

BURN OUT

**RESOURCES TO HELP
DECREASE BURN OUT IN
ACTIVISM**



OVERVIEW



The Need for Active Rest.....2-3

Rest is an non-negotiable need but it can look a lot of different ways

Emotional Exhaustion.....4-5

Emotions need to be addressed or they contribute to our burnout

Martyrdom & Recognizing Loosing Battles.....6

Is your activism grounded in sustainable mindset that will serve you and your community in the longterm?

White Urgency.....7

Is your urgency in activism coming from clean or dirty pain?

Radical Self Care.....8

Self-care is useless without community care, esp. in minority groups

The Healing Justice Movement.....9

‘Our movements themselves have to be healing or there’s no point to them.’ -Cara Page

Prioritization Tools.....10

Ways to make sure the most important stuff gets done first



SIGNS OF BURN OUT

MASLACH'S 3 DIMENSIONS OF BURNOUT

1. Emotional Exhaustion
2. Depersonalization (feelings of detachment)
3. Decreased Personal Accomplishment

HOW IT COULD SHOW UP:

- Fatigue/Sluggishness
- 'Wired but Tired'
- It's harder to deal with problems
- Feelings of detachment or unmotivation towards activism

- Irritability, feeling on edge
- More easily upset or frustrated
- Increased cynicism and negativity
- Dread towards activism

- Headaches
- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Muscle Tension

MASLACH'S 6 FACTORS OF BURNOUT IN THE WORKPLACE

1. Workload (correct amount and challenge level)
2. Control (ability to have autonomy)
3. Reward (recognition and compensation)
4. Community (good social support)
5. Fairness (no strong power imbalances or inequality)
6. Values (individual's matches well with groups')

(here is the legal disclaimer to get checked out by your doctor and/or psychiatrist to make sure nothing else is also going on)

THE NEED FOR "ACTIVE REST"

"We're not saying you should take 42 percent of your time to rest; we're saying if you don't take the 42 percent, the 42 percent will take you. It will grab you by the face, shove you to the ground, put its foot on your chest, and declare itself the victor."

-Burnout by Dr. Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski

Our **needed 42% rest** (~10 hours/day) can be passive or active.

Active rest can refer to activities that you find **enjoyable and rejuvenating** (And will probably fit into one of the categories below)

DR. SAUNDRA DALTON-SMITH'S 7 DIFFERENT TYPES OF REST TO PREVENT BURNOUT:

1. Physical
2. Mental (reduce cognitive load by automating tasks and reminders, externalizing working memory etc. or even just a 10-15 min break between tasks)
3. Sensory (take time away from screens, bright lights, constant/irritating noise, visit/create restful spaces etc.)
4. Creative (appreciating beauty instead of creating)
5. Emotional (identify, express, and honor as important)
6. Social (supportive relationships)
7. Spiritual (Connect with self and/or a meaningful thing/concept that is bigger than self)





“Pouring from an empty cup just gets you nowhere. Trying to boil an empty kettle can ruin the kettle, the stove, and burn down your house if you keep trying.”

- TUNDRAKATIEBEAN.COM

HOW CAN YOU MAKE YOUR ACTIVISM MORE REST-FULL?

- Are there ways that you can make your activism tasks more enjoyable or fit into a type of ‘rest’?
- Are there unreasonable deadlines you need to counter so you can approach your activism at a sustainable pace?
- Are there ways to safely automate or outsource taxing aspects?
- Can you focus more on activities you enjoy (and still make an impact) rather than ones you find draining?
- Similarly, can you collaborate with others so your activism tasks are geared towards your strengths?
- Can you decrease any multi-tasking you do for the sake of feeling productive (rather than making a task more enjoyable)?
- Can you reduce doom/news scrolling?

From kc davis in ‘How to Keep House While Drowning’:

1. Activism is not sustainable when coming from a place of shame (internally or externally)
2. Division of labor is not about who is more deserving of rest, but ensuring that no one is taking advantage of other people’s labor
3. Take Glass vs. Plastic Ball Theory approach to determining your non-negotiables vs. ideals in your activism work

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

The Nagoski sisters explain that emotional exhaustion can come from a build up of emotional burden when we don't "complete the cycle" of the stressors we experience.

According to popular psychology, emotions must be experienced fully, respected, and expressed in a healthy way in order to be processed (instead of being repressed and contributing to our emotional burden)

WHAT IS THE EMOTION'S SOURCE?

- Sometimes an emotion comes from past parts of ourselves and other times it is telling us important information about the here and now. Sometimes it can also come from our neurophysiology (like hormones, brain chemistry etc.)
- An emotional reaction to a current situation might be amplified by the built-up emotions from similar events in your past
- Especially if your activism exposes you to similar situations or emotions as your past, you are at a higher risk to develop emotional exhaustion because it is likely any old unprocessed emotions will cause much larger emotional reactions to current situations.
- If you want to continue your activism without burning out, you will need to get professional help to process the emotions from your past. Suppression is only a short term solution. (A case study outlining something like this is mentioned by Gabor Mate in 'When the Body Says No')

WHAT IS THE EMOTION'S MESSAGE?

- No matter their source, if we ignore or dismiss what our emotions are trying to say, they will just be refrozen and continue to contribute to our emotional burden.
- See if treating those emotions as something expressed by a younger self helps you extend compassion and space for processing it and determining an appropriate response (and if you like this method look into 'No Bad Parts' and IFS Theory by Richard Schwartz)

TYPICAL MESSAGES FROM COMMON EMOTIONS

- Sadness: unmet expectations or loss of something we valued
- Anger: perceived boundary violation that threatens the physical/mental/emotional wellbeing of ourselves or someone we care about or an internal or external situation we aren't okay with
- Fear: alerts us to potential threat or danger so we can avoid harm

HOW DO WE 'UNBURDEN' OUR EMOTIONS?

- Typical ways for processing emotions involve creativity, mindful movement, meaning making, and/or other therapeutic tools. It is important that whatever you choose feels safe and unforced.
- What outlets do you already enjoy? (journaling, art, or other personal and community rituals)
- What kind of movements feel naturally inclined to help your emotions be released from your somatic (body) system?
- Healing movement can involve trauma yoga, bilateral tapping, walking therapy etc. Your connection to what is going on in your body is key to it being therapeutic (for more information on this, see 'The Body Keeps the Score' and 'Waking the Tiger')

HOW DO WE COMPLETE THE CYCLE?

'Completing the stress cycle' helps our bodies recognize we are no longer in danger and can return to the 'rest and digest' state of being. This can be done by using physical movement that has a peak exertion and a lull afterwards. Or by doing something like dancing or a victory stance.

1. According to the Nagoski sisters, it is also important to reduce as many stressors as you can so you have less stress cycles to try to complete.
2. But sometimes, especially in activism, our sources of stress are outside of our control. Therefore, the completion of the cycle of stress must be detached from removing the stressor or achieving some goal.
3. We can channel emotional energy into activism, but we must also take time to celebrate with our community and send safety signals to our body to avoid burnout.

TURN A SLOW TIGER INTO A FAST TIGER

(Or, for when your body thinks you are being chased by a tiger when it's constant 'slow' stressful things that are not-so-literally chasing you)

"Lay in a bed and intentionally hold all your muscles clenched. Clench EVERYTHING. hold it for a few seconds, then let go.

"It tricks your animal fight-or-flight monkey brain into thinking it had, and won, a fight, and some of the stress response will leave you."

via @yellbug on tumblr
<https://www.tumblr.com/creekfiend/623746237266558976>



THE MARTYR MINDSET AND SUSTAINABILITY

- You have inherent value that doesn't need to be proved. Treat yourself this way. (i.e. You do not have to sacrifice your needs to prove you are a good activist.)
- Identify the 'shoulds' in your life and their source. Do these actually fit your values? How many can you take out so you can dedicate your limited time and energy to things that are rewarding and important to you?
- Identify your needs and treat all of them as non-negotiable. If you neglect them long enough, you will have to deal with the consequences and probably have to step away from activism and other things you care about indefinitely.

DETERMINING HOW TO MEET YOUR NEEDS

What are the needs you have and how do you fulfill them in a way that works for you?

- joy and pleasure
- emotional needs like attachment (close social bonds and assistance)
- creativity and authenticity (being connected with ourselves)
- adequate sleep, regular meals, hydration, rest, movement, outdoors and sun
- what other things negatively impact your life if you are unable to access them?

How can you protect your health and live a fulfilling life while stretching yourself to help as you can?

- What are the detrimental effects of a 'don't look away' mindset in the context of emotional burnout and living a full life during the revolution?
- Consider limiting news intake through trusted aggregate sources
- Focus on only 1-2 things in your activism instead of trying to fix everything
- Automate, set up external reminders, write things down so you don't have to remember them, do whatever you need to to make life easier in a way that works for you.

IS YOUR ENERGY BEING DRAINED BY A LOOSING BATTLE?

- Are you trying to change people so they act or think 'correctly'? Why do you think that's your job?
- Are there times that trying to force someone into the 'right way' isn't coming from an authoritarian mindset?
- How would you approach activism if you accepted you couldn't change everyone's mind?
- Can you maneuver it so you can have your group meet others as equals so both your desires can be negotiated?
- What other battles could you consider approaching differently?

EXCERPT FROM BETH BERILA'S WHITE URGENCY TO END RACISM: WHY NOW?

“As we collectively work toward racial justice, I invite those of us who are white to examine our impassioned reactions.

“Reflect on that urgent energy. Where is it showing up in your body? Is there a temperature, an impulse or movement? How is it manifesting? Is there an urge to do, and do you engage that impulse immediately—or can you create space to reflect on it first?

“Now go deeper. What’s underneath that urgent energy?

“Much of the urgent energy we see coming from whites right now, especially whites new to the cause, stems from our inability to be with our own pain. In his profound book, ‘My Grandmother’s Hand: Racialized Trauma and the Pathways to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies,’ Resmaa Menakem distinguishes between clean and dirty pain. Clean pain ‘is a pain that mends and can build your capacity for growth....Dirty pain is the pain of avoidance, blame, and denial.’

“There is a parallel distinction around urgency. Some urgency is a catalyzing force for transformation with integrity. But when we try to manage dirty pain, it can morph into a self-serving, individualistic, and ungrounded urgent energy.

“This urgency can feel frenetic, righteous or frantic

- Is it actually deep pain at the pervasive violence of racism?
- Is it because you didn’t realize or acknowledge systemic racism until now?
- Is it a pain that you contributed to it in some ways, even if you didn’t mean to?
- Is it a confusion that you don’t know what to do or how to help?
- Is it a righteous rage that this has to end now? If so, I invite you to go deeper still: what’s underneath that righteous rage?
- Is it, at heart, a longing to be a good person? For people to know you are a good person?

“It’s important for white people to feel the deep pain of racism. As many racial justice leaders have pointed out, racism is not actually people of colors’ responsibility to end, though they bear the violent consequences of it. It is white people’s issue to dismantle.

“Can we, as white people, bear that pain, including the pain of our complicity?”

EXCERPT FROM KATHLEEN NEWMAN- BREMANG'S 'RECLAIMING AUDRE LORDE'S RADICAL SELF-CARE':

{Quoting Justice Namaste} "I'm so fucking TIRED of the onus being put on Black people to 'find a way to heal'... This is a time when the concept of self-care is rendered essentially useless without community care, this is not the kind of thing that *can* be survived alone, and it is also the kind of thing that is all the more devastating in isolation."

...Community care is about using our power and bandwidth to support and provide for our communities when the systems we exist in don't. We need to ask ourselves what we can do politically, socially, and in our relationships to offset the harm our governments and institutions are already doing to our communities. If that seems like too big of a burden to bear, maybe it is, but that brings me back to the roots of self-care.

Lorde interrogated, "the devastating effects of overextension" and the difference between "overextending" herself and "stretching" herself. To me, this distinction is at the crux of understanding true self-care. It isn't about not working hard or ignoring our solo ambitions, mental health or self-worth. It's about making sure we aren't measuring that worth by our weariness. In Lorde's case, she was literally dying of cancer when she wrote these words. It's not unreasonable to assume that her overextension contributed to her waning health and therefore, her demise. We must use Lorde's life as a cautionary tale. What does it say about America that one of its most visionary and brilliant Black minds deteriorated while she was fighting against the conditions that work us to death? And how can we create better conditions in our communities so that history isn't repeated?



"During the darkest days of the AIDS crisis, we buried our friends in the morning, we protested in the afternoon, and we danced all night. The dance kept us in the fight because it was the dance we were fighting for. It didn't look like we were going to win then and we did. It doesn't feel like we're going to win now but we could. Keep fighting, keep dancing."

-Michael Shugert

APPLYING A HEALING JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

“Most folks I know come to activist spaces longing to heal. But our movements are often filled with more ableism and burnout than they are with healing. We work and work from a place of crisis. Healing is dismissed as irrelevant, reserved for folks with money, an individual responsibility, something you do on your own time. Our movements are so burnout-paced, with little to no room for grief, anger, trauma, spirituality, disability, aging, parenting, or sickness...

“To me [Healing Justice] means a fundamental and anti-ableist shift in how we think of movement organizing work. To think of it as a place where building in many pauses, where building in healing, where building in space for grief and trauma to be held, makes the movements more flexible and longer lasting...

“Although containing and denying grief is a time-honored activist practice that works for some people, I would argue that feelings of grief and trauma are not a distraction from the struggle.”

- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (Care Work)

“Our movements themselves have to be healing or there's no point to them.”

- Cara Page

Kindred: Southern Healing Justice Collective



“If we let ourselves be caught up in the discussion of self-care we are missing the whole point of Healing Justice (HJ) work... We need to move the self-care conversation into community care. We need to move the conversation from individual to collective. From independent to interdependent.

“Too often self-care in our organizational cultures gets translated to our individual responsibility to leave work early, go home—alone—and go take a bath, go to the gym, eat some food and go to sleep. So we do all of that ‘self-care’ to return to organizational cultures where we reproduce the systems we are trying to break; where we are continually reminded of our own trauma or exposed and absorb secondary PTSD, and where we then feel guilty or punished for leaving work early the night before to take a bubble bath.”

- Yashna Maya Padamsee (Communities of Care, Organizations for Liberation)

- Healing Justice centers the disabled-queer-trans-BIPOC community who created it and encourages cross-class solidarity like finding ways to pay for the organization and healing work that is done by this often lower-class group.
- For more information about the healing justice framework, visit: <https://socialgrantmakers.org/media/resources/healing-justice>

PRIORITIZATION TOOLS

Spoon (And Knife) Theory

Spoon Theory was developed by Christine Miserandino to explain the limited energy of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. A person only has so many spoons that they can spend on tasks, and the amount of spoons available or the spoons required for a task vary from day to day.

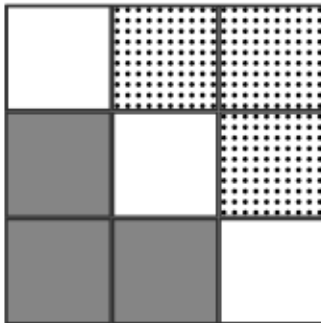
Knife Theory is a way to explain the pain, increased recovery time, and other negative consequences that happen when a person does a task they don't have the spoons for.






Glass vs. Plastic Ball Theory

“The key to juggling [your responsibilities] is to know that some of the balls you have in the air are made of plastic and some are made of glass.”
-attributed to Nora Roberts

KC DAVIS' 9 SQUARE PRIORITIZATION



-  Low effort and high impact - things to be prioritized
-  Mid effort and mid impact - things to be given secondary priority
-  High effort and low impact - things to be de-prioritized

If you found this helpful (and are able), please consider paying it forward to the Disabled QTBIPOC communities that dreamt up a lot of the concepts fundamental to fighting burnout in activism, some of which are featured in this zine.



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