

Editor's Column: Excuse Me, WTF Are You Doing?

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To be honest, I'm not really sure what I'm doing. My husband and I were taking a long drive some weeks back, to get out of the house, and while he drove, I did what I do best: ruminate. I know that a few academic libraries in Louisiana have brand-new library directors – new as in new to being a director and/or new to the state. I was thinking about how COVID-19 and the state's stay-at-home order might be affecting them in the midst of their newness. I felt bad for them and, for a moment, thought to myself: *man, it's a helluva time to be a library director, I feel bad for them...* before remembering, obviously, that **I too am a newish library director. And have been dealing with COVID-19 and the stay-at-home order.**

It's been a weird time for the world. It's been a weird time for all of us. An

unprecedented time. It's been a rollercoaster, too – one we're all riding together but apart (because social distancing, you know). We're all wearing masks – literal ones and, I've no doubt, figurative ones whereby we try to hide our anxieties, fears, and frustrations. I'm not sure how well any of us are doing. I feel like most of us are doing our best or trying to anyway, and frankly, that's the most I think we can ask of ourselves and everybody else.

I keep finding myself using and hearing the word *unprecedented* in conjunction with the pandemic. It works. It's true. It's terrifying. It's not just a disaster situation warranting emergency management-type responses. It's also a change situation, and change is – even under the best circumstances – scary for most people. Given the tidal waves of misinformation, the swiftness with which information about the virus and its prevention and treatment changes, the conflicting information people are being slammed with, and the overall uncertainty of what feels like *everything*, it's not hard to imagine that we might all feel like we're on the edge of *something*, even if we aren't sure *what*.

But the pandemic is not the only calamitous event we find ourselves facing. In the wake of the senseless deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, and many (too many) others, we find ourselves facing violence, equity, civil rights, and civil unrest. People mistrust the police (to some degree rightfully so). People mistrust the government (to some degree rightfully so). There are riots all over the country, and people – protestors and public servants alike – are getting hurt and killed. It hurts. I fear for my black and biracial family members, friends, colleagues, and fellow human beings. I also fear for my fellow human beings in blue who are trying to do right by people and who denounce the actions of officers like those whose actions have resulted in the deaths of too many Black and minority people. Yes, all lives matter, but one step at a time, one day at a time,

and right now that step and day and time is Black Lives Matter.

In the midst of all this fear and violence, I know libraries, librarians, and library staff are doing what they've always done: try to be bastions of equity, access, and social justice. We've all struggled, I know, with adapting to the new normal. Inboxes and webinars seem awash in guidelines, updates, recommendations, case studies, and products on how to be contactless, low-contact, to sanitize and disinfect all sorts of things, to protect ourselves and our patrons, to ensure some semblance of service and access, to transition to online environments and services, to support our classroom colleagues in that same endeavor, to support our patrons in that effort, to try to support ourselves as we work from home or in the danger zone of public service desks. We struggle with guilt in working from home; we struggle with guilt and fear working the desks. It's a balancing act that none of us have much time to practice much less perfect – we just have to do it. One foot in front of another, one Zoom meeting and spreadsheet after another.

This issue of *Codex* is a little different, in deference to the unusual times in which we find ourselves. The usual suspects appear – that is, columns and scholarly, peer-reviewed articles. But I also modified the “Call for Content” when I sent out a reminder. I asked for librarians and library staff to write candidly about their experiences and reactions to COVID-19 and how they are/were dealing (or not dealing) with it. I hoped to elicit the daily, lived experiences (AKA qualitative) experiences of library personnel, of course. But I also hoped to offer a means of catharsis. As a friend of mine – who works on the front lines of healthcare – observed, we are all experiencing a shared trauma. And for some of us, writing is catharsis. For some of us, reading the experiences of others is also catharsis. I hoped to connect those individuals in this issue. So, if things seem a little less scholarly and little more emotional or unguarded or slice-of-life than usual, that's why. I think it's important to examine these accounts and see how we might learn

from them, even if they aren't strictly methodology-based, literature reviewed-founded studies.

On an even more confessional note, I'm *tired* and *frustrated* and sometimes a little *scared*. I have an autoimmune disorder, but I've had to return to the workplace because (1) I have employees on extended medical leave, (2) my administration wants the Library open – and arguably with the start of the fall semester looming, the Library *needs* to be open, and (3) I believe in solidarity. If we have to be open, I need to be here to pitch in. I need to be here to help. But that's how I feel. Do I want to be here? Hell no. On top of an autoimmune disorder, I have asthma and a predisposition to respiratory infections (even before I was diagnosed with adult onset asthma). I would feel much safer working from home. But I also feel an ethical and moral obligation to be here, to risk alongside those employees who don't have the option to work from home. To support them and help them do their jobs, to show that the Library is a team player, to show that Library employees are team players and contributors.

I have no idea what the future holds for me, for the Library, for Louisiana, for any of us. I asked my sister, a nurse practitioner who is married to an ER doctor, what she thought this time next year might look like. She said she thought it would be closer to a normal we recognize, but still not the normal from before pandemic. It used to be, for me, living in Louisiana, that things were delineated “before the hurricanes [Katrina and Rita]” and “after the hurricanes.” Things will now be “before COVID-19/pandemic” and “after COVID-19/pandemic,” I think. A normal closer to what we recognize pre-pandemic is hard to imagine in this moment. I feel immersed in the new normal – face masks, limited social contacts, and lots of meetings via web conferencing. I have no idea what things will look like moving forward as we attempt to address the civil rights issues and violations in play. Yes, all lives matter; no one is disagreeing with that. But at this moment in time, I think we should be focused on Black Lives Matter. If we don't support that

conversation, we aren't supporting our colleagues, our patrons, or our communities. And isn't that what libraries have always done – support our colleagues and compatriots, our patrons, and our communities? Identifying and attempting to meet their needs? I don't think that's changed at all. I simply think the conversation has become more urgent than ever.

Throughout all of this – amongst the many things we are being asked to remember, to think about, to consider and calculate – take a moment to breathe. Be sure to take moments to address self-care. The oxygen mask analogy has never been more appropriate, and I have seen it used in many COVID-19 related webinars and training: we have to put our own masks on before we can help others. Find something that calms you, whether it's yoga or a hobby or video games or whatever – find your happy place. Spend some time there to ensure your life is balanced and you are taking care of you. Hang in there, my friends, and as always feel free to reach out with ideas. I'm still very much open to publishing personal-professional accounts of y'all's experiences with COVID-19, especially as these dramas and traumas continue to unfold.



[Image from Pixabay](#) – I love succulents; they always inspire me.