

# Beating Burnout: Sustaining Ourselves, Sustaining Our Movements

A Web-Based Workshop Developed by Dallas Rising & Paul Gorski



# a little about us



Dallas has been working to change the world since she was very young, went vegan 19 years ago, has been an activist for over two decades, and is very fond of beavers.



Paul is a social justice activist, educator, and writer who does all he can to cultivate young activists. He is a big fan of mangos and vegan cookies.

# shout-outs

Thanks to the Council of Sustainable Activism, a project sponsored by In Defense of Animals.



## **\*\* action slide \*\***

- take one minute and list all of the things that come your mind that you KNOW contribute to you feeling burned out



# causes of burnout

- *“emotional labor” (seeing what others choose not to see)*

“I find that when I get together with other activists, we just end up talking about the issues and not necessarily developing relationships with each other.”



# causes of burnout

- *tension and in-fighting among activists*

“...as with many social justice movements, **there’s a lot of in-fighting...** The infighting is based on ‘Well, who’s getting the credit for the work?’”

“We get together once a month for happy hour and ... we **don’t talk about what’s going on in our lives. We bitch about other people in the movement.**”

# causes of burnout

- *“culture of martyrdom” within movements that devalues attention to self-care*

“There is also a culture of martyrdom: a lot of activist spaces where people are just killing themselves and don’t engage in self-care in very comprehensive ways ... **There’s this constant overdrive level of activity.**”

# causes of burnout

- *“culture of martyrdom” within movements that devalues attention to self-care*

“Like when I think about it and I know there are 13 trillion animals suffering right now in the system, a **feeling of guilt** might arise as I’m sitting here in my house with the heat on and **not spending every waking moment doing what I can for them.**”



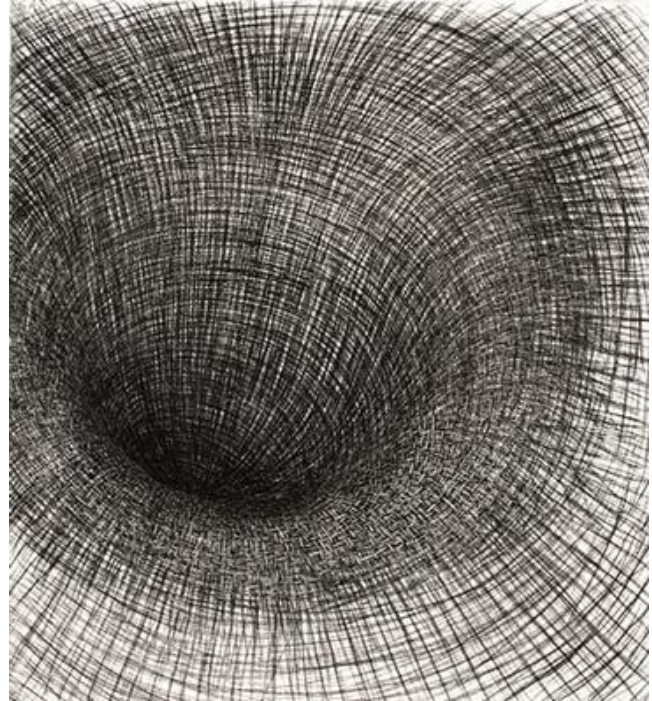
## causes of burnout

- *racism, heterosexism, classism, other oppressions within movements*

“This is something that my girls and I talk about constantly: the wear and tear of what it is to be [in this movement] in our skin, just the **constant micro-aggressions** that are there and the paper cuts that occur.”

## **\*\*action slide\*\***

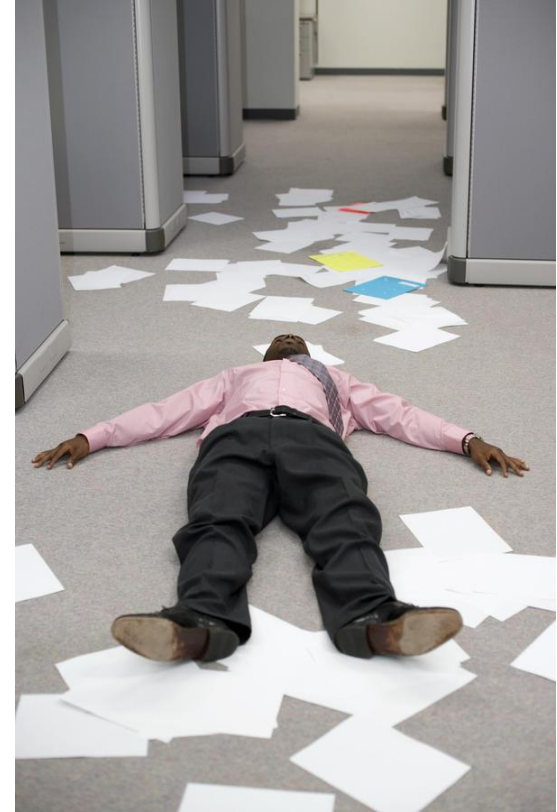
Take one minute and list the symptoms of what your burnout looks like and the ways it impacts you and your work.



# symptoms of burnout

- *deterioration of physical, psychological, and emotional health*

“I would basically push myself to the point of being very ill or in sheer exhaustion.”



# symptoms of burnout

- *deterioration of physical, psychological, and emotional health*

“Last year I was really, really, really depressed. And I said I have to do something about this because **I didn’t even have energy to play with my children.**”

# symptoms of burnout

- *hopelessness and cynicism*

**“You feel like, ‘I’m putting in all this energy and I don’t see anything changing,’ so it gives you a sense of burnout. [You wonder], is it really working? Does it really matter that I do all this?”**

# symptoms of burnout

- *hopelessness and cynicism*

“I was just losing my soul.”



# symptoms of burnout

- *withdrawing from activism*

“There are periodic times when **I overwork myself** and I feel like I just need to quit all of this.”





# symptoms of burnout

- *withdrawing from activism*

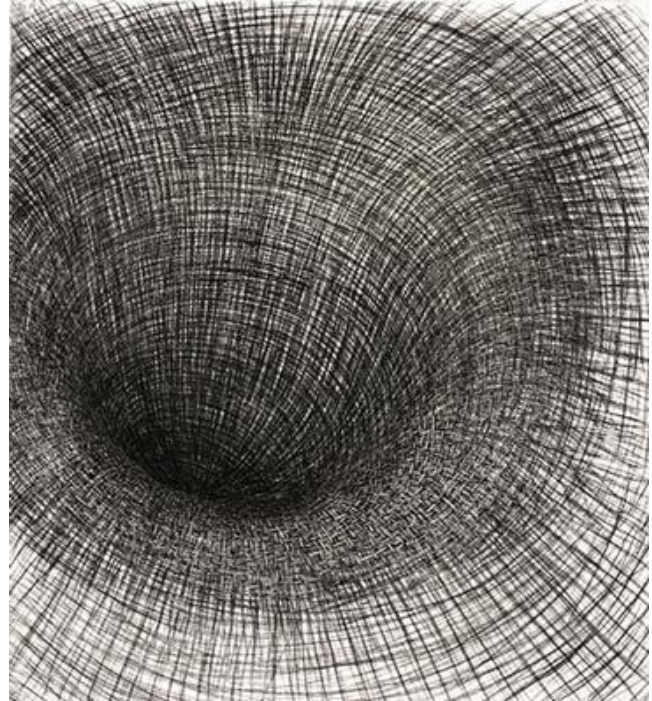
“When I left the organization I was at a point where ‘I don’t want to do trafficking work.’ Years before I was so passionate about it. That was all I wanted to do, all I wanted to think about or read about or talk about.”





## **\*\*action slide\*\***

Take one minute and write about what, in your experience, the consequences of activist burnout are in the movements in which you participate.



# consequences of burnout

- *becoming a less effective activist*

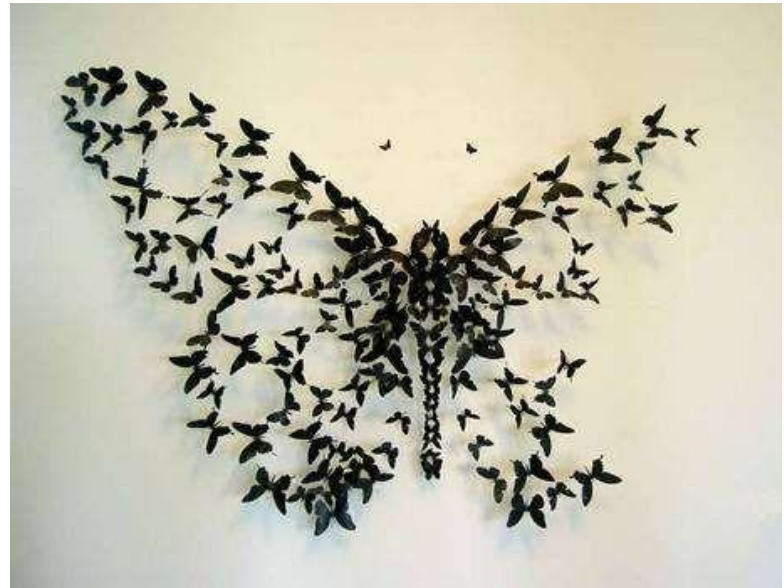
“I was losing my capacity to think well... My sense of creativity and being able to see what is going on and identify, ‘here is an effective strategy’... faded. It was like I had no sense about how to navigate that anymore. **I felt sort of immobilized in terms of being able to ... take any sort of action.**”

# consequences of burnout

- *disrupting the movement*

50-60% of social justice activists eventually walk away from their activism due to burnout.

- loss of mentors
- wheel-reinventing



# Audre Lorde Quote

“Self-care is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation. And that is an act of political warfare.”



# Reassess Priorities

When everything is piling up and we're feeling overwhelmed, taking time to determine what's most important and what can be let go is critical.



# Daily Relaxation

- Even if it's for a few minutes
- Don't worry if you don't feel relaxed at first.
- Consider doing this in the morning.





# Eat Healthfully

- Adequate nutrition supports our bodies
- Energy from healthy foods is better for us
- Eating right helps us be resilient



# Hydrate

- Our bodies are mostly water
- We don't function well without it
- Proper hydration supports everything we do





# Get Adequate Sleep/Rest

- Burnout = exhaustion
- Lack of sleep compromises our immune system
- Chronic sleep deprivation makes everything harder



# Set Healthy Boundaries

- It's okay to say "no"
- Some things won't get done - it's ok.
- Saying no to some things allows you to say yes to others (priorities!)



# Cultivate Creativity

- Choose activities that are unrelated to activism
- Challenge yourself to find something not result oriented



# Manage Stress

- If drugs or alcohol are hurting more than helping, acknowledge it and get help
- Learn your symptoms



# How can we change movements?

How can we change conditions within our movements that lead to burnout? What should organizations be doing?



## **\*\*action slide\*\***

Brainstorm ways  
organizations can  
foster better self- and  
community-care. Post  
to chat log.

# Caring for Each Other *as Activism*

Cultivating a self-care and community-care ethic in our movements helps sustain those movements.

How do we do that?



# **Cultivate Care = Sustain Movements**

Encourage conversations about burnout and self-care within your movements and organizations--set aside time for it. Never allow people to be shamed for talking about burnout.



# **Cultivate Care = Sustain Movements**

Challenge your organization or movement(s) to directly address racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other oppressions. (Yes, exist in your movement, too.)

If you are relatively privileged within your movement, your responsibility on this increases.

# Cultivate Care = Sustain Movements

Go easy on ego, heavy on humility. Activism shouldn't be a competition among activists or a popularity competition among activist organizations.



# **Cultivate Care = Sustain Movements**

Consider any of the ways you are behaving in the activist world, purposefully or not, that might be contributing to the burnout epidemic. One of the most important things any of us can as part of our activism is to challenge burnout-causing behaviors in ourselves and each other.

**thanks!**

