tend to feel like I'm not good enough. Which propagates, the cycle of me not wanting to do it. Then, not feeling I'm good enough. Then, thinking . . . I can't do it. It's a repetitive cycle. And of course too much anxiety does lead to depression, but I'm on medication for that. . . . Burnout creates anxiety, depression, and stress, which means for me, increased migraines.”

—**Heather, remote presentation specialist, vice president, small business**

“ Burnout to me felt like fatigue and anger.”

—**Taylor, production lead, advertising agency**

“ I just shut down. . . . I don't sleep as well. . . . A lot of tiredness, fatigue, and irritation. When I am depressed or burned out, I tend to not eat and lose a lot of weight. . . . I am confident that came from depression, which turned into physical illness.”

—**Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm**

“ *It's a feeling of disparity. A very strong disparity when I see colleagues not as taxed with workload or with expectations. . . . I don't feel listened to or heard. . . . So, there is an element of feeling a little bit of abused, but I guess incredibly undervalued that comes along with it. . . . And that acknowledgment would go a long way. . . . I do get very frustrated. I feel sad. I feel just mostly worn down. . . . and yet I still produce. So, the emotion behind it is . . . just feeling very strained. . . . It's the emotion that I would associate with abuse. . . . Feeling used and somewhat abused and worthless. But yet, worthless and yet highly valued simultaneously which is bizarre. . . . There's an internal battle that's being fought as well. . . . Who do I value more? My job or my life? . . . Then you feel awful, because you realize that you're putting your job over yourself. I love being a teacher. . . . I'm good at what I do, but I need to feel like I'm good at what I do. . . . I need to be given the tools and resources to do what I do well. And then also, not have other people . . . overtax me to the point where I don't get to say no.”*

—Paul, design educator, university

Many recognized the symptoms of burnout within themselves. However, some were made aware upon seeking medical attention—making frequent visits to doctors and therapists. Many stated burnout affected their health not only mentally, but physically as well. Physical health challenges experienced were issues with sleeping, eating, weight gain/loss, muscular problems, and shingles. A few experienced cardiovascular issues including high blood pressure, heart palpitations, and inflamed heart walls as well as headaches and migraines. A few said it affected their relationships outside of work.

“ *I ended up having to go to the doctor 20 times last semester. Ended up with shingles twice.”*

—Paul, design educator, university

“ *I went to counseling. I got diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder. . . . I went to several counseling sessions. . . . [W]e figured out that . . . my job at the time was the biggest contributing factor to what was going on. . . . I was working those crazy hours. . . . I wouldn't have time to see my friends or my family. And then, . . . I was really stressed out all the time so I'm sure that negatively affected people I was around in work relationships.”*

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

“ *Someone brought it to my attention just because I kind of didn't really know what it was before. . . . I would . . . have trouble sleeping, because I would be thinking about work and having heart palpitations a little bit.”*

—Monica, technical design assistant, design assistant, sales assistant, sportswear manufacturer

“ *If I get too stressed out, my heart walls get inflamed really bad, and that's only stress-prone.”*

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

“ *I gained so much weight and my blood pressure was high.”*

—Jessica, senior graphic designer, private sector business

“ *I've spent money on cognitive behavioral health, mental health. I have spent money on migraine treatments.”*

—Heather, remote presentation specialist, vice president, small business

“ *I've actually gone to the doctor and they've said, 'Your job is stressing you out and causing these things.'”*

—Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

“ *It definitely affects my health. . . . I noticed that I would spend more in extra healthcare.”*

—Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation

“ *I went to therapists.”*

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

Burnout was said to affect their work in different ways. Some felt less motivated, lacked attention to detail, rushed through projects, and/or took longer to complete tasks. However, many stated they thrived under pressure and were high-functioning amid burnout, although struggling mentally and physically. When burned out, some said they felt uncertain, experienced impostor syndrome, and questioned their abilities.

“ *[D]espite all of the overworking, I'm still am incredibly high-functioning. I still produce at an incredibly high level, and I still am creative, and I'm so top of my game, and I'm still*

producing. . . . And I don't do it because I have something to prove. . . . [T]hat's who I am. . . . I think what happens is, other people, before they shut down and burn out, they've already checked out. . . . It's already very evident that they're burning out. Whereas I have to verbally say, . . . 'by the way you're killing me.' Then, I change my conversation to . . . are you trying to make me want to leave, and then, people started listening. And it's because . . . I don't think they think it's real or serious. I think they think that I'm joking. . . . I still produce and I am high-functioning. I'm still happy. I'm still nice to people. I'm still good for my students. But, just because I am a high-functioning does not mean that you still then begin to abuse me."

—Paul, design educator, university

“*I was exhausted all the time. I wasn't thinking clearly."*

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

“*It makes me not care as much and I want to rush through the job more. I do notice that my attention to detail does lack a lot, if I'm too burned out."*

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

“*When you're burned out you're not really thinking about ways to be creative. You're just wanting to get the job done, because it's good enough. And I think as a designer, you can really push yourself in the middle where other people will just be satisfied with the work until you're burned out. You just meet their expectations; not really push yourself to grow as a designer or a creative person."*

—Anna, graphic designer, university

“*I kind of thrive [when feeling burnout]. I don't know if that stems from my previous job—being able to just roll. Just keep going. . . . Having it coming at you from all angles and still just churn it out. . . . I think I'm a product of my training. . . . It depends on what stage of burnout, because I will take it to the very end of it and once I reach that [point] . . . your head is all muddled, and you're just firing blanks at that point. The creativity is just not there. You got to recharge."*

—Jessica, senior graphic designer, private sector business

“ *It definitely stifles my creativity, because I would get kind of pigeon-holed trying to please everyone, because everyone has multiple opinions and it's like from all different angles and they're all different.”*

—Marcy, graphic design coordinator, university

“ *You start with one small, halfway negative thought and it turns into a cascade of thoughts that make you more and more unable to feel good about yourself. Unable to be able to perform appropriately. Never feeling like you can do your best.”*

—Heather, remote presentation specialist, vice president, small business

“ *Maybe it's my personality. . . . I can design or I learned to design under pressure. . . . Sometimes stress is a stimulant to create something. At least for me.”*

—Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation

Many resigned from the positions where they were experiencing burnout, while some were terminated or fired due to poor performances as a result. A couple had a change in leadership, which aided in alleviating burnout and continuing employment. All who were currently experiencing burnout stated plans to resign if things did not change.

“ *My version of burnout is me questioning my career choices. Should I go back into private practice? Should I go work in a different institution? . . . My version of it is just that this is unsustainable for the long-term and if they want to keep me long-term, then we need to make this more sustainable. . . . And, in understanding sustainability, that is, social, economic and environment. If one of those is overtaking the other, then we've got a problem.”*

—Paul, design educator, university

“ *I did switch [positions], because I was experiencing some burnout . . . the minimum I would work is 60 hours a week. . . . The team I was working with . . . the leadership wasn't great . . . a bit too . . . inexperienced . . . to be running the department . . . 60-80 hour weeks, and that was just really intense. So, that's why I switched positions and actually. I even moved away from where I was living.”*

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

“ *The day they let me go, I didn’t even cry. I didn’t know where the money was gonna come from to pay my mortgage, but I felt better that I didn’t have to see [my manager] anymore.”*

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

“ *I lost a job, because . . . I was experiencing burnout. . . . [I] couldn’t perform at my top standard.”*

—Heather, remote presentation specialist, vice president, small business

“ *Yesterday I was talking with someone about the possibility of starting a doctoral program, because I said there’s only a limited window that I’m going to be able to work in corporate ID.”*

—Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

Most said their organizations knew they were burned out either because they vocalized it to their managers or because of the work climate. However, a few stated their organizations did not know they were burned out, either because they were high-functioning, still producing high-quality work, or because they had limited interaction with management.

“ *I’ve told my managers I was burned out. We would tell leadership that we were burned out. . . . They didn’t really seem to care, . . . as long as the project got done.”*

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

“ *I don’t think they really recognize that. I just feel sometimes companies believe that your machines that just put out work and that you’re not really human. You don’t have feelings and other factors to kind of affect your mood or affect your ability to work. When in reality, everyone needs a day off, just to kind of just take a break. It’s too much!”*

—Monica, technical design assistant, design assistant, sales assistant, sportswear manufacturer

“ *The companies know. They don’t care.”*

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

“ *I am one of these [people that will] wait until I get ready to flame out and they usually just . . . let me take [a week off].”*

—Jessica, senior graphic designer, private sector business

“ *I don't know if it was that they knew I was burned out or if they just knew that I was frustrated with the situation.”*

—Marcy, graphic design coordinator, university

“ *I don't think our upper management knows at all. I don't think they really care, because all they're seeing is numbers.”*

—Brice, night shift manager/graphic designer, design house

“ *Currently I can conceal it really well, because I don't have anyone around me in neighboring cubicles or offices who can see it. . . . I do [vocalize burnout] when I can articulate it.”*

—Heather, remote graphic designer, vice president, small business

“ *I don't see my colleagues reach the point, like I reached the point. There are a lot of 'Yes, people' in this organization and I tend to be a 'don't mess with my balance person' and push back. . . . If there were more people like me who said, 'Hey, don't touch my time,' but it's these people who . . . will do whatever. If we keep producing at this amount, then they're going to continue to crunch us, because it's not hurting anything. We're taking all the brunt. Partly, however, lot of it falls on our manager. . . . You have to have a very strong manager who's able to push back and say no. . . . It's a really easy concept, but it never happens.”*

—Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

“ *They knew everybody was burned out. They will overhear something here or there, but deadlines are deadlines.”*

—Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation

“ *At [my previous company], no one knew or cared. [At my current company], it is really dependent on who your manager is.”*

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

The majority stated that there were no systems in place for preventing or alleviating burnout within their organization. A few named good supervisors, employee assistance programs with free counseling, massages, paid time off, meetings, social gatherings, professional development, and mentorship programs as ways their organizations provide support. Most stated burnout was managed by self-coping.

“ I don't know if there's anything about preventing. I guess the closest thing would be just conversations with your manager. And just, . . . very clearly saying if you're feeling like you're working too much or there's too much on your plate. I guess that's the most preventative thing we have here, as far as alleviating . . . [is the] employee assistance program, which is an option for more than just people with burnout. . . . Sometimes we do retrospectives. So, that is another place where themes of burnout can come up and be solved.”

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

“ There aren't any. . . . [T]here is no . . . mental day, kind of thing. We'll . . . do it discreetly within our office. . . . [I]f we get too burned out, we're just pretty much like 'Screw it. I'm leaving.'”

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

“ I don't think they ever directly use the word burnout, because they don't want to 'scare people.' Even though I think they should, but they have what they call . . . internal customer service program. . . . They have some webinars, some emails, internal emails, and combined.”

—Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation

“ Honestly, I don't think there are any. It seems very self guided. . . . I think they anticipate you taking care of you, instead of them helping to take care of you.”

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“ We have a Morale team in our . . . office. [They] give happy hours and they take votes on what people want to do for those happy hours and then we have a picnic in the summer and then the Christmas party in December, but as far as like specific burnout stuff, not really. They say we have a mentorship program, if you want to sign up for that, . . . and it's kind of luck of the draw if you get somebody that you can trust enough to help you out. . . . Again, it depends on who your team is; whether you can vocalize that and something be done, because I have coworkers who are just ready to drop and nobody cares, because of the team that they're on.”

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

“ Besides vacation time, not really. . . . Professional development can help and that's sort of encouraged, but it's . . . up to what's in the budget, for as far as professional development allowances go. So, just those two things really.”

—Emma, graphic designer, university

Most believed it is leadership's responsibility to advocate, support, and communicate with designers in order to prevent and alleviate burnout. At the same time, many also believed it was up to the designer to vocalize burnout and communicate needs and limitations to their manager. Some stated it was equally the manager's and the designer's responsibility to communicate burnout and set expectations.

“ I think that comes from managing person. So, whomever is right above other people. . . . But there needs to be an understanding of being on the pulse of the people you're working with. And, again, not micromanaging, but just understanding them, and knowing them. Not making assumptions, mind you, but knowing them which is very different. . . . I also think that there should be certain policies put in place to be mindful of employees. To be mindful of workloads and again just to not have those assumptions that everyone's fine.”

—Paul, design educator, university

“ From leadership and management point of view, always making sure the scope of the work is appropriate. [For example], if your team has 10 people . . . don't ask them to do 15 people's worth of work. . . . And then from an individual's point of view, I think communication is really key. Nobody's gonna know you're overworked or overwhelmed unless you share that with someone.”

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

“ I say it's more company-based, but definitely individually. It is also your responsibility to either voice that you're getting burned out, because a lot of people within the company . . . have their own problems to deal with. . . . [T]hey can't always be focused on how you're feeling that day. . . . There should definitely maybe be a system in place to help with that, but . . . I definitely think . . . it's a little more company-based, because then it puts the individual at ease too that they know that there is something that is available for them, because a lot of people don't ask. They just assume that if they do ask that . . . the company will think that they're just being lazy. A lot of judgment.”

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

“ *Because of the lack of knowledge about it, and sometimes the lack of wanting the knowledge about it, I think that it is up to the individual themselves to . . . see where they are and . . . check in with themselves.”*

—Monica, technical design assistant, design assistant, sales assistant, sportswear manufacturer

“ *I think it's a shared responsibility that weighs a little bit heavier load on the supervisor of the institution. They need to create a structure [that is] safe for designers to be able to talk about their burnout and not feel like they have to hide it, and then have the means to support them when they are feeling burned out.”*

—Anna, graphic designer, university

“ *I would say, whoever their manager is needs to be aware of the workload and what all they are putting on someone, but I also think it is partially the designer's responsibility to know their limits and speak up.”*

—Jessica, senior graphic designer, private sector business

“ *I feel like it's gonna be a joint effort and it all comes down to communication. . . . I feel like if [the direct manager] were to allocate things or communicate with the people that are burning us out, essentially, things would be easier for us and we wouldn't struggle with it as much.”*

—Marcy, graphic design coordinator, university

“ *I do think it lies on some of us. I do look at my co workers and go ‘why are you doing that?’”*

—Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

“ *I think it's a mix. I think it's probably 50% the higher ups, and then it's also 50% on the actual designer themselves for not speaking up as well.”*

—Taylor, production lead, advertising agency

“ *Good management is so important. . . . Knowing how your team works and what teams should work well together. And that, not only produces good work, but also keeps your teams strong and keeps them from burning out—as teams and as individuals, but then also I think*

the company should also offer benefits that are supportive of recovery from burnout if you get burned out. Like additional time off or having at least a reasonable time off benefits package so that you feel like it's okay to take time off."

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“*I think it's equally with me and my manager to make things happen if I need changes."*

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

“*In preventing it, I would leave that up to the people in charge. . . . I feel with the employee, it might need to start there in that they can recognize that burnout is a thing. And see that onset coming and their ability to talk to their directors, their supervisors. . . . Then it does become supervisor's responsibility to listen and work with them to figure out how to kind of alleviate that burden."*

—Emma, graphic designer, university

When asked their opinion on what needed to be changed or be instituted at their company/organization to prevent burnout from happening, there were a variety of responses. Most suggested having a safe space or system to comfortably communicate and voice burnout, making it an open conversation in the workplace. Many stated needing better management of expectations and workload. There were suggestions to instill a system that empowers designers to speak up and advocate for their needs as well as foster respect. Many spoke of the struggles designers face with constantly managing expectations, as well as proving worth and value. A couple suggested developing burnout assessments to identify, assess, and manage burnout. A better system to hire quality personnel was also suggested. There were some who believed self-care and self-awareness were important. Additional needs suggested were having resources to do the job, better communication, proper compensation, increased professional development opportunities, supportive recovery from burnout, flexible work schedules and additional vacation, social, economic, and environmental sustainability, employee wellbeing promotion, having a therapist of choice covered by health insurance regardless of network, activities during company work hours, company appreciation, time and space for play, equal accountability at work, and mental health/counselor training.

“ *I think there needs to be a different way of assessing burnout. . . . I would love if my healthcare paid for therapists. . . . [T]he one that I would choose. Not one that's in my network provided, because of insurance.”*

—Paul, design educator, university

“ *Our leadership asks a lot. . . . Somewhere in the middle, there's always a miscommunication of what can be done. . . . When we constantly set goals that are impossible to achieve, people will just keep trying to achieve them and then feel bad when they don't meet them, but it was . . . impossible to meet to begin with.”*

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

“ *I definitely think it needs to begin with an HR department, that's outside of their family, to kind of come in . . . to make changes within the workplace. . . . I feel if we could . . . sit down and talk about our grievances and not have any judgment. . . . Listen to different suggestions and different things that we could put into place to kind of make the morale better. . . . [J]ust feeling appreciated can change the whole entire dynamic of the workplace.”*

—Monica, technical design assistant, design assistant, sales assistant, sportswear manufacturer

“ *I would say the communication, obviously, and then also maybe a strict request system, [for requesting jobs], would probably help.”*

—Marcy, graphic design coordinator, university

“ *I would like communication.”*

—Jessica, senior graphic designer, private sector business

“ *Better leader; upper management; just better quality. . . . [R]ight now, the current leadership is just non-exist in terms of their leadership and direction that they provide.”*

—Brice, night shift manager/graphic designer, design house

“ *Better communicate with each other. . . . Everyone needs to just talk more.”*

—Victoria, application engineer, training and consulting firm

“ *The main thing is that people who make the decisions, when they're making decisions with stakeholders, they need to say to the stakeholders, 'we are going to have this possibly by this date, but it may need to shift.' . . . People understand that. . . . [G]ive them a date range. It's not hard!"*

—Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

“ *Instead of the elephant in the room, it should be an open conversation about burnout. And I say, it would be important to hear people participating on giving suggestions to have like some . . . activity outside the company, during our work hours. . . . Bottom line, . . . the managers and the leadership above need to provide some solution . . . and we need to speak [up] more."*

—Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation

“ *I think good management is always important, and having, like-minded people on a team, but then again, I don't know how that can really be changed, because it really just depends on who you hire and who you can hire. . . . On the side of alleviating [burnout], if it does happen, I think, having at least 23 days of available time off, so that you feel like you can take care of yourself and your health, and also have time off to enjoy yourself and not feel like you owe your soul to the company."*

—Abbey, architectural designer, architecture firm

“ *I think what would be helpful, [is] if leadership would take more of an interest in their worker bees. . . . They claim to be very transparent, and in some ways they are, but [with burnout] they're not very transparent at all. They think they are, but they're not. There . . . are very nice perks and bonuses, which are helpful, but it's not enough for everything that we do. . . . Some of my coworkers that I mentioned are ready to drop and nobody cares. They need to simply take an interest in these people and do something!"*

—Ellen, graphic designer, consulting firm

“ *More opportunities for professional development. Proper compensation would really help out. A lot of staff here struggle financially."*

—Emma, graphic designer, university

Lastly, when asked if there was anything they liked to share that the student researcher did not ask pertaining to designers and burnout in the workplace, many reiterated its existence and discussed

the problems associated with it. Many also spoke of where they believed the normalcy of burnout was established in the design industry and shared thoughts on what needed to be done to address the problem going forward.

“ *I definitely think that it's a thing that people handle it in different ways. . . . [I]f there's more research done on it, then we can address the issue, because people always talk about how fashion design, the design industry, is very competitive, but in any competition there's stress in that. . . . It's so important to . . . look into that even before the workplace. . . . During college, . . . a lot of designers . . . experienced burnout. They experienced depression. They experience a lot of different things; . . . especially at larger schools.”*

—Monica, technical design assistant, design assistant, sales assistant, sportswear manufacturer

“ *I think there is something to be said for the type of person that's attracted to becoming a designer in the first place. Generally, if you consider yourself a creative person, I noticed that a lot of people who think of themselves that way tend to be more . . . empathetic. And that's one of the reasons why they can emote so well in their design, . . . because there is emotion. . . . I do think to be a really great designer, you tend to feel more. You tend to have those issues, which are wonderful and terrible at the same time. . . . So, to be a designer, just know that you're going to have to tap into those emotions and feelings everyday, which means you're going to have increased feelings of happiness and there is also increased feelings of sadness, burnout, anxiety.”*

—Heather, remote presentation specialist, vice president, small business

“ *It is not easy to find a solution for this subject, because . . . [the design industry works] more heavily in terms of hours, because . . . there are deadlines, sales, and the company [needs] to please people. . . . [The companies need to] take care of their own people to maintain their sentimental sanity or [keep] creative juices flowing.”*

—Joselyn, event exhibitor/designer, large corporation

“ *I think a lot of people still don't know what designers do when they work somewhere. And I think, the brilliance of what we do, is we can make something look so simple and easy that people think it's that simple and easy. . . . A lot of my time, . . . 50% of it was . . . managing expectations*

with certain people, and a lot of my time is just trying to set the expectation. . . . I think, having to do your regular job tasks and educate other people around you, that can also lead to another part of burnout that people don't really consider. . . . There's a lot of hidden steps to the work we do that I think isn't factored into workload. . . . And then just being a designer is new for a lot of companies . . . having a design team. And so, there's also that fight that you're doing all the time in the background, trying to advocate your worth and prove that you're supposed to be here, which is always a hard fight that in itself. That in itself can be a full time job."

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

“*I think special consideration should be taken for the actual physical workplace . . . making sure there are different options for keyboards, monitors, laptops—physical work. . . . [N]ot only could it be the mental load of burnout, but the physical load as well—I think it important for the organizations to consider."*

—Anna, graphic designer, university

“*In the workplace I challenge myself to break any negative stereotypes or preconceived misconceptions that they have about myself or others that may look like me. The stress of this is also something that leads to reaching the level of burnout as well, because it is not something that I can hide. I am proud to be an African American woman, but when those around you do not see the value and the asset that is possessed in holding both of those titles in itself, it becomes difficult to not become upset or angry and allows my inner feelings to be projected upon my facial features or tone. However, my age and being one of the youngest employees is also another factor that I am faced with combating, because of the outlook that Boomers have on the younger millennial generations. Some feel as though we are entitled and do not see the value in work, which I have to disagree with. Tying back into the ideals that I hold about race and gender, I take it upon myself to always work hard and ensure that I am making it easier for the next generations to come while also paying homage to those who came before me. Working twice as hard to receive half of the credit is something that so many of us are used to dealing with that it becomes second nature, or has the opposite effect which is not always good. So with all of that tied into everything else—burnout can very easily be expected."*

—Monica, technical design assistant, design assistant, sales assistant, sportswear manufacturer

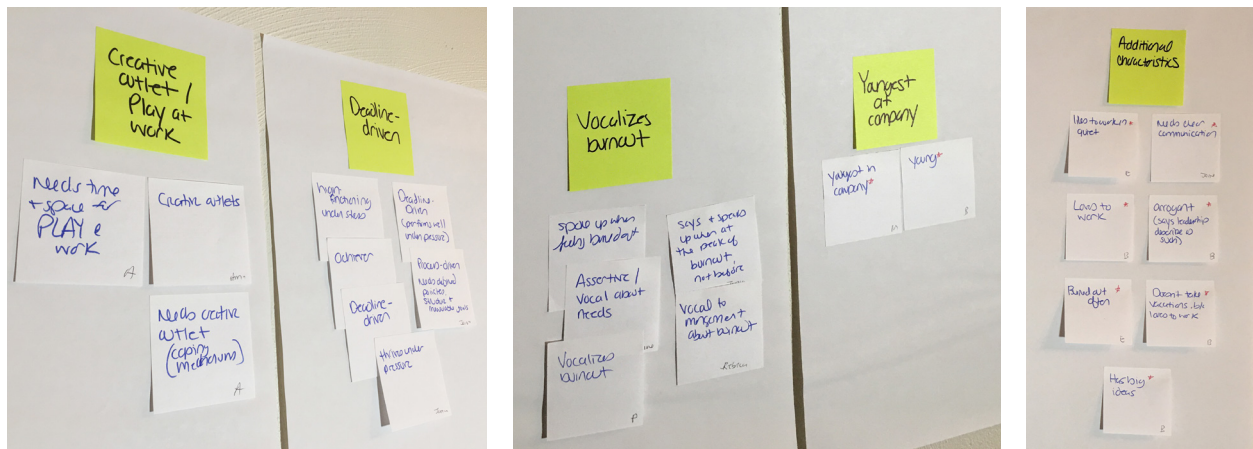
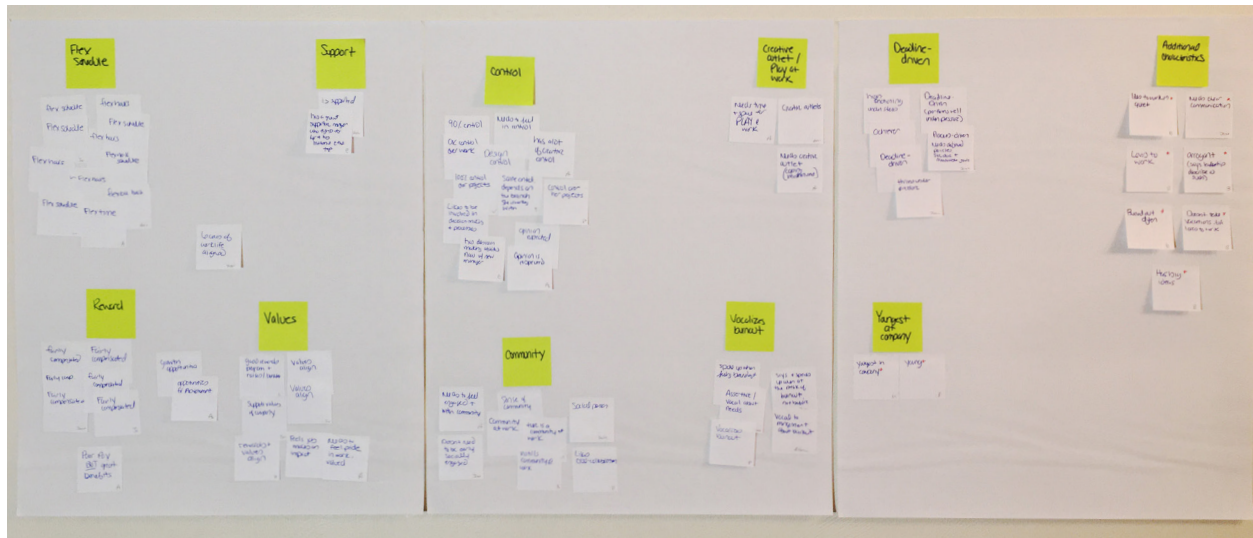
“*I think that burnout starts in education. . . . I think that we promote and push our students to the breaking point before they graduate and then we expect them to maintain that. We tell them that . . . once you're out of school, then life will get better, because you won't have all this homework. You'll be at work. But the reality is that it doesn't change. . . . I think on an educational level, we need to teach better balancing skills in undergrad, because if they don't know how to balance life then, . . . when life gets harder, . . . they're never going to be able to balance it and if they can't balance it, that's where things become unsustainable. . . . We are a passion driven industry. Love can be abusive. Love can be draining. This is what happens with professions of passion. . . . We think all you need is love and really we also need income. We need some stability. We need to not be abused. And we don't teach that as an undergrad. Instead, . . . we push our students into so many corners of all nighters that they question whether they should change their major even in their senior year. It is hard, and we almost relish in making it harder. . . . I think, in part because of the design culture, we have been working for decades to prove to people that we're smart, and prove to people that we're valuable, and prove to people, architects, the industry, the public, that we are something, and because of that we work ourselves to death! Literally! I think we do it starting in undergrad. I think that we start this culture, and we push it because it's what we do, and it's the version that we are keeping, and it's not sustainable.”*

—Paul, design educator, university

Affinity Clustering: Affinity clustering interview responses from the 18 ($n=18$) participants provided a visual summary of the findings from the interview. The student researcher examined interview responses and wrote down key insights on sticky notes from each respondent. Responses were examined around the six areas of worklife and the three key dimensions of burnout. Sticky note insights were grouped and divided into the following categories: six areas of worklife and other common characteristics relating to burnout, consequences of burnout, antecedences of burnout, current burnout interventions implemented within their organizations, and suggestions for preventing and alleviating design burnout.

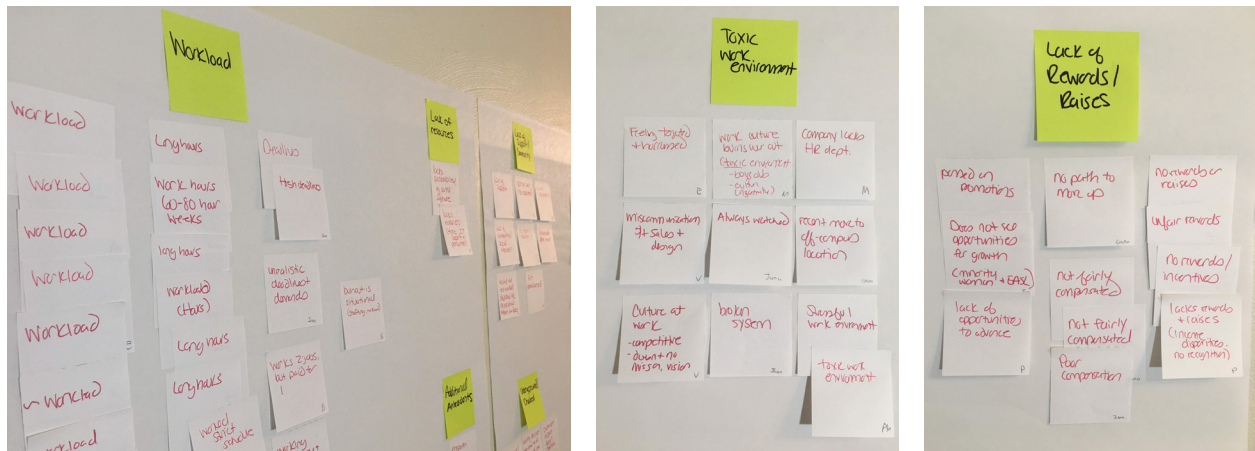
Affinity clustering characteristics of respondents showed several commonalities among the group (see Figure 1). Many stated they had the option to work flexible schedules. Some stated they were fairly compensated and were given growth opportunities. Many stated that their values aligned

Figure 1. Affinity Clustering of common six areas of worklife and general characteristics of respondents



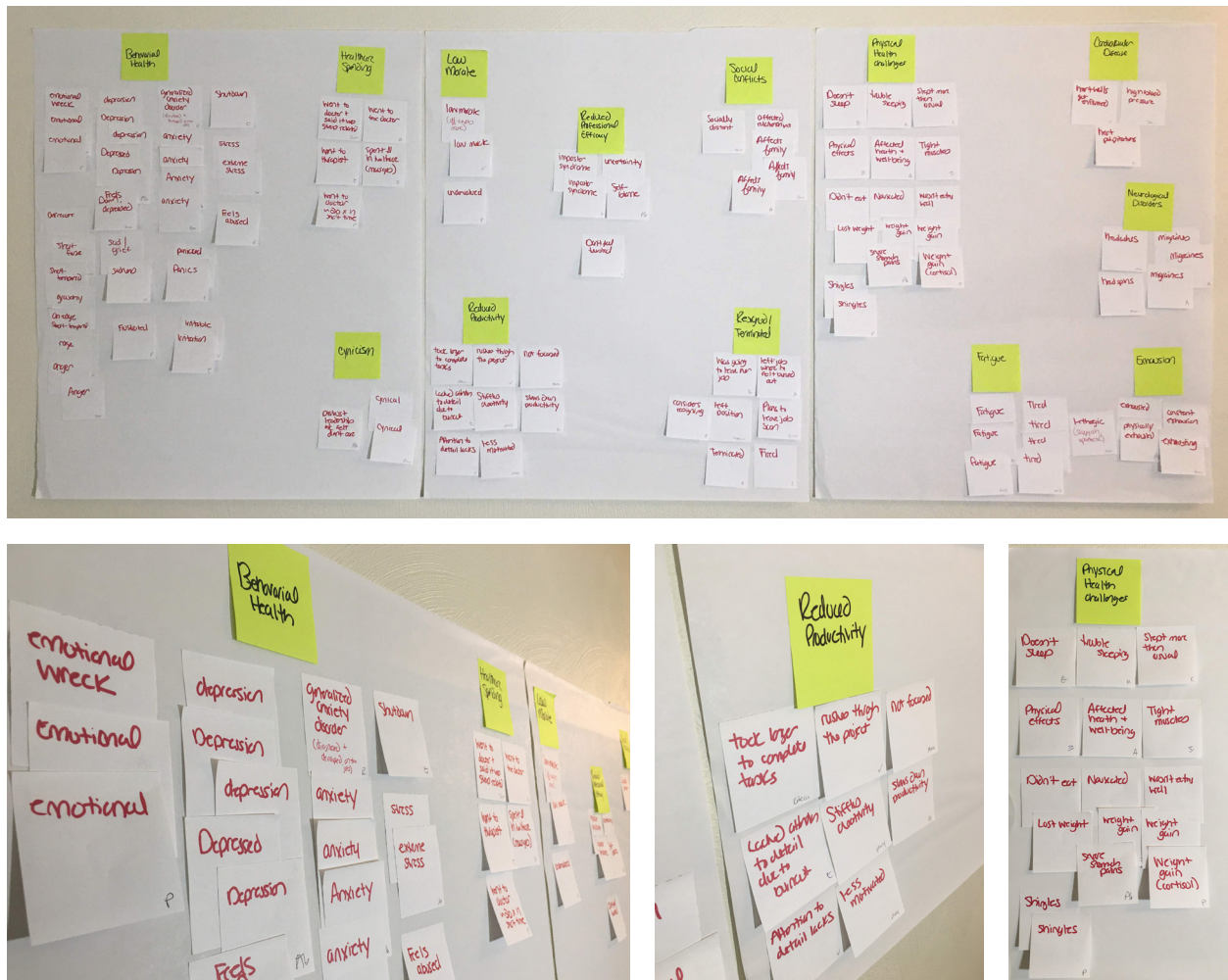
with the company. Some described themselves as achievers and deadline-driven. A few stated they had control over their design projects, depending on the client, and that their opinion was respected by their colleagues. A few felt a sense of community at work and even fewer expressed feeling supported at work. Some stated that they were assertive and vocalized burnout to their managers. A couple stated they were among the youngest at the company, which was said to contribute to their burnout.

Common antecedents of burnout were found through affinity clustering (see Figure 2). Many stated high workloads and harsh deadlines were causing burnout, resulting in working long hours. A couple of respondents believed monotony of work and a lack of creative projects were causing their burnout. A lack of resources was also a source of the problem for a couple. Many were dealing with

[illegible]

Affinity clustering consequences of burnout show many common struggles associated with burnout (see Figure 3). Almost everyone suffered behavioral health issues as it pertains to chronic interpersonal stressors in the workplace. There were some who stated increased healthcare spending as

Figure 3. Affinity Clustering of common consequences of burnout among respondents



a result of burnout. A few became cynical and distrusted leadership. There were also a few who voiced having low morale or feeling undervalued. Many stated having reduced productivity by rushing through projects and lacking attention to details when suffering burnout. There were some who experienced reduced professional efficacy, impostor syndrome, and feelings of self-blame. When experiencing burnout, some stated it affected their relationships. Many who suffered or were suffering from burnout experienced physical health challenges, including cardiovascular problems and neurological disorders. Additionally, many cited feelings of fatigue, tiredness, and exhaustion.

Affinity clustering existing burnout interventions showed the majority of respondents did not have burnout interventions in place at their organizations (see Figure 4). Some stated meetings and conversations with managers helped to alleviate burnout. A few stated leave time was believed to be the

[illegible]

The student researcher affinity clustered responses to where respondents believed the onus lied in preventing and alleviating designer burnout as well as suggestions for changes to be instituted at their company/organization, and found many commonalities (see Figure 5). Many believed the leaders of companies need to advocate, support, and better communicate with designers. A few believed management of expectations and workload would help alleviate burnout. Many also stated it was important for designers to vocalize burnout to their managers. A couple of respondents suggested a system of empowerment and respect that would make it easier for designers to do so. Some suggested creating safe spaces to voice burnout. Overall, communication between managers and designers were stated to be an important part of the solution. A couple of respondents believed a solution to burnout starts with

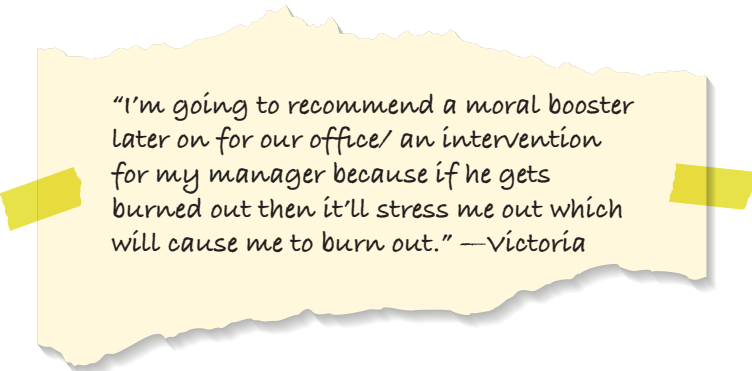
Figure 5. Affinity Clustering of suggested burnout interventions noted by respondents



hiring quality personnel. Creating and implementing burnout assessments was also a common solution mentioned for alleviating and preventing burnout. A few believed self-care and self-awareness were a part of the solution.

Journaling: Four ($n=4$) designers participated in the journaling activity, where they were instructed to journal feelings associated with burnout for one work week. All participants journaled on personalized password-protected Tumblr blogs except one participant, who experienced technical difficulties and journaled in a Google document instead. One ($n=1$) participant showed clear signs of burnout, communicating the three dimensions of burnout, as well as a misalignment of worklife, and two ($n=2$) participants showed potential for burnout. Please note pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality.

Victoria, application designer for a training and consulting firm, submitted three journal entries on her Tumblr blog during the week (see Appendix S for journal). Her first entry discussed the low morale experienced at her place of work and her struggle of generational differences among colleagues. She wrote of finding excuses to be away from work, because of low morale: *“Anytime I have an appointment I ether make it a half or whole day as an excuse to be anywhere but work because the morale sucks.”* Victoria has tried to help boost morale, but feels she is not listened to or heard, because of generational differences. She also wrote about a frustrating project she was assigned. Attaching a photo of the project to her journal entry to describe its complexity, Victoria explained that she did not have access to the resources to efficiently complete the project. She described the frustrations with not only the project she was assigned to, but also the grievances with her manager, stating she was only assigned the job because her manager was too busy and continues to take on more work. In her second journal entry, she wrote more in depth about the concern for her manager and the high workload. She wrote about the lack of praise and rewards, which is said to be the main cause of burnout and high turnover at the company. She discussed intentions of recommending a morale booster for the office and having an intervention for her manager: *“I’m going to recommend a morale booster later on for our office/ an intervention for my manager because if he gets burned out then it’ll stress me out which will cause me to burn out. . . . My manager working as hard as he does should be praised with maybe a bonus or a couple days off as a “good job” but instead he gets nothing but ‘eh you can do more’. So now as an employee and someone that cares- i’m going to have an intervention with him to tell him to slow it down and take some time mentally.”* In the third journal entry submitted, Victoria journaled reflections on this research study, writing her thoughts about the relationship between burnout in one’s personal life and how it can be brought into the workplace. Victoria wrote of wellness programs and offerings that workplaces could consider implementing to help alleviate burnout, such as yoga, massages, and mindfulness. She also journaled anticipating burnout due to a high workload and her department being understaffed, describing increased overwhelming feelings amplified by ADHD, which she says causes early burnout, writing, *“The burnout is going to be real at my work here soon. We’re about to be swamped in projects and understaffed*



“I’m going to recommend a morale booster later on for our office/ an intervention for my manager because if he gets burned out then it’ll stress me out which will cause me to burn out.” —Victoria

and the only way for us to hire another person is to show that we're dying but even then that might not be enough... I suffer with ADHD decently bad- so I get overwhelmed very easily in general. Therefore leading to early burnout."

Ellen, graphic designer for a consulting firm, submitted five journal entries on her Tumblr blog during the week (see Appendix T for journal). Entries reflected overall experiences during the workweek as she was working from home. Entries discussed balancing work with home life. In Emily's first journal entry, she wrote of frustrations with a project

she was working on: "[A manager] emailed and asked me to redo the proposal anchor graphic again for the 5th time. They don't even know requirements yet for graphics so all the rework is wasting time and taking away from client work. Will talk to [my

*"They don't even know requirements yet for graphics so all the rework is wasting time and taking away from client work."
—Ellen*

manager] at 3pm. [My manager] will contact [the other manager] and tell him his deadline isn't possible and he's 'gone to the [Emily] well' too many times already." In her second entry, she wrote of the quiet time she was experiencing on that particular day working from home, as her husband and child were out of the house that day, allowing her to fully focus on work. In entries three and four, Emily wrote of quiet workdays and things that were happening in her personal life. In her last entry, she described her frustrations working from home with a toddler and a puppy she was potty training. Overall, entries did not reflect feelings of burnout experienced during the week.

Amy, graphic designer at a university, submitted five journal entries via Google Docs (see Appendix U for journal). In her first entry, she discussed frustrations with a project she was working on and not feeling respected for design expertise: *"We just presented sections of the viewbook to the client. It feels like this is the same feedback I've been getting for 20 years now. I need to put an African American on every spread of the book, despite using less images than in the past, despite being about 7% African American. I am not using pictures that look 'science' despite the fact that the majority of work and collaboration is being done huddled over a laptop, looking at research. It's exhausting to be told how to do my job by people with little to no experience, little real insight into what actually happens in labs and classrooms."* She also wrote of not feeling supported by her manager on aspects of the project. In a second journal entry, she described feeling stressed and anxious while awaiting feedback from a

client on a project. Amy also wrote of a lack of support and respect from her manager: *“Once again, my marketing manager is questioning why I designed something a certain way. She’s really stepping on my toes. I have to really work at taking a deep breath and trying to answer her comments constructively. I feel like they have been handed the keys to*

the car before they got their license. I feel like I’m having to teach them to drive the car but I have no authority to tell them how to do it. It’s not a good place. I’m not getting a lot of respect here.” Amy wrote of a good day she had in her third entry, feeling empathy

“It’s exhausting to be told how to do my job by people with little to no experience, little real insight into what actually happens in labs and classrooms.”

—Amy

for her manager: *“My managing editor finally fell apart a little bit. To be fair, she’s also got two kids at home that are attempting to school from home. It’s a lot. I told her I only cried four times last week, so today was better. Reminding myself of Brene Brown: we’re all doing the best we can. Especially now.”*

In Amy’s fourth journal entry, she wrote of frustrations she was having with a client: *“Dealing with this client is a nightmare. They pick and pick at the design and yet they can’t get their own shit together. An entire spread chock full of copy is being rewritten. They saw it at the manuscript stage too. I’m not lashing out but I am totally rolling my eyes on this. I said something about that I hoped they would learn from this experience for next year but let’s just say I’m dubious.”* In a final journal entry, Amy wrote of a bad day she was having feeling overwhelmed by a high volume of project requests. She also discussed being micromanaged by her art director, which made her feel demeaned and undervalued. Amy wrote,

“I’m being bombarded with requests and emails and I cannot do it all. And to top it all off, I was going to finally FINALLY finish this big piece, which is technically due today, and the project manager tells me to work on this [project] instead. I had a terrible time finding the template, and I manage to get that to my art director, who apparently has let [their] OCD kick in. This is [their] design that I’m just attempting to carry out and [they have] some sort of issue with the way it looks and even though we’ve talked on the phone, I have no idea what [the art director] is talking about. The best I can tell, [the art director is] talking about a pixel problem? I have no idea. And I have don’t know how to fix a problem I’m not seeing. This needs to be done today and [they are] looking at a pixel overlap problem? So angry and tired and overwhelmed. . . . Ultimately, I feel like I can’t design. I feel like my years of doing this are useless because I’m being told to move things two pixels to satisfy things visually. I don’t get why these changes

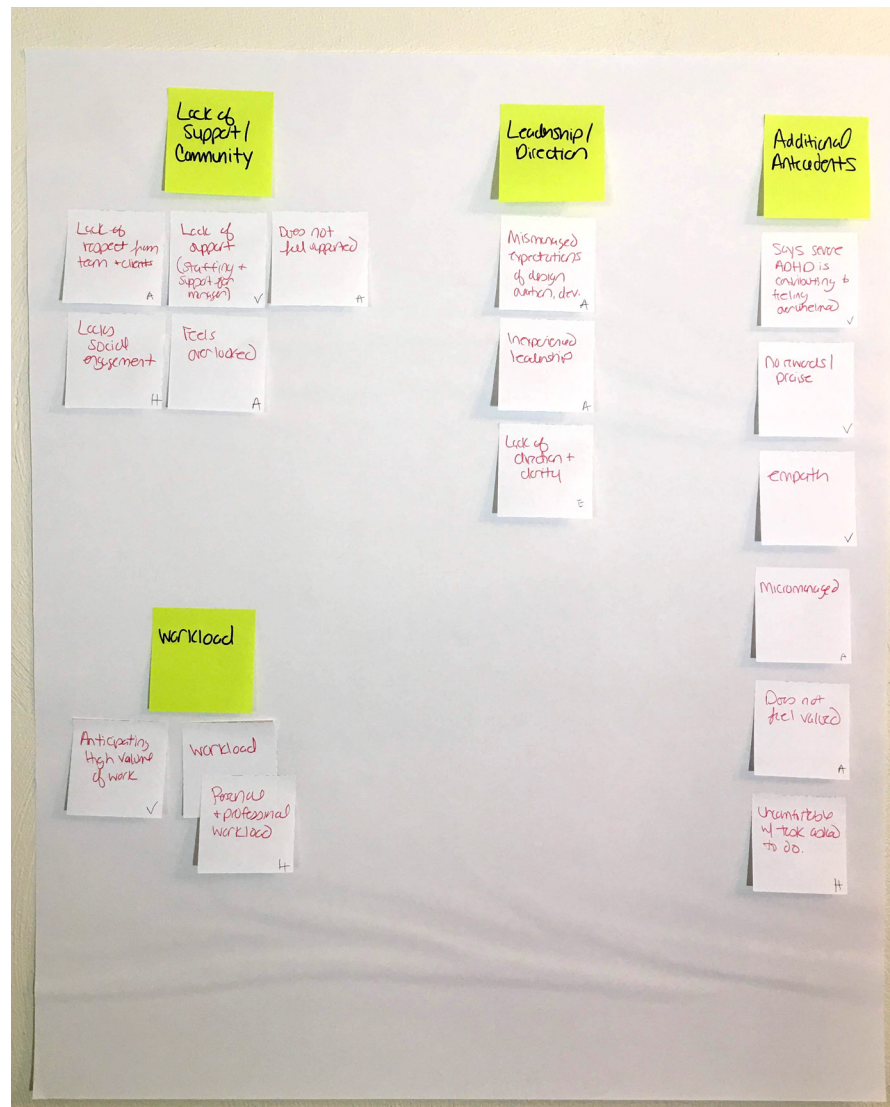
are being requested. And, I have to just swallow it all and obey what I'm asked to do. I'm so sad and frustrated."

Heather, remote presentation specialist and vice president at a small business, submitted three journal entries on her Tumblr blog during the week (see Appendix V for journal). In her first entry, she wrote of feeling overwhelmed and anxious by her list of things to do and the outlook of the week ahead. Describing herself as a social person, Heather also wrote of the struggles she was having working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which also made her feel sad and overwhelmed. She also wrote of feeling preemptively exhausted as she was also enrolled in graduate classes. She discussed goals she had for herself and thoughts of how she could be more self-disciplined and combat feelings of loneliness collaborating with coworkers and classmates. In a second journal entry, Heather wrote of a challenging assignment she was assigned to work on that involved copywriting, which she did not feel fully capable of doing. *"I used to teach a basic copywriting class when I was a department chair for a graphic design program years ago. I know just enough copywriting to recognize when it's good, and to appreciate why we should hire copywriters to write our copy for us. I am freaking out. I am overwhelmed, irritated, and feeling incompetent. Normally, I love assignments where I can stretch my creative abilities. But this project- not so much. I got a message asking for the writing I was supposed to be doing by end of day. Now, due to procrastination, I am frantic. I keep trying to remind myself 'What's the worst thing that will happen?' and I know all they can*

*"I am freaking out. I am overwhelmed, irritated, and feeling incompetent. Normally, I love assignments where I can stretch my creative abilities. But this project- not so much.
—Heather*

do is say 'try again.' But now I have a mental block I have built around this assignment." Heather wrote of the stresses of finding a new normal with social distancing, which had distracted her from doing her tasks. She also learned she had to take an additional course for her graduate program, and wrote about processing that new addition to her schedule. In Heather's final journal entry, she wrote of a migraine she was suffering from and the concerns she was having surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Heather wrote of feeling anxious and scared on what was to come, which was making it difficult for her to work: *"Today I am anxious and scared. It makes it difficult to write. Most of my triggers have come from concern about current events happening- the virus that has shut down most of the US. But some triggers I cannot identify at the moment."* She concluded her entry writing plans to establish balance and routines in her life going forward.

Figure 6. Affinity Clustering of common antecedents of burnout found among journaling participants



Affinity Clustering: Affinity clustering insights of burnout from the four ($n = 4$) journaling participants provided a visual summary of the findings. The student researcher examined journal entries and wrote down key insights on sticky notes from each respondent. Journal entries were examined around the six areas of worklife and the three key dimensions of burnout. Insights were grouped in categories relating to antecedences of burnout and consequences of burnout.

Affinity clustering insights from journal entries showed several commonalities among the group, which also coincided with findings from the interviews conducted. Common antecedents of burnout were a lack of support and community, heavy workloads, and poor leadership and direction (see

Figure 7. Affinity Clustering of common consequences of burnout found among journaling participants

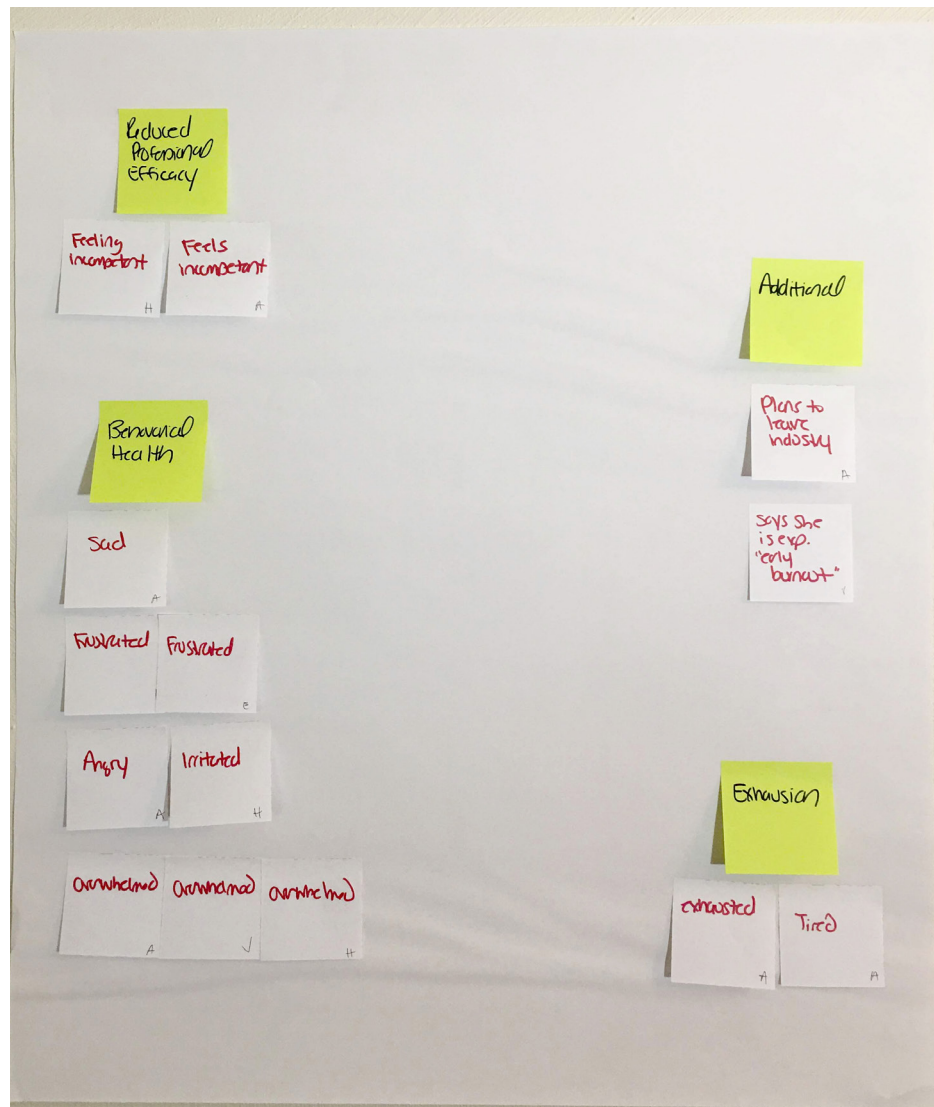


Figure 6). Additional antecedents stated were related to ADHD, which was said to contribute to feeling overwhelmed, a lack of rewards and raises, being empathic and micromanaged, feeling undervalued, and lacking resources. Common consequences of burnout found among journaling participants were reduced professional efficacy with feelings of incompetence and struggles with behavioral health, consisting of feeling sad, frustrated, angry, and overwhelmed (see Figure 7). Additional consequences of burnout found were feelings of exhaustion and an intention to resign. Insights gleaned from this affinity cluster were added to the affinity clustering of interview responses for overall assessment.

Persona Profile: Data gathered from the survey, interview, journaling activity, and affinity clusters were meticulously analyzed to create eight Persona Profiles that best represented designers who were prone to or suffering from burnout (see Figures 8-15). The student researcher was deliberate in creating realistic summaries of designers based solely on the data collected. Although data concerning age, gender, and race were not collected from respondents, the student researcher was intentional to create profiles representative of the design population based on design field experience and from information respondents shared during interviews and in journal entries to create profiles of designers that were inclusive and diverse. Realistic names, representative portraits, and quotes from the interviews and journal entries were adapted to be included in the profile.

PART TWO (Design-thinking Workshop)

The student researcher conducted a virtual design-thinking workshop over Zoom with 11 ($n = 11$) designers recruited from a global enterprise company. The student researcher opened the workshop with an introduction and stated the purpose of the research study, discussed the current progress made in data collection, and stated the goals for the design-thinking workshop. After allowing an opportunity to ask questions, the workshop proceeded.

Critique/Discussion: For the Critique/Discussion strategy, the student researcher shared the Persona Profiles one by one through the Zoom share screen feature and asked participants to critique and discuss each Persona Profile based on their personal experiences. The student researcher specifically asked participants to provide feedback on the needs and goals set for each individual based on the description and attitudes noted. Constructive critiques were given on the Persona Profiles; edits are noted in red from feedback received (see Figures 8-15).


In critiquing the Persona Profiles, participants suggested that the profiles be more specific to include the industries in which the designers worked and that their area of expertise be included as well. This was deemed important, because every industry and company operates differently and it is important to provide more context to best determine solutions. It was also suggested that the goals set for each designer be those that were actually stated by the designer, to not press goals upon them that they did not specifically ask for, which could be counterproductive and cause additional stress. With that feedback, the student researcher gave participants more details on the industry and company of the individuals and pointed out goals to be eliminated.

Figure 8. Persona Profile - Wendy

Innovating for People | Activity Templates | Persona Profile

NAME:

Wendy



"It's exhausting to be told how to do my job by people with little to no design experience. I feel like I can't design. All of my years of design experience are useless."

ATTITUDES:

Design expertise is not respected

Feels that she does not have a voice

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Senior Designer — ~~Graphic Designer*~~
Public sector — ~~University*~~
20 years of experience and service at company

- Has a heavy workload
- Dissatisfied with reorganization of department when they hired younger, inexperienced leaders
- Micromanaged
- Clients and management nitpick designs
- Feels she does not have a voice
- Plans to leave the design industry
- Vocalizes burnout to manager (exhaustion, depression, frustration and feeling overwhelmed)

GOALS:

Value, appreciation and respect of design expertise

Establish a positive, supportive working relationship with leadership

Control and maintain a manageable workload

Eliminated*

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*Edit made during design-thinking workshop

Figure 9. Persona Profile - Mark

Innovating for People | Activity Templates | Persona Profile

NAME:

Mark



"I've been passed up for promotions several times. I still have to do the same level of work that a promoted role would do, yet I don't get paid for it. I don't think my manager fully understands what I do."

ATTITUDES:

Undervalued

Doesn't feel trusted

Management is too busy and doesn't care about his professional development

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Designer — UX Designer*
Private sector — Global Enterprise*
8 years of experience

- Has a heavy workload
- Works long hours (60-80 hrs/week)
- Micromanaged
- Unsatisfied with rewards and incentives
- Management is uninvolved and doesn't fully understand what he does
- Passed on promotions due to restructuring of departments
- Performs duties of those in higher level positions, but is not recognized or compensated for it
- Internalizes burnout (depression, migraines, constant exhaustion, irritability, and anger)

GOALS:

Control and maintain a manageable workload

Better communication and engagement with management

Defined, clear paths toward promotion

Thoughtful rewards and incentives for achieving attainable goals

Safe space/system to communicate burnout

Eliminated*

*Edit made during design-thinking workshop

Figure 10. Persona Profile - Naomi

Innovating for People | Activity Templates | Persona Profile

NAME:

Naomi

"Sometimes I feel like the company believes I am just a machine that puts out work, and that I don't have feelings, and other factors that affect my mood or ability to work."

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Entry Level Designer — Fashion Designer
Private sector, small family-owned design house
2 years of experience

- One of the youngest at the company
- Chooses to work multiple jobs within the company, although getting paid for one, to present self as nonexpendable and show value
- Toxic work environment (negative, boys club)
- Highly empathetic
- Absorbs negative emotions and stresses of others
- Experiences low morale at work
- Tries to improve morale by organizing social celebrations for birthdays and holidays
- Workplace lacks Human Resources department
- Internalizes burnout (anger, sadness, trouble sleeping, heart palpitations, reduced productivity)

ATTITUDES:

Underappreciated

Needs to work harder to show value and worth (age, race and gender)

Company does not care about well-being

GOALS:

An inclusive, positive work culture of support and appreciation

Nonjudgmental, safe system to report and address grievances within the company

Professional development opportunities

Access to resources, services and support through the company

Safe space/system to communicate burnout


Eliminated*

*Edit made during design-thinking workshop

Figure 11. Persona Profile - Hannah

 Innovating for People | Activity Templates | **Persona Profile**

NAME:
Hannah



"I feel socially disconnected from the team. Senior leadership has no idea what I do. The projects I have are so boring. I have zero input in the designs I create. They don't tell you about the lack of creative design jobs in design school."

ATTITUDES:

Can't connect, because of age gap; different generational mindsets

Underappreciated

Does not feel trusted

Leadership does not care about designers

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Entry Level Designer — Architectural Designer*
Private sector — Architectural Firm*
2 1/2 years of experience

- The youngest employee at the company by around 25 years
- Divisive, competitive work culture
- Design projects are monotonous
- Craves creative design projects
- Micromanaged
- Has a heavy workload
- Admits to rushing through projects
- Believes senior leadership lacks understanding of design and what goes into creating
- Vocalizes burnout to manager (depression, extreme exhaustion and anxiety)

GOALS:

Community and engagement in the workplace

Opportunities to exercise creativity

Build a shared understanding and create a more manageable workload with leadership


Appreciation, trust and control of work

*Edit made during design-thinking workshop

Figure 12. Persona Profile - Ben

Innovating for People | Activity Templates | **Persona Profile**

NAME:
Ben



"I work in the basement with no windows, in a multi-million dollar building. My designs are picked apart and I have no support from my team. I feel like I can't design. Leadership has no clue I am burned out."

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:
Entry Level Designer — Web Designer*
Private sector — Agency*
7 years of experience

- Lowest on the totem pole
- Workspace is isolated from team and leadership
- Lacks community and support from team and leadership
- Needs creative play in the workplace
- Does not feel valued at work
- Heavily micromanaged, causing inability to work
- Ready to leave the design industry
- Internalizes burnout (depression, anxiety, shingles, migraines, impostor syndrome)

ATTITUDES:

- Alienated and unwelcomed
- Does not feel he is good enough
- Company does not care

GOALS:

- Support and engagement from team and leadership
- Creative input and ownership over design
- Opportunities for creative play
- Safe space/system to communicate burnout
- Improved environmental workspace optimal for creativity and collaboration

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*Edit made during design-thinking workshop

Figure 13. Persona Profile - David

Innovating for People | Activity Templates | Persona Profile

NAME:

David



"I will work until I'm close to burning into a ball of flames, but I love to work and I work hard for my team. We are in the trenches together! The company only cares about sales anyway. We are all replaceable."

ATTITUDES:

Company doesn't care about well-being

Needs to freelance to maintain a liveable wage

Burnout is apart of being a designer

Cynical

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Designer — ~~Graphic Designer*~~
Private sector large corporation — ~~Newspaper*~~
3 years of experience

- Has a heavy workload
- Works long hours (over 60 hrs/week)
- Has shared camaraderie with other designers
- Poorly compensated
- Receives no rewards, raises or incentives
- Heavily micromanaged
- Works freelance design jobs for extra income and burns out when the workload of both collide
- Has ideas to contribute, but no opportunities to share
- Distrusts the motives of leadership and company
- Deadline-driven- works well under pressure
- Internalizes burnout (high blood pressure, weight gain, and fatigue)

GOALS:

Fair and liveable compensation

Company appreciation, respect and support

Opportunities to share and contribute ideas

Control and maintain a manageable workload

Safe space/system to communicate burnout

Eliminated*


*Edit made during design-thinking workshop

Figure 14. Persona Profile - Maria

Innovating for People | Activity Templates | **Persona Profile**

NAME:

Maria



"Management knows I am burned out, but deadlines are deadlines and I make it happen! I would like opportunities to further design projects, but the engineers don't feel it is necessary. I don't see any opportunities to advance."

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Designer — Industrial Product Designer*
Private sector large global corporation
20 years of experience and service at company

- Stressful work environment (heavy workload, long hours, harsh deadlines)
- Works well under pressure, stress is a stimulant for creation
- Excluded from ideation of projects and corporate initiatives outside of design department
- Excluded from rewards and raises given to sales and senior leaders
- Believes burnout as part of the job, but wishes systems were in place to safely discuss and alleviate it
- Although respected, she does not see opportunities to advance professionally, because she is a minority with English as a second language
- Vocalizes burnout to manager, but nothing changes, because work keeps getting produced (fatigue, exhaustion, muscle tension, anxiety)

ATTITUDES:

Company doesn't care about well-being

Won't be able to advance in career

Burnout is apart of the job

Devalued and demeaned at times

GOALS:

Support and empowerment

Professional development opportunities and defined paths to promotion

Open conversations about burnout that evoke change and forge support

Cross collaborative opportunities


Value, appreciation and respect of design expertise

*Edit made during design-thinking workshop

Figure 15. Persona Profile - Anthony

Innovating for People | Activity Templates | **Persona Profile**

NAME:
Anthony



"I am treated like a robot! Clients do not respect or understand what it takes to design. The design approval process is lengthy and demeaning. There are too many people having a say in design, who shouldn't."

ATTITUDES:

Devalued and demeaned

Does not feel trusted or supported

Cynical

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Designer — Motion Designer*
Public sector — Agency*
16 years of experience

- Has a heavy workload
- Works long hours
- Lacks the resources to effectively do his job
- Feels treated like a machine
- Heavily micromanaged with lengthy design approval process
- Enjoys engaging with colleagues, but doesn't always feel supported by them
- Finds himself thinking negatively towards clients
- Experiences poor communication across teams and leadership
- Distrusts the motives of leadership
- Internalizes burnout (low morale, fatigue, exhaustion, irritability)

GOALS:

Value, appreciation and respect of design expertise

Control and maintain a manageable workload

Clear and transparent communication across teams and leadership

Safe space/system to communicate burnout

Access to necessary resources

More efficient design approval process

*Edit made during design-thinking workshop

When reviewing the Persona Profiles of younger designers, the topic of critiquing design work was had, with the thought raised that often times critiques are equated to the value of the designer, rather than the appropriateness of the concept, which causes one to feel devalued. The importance of making a distinction between professional design and college studio to students and recently graduated designers was also mentioned. A discussion about safe spaces was prompted by Persona Profile - Naomi (Figure 10), with a suggestion made to create a co-discipline studio for her to have opportunities to work with cross-discipline teams. Persona Profile - David (Figure 13) resonated with many participants, as several had said to have known of many designers like him, who take pride in working overtime and not taking vacation. It was said that some companies often treat overworking as a badge of honor, encouraging such behavior.

Many thoughts were raised and discussions had for further exploration in understanding the issue of designer burnout and developing solutions. Creative play was said to be a by-product of good management and not design specific. Participants stated belief in most designers being able to put up with nonsense accompanying a job, in a more manageable way, if more money is involved. Alternatively, it was also said that being unappreciated and mistreated should not be tolerated, regardless of compensation. Discussion of the topics of hustle culture and competitive burnout was had with strong belief of it being indicative of the design culture and leading to burnout. A notion of jealousy and envy factoring into the emotional maturity of designers was discussed, spurring to question whether design was a jealous culture and if craft and beauty provoke that. A discussion was had of the importance of designers being able to humble themselves to the user, though difficult to do, depending on if a superior art-mentality was instilled, which was believed to stem from education. The rewards and incentive systems at companies was also discussed with thoughts that many companies purposively let all employees know who is being rewarded within the company in order to encourage others to try harder, which causes question to its effectiveness. Lastly, the notion of social factors within the design culture and its connection to burnout was discussed, questioning whether there are subcultures who flock to design and if there are social stigmas attached. A question was raised as to whether there are inherent burnout pressures associated with those subcultures, particularly those of the LGBTQI+ community and minorities, who face many struggles for parity. A question of whether the design culture offers a higher level of support for those subcultures was raised for thought. Additionally, questions were raised about the connection between personality types and certain design roles. The following questions were raised for thought: Are

developers stereotypically less social? Are product/project managers and design leads more career-driven? Are designers the former “artsy kids” of visual designers? Are designers introverts or extroverts?

Overall, participants believed the Persona Profiles were realistic and representative of designers they knew or had worked with at some point in their career. Participants were able to empathize with the designers and had thoughtful discussion and ideas to move forward.

Brainstorming: Workshop participants were instructed to reflect on the goals mentioned collectively in the Persona Profiles to generate solutions to prevent and alleviate burnout. The student researcher divided participants into two teams utilizing Zoom breakout rooms and created storms for each team to brainstorm. Participants were instructed to post as many solutions to their storm as possible for the allotted time.

For the first brainstorming round, teams brainstormed solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout among designers, posting notes onto their storm for five minutes. Many of the ideas generated were straight-forward and generally addressed the causes of burnout. Team 1 proposed proper bonuses commensurate for hustling and hard work, encouraging and facilitating resources for projects outside of work, creating systems and programs of support, aligning design education with the workplace, creating opportunities for creative expression, enforcing worklife balance by capping work hours, maintaining design management lines, mentorship based on personal goals, job assessments, empathy-building with designers through job shadowing, creative design sprints, and designated company-time for personal and professional development (see Figure 16). Team 2 proposed celebrating milestones, having leaders with design experience, collaborative groups and spaces, design enablement programs for non-design professionals, user-group for job candidates to determine company fit, design vetos, proper rewards, a safe space to communicate burnout, enforced worklife balance, mentorship, defined and measurable career goals for promotion, project intake learning sessions, emotional regulation guidance, clear parameters and management of expectations for managers and designers, and cultural-sensitivity training (see Figure 17).

For the next five-minute brainstorming round, workshop participants were tasked with brainstorming solutions utilizing resources assigned by the student researcher. Team 1 was assigned magic and Team 2 was assigned unlimited funding and brainstormed for five minutes. Team 1’s solutions included magically creating studios with clones of the best thought leaders to advise in each studio, embedding all designers with a career ladder based off of 20 questions, having superpowers of more time, a resizing chamber, magic design dust, mental ice cubes, a house of weird or circus to showcase bad designs for fun,

Figure 16. Brainstorm 1 – Team 1

Brainstorm I - Team I

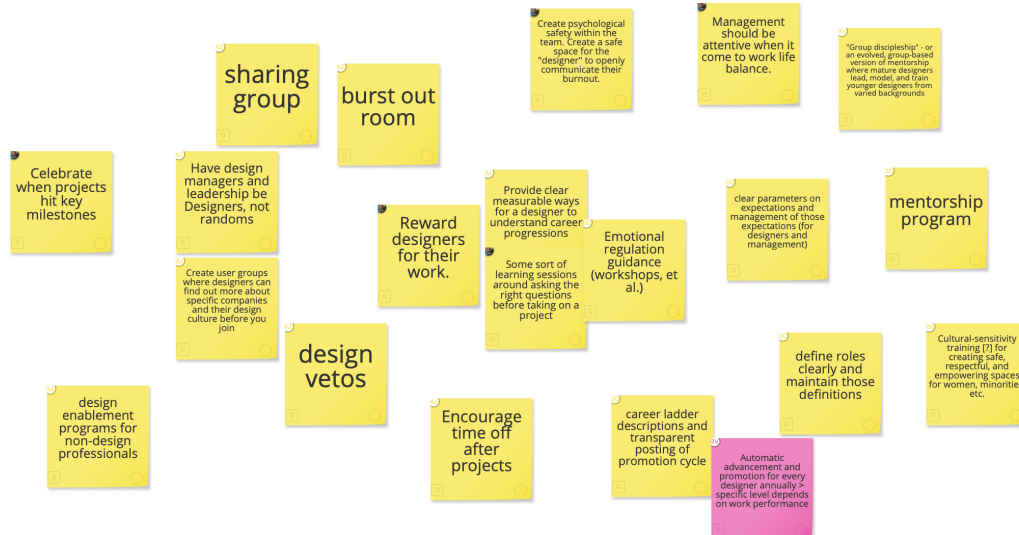
Brainstorm solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout



Figure 17. Brainstorm 1 – Team 2

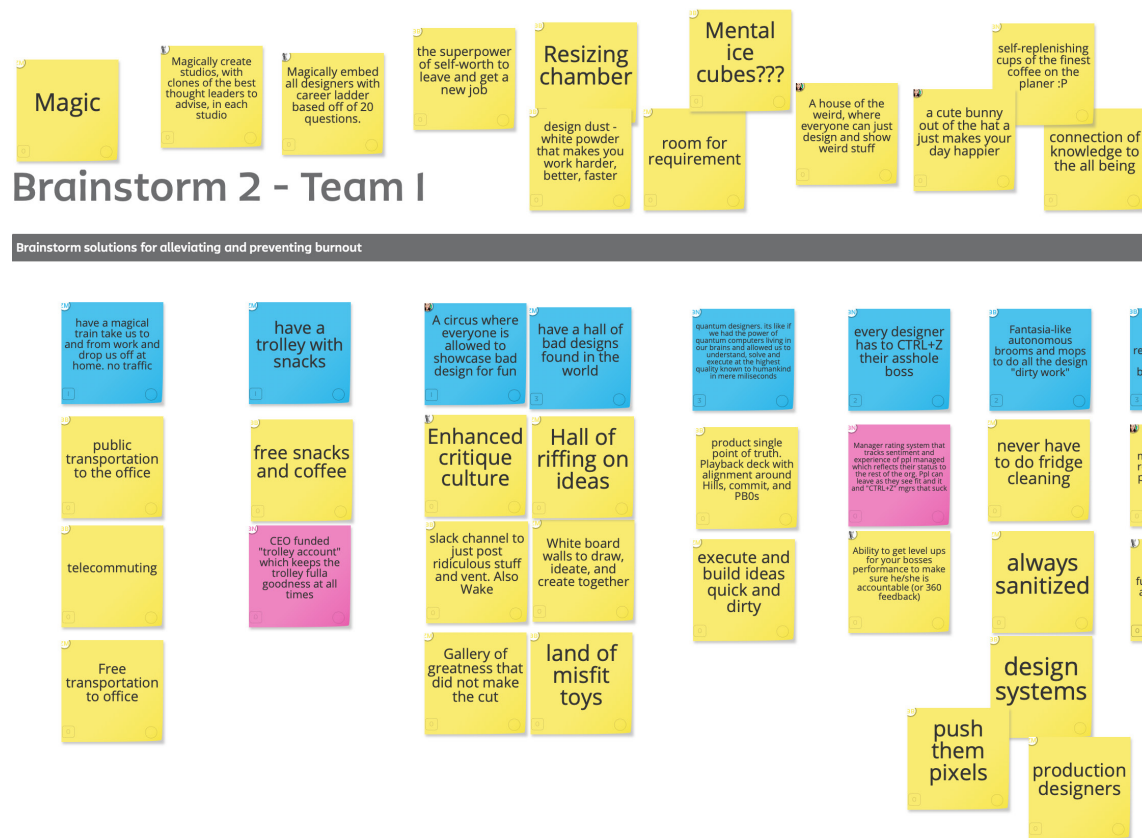
Brainstorm I - Team 2

Brainstorm solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout



a cute bunny to make people happy, self-replenishing cups of the finest coffee on the planet, connection of knowledge, a magical transportation to and from work, a trolley with snacks, quantum designers with the power of quantum computer brains that allowed designers to understand, solve, and execute at the highest quality in milliseconds, CTRL+Z bad bosses, fantasia-like autonomous brooms and mops to design dirty work, and psychic abilities to foresee the future (see Figure 18). With unlimited funding, Team 2's

Figure 18. Brainstorm 2 – Team 1

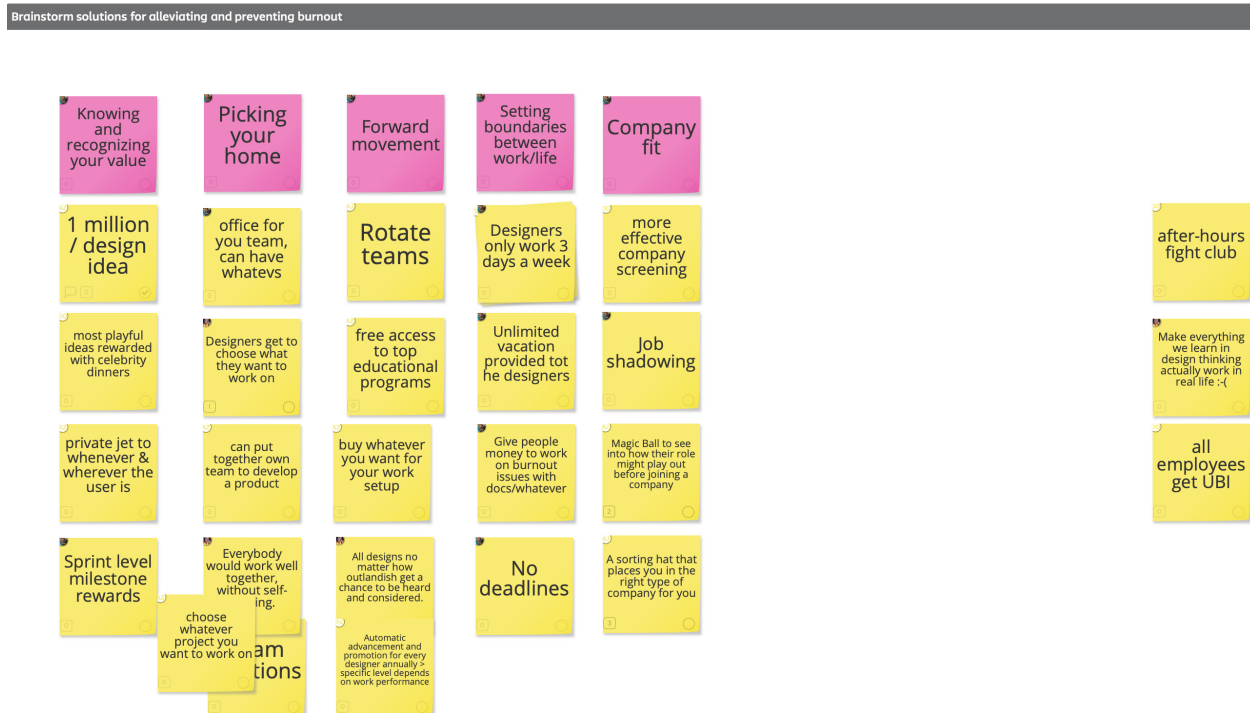


solutions included providing universal basic income, making design-thinking work, an after hours fight-club, grand rewards and compensation for design, resources and office space for work needs and desires, designers deciding what projects to work on, designers forming their own teams and ability to rotate teams, free access to top educational programs, having designs heard and considered, an annual automatic advancement and promotion, 3-day work weeks, unlimited vacations, no deadlines to adhere to, and a way to screen, foresee, or job shadow a company before joining (see Figure 19).

Next, both teams were instructed to come up with ways to implement those ideas within the confines of their place of work. These solutions are also shown in Figures 18 and 19. Team 1 proposed free transportation to work, a trolley of free snacks and coffee at work funded by the CEO, a circus or showcase of bad or rejected projects that did not get approved for fun and humor, a quick and dirty system for executing and building ideas, a manager rating system that tracks sentiment and experience of employees or a 360 feedback for management, production designers or design systems that allow designers to focus on creative aspects of the job and idea generation, and prediction road maps and project

Figure 19. Brainstorm 2 – Team 2

Brainstorm 2 - Team 2



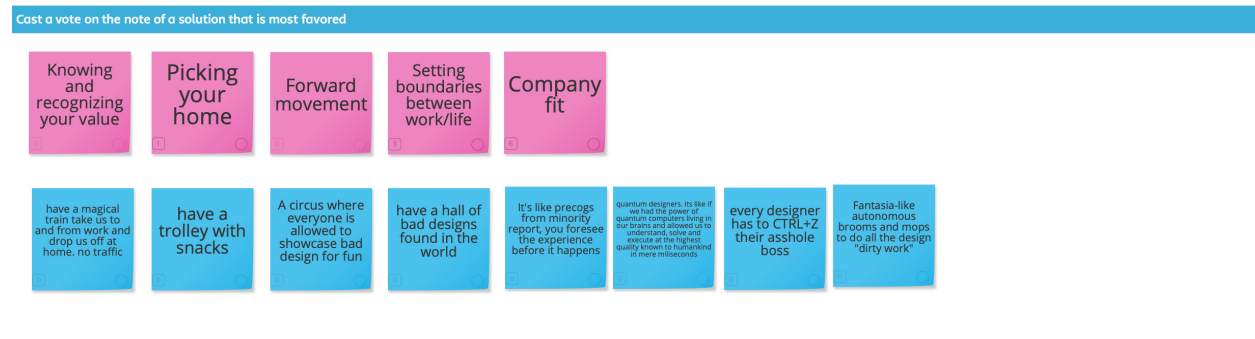
road mapping for personal and career goals. Team 2's solutions consisted of knowing and recognizing value, designers picking their teams, space, and resources, systems for forward movement or progression, setting boundaries between work and home life, and determining company fit.

Visualize the Vote: Ideas proposed from each team were placed on a storm for all participants to vote on the best solutions. Everyone voted simultaneously. The majority voted for determining and assessing company fit within an organization (see Figure 20).

Rough & Ready Prototyping: Teams were instructed to design a plan for implementing ways for determining company fit before joining an organization. Team 1 explored many ways to determine and assess company fit (see Figure 21). Ideas included measuring team fit at the time of hire through coop/intern/apprenticeship, measuring team fit incrementally, an assessment metric before and after hire that rate for rigor, work/life balance, quality versus quantity, and client support, implementing continuous goal setting and evaluation checkpoints, a team profile and candidate profile to assess compatibility, an automated tool for measuring T-shape skills of job candidates against roles before hire and during career progression, and 360 feedback evaluations. Team 1's top solutions for determining company fit were centered around

Figure 20. Visualize the Vote

Visualize the Vote



assessing compatibility of the role and team within an organization, proposing a job searching system for job seekers that match companies with the individual. They also proposed job shadowing, a magic ball to see into how their role might play out before joining a company, more effective company screening, and an on-site test day for selected job candidates.

Team 2's plan focused on the journey of the job seeker and more effective company screening (see Figure 22). They proposed job seekers reach out to network connections to get a feel for the organization they are looking at applying to and to also research the company through a real-time job searching system to get authentic reviews from people who are currently working there. Job seekers would then apply to a position within the company that is determined to be most compatible. The idea of utilizing a magic ball to see into how a role might play out before joining a company as well as job shadowing were proposed as means to determine fit. Lastly, the job candidate would try out the role and if all is aligned, the new hire would begin his or her first day all knowing of expectations with confirmed fit within the organization.

After teams presented ideas, participants discussed ideas and thoughts for future research. The notion of picking your boss was discussed. It was stated that employees usually leave their bosses, not their jobs—speaking to the importance of job candidates interviewing the company while being interviewed to best determine company fit. The disparity between internships was also raised, stating that some managers only spend two to three days with interns versus meeting several times a day or week during their internship. The Blind app was also mentioned as an example of an anonymous forum and community for verified employees that could be adapted and utilized in one's job search to determine company fit.

Figure 21. Rough & Ready Prototyping – Team 1

Rough & Ready Prototyping - Team 1

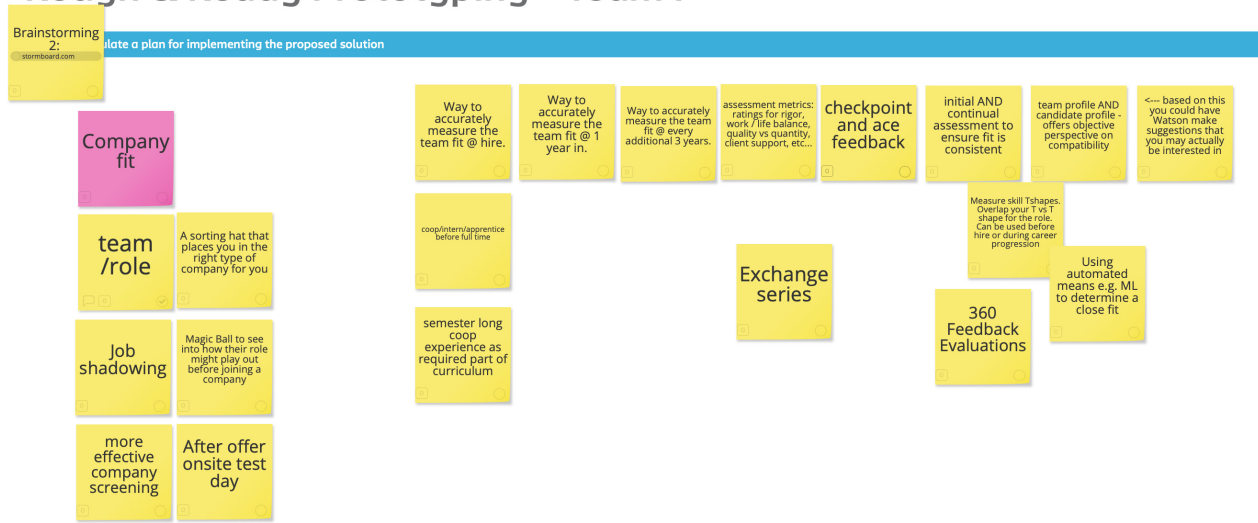
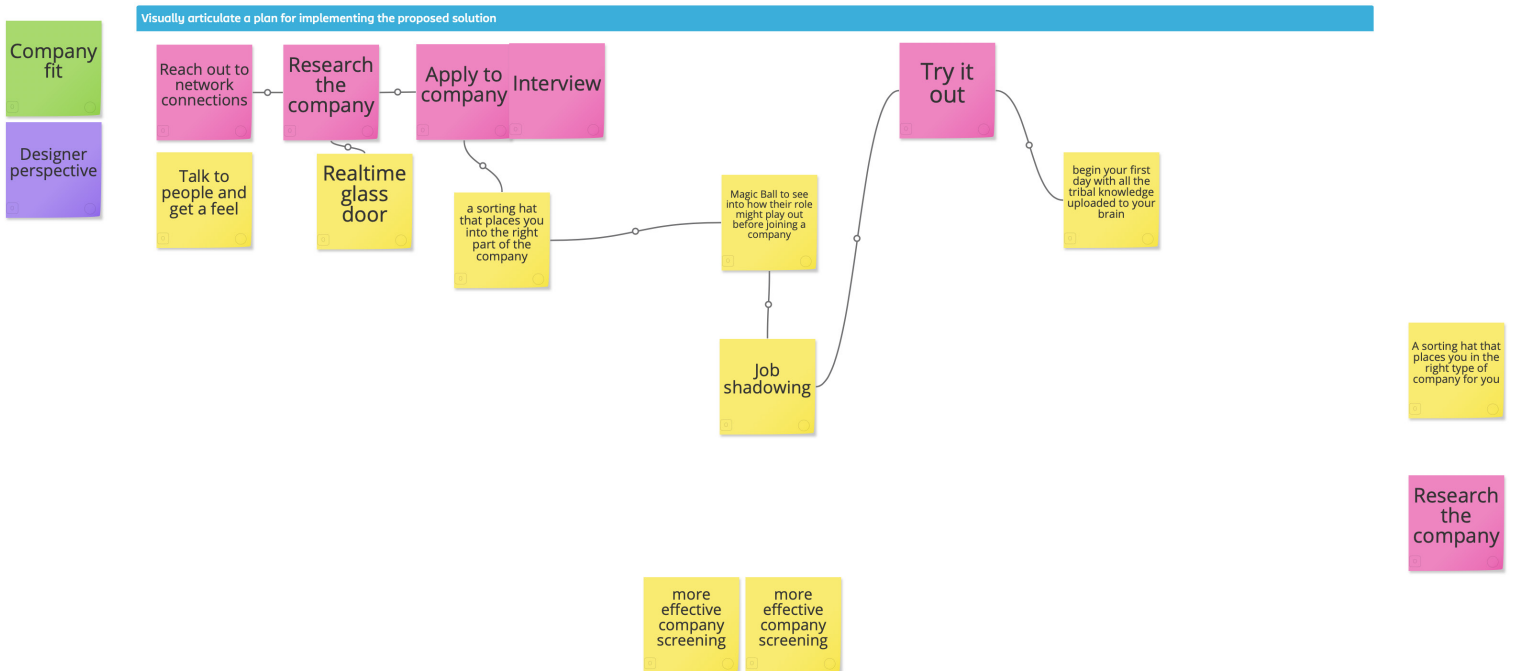


Figure 22. Rough & Ready Prototyping – Team 2

Rough & Ready Prototyping - Team 2



PART THREE

Interview: The student researcher conducted two ($n = 2$) one-on-one interviews with designers who have worked with a company or institution for over 20 years. Questions 1-5 inquired about respondents' demographics and 6-11 explored their success of longevity in service and experiences with burnout. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality. Respondents were Victoria, a senior graphic designer working at a university for 23 years, and Dennis, a 30-year design professor at a university.

Both Victoria and Dennis had experienced burnout at some point during their tenure. Victoria stated that she had never experienced burnout for long periods of time, but burns out from monotony of projects from time to time. She recalled experiencing burnout under poor management where she had considered leaving the institution.

“ *I will say there was a period of time and it was during a time I had a horrible manager and I found it difficult when I woke up in the morning to get into the office. . . . And it was icky and the feeling, for me, was: Keep your head down. Keep your mouth shut and just do your work.”*

—Victoria, senior designer, university

Dennis stated at times work can be overwhelming and spoke of a pivotal point in his career when he experienced burnout. It happened during the first six years of his career, leaving him wanting to resign from his position. Dennis described a hostile work environment made difficult due to a leader who did not acknowledge the issues he was facing, because of his race and lack of respect for his design expertise and opinions. There was also a lack of grace extended to him if he made a mistake.

“ *One day the Chair asked me what I thought about [a particular program offered in the design program] . . . and I told her and, oh, it got me in trouble. . . . That hostile environment and looking for every way to stick to you when you made a mistake. So, I actually sold all my furniture. I was ready to go! . . . I was a black male teaching primarily privileged white females and, you know, I looked like the gardener. But, I was not a person of authority and the ‘then leadership’ in my department would not recognize that had been causing a problem for me, because they didn’t want to own that or acknowledge that.”*

—Dennis, design professor, university

Victoria and Dennis overcame and alleviated burnout in different ways during their tenure. At Victoria's place of employment, creative play, thought-provoking activities, and humor are often utilized to break the stresses and monotony of work and foster creativity and synergy. She spoke of design field trips to art museums, fun with interactive coloring books, personal development activities, book groups, ongoing board games among team members, and Friday Jokes of the Day. Victoria also gave credit to having a supportive and understanding manager.

“ *I've had a new manager now for probably five years who understands what it takes to do what we do. So, they don't have these unreasonable expectations. . . . [T]hey're able to be the go between when needed, so that we are not overburdened. They get to be the person that can say no to certain things or manage the expectations of the people asking to know [what] can't be turned around in a day. . . . We get to do more strategy and more design. Whereas before we might have had to do more client management. So, it's helpful to be able to focus.”*

—Victoria, senior designer, university

Dennis did not experience burnout after his Chair retired. He credited his survival during that difficult time in his career to supportive colleagues and his own tenacity not to fail. Having a high workload was never a concern nor noncontributing factor to his burnout.

“ *I am a workhorse. When anyone comes to a place like . . . a teaching school, as opposed to a Research 1 school, you know you're going to teach a heavy teaching load. The problem is when that work is not appreciated or your beaten down for what you do and not getting credit for it. . . . I had some good friends looking out for me. It was my community. It was the Dean. It was the VP. It was others that knew what was going on that came to my aid. . . . It is the dynamics of the system that you're in and every system has its own set of dynamics and you either get in line with it, you oppose it, or you find a way to survive within it. And for the first six years, I found a way to survive with it, because I couldn't accept it.”*

—Dennis, design professor, university

Victoria's and Dennis's experiences with burnout were different as well. Victoria did not experience physical consequences of burnout, but felt exhausted at times and lacked creativity and motivation. When Dennis was burned out, he turned off, fought for himself, and compartmentalized.

“ Burnout is a turnoff, for me. I just turned off. That’s how I deal with it. I’m very good at compartmentalization. You stop caring. You no longer feel a part of a system. You lose interest in the system and you really don’t care. . . . That fighting is gone. . . . [S]ome people become depressed and other things. When I turn off, I let it all go.”

—Dennis, design professor, university

Despite experiencing burnout in their careers, both Dennis and Victoria never wanted to leave the design industry.

“ I, years ago, actually looked at another position. Not in the university. I actually looked at another job outside of university. What kept me at the university? Well, one big thing — free education . . . for myself and for my son. . . . So, during that difficult time where friends were even advising me to leave, the benefit of that extra \$30,000 towards my son’s education kept me there. . . . I have good relationships at the university. I still . . . enjoyed what I did. So, there was never a point where I hate my job. . . . I’ve always liked my job, because yucky projects go away and . . . bad managers go away too.”

—Victoria, senior designer, university

“ I am an educator. I was looking at other teaching positions. I love what I do. I love design. It has always been apart of me, from a little kid. I will always be in design in some manner. So, I just wanted a better environment.”

—Dennis, design professor, university

The long-standing commitment to their jobs were attributed to motivation, a strong belief in institutional mission, incentives, and positive, reinforcing work environments and relationships.

“ We are not perfect and we make a lot of mistakes, but I believe in our mission. [B]eing in higher ed, I’m a lifelong learner. My life at the university is much bigger than the position that I have. [E]ven when I had the bad manager, it was really just a scratch in my life at that place, but if it would have been 90% of how I belong, I could not have survived it. So, plenty of relationships outside of my office and wonderful cerebral faculty friends.”

—Victoria, senior designer, university

“ *You don’t survive at a job twenty-nine plus years if it doesn’t infuse you, if you’re not motivated, if it doesn’t enrich your soul. The environment in which you work in makes such a difference and when it’s positive, when it’s reinforcing, when it’s appreciative, when there’s a reciprocity amongst other participants—it’s magic!”*

—Dennis, design professor, university

Victoria and Dennis shared additional insights about their career longevity and burnout among designers. Victoria spoke of her experience working as a designer in a flat organization where paths to promotion are lacking.

“ *We are flat where we are. There’s nowhere for me to go and there’s that understanding. . . . One of the things that keeps me where I am is, it’s easy. It’s a basic nine to five and when I leave that office, I don’t have to really think about these projects and I don’t have a weakened demand. So, it’s easy work and [having] things that you like to do outside of the office. . . . I use the other benefits. I’ve taken classes and I’ve even signed up and taught some classes. . . . For me working in higher ed, . . . every year there’s new interests and new things. There are new ways to do things and we’re in a place where we might not be extremely innovative, but we know that we need to innovate to continue to be valid to recruit students, to recruit donors to get our campaigns going. So, I always tell people it’s not like I’m designing Campbell Soup cans. . . . I get to try new things a lot.”*

—Victoria, senior designer, university

Victoria also discussed the importance of creative outlets and how positive relationships and understanding managers have aided in her longevity.

“ *I think that helps to have a community or have good people you care about. . . . I’m surrounded by creative professionals. . . . We as an office will try to do things. In the summer, every year we . . . take an afternoon to bowl. We have bi-weekly staff meetings and some of that is brainstorming or we will celebrate a birthday. . . . When you have a manager who understands. . . . [Having] the ability to have a conversation about a project, as opposed to just being told what it should be. . . . It’s being in the space that recognizes it and appreciates it. And that’s what I think about being, not just in higher ed, but the type of university I work in.*

... I believe their mission, it's 'for and with others', 'care of the whole person.' We don't do it perfectly, but if you say this is our mission, then I can fall back on that."

—Victoria, senior designer, university

Dennis spoke about the importance of designers' valuing themselves and having space to decompress from the stresses of the day to alleviate burnout. He also shared his thoughts on the hustle culture mindset in the design industry as well as insight on being a minority in the design industry.

“*You must be more than what you do and if you don't have a space you can retreat to when work becomes too much, you are prone to burnout. Some people get so embedded that they can't let go and they run down this rabbit hole knowing it leads nowhere, but they can't pull themselves out of it. And you must always renew yourself. Refresh yourself. Because doing the same old thing repetitively can easily lead to burnout. ... If don't you value yourself and appreciate who you are, you try to transfer that value onto accomplishments and things which aren't you. So their transitory; they're fleeting; and it's like a drug. They're only good as your next high. Somehow we got to find the dignity. ... To keep that high, to keep those good vibes, you've got to keep producing. You've got to keep doing more; trying to top yourself better and better, which can be healthy, but it's not healthy when ... it drives you and your happiness, your sense of self. ... Being a minority, you cannot be as good as to be seen as equal. You still have to be a little better to be seen as accepted. That hasn't gone away. That's never going. ... You must justify your existence and your worth every single day."*

—Dennis, design professor, university

Dennis also elaborated on his experience with burnout and achieving tenure. He spoke of the mental and psychological aspects of burnout and belief in it affecting some more than others. Dennis told of life experiences that shaped the way he framed challenges, building his tenacity and ability to succeed and make tenure. Lastly, Dennis shared his thoughts of designers and burnout in the workplace.

“*Burnout is your body telling you, it's time to take a pause. ... That is our survival mechanism kicking in. We have to listen to it. Lucky are those who find their true love or compassion. ... Because for me, work is like play. ... Tenure is a celebration. ... There was no burnout at all [after my system changed, because] ... I was still productive. I still did everything that I needed to do to achieve tenure. ... So, I wasn't worried about it. ... I was*

confident in my abilities. I knew what I had to offer. . . . For some, it brings them down. They become lethargic; all those negative things. For me, . . . I come out swinging. . . . And that's a part of burnout, that we don't look at, . . . how you face the situation. . . . Some people also know that failure is not an option and I guess it's part of what made me the way I am too. I was my own support network. My livelihood depended on me. I could not collapse. . . . Designers tend to be terribly creative individuals. Our minds never stop working. We're good at many things—masters at few things. . . . We have a hard time at rest. And so, we don't value ourselves as much as we value our work. So, that's a dilemma for designers in general. . . . When you throw in life, work, . . . maybe a hostile environment, challenging situations, unappreciative environments, burnout occurs frequently.”

—Dennis, design professor, university

Discussion

This study used design-thinking to examine burnout among designers in the workplace and the findings have revealed its prevalence. Burnout was expressed in many different ways; some were not outwardly obvious, as stated in the literature. Solutions proposed were focused on better communication, leadership support, managing workload and expectations, and establishing company fit within an organization.

The online survey sought to determine the existence of burnout by examining three dimensions: exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and reduced efficacy or accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 1996; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 1993). Respondents experienced some of these feelings, but it was not significant enough to prove burnout's existence entirely. Although the data from the survey did not provide strong evidence of burnout among designers, other strategies implemented in the study did.

Interview questions examined Leiter's and Maslach's (1999) proposed worklife themes and directly questioned respondents' experiences with burnout. Seventeen ($n = 17$) out of 18 ($n = 18$) interview respondents were recruited directly from the online survey. Survey and interview responses from each individual were compared and in doing so found that although survey responses did not indicate burnout, the majority were in fact currently experiencing burnout or had experienced burnout at some point in their design career. Direct questions that specifically inquired about respondents'

experiences with burnout sparked raw reply, telling of its existence. Most had resigned or were terminated from the positions they were burned out from at the time of the survey, hence, why survey results did not indicate burnout when compared to their interview responses. It is probable that survey results did not indicate burnout due to phrasing of questions and lack of questions directly examining burnout. Additionally, as mentioned by researchers Hanson and Sloane (1992) and Hill et al. (2014b), there is hesitancy to report dissatisfaction with work in social surveys.

Supporting the notion of designer burnout, the interviews, journaling activity, and design-thinking workshop indicated many had experienced the three dimensions of burnout and were mismatched in some way with the six areas of worklife in their design career, which caused their burnout. According to Leiter and Maslach (1999), mismatches arise when issues go unresolved or when the working relationship is deemed unacceptable. Respondents experienced exhaustion and low morale due to long work hours, heavy workloads, and toxic work environments, as well as depersonalization and reduced efficacy and accomplishment from poor leadership and not feeling valued. Many also spoke of needing leadership, direction, and support. Coinciding with burnout literature, a lack of recognition, promotion, and career growth opportunities were common antecedents found among respondents who had or were experiencing burnout (Charchar, 2015; Helou et al., 2016; Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Manju, 2018; Sabagh et al., 2018). There is understanding for lack of monetary rewards that may be available, but findings suggest thoughtful acts showing value and appreciation would significantly improve one's morale and deter burnout.

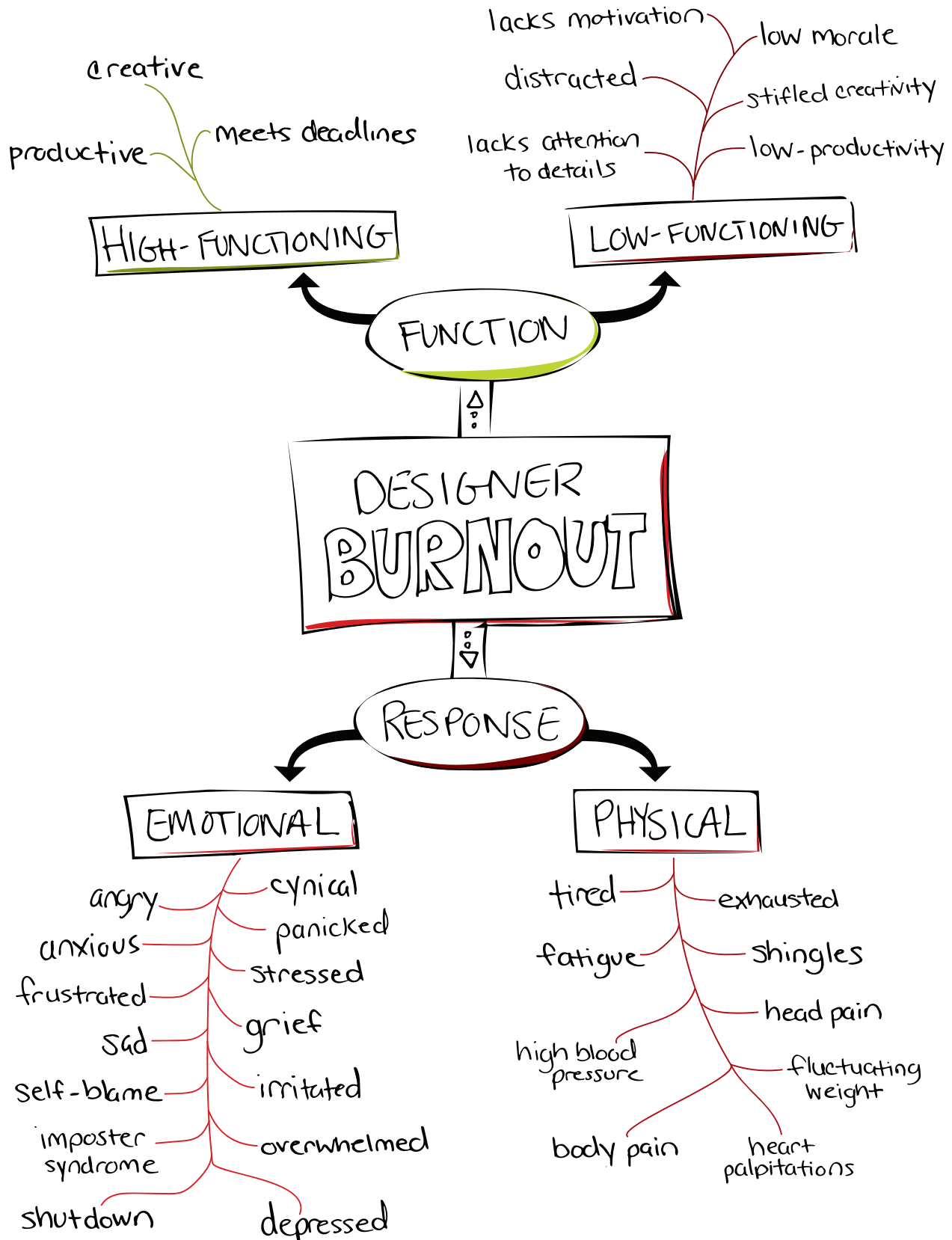
There were interesting findings not identified in the literature that were said to cause burnout. One contribution to burnout among some designers was monotony of work. A lack of creative projects can stifle creativity and one's ability to innovate (Eckert et al., 1999). Findings of this research study suggest that designers be given creative outlets and opportunities to lessen the chance of burnout and promote innovation. Designers should be supported and encouraged to seek out creative opportunities of their choice, as this approach was found to be successful among respondents. Differences among colleagues was also said to contribute to burnout. It is important to find commonalities and embrace positive indifference (Neely, 2017). Feeling a sense of belonging and connection within the larger organization—even if working across geographical boundaries—promotes trust, shared values, and goals (Neely, 2017), which align with the six areas of worklife. It is recommended that organizations take an active role in fostering this behavior. There were many who stated leadership lacked understanding on what designers

do. As stated by respondents, there are several hidden steps of a designer's job that are not factored into their workload. A designer's work may look effortless, especially when done well, but it takes talent to communicate messages in a design or create a functional product in a visually appealing way. Another hidden task found causing burnout among designers is having to educate and advocate worth and place within corporations. There were also respondents who identified as empath and stated that contributed to their burnout. Empaths are highly sensitive individuals who absorb the emotions of others, which can lead to physical and emotional depletion (Hansen, Eklund, Hallén, Bjurhager, Norrström, Viman, & Stocks, 2018). Being a minority was also said to contribute to burnout. Respondents spoke of having to work harder to be seen as equal and accepted in their organizations. This calls into question other demographics that may be factoring into burnout, as younger respondents in the study also spoke of the pressures to prove themselves and integrate into their places of work.

Resignation was a common consequence of burnout found among designers, corresponding with the literature (Hill, Hegde, & Matthews, 2014a). Designers dissatisfied with work or experiencing burnout were passionate about their craft and did not have intentions on leaving the design industry, but were discontent in the organizations in which they worked. Designers with over 20 years of service with companies/institutions interviewed had experienced apathetic leaders who did not show support, value, or respect, which almost led to their resignations. However, both maintained longevity in their positions upon departure of their managers and acquisition of better leadership. Additionally, encouraging and supportive colleagues, creative play, work incentives, and personal tenacity were driving forces attributing to their commitment and lasting careers.

The consequences of burnout experienced by respondents were serious and poignant. Depression, shingles, cardiovascular issues, and fluctuating weight were experienced by many. Aligning with findings in research, behavioral, physical, and mental health challenges are common effects experienced from toxic work environments (de Looft et al., 2018; Heaney & Ryn, 1990; Leiter & Maslach, 2009; Maslach, 1998). Those who suffered with these challenges were said to have frequented healthcare providers to understand and resolve the problem. Many did not know they were suffering from burnout, indicating a general lack of awareness. Although there were some who mentioned reduced productivity as an effect, there were many who were highly functioning. If they did not voice burnout to their managers or make mistakes, their employers were presumed unaware of their struggle, leaving them suffering in silence. Managers would only know of their grievances upon receipt of their resignation. There were a

Figure 23. Designer Burnout Mind Map



few who felt comfortable voicing burnout, but many who did not feel they had a safe space to talk about it without fear of being seen as weak and jeopardizing their job. With the multitude of perspectives obtained in the study, it is important to note the complexity of burnout and how emotional and different it is for every person (see Figure 23). Overall, findings indicate the importance of direct leadership being in tune with their designers and designers feeling comfortable voicing their limitations.

Burnout interventions noted from respondents were overwhelmingly of an individual approach, consisting primarily of coping strategies. There were many who did not have systems in place at their organizations to assist in alleviating and preventing burnout, but relied on vacations and the organization's Employee Assistance Program to aid in coping. Individual-approach interventions are temporary fixes to a larger organizational problem, outside of the individual's control. A few found creative meetings, integrating play at work, and morale boosting activities, such as after or during work activities, helpful in dealing with stress. When respondents were asked for suggestions for alleviating and preventing burnout in their places of work, the majority of the solutions fell on the manager to advocate for the designer and better manage workload and expectations, yet, many also cited importance for the designer to communicate with the manager to best solve the problem. This popular suggestion was due to many respondents feeling undervalued in their organizations with constant pressure to prove their value and worth. Thus the suggestion made for a system of empowerment, value, and respect of designers is critical to preventing designer burnout. A human-centered organizational-approach intervention is suggested to instill this sort of system, as it involves engaging all stakeholders, not just designers and their managers, to develop a shared solution that would be supported and accepted by the organization (Halbesleben et al., 2006; Munn-Giddings et al., 2005). At the design-thinking workshop, solutions were proposed for determining company fit prior to accepting a position. This is believed to be a worthy idea to pursue, as every company has different dynamics and if one is able to determine team fit prior to hire, that would be beneficial for not only the designer, but also the company.

Design-thinking was successfully used in this research study to understand and explore burnout among designers in the workplace and propose solutions. The methods implemented aided in providing vital information, clarity, direction, and synthesis from the data. It involved ethnographic and participatory research, empathy, and active-listening to what designers were feeling and experiencing to determine its existence, as well as realize how complex burnout is and how it affects everyone differently.

Limitations

There are certain limitations to this study that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. Although the study had a substantial sample size, the majority of respondents worked in the graphic design, print, and production fields, limiting the generalization of the results. The recruitment materials targeting designers of specific fields could have contributed to this limitation. Additionally, there were flaws to the online survey. Questions could have been confusing for respondents to answer and some were similar in nature. The Likert Scale rating of “sometimes” and “occasionally” may have been considered too similar in meaning as well, making it difficult for respondents to select. There were also no specific questions on the online survey that directly inquired about burnout, which made it impossible to determine if designers were or had experienced burnout. Lastly, the three dimensions of burnout were not measured in this study. Therefore, it is suggested that the MBI-GS be used in future burnout research studies if wanting to quantify burnout.

Summary and Future Directions

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by exploring burnout among designers in the workplace by using design-thinking. It took an empathic, humanistic approach to fully understand the problem, determine its existence, and propose solutions. Although, not experiencing burnout to the severity of some respondents in the research study, the student researcher, an experienced graphic designer, can affirm the intense pressure to produce creative outcomes and the physical and mental effects it can have. Leadership support, designer respect, value, and empowerment, safe spaces for communication, and a sustainable workload are imperative to addressing the issue of designer burnout.

The environments in which designers work, particularly in the private sector, are fast-paced with harsh, and at times unrealistic, deadlines. Respondents cited the “hustle culture” of the design discipline as possible cause. In an article about hustle culture and its effects on health and happiness, Professor Bryan Robinson (2019) stated, “The toil glamour of the hustle culture extols overworking and burnout and signals you’re a hard, dedicated employee, and 45% of the workforce brag about being modern-day members.” The majority of respondents did not boast about working long hours and having deadline pressure, as these circumstances were pressed upon them by their employers, but believed it to be the nature of the industry that one must succumb to. Hustle is not negative, but if driven by its internal and external pressures, can be detrimental to one’s health and well-being, leading to burnout (Robinson,

2019). In research findings, respondents speaking to this notion suggested that hustle culture starts in design education. It is recommended that additional research look into hustle culture within the design discipline as it relates to education using design-thinking. Another suggestion for further exploration is the concept of economic, social, and environmental sustainability at work. Future research is suggested to determine how to harmoniously achieve all three in the workplace to prevent burnout using design-thinking.

Burnout is a wicked problem, not solved by one solution. However, by utilizing design-thinking, it was better understood and proven to widely affect designers among multiple design disciplines and in different ways. The solutions proposed in this study were generated by designers for designers and are encouraged to be considered for future exploration.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey questions

Demographic Information

Select or fill in your responses to the questions below.

1. Which of the following best describes your current status in the design industry? Professional with under 5 years of experience; Professional with over 5 years of experience; Other (fill in)
2. What type of organization do you work for? Agency; Startup; Corporate; University; Other (fill in)
3. What sub-field(s) of design do you specialize in? Web Design; Graphic Design; Animation; Interior Design; Motion Graphics; Industrial Product Design; Fashion Design; UI/UX Design; Architectural Design; Other (fill in)

Survey Directions

Using a Likert Scale, please rate statements from 1 to 5 with 5- Always, 4- Frequently, 3-Sometimes, 2- Occasionally, and 1- Never.

4. I feel exhausted and worn out from work.
5. I feel depleted at the end of a workday.
6. I have low energy at work.
7. I am energized to go to work.
8. I feel fatigued at work.
9. I find myself having negative thoughts and attitudes towards clients.
10. I feel supported at work by my coworkers.
11. I enjoy engaging with my colleagues at work.
12. I distrust the motives of leadership and the company/institution I work for.
13. I feel supported at work by leadership.
14. I am productive at my job.
15. I believe I make a significant contribution at work.
16. I experience low morale at work.
17. I feel accomplished at my job.
18. I am valued at my job.

If you would be interested in being contacted for further participation in the study to be interviewed, complete a journaling activity, or design-thinking workshop, please provide your name and email address. All parts of the study are anonymous. Data will be rendered anonymous. A \$5 Starbucks gift card will be given for further participation in the study.

Appendix B: Electronic solicitation for survey

Hello **Name**,

My name is Nakia Shelton and I am a graduate student at Radford University. I am currently working on my master's thesis where my research will focus on exploring designers' engagement with work.

I am recruiting a diverse group of designers specializing in web design, graphic design, animation design, interior design, motion graphics design, industrial product design, fashion design, UI/UX design, instructional design, and/or architectural design working full-time in private- and public-sector companies and institutions for participation in the study.

I would like to see if you could take part in an **anonymous online survey**: <https://forms.gle/SmS3aZ4oyW8zqg4t7>. It **takes less than 5 minutes to complete**.

Identity of participants will remain anonymous. All data will be rendered anonymous.

I am asking you to participate in this study because I believe you would bring a unique perspective to the research.

If there are other designers you believe may be interested in taking this survey, please forward the survey link to them. If you have any questions, you may contact me at nshelton@radford.edu, or Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

I appreciate your time and hope that you are able to help me with this study.

Thank you,
Nakia Shelton

Appendix C: LinkedIn post

Department of Design



Designers needed for participation in research study survey!

Identity of participants is anonymous.

Seeking designers specializing in web, graphic, animation, interior, motion graphics, industrial product, fashion, UI/UX, instructional, design education, or architecture and working full-time in the private- and public-sector to participate in an **anonymous online survey** examining designers' engagement with work.

Survey **takes less than 5 minutes** to complete: <https://forms.gle/SmS3aZ4oyW8zqg4t7>

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Nakia Shelton
M.F.A. Design-thinking Candidate '20

*P.O. Box 6967
Radford, VA 24142*

*(540) 831-5386
(540) 831-5719 FAX*

www.radford.edu

Appendix D: Cover letter for internet research

Department of Design



Radford University Cover Letter for Internet Research

*P.O. Box 6967
Radford, VA 24142*

You are invited to participate in a research survey, entitled "Using Design-thinking to Explore Burnout among Designers in the Workplace and Propose Solutions." The study is being conducted by Nakia Shelton (nshelton@radford.edu), a graduate student in the Department of Design, and Dr. Joan Dickinson (jdickins@radford.edu), a faculty member in the Department of Design of Radford University, 801 East Main Street, Radford, VA 24142.

*(540) 831-5386
(540) 831-5719 FAX*

www.radford.edu

The purpose of this study is to examine burnout among designers in the workplace and propose solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout using design-thinking strategies. Your participation in the survey will contribute to a better understanding of designer's engagement with work. We estimate that it will take less than 5 minutes to complete the questionnaire. You are free to contact the investigator at the above address and phone number to discuss the survey.

This study has no more risk than you may find in daily life.

We anticipate that your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet.

The research team will work to protect your data to the extent permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that an unauthorized individual could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. This risk is similar to your everyday use of the internet.

No IP addresses will be recorded.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. If you wish to withdraw from the study or have any questions, contact the investigator listed above. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, there will be no impact on any current or future relationship with Radford University.

If you have any questions, please email Nakia Shelton at nshelton@radford.edu. You may also request a hard copy of the survey from the contact information above.

This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Ben Caldwell, Institutional Official and Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research, bcaldwell13@radford.edu, 1-540-831-7163.

If you agree to participate, please continue on to answer the questions below. Otherwise use the X at the upper left corner to close this window and disconnect.

Thank you.

Appendix E: Electronic message for interview

Hello **Name**,

My name is Nakia Shelton and I am a graduate student at Radford University. I am currently working on my master's thesis where my research will focus on exploring designers' engagement with work.

I am recruiting a diverse group of designers specializing in web design, graphic design, animation design, interior design, motion graphics design, industrial product design, fashion design, UI/UX design, instructional design, and/or architectural design working full-time in private- and public-sector companies and institutions for participation in the study.

I would like to see if you could take part in an anonymous individual interview with me to gain information about your engagement and satisfaction with work. The interview will take about thirty to forty-five minutes and can be done in-person at a mutually agreed upon location at Radford University, over the phone, or through Zoom.

Identity of participants will remain anonymous. All data will be rendered anonymous.

I am asking you to participate in this study because I believe you would bring a unique perspective to the research. I have attached the consent form for review and permission. If you have questions about this study, please ask before you sign this form. You may contact me at nshelton@radford.edu, or Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669. If you agree to participate, please print, sign, scan and email the consent form back or electronically sign and email the consent form back to me at nshelton@radford.edu.

I appreciate your time and hope that you will work with me on this project.

Thank you,
Nakia Shelton

Appendix F: Interview questions

Demographics

1. What sub-fields of design do you specialize in?
2. How long have you worked in the design field?
3. What type of organization do you currently work for?
4. What is your job title?
5. What are your job duties?
6. How long have you worked in your current position?

Workload

7. Describe your work schedule.
8. Do you have an option to work flexible hours?
9. Do you feel that you have the resources necessary to effectively do your job?

Control

10. Describe your involvement in decision-making within your department as well as at the corporate/organizational level?
11. Do you feel your opinion is respected by your colleagues and superiors? Why or why not?
12. Describe the amount of input or control you have over your design projects, from ideation to completion, as well as other tasks you are assigned.
13. Do ever you feel micromanaged? If so, explain and discuss how it makes you feel.

Community

14. Describe your level of engagement with leadership.
15. How satisfied are you with the decisions being made at your organization? Explain.
16. Describe your level of engagement with your coworkers. Are you satisfied with the level of engagement?
17. Do you feel a sense of community within the workplace as a whole?

Reward

18. How satisfied are you with the vacation allowances offered at your organization?
19. What are your feelings regarding the overall rewards, raises, and incentives offered at your organization?

Fairness

20. Do you feel fairly compensated?
21. Do you feel you have an equal opportunity to advance within the company/organization? Why or why not?
22. How satisfied are you with the ethical standards and employment policies in place at your institution?

Values

23. Do you believe the work you are doing is meaningful and makes a great impact? Explain.
24. Do you support the mission, values, and vision of the company/institution in which you work? Explain.

Attitude and thoughts of burnout

25. Do you ever feel burned out in your current position or in previous design positions held? If in previous design positions, describe the position held in detail. Discuss contributing factors that led you to becoming burned out.
 - a. Describe in detail your temperament and the emotions felt when experiencing burnout?
 - b. Did you recognize you were burned out or did someone have to bring it to your attention? Explain.
 - c. Did it affect your health? If so, how?
 - d. How did it affect your relationships inside and outside of work?
 - e. Did it affect your ability to design or do your job?
 - f. Do you think the company/organization knew you were burned out? Explain.
26. What systems are in place for preventing or alleviating burnout within your company/organization?
27. Where do you think the onus lies in preventing and alleviating designer burnout in the workplace? Explain.
28. What do you think needs to change or be instituted at your company/organization to prevent burnout from happening?
29. Is there anything you would like to share that I didn't ask pertaining to designers and burnout in the workplace?

Appendix G: Adult Informed Consent — Interview

Department of Design



Adult Informed Consent – Interview

P.O. Box 6967
Radford, VA 24142

Title of Research: Using Design-thinking to Explore Burnout among Designers in the Workplace and Propose Solutions

(540) 831-5386
(540) 831-5719 FAX

www.radford.edu

Researcher(s): *Nakia Shelton, MFA in Design-thinking Student Researcher and Joan I. Dickinson, Ph.D., Radford University*

We ask you to be in a research study designed to explore burnout among designers in the workplace and propose solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout. If you decide to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview conducted to gain information about engagement and satisfaction with work.

The interview will take place in-person at a mutually agreed upon location at Radford University, over the phone, or through Zoom. The interview will last approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. During the interview, the student researcher will record audio of the conversation on a password-protected iPhone to be analyzed.

This study has no more risk than you may find in daily life.

There are no direct benefits to you for being in the study.

You can choose not to be in this study. If you decide to be in this study, you may choose not to answer certain questions or not to be in certain parts of this study.

There are no costs to you for being in this study.

If you decide to be in this study, what you tell us will be kept private unless required by law to tell.

The data collected in this research study will be kept confidential and will be rendered anonymous. Participation in research may involve some loss of privacy. We will do our best to make sure that the information about you is kept confidential, but we cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your personal information may be viewed by individuals involved in the research and may be seen by people including those collaborating, funding, and regulating the study. We will share only the minimum necessary information in order to conduct the research. Your personal information may also be given out if required by law, such as pursuant to a court order. While the information and data resulting from this study may be presented at scientific meetings or published in a scientific journal, your name or other personal information will not be revealed.

We will collect your information through a password-protected iPhone. This information will be stored on a password-protected iMac and cloud-based system.

The research team will work to protect your data to the extent permitted by technology.

If you give the research team permission to quote you directly, the researchers will give you a pseudonym and will generalize your quote to remove any information that could be personally identifying.

Audio recordings will be collected during this study and used to analyze findings. The recordings will be destroyed after three years. The recordings will not be shared with the general public or other researchers. If you give the research team permission to quote you directly, the researchers will give you a pseudonym and will generalize your quote to remove any information that could be personally identifying.

If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw from this study, there will be no impact on your relationship with Radford University.

If you have questions now about this study, ask before you sign this form.

If you have any questions later, you may email Nakia Shelton at nshelton@radford.edu, or contact Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

If this study raised some issues that you would like to discuss with a professional, you may contact Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Ben Caldwell, Institutional Official and Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research, bcaldwell13@radford.edu, 1-540-831-7163.

It is your choice whether or not to be in this study. What you choose will not affect any current or future relationship with Radford University.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

If all of your questions have been answered and you would like to take part in this study, then please sign below.

_____ Signature	_____ Printed Name(s)	_____ Date
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I/We have explained the study to the person signing above, have allowed an opportunity for questions, and have answered all of his/her questions. I/We believe that the subject understands this information.

_____ Signature of Researcher(s)	_____ Printed Name(s)	_____ Date
-------------------------------------	--------------------------	---------------

I do ☐ or do not ☐ give my permission to the investigators to quote me directly in their research.

The investigators may ☐ or may not ☐ digitally record this interview.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix H: Electronic message for journaling

Hello **Name**,

My name is Nakia Shelton and I am a graduate student at Radford University. I am currently working on my master's thesis where my research will focus on exploring designers' engagement with work.

I am recruiting a diverse group of designers specializing in web design, graphic design, animation design, interior design, motion graphics design, industrial product design, fashion design, UI/UX design, instructional design, and/or architectural design working full-time in private- and public-sector companies and institutions for participation in the study.

I would like to see if you could take part in an anonymous journaling exercise for one work week, Monday-Friday. I will email you the date to begin the journaling exercise, if you agree to participate. The writing prompt given will state the following: "Immediately submit a journal entry if you experience any of the following while at work: exhaustion, fatigue, cynicism, irritability, helplessness, lack of productivity, incompetence, or feeling overwhelmed. Discuss and describe triggers in detail." I will create a password-protected Tumblr Blog for each participant to journal. A personalized password protected Tumblr Blog link will be sent to each participant. Participants will be asked to discuss and describe triggers in detail and are urged to record at the time of occurrence.

Identity of participants will remain anonymous. All data will be rendered anonymous.

I am asking you to participate in this study because I believe you would bring a unique perspective to the research. I have attached the consent form for review and permission. If you have questions about this study, please ask before you sign this form. You may contact me at nshelton@radford.edu, or Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669. If you agree to participate, please print, sign, scan and email the consent form back or electronically sign and email the consent form back to me at nshelton@radford.edu.

I appreciate your time and hope that you will work with me on this project.

Thank you,
Nakia Shelton

Appendix I: Journaling instructions email

Hello **Name**,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the journaling activity for my research study exploring designers' engagement with work.

Here is the link to your personal password-protected Tumblr blog: **link**.

The password to your blog is **special password to be created**.

Below are the instructions for the journaling activity:

Immediately submit a journal entry if you experience any of the following while at work: exhaustion, fatigue, cynicism, irritability, helplessness, lack of productivity, incompetence, or feeling overwhelmed. Discuss and describe triggers in detail.

You may incorporate photographs and/or drawings with your entry as long as it is accompanied with a detailed description and explanation of the visual.

Journaling is to commence for one work week, beginning on Monday, **Date** and ending on Friday, **Date**.

If at any point you feel uncomfortable with this journaling activity, you can completely withdraw from the study.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at nshelton@radford.edu, or Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

I appreciate your time and help with this project.

Thank you,
Nakia Shelton

Appendix J: Adult Informed Consent — Journaling

Department of Design



Adult Informed Consent – Journaling

P.O. Box 6967
Radford, VA 24142

Title of Research: Using Design-thinking to Explore Burnout among Designers in the Workplace and Propose Solutions

(540) 831-5386
(540) 831-5719 FAX

www.radford.edu

Researcher(s): *Nakia Shelton, MFA in Design-thinking Student Researcher and Joan I. Dickinson, Ph.D., Radford University*

We ask you to be in a research study designed to explore burnout among designers in the workplace and propose solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout. If you decide to be in the study, you will be asked to journal to the following writing prompt: “Immediately submit a journal entry if you experience any of the following while at work: exhaustion, fatigue, cynicism, irritability, helplessness, lack of productivity, incompetence, or feeling overwhelmed. Discuss and describe triggers in detail.” Journaling will take place over the course of one work week, Monday-Friday. Journaling will be done through a personalized password protected Tumblr blog. If you agree to be in the study, the student researcher will contact you via email to provide you with the link to the Tumblr blog.

This study has no more risk than you may find in daily life.

There are no direct benefits to you for being in the study.

You can choose not to be in this study. If you decide to be in this study, you may choose not to answer certain questions or not to be in certain parts of this study.

There are no costs to you for being in this study.

If you decide to be in this study, what you tell us will be kept private unless required by law to tell.

The data collected in this research study will be kept confidential and will be rendered anonymous. Participation in research may involve some loss of privacy. We will do our best to make sure that the information about you is kept confidential, but we cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your personal information may be viewed by individuals involved in the research and may be seen by people including those collaborating, funding, and regulating the study. We will share only the minimum necessary information in order to conduct the research. Your personal information may also be given out if required by law, such as pursuant to a court order. While the information and data resulting from this study may be presented at scientific meetings or published in a scientific journal, your name or other personal information will not be revealed.

We will collect your information through a password-protected Tumblr Blog. This information will be stored in an encrypted cloud-based system.

The research team will work to protect your data to the extent permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that an unauthorized individual could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. This risk is similar to your everyday use of the internet.

If you give the research team permission to quote you directly, the researchers will give you a pseudonym and will generalize your quote to remove any information that could be personally identifying.

If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw from this study, there will be no impact on your relationship with Radford University.

If you have questions now about this study, ask before you sign this form.

If you have any questions later, you may email Nakia Shelton at nshelton@radford.edu, or contact Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

If this study raised some issues that you would like to discuss with a professional, you may contact Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Ben Caldwell, Institutional Official and Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research, bcaldwell13@radford.edu, 1-540-831-7163.

It is your choice whether or not to be in this study. What you choose will not affect any current or future relationship with Radford University.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

If all of your questions have been answered and you would like to take part in this study, then please sign below.

Signature

Printed Name(s)

Date

I/We have explained the study to the person signing above, have allowed an opportunity for questions, and have answered all of his/her questions. I/We believe that the subject understands this information.

Signature of Researcher(s)

Printed Name(s)

Date

I do ☐ or do not ☐ give my permission to the investigators to quote me directly in their research.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix K: Reminder electronic message for journaling

Hello **Name**,

You are halfway through the journaling exercise!

As a reminder, the writing prompt states the following: “Immediately submit a journal entry if you experience any of the following while at work: exhaustion, fatigue, cynicism, irritability, helplessness, lack of productivity, incompetence, or feeling overwhelmed. Discuss and describe triggers in detail.”

If there are other feelings experienced that are similar to, but not listed in the prompt, make an entry and elaborate in detail.

If you have any questions later, you may contact me at nshelton@radford.edu, or Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

Thank you again for participating in the journaling activity.

Nakia Shelton

Appendix M: Electronic message for Design-thinking Workshop

Hello **Name**,

My name is Nakia Shelton and I am a graduate student at Radford University. I am currently working on my master's thesis where my research will focus on exploring designers' engagement with work.

I am recruiting a diverse group of designers specializing in web design, graphic design, animation design, interior design, motion graphics design, industrial product design, fashion design, UI/UX design, instructional design, and/or architectural design working full-time in private- and public-sector companies and institutions for participation in the study.

I am seeking 12 designers to participate in a design-thinking workshop where we will implement strategies to explore burnout among designers in the workplace and generate potential solutions. The workshop will last approximately one hour and forty-five-minutes on-site in your facility (4205 S. Miami – Bldg 503, Durham, NA 27703). If the COVID-19 outbreak prevents meeting in-person, the workshop can be conducted virtually over Zoom.

Identity of participants will remain anonymous. All data will be rendered anonymous.

I am asking you to participate in this study because I believe you would bring a unique perspective to the research. I have attached the consent form for review and permission. If you have questions about this study, please ask before you sign this form. You may contact me at nshelton@radford.edu, or Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669. If you agree to participate, please print, sign, scan and email the consent form back or electronically sign and email the consent form back to me at nshelton@radford.edu.

I appreciate your time and hope that you will work with me on this project.

Thank you,
Nakia Shelton

Appendix N: Design-thinking confirmation email

Hello **Name**,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the design-thinking workshop, exploring designers' engagement with work.

The design-thinking workshop will be: **Date**, **Time**, and **Zoom meeting ID number**.

The workshop is scheduled to last approximately one hour and forty-five minutes.

If at any point you feel uncomfortable at the design-thinking workshop, your participation can cease until you are ready to resume, or you can completely withdraw from the study.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at nshelton@radford.edu, or Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

I appreciate your time and help with this project.

Thank you,
Nakia Shelton

Appendix O: Adult Informed Consent — Design-thinking Workshop

Department of Design



Adult Informed Consent – Design-thinking Workshop

P.O. Box 6967
Radford, VA 24142

Title of Research: Using Design-thinking to Explore Burnout among Designers in the Workplace and Propose Solutions

(540) 831-5386
(540) 831-5719 FAX

www.radford.edu

Researcher(s): *Nakia Shelton, MFA in Design-thinking Student Researcher and Joan I. Dickinson, Ph.D., Radford University*

We ask you to be in a research study designed to explore burnout among designers in the workplace and propose solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout. If you decide to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a group Design-thinking Workshop to implement the following strategies: Critique/Discussion, Brainstorming, Visualize the Vote and Rough and Ready Prototyping that will be documented through photographs. Twelve designers of various specialties/fields will be asked to participate in the workshop. The workshop will take place at IBM Studios / Raleigh (4205 S. Miami – Bldg 503, Durham, NA 27703). If the COVID-19 outbreak prevents meeting in-person, the workshop can be conducted virtually over Zoom. The workshop is planned for one hour and forty-five-minutes (Critique/Discussion: twenty minutes; Brainstorming: thirty minutes; Visualize the Vote: ten minutes; and Rough and Ready Prototyping: thirty minutes) with fifteen minutes allotted for introductions, questions, and five-minute breaks. In total, a one hour and forty-five-minute time commitment will be asked of each participant.

For the Critique/Discussion strategy, you will be asked to critique and discuss the profiles created by the student researcher of designers who have been identified to be prone to burnout. It is anticipated that the activity will take approximately twenty minutes.

For the Brainstorming activity, you will be asked to generate solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout in designers. Sticky notes and pens will be distributed for participants to write down solutions. It is anticipated that the activity will take approximately thirty minutes.

For the Visualize the Vote strategy, you will be asked to vote on the best solutions proposed from the brainstorming activity. It is anticipated that the activity will take approximately ten minutes.

For the Rough and Ready Prototyping strategy, you will create a rough and ready prototype of the solution voted on in the Visualize the Vote strategy. You will work with a team to design a plan for the selected solution. You will be given paper, pens, markers, pencils, tape, and scissors and to visually map out the plan for implementing the proposed solution. It is anticipated that the activity will take approximately thirty minutes.

If conducting the workshop over Zoom, Trello and Stormboard will be used to facilitate the activities.

This study has no more risk than you may find in daily life.

There is no compensation from being in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for being in the study.

You can choose not to be in this study. If you decide to be in this study, you may choose not to answer certain questions or not to be in certain parts of this study.

There are no costs to you for being in this study.

If you decide to be in this study, what you tell us will be kept private unless required by law to tell.

The data collected in this research study will be kept confidential and will be rendered anonymous. Participation in research may involve some loss of privacy. We will do our best to make sure that the information about you is kept confidential, but we cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your personal information may be viewed by individuals involved in the research and may be seen by people including those collaborating, funding, and regulating the study. We will share only the minimum necessary information in order to conduct the research. Your personal information may also be given out if required by law, such as pursuant to a court order. While the information and data resulting from this study may be presented at scientific meetings or published in a scientific journal, your name or other personal information will not be revealed.

Photographs of the strategies implemented will be taken with a password-protected iPhone. This information will be stored on a password-protected computer and cloud-based system.

We will request that all participants respect the confidentiality of the group and do not share any other participant's responses outside of the group. However, we cannot guarantee your privacy or confidentiality because there is always the possibility that another member of the group could share what was said.

Photographs will be taken during this study and used to interpret and analyze findings by the student researcher only. The photographs will be destroyed after three years. The photographs will not be shared with the general public or other researchers. You do not have to agree to be photographed in order to participate in this study.

If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw from this study, there will be no impact on your relationship with Radford University.

If you have questions now about this study, ask before you sign this form.

If you have any questions later, you may email Nakia Shelton at nshelton@radford.edu, or contact Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

If this study raised some issues that you would like to discuss with a professional, you may contact Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669.

This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Ben Caldwell, Institutional Official and Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research, bcaldwell13@radford.edu, 1-540-831-7163.

It is your choice whether or not to be in this study. What you choose will not affect any current or future relationship with Radford University.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

If all of your questions have been answered and you would like to take part in this study, then please sign below.

Signature

Printed Name(s)

Date

I/We have explained the study to the person signing above, have allowed an opportunity for questions, and have answered all of his/her questions. I/We believe that the subject understands this information.

Signature of Researcher(s)

Printed Name(s)

Date

I do ☐ or do not ☐ give my permission to be photographed.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

You do not have to agree to be photographed in order to participate in this study.

Appendix P: Electronic message for interview with over 20 years of service

Hello **Name**,

My name is Nakia Shelton and I am a graduate student at Radford University. I am currently working on my master's thesis where my research will focus on exploring designers' engagement with work.

I am recruiting a diverse group of designers specializing in web design, graphic design, animation design, interior design, motion graphics design, industrial product design, fashion design, UI/UX design, instructional design, and/or architectural design working full-time in private- and public-sector companies and institutions for participation in the study.

I would like to see if you could take part in an anonymous individual interview with me to gain insight on your success of tenure and experiences with burnout. The interview will take about twenty to thirty minutes and can be done in-person at a mutually agreed upon location at Radford University, over the phone, or through Zoom.

Identity of participants will remain anonymous. All data will be rendered anonymous.

I am asking you to participate in this study because I believe you would bring a unique perspective to the research. I have attached the consent form for review and permission. If you have questions about this study, please ask before you sign this form. You may contact me at nshelton@radford.edu, or Dr. Joan Dickinson at jdickins@radford.edu, 1-540-818-1669. If you agree to participate, please print, sign, scan and email the consent form back or electronically sign and email the consent form back to me at nshelton@radford.edu.

I appreciate your time and hope that you will work with me on this project.

Thank you,
Nakia Shelton

Appendix Q: Interview questions for over 20 years of service

Demographics

1. What area of design do you work in?
2. Describe the type of organization do you currently you work for?
3. What is your job title?
4. What are your job duties?
5. How long have you worked in your position?

Tenure and burnout

6. Do you ever feel burned out at your job? Explain your answer and contributing factors.
7. How do you alleviate or prevent burnout?
8. Have you ever wanted to resign from your position? Explain your answer.
9. Have you ever wanted to leave the design industry entirely? Explain.
10. What has driven the commitment to your job and the organization you work for?
11. Is there anything you would like to share that I didn't ask pertaining to designers and burnout in the workplace?

Appendix R: Adult Informed Consent — Interview with over 20 years of service

Department of Design



Adult Informed Consent – Interview with tenured

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The interview will take place in-person at a mutually agreed upon location at Radford University, over the phone, or through Zoom. The interview will last approximately twenty to thirty minutes. During the interview, the student researcher will record audio of the conversation on a password-protected iPhone to be analyzed.

This study has no more risk than you may find in daily life.

There are no direct benefits to you for being in the study.

You can choose not to be in this study. If you decide to be in this study, you may choose not to answer certain questions or not to be in certain parts of this study.

There are no costs to you for being in this study.

If you decide to be in this study, what you tell us will be kept private unless required by law to tell.

The data collected in this research study will be kept confidential and will be rendered anonymous. Participation in research may involve some loss of privacy. We will do our best to make sure that the information about you is kept confidential, but we cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your personal information may be viewed by individuals involved in the research and may be seen by people including those collaborating, funding, and regulating the study. We will share only the minimum necessary information in order to conduct the research. Your personal information may also be given out if required by law, such as pursuant to a court order. While the information and data resulting from this study may be presented at scientific meetings or published in a scientific journal, your name or other personal information will not be revealed.

We will collect your information through a password-protected iPhone. This information will be stored on a password-protected iMac and cloud-based system.

The research team will work to protect your data to the extent permitted by technology.

If you give the research team permission to quote you directly, the researchers will give you a pseudonym and will generalize your quote to remove any information that could be personally identifying.

Audio recordings will be collected during this study and used to analyze findings. The recordings will be destroyed after three years. The recordings will not be shared with the general public or other researchers. If you give the research team permission to quote you directly, the researchers will give you a pseudonym and will generalize your quote to remove any information that could be personally identifying.

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If all of your questions have been answered and you would like to take part in this study, then please sign below.

_____ Signature	_____ Printed Name(s)	_____ Date
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I/We have explained the study to the person signing above, have allowed an opportunity for questions, and have answered all of his/her questions. I/We believe that the subject understands this information.

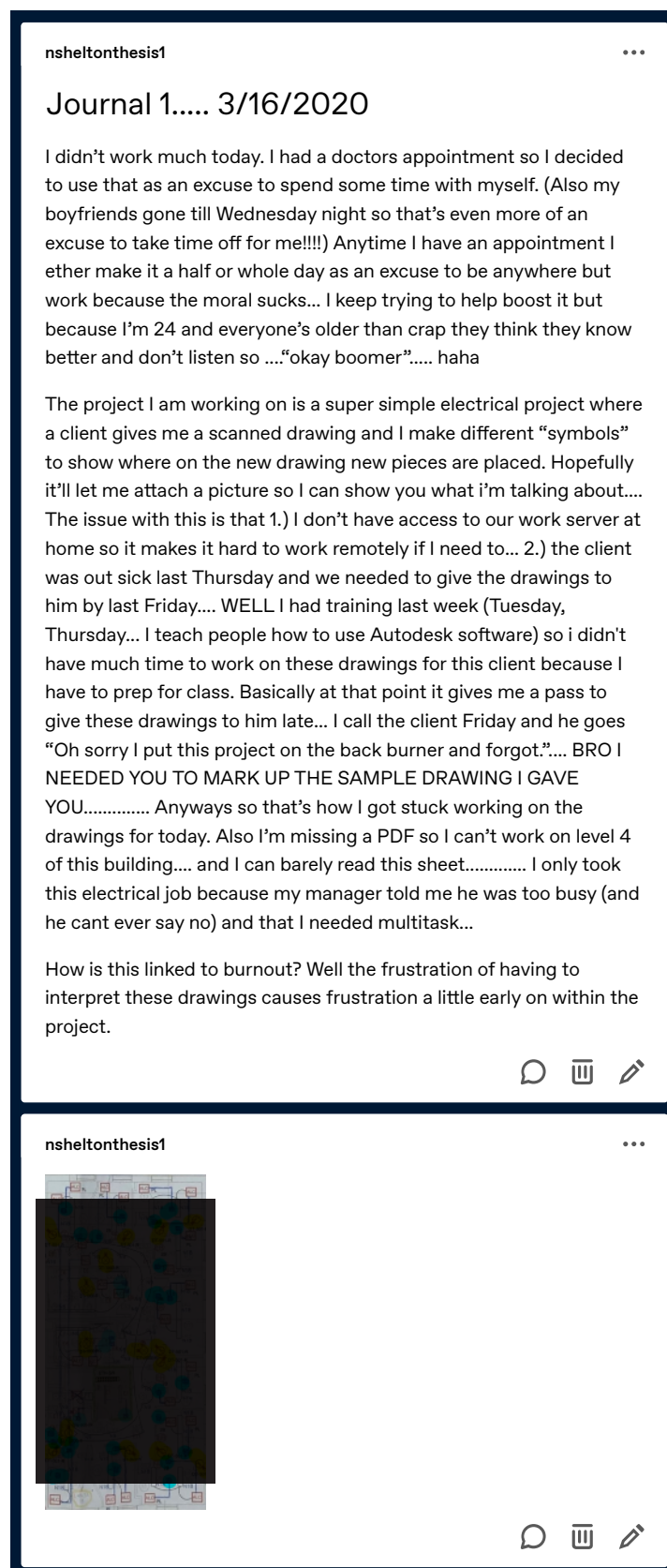
_____ Signature of Researcher(s)	_____ Printed Name(s)	_____ Date
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I do ☐ or do not ☐ give my permission to the investigators to quote me directly in their research.

The investigators may ☐ or may not ☐ digitally record this interview.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Appendix S: Journal - Victoria



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Journal 2.....3/17/2020

Thankfully today seems to be a little less stressful in terms of workload BUT I did find out that my manager is falling into a trap within the company that's been the main cause of turnover/ burnout.... According to my old boss it goes: You keep taking on more work and basically being told it's not enough. So there's no praise involved and that's when people drop like flies. I'm going to recommend a moral booster later on for our office/ an intervention for my manager because if he gets burned out then it'll stress me out which will cause me to burn out..... being an adult is fun. I remember YOU (actually you this time, m not as a whole) saying during the phone interview if I think burnout is a result of more individual or higher-up? (something like that) THIS is the definition of higher-up being the issue..... My manager working as hard as he does should be praised with maybe a bonus or a couple days off as a "good job" but instead he gets nothing but "eh you can do more". So now as an employee and someone that cares- i'm going to have an intervention with him to tell him to slow it down and take some time mentally.



nsheltonthesis1

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Journal 3.... 3/18/2020

I was thinking last night about this research project... I know this is about workplace burnout but another reason why people can get burned out so easily at work is also because of negative things happening in their personal lives.... imagine coming into work after you found out your spouse was cheating on you or you just lost a family member or you in general have depression THEN you have to go spend 8 hours in a place that already has low moral. Big oof.

Maybe work places should offer free counseling, yoga, massages, or mindfulness groups. Some large scale companies do offer stuff but it should almost be mandatory for smaller companies to have something.

The burnout is going to be real at my work here soon. We're about to be swamped in projects and understaffed and the only way for us to hire another person is to show that we're dying but even then that might not be enough... I suffer with ADHD decently bad- so I get overwhelmed very easily in general. Therefore leading to early burnout. I kind of miss having the "easier" jobs. My current job is super challenging and although that's fine every now and again- doing challenging work constantly since I started college (8 years, started college in 2012) is just taking a toll on someone that has the same mental capacity as someone with Alzheimer's.



Appendix T: Journal - Ellen

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Monday Mar. 16

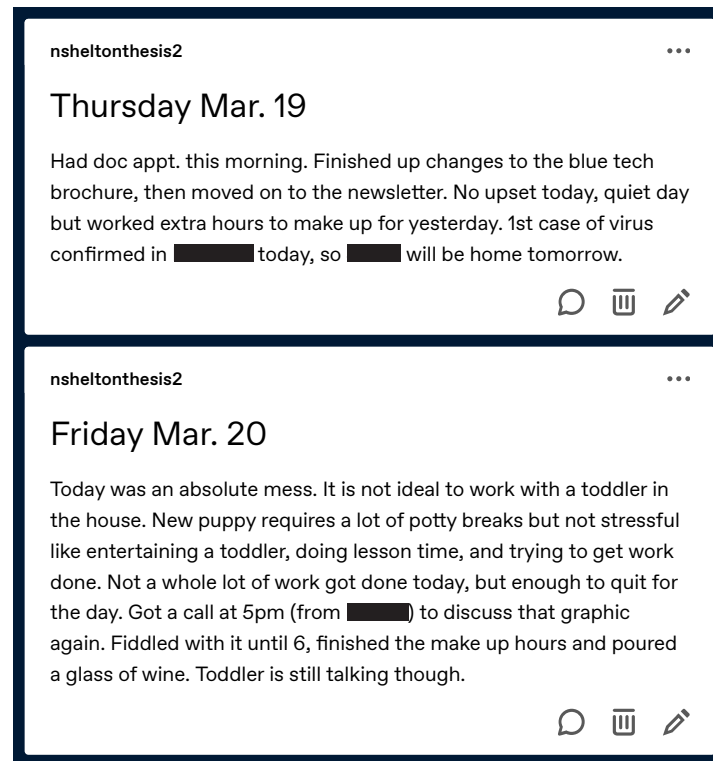
Started today thinking it would be a slow day/slow week since the coronavirus is slowing things down on client sites. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] manager] emailed and asked me to redo the proposal anchor graphic again for the 5th time. They don't even know requirements yet for graphics so all the rework is wasting time and taking away from client work. Will talk to [REDACTED] [my manager] at 3pm.

[REDACTED] will contact [REDACTED] and tell him his deadline isn't possible and he's "gone to the [REDACTED] well" too many times already. Apparently he pushed back but gave me an extra day to do the graphic. Finished up [REDACTED] brochure draft and sent to [REDACTED] team for review.

Tomorrow, plan to finish up [REDACTED] project portfolio title slide design. Wednesday will be James' graphic. Thursday [REDACTED] Acquisition newsletter. Friday, do changes for whatever feedback I've received on various projects.

nsheltonthesis2
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nsheltonthesis2
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Appendix U: Journal - Amy

3/23/2020 am

We just presented sections of the viewbook to the client. It feels like this is the same feedback I've been getting for 20 years now. I need to put an African American on every spread of the book, despite using less images than in the past, despite being about 7% African American. I am not using pictures that look "science" despite the fact that the majority of work and collaboration is being done huddled over a laptop, looking at research. It's exhausting to be told how to do my job by people with little to no experience, little real insight into what actually happens in labs and classrooms.

And this review WENT WELL. Imagine if it didn't go well.

I know they think I'm mailing it in. I'm not. I just can't get them to see what if I present a photo, it's honestly the best option I have for telling that story.

To top that off, the project manager asked if we could produce 1,000 more acceptance packets by the end of the week. This is a 28pp full color book, an 8pp one-color insert and a custom 9" x 12" envelope that needs to be printed and converted. I just want to say "NO" but my production manager is all like "we will see what we can do!"

3/23/2020 pm

The silence from the client this morning was foreboding and I hope I am wrong. She tends to share her feedback privately so I am hesitant. Fingers crossed. It's stressful. And, sure enough, there's no way the printer can provide 1,000 copies of a book this size with a converted envelope in a week. It would take four weeks, at least. Feeling a little validated.

Once again, my marketing manager is questioning why I designed something a certain way. She's really stepping on my toes. I have to really work at taking a deep breath and trying to answer her comments constructively. I feel like they have been handed the keys to the car before they got their license. I feel like I'm having to teach them to drive the car but I have no authority to tell them how to do it. It's not a good place. I'm not getting a lot of respect here.

3/24/2020

A good day for the most part. My managing editor finally fell apart a little bit. To be fair, she's also got two kids at home that are attempting to school from home. It's a lot. I told her I only cried four times last week, so today was better. Reminding myself of Brene Brown: we're all doing the best we can. Especially now. (Well except maybe the president.)

3/25/2020

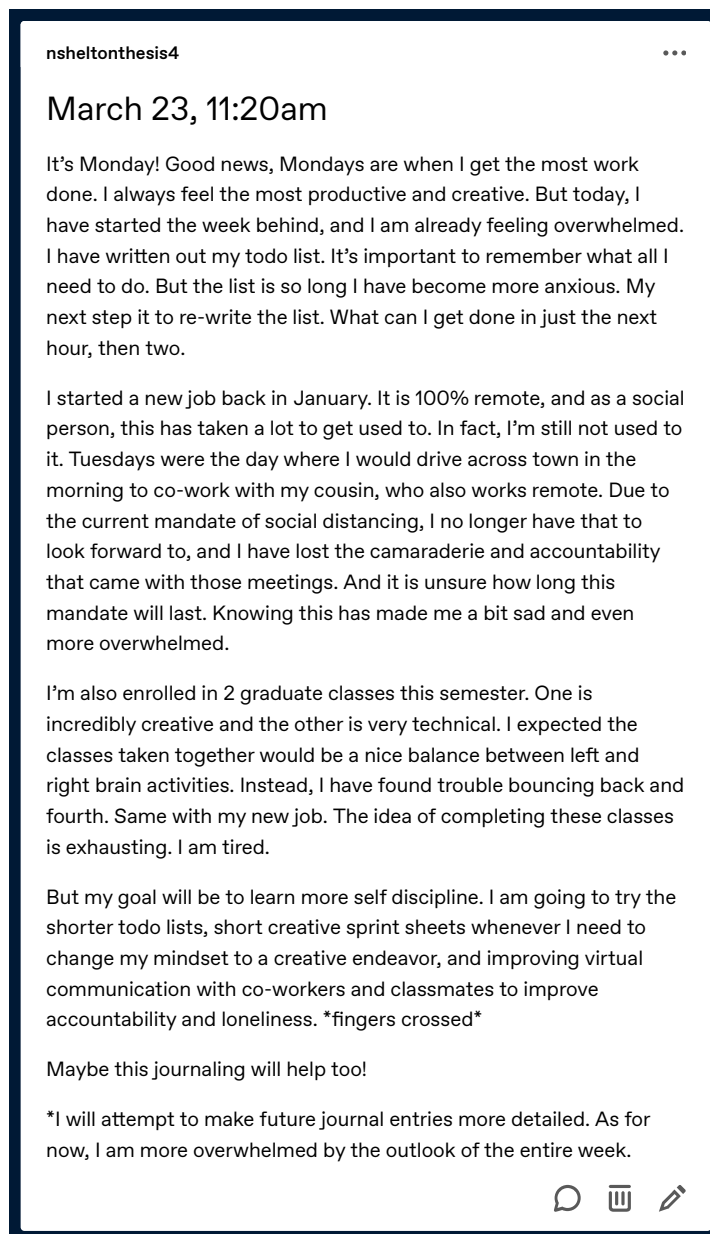
Dealing with this client is a nightmare. They pick and pick at the design and yet they can't get their own shit together. An entire spread chock full of copy is being rewritten. They saw it at the manuscript stage too. I'm not lashing out but I am totally rolling my eyes on this. I said something about that I hoped they would learn from this experience for next year but let's just say I'm dubious.

3/27/2020

Yesterday was a good day. Today is a nightmare. I'm being bombarded with requests and emails and I cannot do it all. And to top it all off, I was going to finally FINALLY finish this big piece, which is technically due today, and the project manager tells me to work on this email instead. I had a terrible time finding the template, and I manage to get that to my art director, who apparently has let his OCD kick in. This is his design that I'm just attempting to carry out and he has some sort of issue with the way it looks and even though we've talked on the phone, I have no idea what he's talking about. The best I can tell, he's talking about a pixel problem? I have no idea. And I have don't know how to fix a problem I'm not seeing. This needs to be done today and he's looking at a pixel overlap problem? So angry and tired and overwhelmed. In the meantime, the rest of the world has time to sit of the couch and watch Tiger King. Why am I the only one up to my eyeballs in work?

Ultimately, I feel like I can't design. I feel like my years of doing this are useless because I'm being told to move things two pixels to satisfy things visually. I don't get why these changes are being requested. And, I have to just swallow it all and obey what I'm asked to do. I'm so sad and frustrated.

Appendix V: Journal - Heather



nsheltonthesis4

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March 25, 10am

I was given a project for work. It includes copywriting. I used to teach a basic copywriting class when I was a department chair for a graphic design program years ago. I know just enough copywriting to recognize when it's good, and to appreciate why we should hire copywriters to write our copy for us.

I am freaking out. I am overwhelmed, irritated, and feeling incompetent. Normally, I love assignments where I can stretch my creative abilities. But this project- not so much.

I got a message asking for the writing I was supposed to be doing by end of day. Now, due to procrastination, I am frantic. I keep trying to remind myself "What's the worst thing that will happen?" and I know all they can do is say "try again." But now I have a mental block I have built around this assignment.

I had a close friend point out to me that I am often self-defeatist. When given an assignment that I'm not sure I can complete easily and well, I find reasons to complain about it. Am I doing that now?

The recent stress of finding a new normal in this time of social distancing has gotten me behind in my classes too.

I didn't get to write yesterday, but due to the recent stress, I cleaned my house, and my office. It is nice to come into my office this morning and not have to step over piles of papers, shuffle notebooks and sketch books off my desk in order to find my keyboard, and sit on my couch without worrying about the pens falling into the cracks of the seat cushions. And as productive as cleaning is, it's not productive enough.

Yesterday was when I found out I had to take an additional class for my graduate program. I will now be taking 3 classes instead of 2. I am working really hard to be excited about the opportunities this is going to bring me, and to not be self-defeating. But I know I will have to learn a new normal again.



nsheltonthesis4

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March 26, 12:30pm

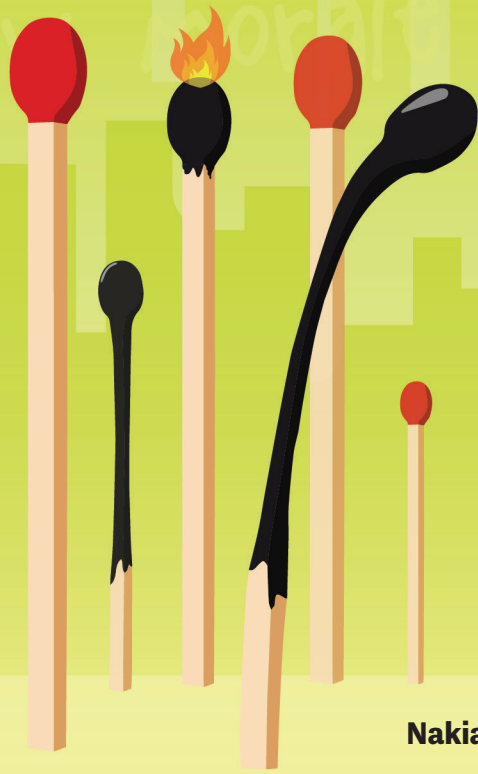
I got another migraine yesterday. It subsided with a bit of medication, but put me behind a few hours. So today is all about self-care and catching up.

Today I am anxious and scared. It makes it difficult to write. Most of my triggers have come from concern about current events happening- the virus that has shut down most of the US. But some triggers I cannot identify at the moment.

I think I've been feeding off of the anxiety and emotions coming from friends and family. Where is this "new normal" everyone keeps talking about? And why can't I find it?

I'll spend today trying to redefine a solid routine. I think I might do a brainstorming/ mindmap session to a- help me define my triggers, b- reduce those triggers, and c- provide myself with time restrictions so that I may find a balanced routine. Wish me luck!





Using Design-thinking to **EXPLORE BURNOUT** among **DESIGNERS IN THE WORKPLACE** and Propose Solutions

Nakia Shelton, Dr. Joan Dickinson, Dr. Holly Cline, & Kathleen Sullivan

Burnout is an occupational phenomenon and is defined as a “psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, p. 399; World Health Organization, 2019a; World Health Organization, 2019b). Three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and reduced efficacy or accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Maslach et al., 2001). The greater the job-person mismatch within the six areas of worklife—workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values—the higher likelihood of burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Maslach, 1998; Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Job turnover, excessive absenteeism, and numerous physical and emotional symptoms have been linked to burnout and have significant financial implications on the organizations where those who suffer work. Workplace burnout has been widely researched and associated among human service occupations. Burnout interventions have been

“*I’ve told my managers I was burned out. We would tell leadership that we were burned out. . . . They didn’t really seem to care; . . . as long as the project got done.”*

—Rebecca, senior UX designer, large global enterprise

implemented by organizations as a way to assist employees suffering with or prone to burnout, with mixed results. Creative industries, particularly the designers who create visual designs, products, and experiences, according to the needs of clients, consumers, and application of products, are among occupations who may be prone to burnout. However, there was a lack of empirical research on burnout as it pertains to designers and the organizations and conditions in which they work. Using design-thinking strategies, the purpose of the research study was to explore burnout among designers in the workplace and propose solutions.

The study was divided into three parts and used a purposive sample of designers. Participants included web designers, graphic designers, animation designers, interior designers, motion graphics designers, industrial product designers, fashion designers, UI/UX designers, instructional designers, design educators, and architectural designers working full-time in private- and public-sector companies and institutions. Part one involved implementing strategies for looking and exploring burnout among designers in the workplace. The following strategies were implemented in sequential order: online survey, interviews, affinity clustering findings from the interviews, journaling, affinity clustering findings from journaling, and creating Persona Profiles to summarize research findings. Part two consisted of a design-thinking workshop with a group of designers to further understand and receive feedback on the results of the findings and develop solutions for alleviating and preventing burnout. Part three involved interviews with designers working for a company or institution for over 20 years to gain insight on their success and experiences with burnout to help inform future research.

“Ultimately, I feel like I can’t design. . . . And, I have to just swallow it all and obey what I’m asked to do. I’m so sad and frustrated.”
— Amy, graphic designer, university

Results from qualitative design-thinking strategies found that the majority of designers in the study had experienced burnout at some point in their careers. Burnout was expressed in many different ways, some not outwardly obvious. Respondents spoke of exhaustion and low morale due to long work hours, heavy workloads, and toxic work environments, as well as depersonalization and reduced efficacy and accomplishment from poor leadership and not feeling valued. Coinciding with burnout literature, a lack of recognition, promotion, and career growth opportunities were common antecedents found among respondents who had or were experiencing burnout. Findings suggest thoughtful acts showing value and appreciation would significantly improve one’s morale and deter burnout.

There were interesting findings not identified in the literature that were said to cause burnout, consisting of monotony of work, indifferences among colleagues, and being an empath and a minority.

“I’ve actually gone to the doctor and they’ve said, ‘Your job is stressing you out and causing these things.’”

— Jaime, remote senior instructional designer, non-profit agency

The consequences of burnout experienced by respondents were serious and poignant. Depression, shingles, cardiovascular issues, and fluctuating weight were among the grievances cited. Many suffering from burnout were highly functioning at work. If they did not voice burnout to their managers or make mistakes, their employers were presumed unaware of their struggle, leaving them suffering in silence. Overall, findings revealed the complexity of burnout and how emotional and different it is for every person.

Burnout interventions noted from respondents were overwhelmingly of an individual approach, consisting primarily of coping strategies. Solutions proposed for alleviating and preventing burnout in the workplace were focused on better communication, leadership support, managing workload and expectations, and establishing company fit within an organization. Burnout is a wicked problem, not solved by one solution. However, by utilizing design-thinking, it was better understood and proven to widely affect designers among multiple design disciplines and in different ways.

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