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## How Poor Leadership and Favoritism Intersect to Create Toxic Work Environments

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## Chapter 12

# HOW POOR LEADERSHIP AND FAVORITISM INTERSECT TO CREATE TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Simone Williams and Lora Del Rio

## Introduction

Discussions about leadership in academic libraries rarely focus on the negative; they mostly focus on best practices of leadership.<sup>1</sup> There is hardly any discussion of poor leadership, nor is there a rigorous discussion of concerning behaviors that poor leaders engage in, such as favoritism. Concomitantly, there is little to no discussion about how to identify and address behaviors that poor leaders engage in and how academic libraries can change toxic institutional culture.



In this chapter, we are interested in defining poor leadership and favoritism to change toxic institutional cultures and give voice to those who are affected by poor leadership and favoritism.

We will attempt to add to the literature on toxic workplace cultures in academic libraries by exploring the intersection between poor leadership and favoritism and how they manifest to cultivate a toxic workplace culture in academic libraries. We will discuss how poor leaders weaponize favoritism to silence, manipulate, bully, and exclude lower-ranked faculty and staff, create de facto leaders, cultivate the wrong type of leaders, and allow egregious behaviors to not be addressed. We will also discuss the long-term implications of poor leadership and favoritism and demonstrate how favoritism is in direct conflict with the espoused values of LIS, particularly diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This chapter aims to help identify the signs of poor leadership and favoritism and validate the experiences of those working in academic libraries saddled by poor leadership and favoritism and empower them to overcome a culture of control and transform it into one of inclusion and engagement.

## Literature Review

A review of the literature on toxic workplace culture in academic libraries demonstrates there is a dearth of literature on the subject. Additionally, little to no literature examines the intersection between favoritism and poor or toxic leadership in academic libraries. To address this lack of scholarship on how poor leadership and favoritism intersect, we must first define academic library leadership.

Defining leadership in academic libraries is complex and understudied. Therefore, clearly identifying poor leadership is also complex and understudied. Despite this lack, there is a common perception among library scholars that leadership in academic libraries is transactional and based on the leader's ability to get people to follow them.<sup>2</sup> Most LIS leadership studies are based on the perspective of leaders or focus on what traits make a good leader and exclude those who work under leaders and those who could help identify traits of poor leaders.<sup>3</sup> The exclusion of these voices has been deleterious to understanding how organizations function and how toxicity manifests itself or how poor or toxic conditions can be improved because these studies overemphasize the role of leaders while de-emphasizing the role of subordinates.

The actions of a single leader do not entirely influence organizations, and the "leader-centered view does not adequately grasp that leadership is contextual, and any part of the context can positively or negatively influence leaders."<sup>4</sup>

Subordinates also have just as much of an impact on an organization, because their skills and competency determine whether a leader will succeed or fail or if the leader will be perceived as good or poor. They also are the ones that ascribe positive and negative traits to a leader.<sup>5</sup> They also have the power to influence the direction of an organization just as much as those in positions of power if they are allowed enough agency within an organization.<sup>6</sup>

By focusing on leaders, these studies really do not focus on poor or ineffective leadership, nor do they focus on the perspective of those who have worked or currently work under poor leaders. In LIS, for example, the most positive traits that library workers ascribe to good leaders are high emotional intelligence, empowering, visionary thinker, trustworthy, good communicator, librarian/manager, catalyst for change, people first, visionary, change agent, experienced librarian, and role model.<sup>7</sup> Poor leaders would supposedly have the opposite traits: low emotional intelligence, disempowering, untrustworthy, and poor communicator. Scholars have additionally identified both positive and negative attributes of toxic leaders. For instance, poor or toxic leaders can be quite charming or charismatic and use their charisma and charm to wield power and gain followers. Research has shown a connection between poor leadership and narcissism; narcissistic leaders often mask their incompetency and unproductiveness by exerting their power to quell criticism and dissent.<sup>8</sup> More important than recognizing the negative traits and shortcomings in poor leaders is understanding the impact this leadership has on the employees and work environment. Positive, effective leaders empower their team and cultivate engagement and growth; conversely, poor leaders control subordinates through methods like favoritism and breed a culture of resentment—us versus them. In academic libraries, engagement between leadership and library staff is important to meet the library's mission and goals; it involves the constant exchange of ideas and shifting power dynamics, especially if a lower-ranked staff person has more experience or expertise about a particular topic than a higher-ranked staff person. A poor leader will not allow these exchanges and instead want to control all aspects of library operations from the top down by making unilateral decisions.<sup>9</sup> The us versus them organizational culture can be related to the ideology of hate. This ideology

implies that leaders see the world in terms of false dichotomies (you are either with us or either you are with the terrorists) and images of hatred... Further, the consequences of an ideology of hate include destroying perceived enemies, sabotaging those who disagree with this ideology and, in extreme cases, pitting others against or ostracizing rivals.<sup>10</sup>

Poor leadership in libraries also belies the values of the profession.

The values of LIS have two main tenets related to leadership: (1) respect for the individuality and diversity of all people, and (2) building consensus and unity with these diverse members by clearly providing direction for institutional decisions.<sup>11</sup> Poor leaders often dismiss these values by engaging in destructive behaviors and allowing toxic workplace environments to fester. They also have their own ethical conflicts that may endanger the core values of LIS and their institutions. Some of these negative behaviors have been identified in the literature frequently and include bullying and not making or tabling decisions.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, just as poor leaders choose which staff to bully in academic libraries, they can also choose which staff are their favorites.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines favoritism as “A disposition to show, or the practice of showing, favour or partiality to an individual or class, to the neglect of others having equal or superior claims; undue preference.”<sup>13</sup> Although some scholars have examined the role that favoritism plays in the workplace, the problem with identifying favoritism in the workplace, and especially in academic libraries, can be attributed to the conflation of favoritism with nepotism and cronyism. All three behaviors are based on being unethical and giving a particular person or persons an unfair advantage in the workplace that is not merited<sup>14</sup>

A Google search will yield many university policies which define nepotism as favoritism in the workplace based on family relationships. However, favoritism exists outside of nepotism; for example, poor leaders may give preferential treatment to some employees and not others, such as sharing information with favored employees and withholding it from others. Favoritism, while arguably unethical, is not illegal and without an explicit university policy (like nepotism and cronyism), it proves difficult to recognize and remedy. Without the language to call it into question and a system to hold leaders accountable, it may not be entirely clear when a leader is practicing favoritism. Additionally, favoritism also naturally occurs within organizations because friendships are often encouraged to uphold organizational culture.

The benefits of workplace friendships can be greater morale, better job performance, and greater support or loyalty to leaders. These friendships can often be hierarchical when supervisors and subordinates develop friendships based on proximity and shared interests or values.<sup>15</sup> When friendships occur between supervisors and subordinates, it is not entirely transparent how either the supervisors or the subordinates benefit from the relationship, nor do many of these relationships meet the definition of favoritism as previously defined. Additionally, those who benefit from favoritism are presumably less likely to identify it as a problem within an institution. Supervisors who have favorites may not consider

having a favorite employee a problem if they do not believe that it negatively affects their ability to lead or that they are treating the favored employees differently from other employees. Just as leaders can feign ignorance about choosing favorites, they can also weaponize favoritism to consolidate control.

Which roll does a follower play in toxic leadership? How does support from their followers give rise to their control? Poor leaders may play favorites with their subordinates because the favored followers are willing to provide the leaders legitimacy by colluding with them. Followers play a role in maintaining the status quo, but there are various categories of followers. In their “toxic triangle model”, Pelletier, Kottke, and Sirotni aim to categorize followers into two main groups: colluders and conformers.<sup>16</sup> Colluders actively support the toxic leader, but the motivations of this group of followers differs, breaking them further into two types: acolytes and opportunists. Acolytes often disregard the behaviors of poor leaders because they truly believe that poor leaders are there for the good of an organization and its members; in other words, these followers feel they share the same values as the toxic leader<sup>17</sup> Opportunists, on the other hand, collude with poor leaders for their own purposes. They use being a favorite to their advantage to advance either financially or professionally with little regard to if an organization succeeds or fails. Conformers are the passive group of followers in the organization, who reluctantly allow toxic leadership to persist for a variety of reasons. There are three types of conformers: authoritarians, who consider the poor leader legitimate; lost souls, who lack the self-esteem to speak up and question the toxic leader; and bystanders, who fear retaliation or being isolated if they question a poor leader’s authority.<sup>18</sup> Without any system or safe space to disrupt the roles the leader and followers play in a toxic culture, employees may not recognize the situation until the working conditions grow to be unbearable. These definitions of followers help give language to describe the experiences of poor leadership in LIS, but favoritism is not an explicit practice; it is vague and ambiguous.

The implicitness of favoritism is due to the inability of LIS professionals to admit or identify that the profession is not as altruistic as it claims and that favoritism is somewhat embedded in the profession. As Katrina Spencer exclaims:

Because of our collective vocational awe and our inclination to believe that librarians as people and professionals are unerringly benevolent, we would never admit that hazing is ubiquitous to LIS culture, but it is alive and well in our cliquish profession. Essentially the implicit and perhaps subconscious question that guides LIS-based hazing is “How much unpaid,

questionably rewarding labor are newbies willing to endure in order to ascend the ranks?” In our field, this type of labor and networking precede prominence. Hazing is meant to test one’s allegiance to a group and dangles an ostensible reward before the enticed. The reward, dear friends, is more work. Prestigious work, status, roles, and partnerships, but more work, nonetheless. Senior LIS professionals know that the newest among us are largely eager to please, frequently unfamiliar with the service landscape, and looking to prove ourselves. This is one of the ways new LIS professionals become burdened with unglamorous roles, winningless exercises, fruitless committees, tiresome meetings, onerous appointments, and undesirable nominations.<sup>19</sup>

Spencer is arguing that the profession itself is inherently flawed due to traditions and the type of work where people aspire to be favorites or well-liked because it is seemingly the only way to advance. Library culture also ensures that poor leadership is embedded in the profession through the socialization process. The socialization process, or onboarding process, requires that leaders and other employees relay the organizational culture to new hires, allowing grooming to take place. This grooming can lead to favoritism or create a toxic work environment, depending on if those in leadership positions or other employees have adopted negative behaviors and have demonstrated that policies or procedures are immutable.<sup>20</sup> Although we were able to find a few concrete examples related to poor leadership and favoritism, we still had problems fully defining favoritism and identifying poor leadership in LIS. Therefore, we performed a broader search of the literature outside of LIS.

Overall, there was a lack of literature that focused on favoritism outside of LIS. However, from these few sources we can glean how favoritism functions at the organizational level and how poor leaders in academic libraries use favoritism to their advantage. In “The Politics of Favoritism: A Qualitative Analysis of the Teacher’s Perspective,” Joseph Blase argues that favoritism is often used to gain loyalty and consolidate power in organizational politics.<sup>21</sup> He also argues that those who practice favoritism are perceived as being poor leaders (i.e., incapable of having good judgment or making sound decisions), therefore linking favoritism and poor leadership. Those Blase surveyed also perceived leaders who practiced favoritism as biased because they often favored those who they had close ties to, offering them preferential treatment and disregarding policy and procedures. Respondents also stated that leaders were more transparent with



individuals whom they favored while not being as transparent with non-favored employees, thus allowing the favorites more access to information. Additionally, they claimed that leaders allocated better resources to their favorites, provided them with better evaluations even if they had performed poorly, and assigned them lighter workloads. While Blase's work is important, April Chaput adds to the study of organizational favoritism by examining the conditions that allow favoritism to take place.

Chaput argues that favoritism occurs in organizations that already have poor working conditions, which Chaput describes as antecedents to favoritism. These antecedents, which include a lack of transparency, decision-making, ethics, and lack of accountability for leaders, make the organization more prone to favoritism in organizational governance and decision-making. This is because "favoritism takes place when human capital decisions are established on personal feelings and/or relationships, such as assessments of ability, knowledge, skills, and past performance."<sup>22</sup> While Blase and Chaput examine favoritism in the workplace across professions, there were two studies directly related to libraries and favoritism.

Henry, Eshelman, and Moniz demonstrate that favoritism is linked to counterproductive employee behavior and negative work environments at libraries. Workers who perceive that there is favoritism can disengage entirely from their places of employment (being late or missing days from work, not communicating or collaborating with coworkers, being standoffish, complaining) or they can be overly engaged (being involved in workplace gossip, bullying, and mobbing).<sup>23</sup>

One of the few studies that fully addresses toxic leadership in academic libraries is a dissertation by Alma Ortega entitled "Academic Libraries and Toxic Leadership." Ortega takes a broader approach to identifying toxic leadership because the subject is understudied across various fields and especially in academic libraries, aiming to fill in the gaps of this research and inform library leadership of how deeply toxic leadership can be embedded in academic libraries. She argues that evidence of poor or toxic leaders in academic libraries is mostly anecdotal, with most librarians citing bullying among employees and bullying between supervisors and their subordinates as primary examples of toxic leadership.<sup>24</sup> Ortega briefly touches on favoritism as a trait of toxic workplace culture and poor leadership in her dissertation.

After conducting a nationwide survey to determine the extent of toxic leadership in US academic libraries and the characteristics or behaviors of toxic leaders, Ortega noted 15 percent of the respondents (74 out of 492 people surveyed) cited favoritism as a trait of a toxic leader, a larger number than anticipated.<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that this is qualitative data that came from an open-response



question that Ortega later coded; the favoritism code was among the highest frequencies, which Ortega defined as having 50 instances or more. This particular study illustrates that favoritism is a clear indicator of toxic leadership. Favoritism is among the most prevalent problematic traits in Ortega's study, alongside the following author-supplied codes: abusive supervision (217 respondents), micromanager (140), insecure (136), no innovation (93), narcissism (93), unprepared to lead (85), authoritarian leader (83), self-promotion (63), deceitful (63), bad communicator (52), and disengaged (50).<sup>26</sup> Ortega goes on to say that while leaders displayed favoritism in a variety of ways, the behavior was obvious to librarians and nevertheless disregarded by upper administrators. What was less conspicuous is the impact of this behavior on those in the organization, whether they benefitted from being a leader's favorite or suffered from not being favored. In her analysis of the data, Ortega lists five general types of toxic leadership: abusive supervision, negligent/laissez-faire leadership, authoritarian leadership, institution's culture, and perceived mental illness. All but the last type, perceived mental illness, include the component favoritism, which illustrates the pervasiveness of the behavior in toxic leaders.

Based on the previously analyzed literature, we assert that when poor leadership and favoritism intersect, numerous problem conditions can arise within academic libraries. Firstly, poor leadership can have long-term negative impacts on the library even if a negative leader is removed or replaced or when a new leader is hired. We also argue that a culture of favoritism will remain if not compound when certain organizational conditions are already in place. The toxic triangle framework argues that destructive or toxic leaders at the top of an institution usually can thrive in an enabling environment (one that lacks checks and balances and overall stability) and with susceptible followers who actively collude with the leader or conform to their leadership style.<sup>27</sup> According to Pelletier, Kottke, and Sirotnik, this is how the toxic triangle is formed:

When administrators institute one-way communication, stifle, or ostracize dissenters as old-fashioned, disconnected from the "real world," and are elitist, or manage to convince skeptics that they are deficient if they do not see the value in the new culture(ism), the forces within the toxic triangle take shape.<sup>28</sup>

Academic libraries that exhibit organizational dysfunction such as the conditions described by Chaput (perhaps due in some part to rigid hierarchal structures) are more susceptible to favoritism.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, due to uncertainty and unpredictability (high turnover of library administrators, changes at the

university level, shifts in user demographics, pressure to constantly evolve, threats to funding), many academic libraries seek dynamic leaders who they believe can adjust to this uncertainty. Dynamic leaders are not necessarily good leaders because they may not be the best leaders to provide stability for an organization.<sup>30</sup> When these dynamic leaders rely on favoritism, it can become systemic in the organizational culture because leaders establish de facto leaders who function as their proxies within an organization. These de facto leaders are reluctant or unlikely to relinquish their positions of power once installed. Moreover, dynamic leaders might be more inclined to continue to practice favoritism if their authority goes unchallenged because their behaviors become embedded in institutional culture: for example, if a departing leader has created a succession plan that would place their favored employee in a higher position or even in the leader's position. Less favored employees, in turn, would be less inclined to challenge the status quo.

This inability to challenge the status quo leads to conformity in the workplace and encourages the notion that certain individuals fit within an organization. This notion of "fit" is problematic and creates in-group and out-group dynamics where members of the out-group often feel alienated from the organization or feel as if they do not belong in their positions. Individuals entering an academic library may feel that they cannot function outside of these established groups; they may assimilate to receive treatment to that received by their other colleagues, or they might choose not to assimilate and be subjected to several toxic behaviors, including bullying. Favoritism also creates us versus them conflicts.

In these us versus them conflicts, trust between colleagues is eroded because of favoritism. Without language to describe it, space to discuss it, or policy to hold leaders and followers accountable, favoritism gives way to tension between the in-group (favored) and the out-group (unfavored). For instance, unfavored employees may be more susceptible to engaging in negative and abusive workplace behaviors such as gossip, harassment, and bullying toward those they perceive to be favorites; some may disengage entirely. The in-group versus out-group conflict can also arise when a leader loudly practices favoritism, with obvious displays of preferential treatment. For example, a favored employee, while not qualified, may be assigned the job duties of an unfavored employee, or a favored employee may receive fewer job duties or a promotion. This example of unfairly assigning duties could lead to competition between employees instead of collaboration and create other tensions that stall organizational progress. Additionally, ineffective leaders may use their favorites to silence, manipulate, and bully members of the out-group through spying or reporting behaviors and

activities with the intention of getting that person reprimanded or terminated or in an effort for the favorite to advance further within an organization.

In-group members are highly trusted, supported, and rewarded; therefore, they enjoy high performance ratings from their leaders. However, the other side of the picture is worse: for instance, out-group members are disrespected, distrusted, and less supported by their leader due to having out-group tags. Therefore, out-group members' motivation to perform their duties dwindles due to having an unjust reward allocation and recognition system.<sup>31</sup>

## Impact of Favoritism in LIS

One of the most significant detrimental organizational impacts that favoritism has is on employee morale. Because morale is linked to leadership, employees who perceive themselves to be victims of system abuse (when a leader uses cronyism or favoritism to curry favor or to control their environment) have less connection to their places of employment or have lower morale. Kaetrena Davis Kendrick research on low morale in libraries shows library employees have “exposure to protracted workplace abuse,” that is, the experience of low morale is one that builds over time and because of repeated abuse. Low morale, especially in the library profession, causes high stress levels or anxiety and negative feelings of low self-esteem or lack of professional confidence. Low morale also contributes to mistrust of leadership or colleagues and greater attrition.<sup>32</sup> Library workers who work in environments where favoritism is practiced might have less motivation to meet performance standards.

Engaged employees find meaning in their work and see the connections of their work to the larger outcomes of the library. While toxic leaders practicing favoritism will have dedicated followers, they will also have no shortage of disengaged staff. Why are these employees less motivated?

According to the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory, it can be argued that organizational cronyism exhausts employees' resources; employees who are ignored and unfavored at the workplace respond with less positive and more negative behaviors toward completing their tasks. Therefore, organizational cronyism can be considered as a workplace stressor.<sup>33</sup>

These employees may be less motivated to work if they feel their work will not be rewarded. They may feel more compelled to not perform their job duties fully if they perceive favored employees do not have to work as hard and if the expectations of their job have been muddled by either increasing or decreasing their assigned duties.<sup>34</sup> When employees are disengaged in the workplace, their performance suffers, and ultimately, so does the library.

## Discussion

To address favoritism and poor leadership in academic libraries and to normalize conversations about both, those working in academic libraries can take several practical actionable steps or strategies. This process requires that library staff look forward and back to define the problem of how poor leadership leads to favoritism. Looking back requires that library staff know how to identify favoritism and poor leadership, and looking forward involves taking preemptive measures to prevent favoritism and poor leadership and establishing what traits define a good leader.

### Break the Silence & Speak Up

The first step in looking back and forward involves breaking the silence. Although this action may be difficult in a toxic work environment due to fear of retaliation or dismissal, speaking up allows for consensus about concerning behaviors. Silence can be interpreted as complicity and supports a cycle or culture of poor leadership, patronage, and favoritism that lasts long after a poor leader leaves an organization. Faculty and staff should be encouraged to call out these behaviors without fear of repercussions. Faculty and staff should also change policy to operationalize anti-favoritism and to define leadership at their respective organizations.

### Practice Shared Governance

It is essential for faculty or higher-ranked library employees to address and disavow favoritism and emphasize a culture of shared governance so that leadership is more democratized and decentralized. If academic libraries have operating papers, they must include language about shared governance. Inclusion of such language will not only hold leaders accountable, but it will also lessen the chances that leaders will engage in problematic behavior, especially practicing favoritism, because shared governance allows for a more democratic leadership process where all faculty are involved in decision-making, allowing leaders to

be built at all levels of the organization. If academic libraries do not have operating papers, they should implement policies and procedures that have explicit language about shared governance or that aim to democratize leadership in other ways as well as to provide protection for employees to address favoritism or other abuses of power. For example, academic library employees should be able to file a complaint or grievance to external departments or units if leadership is involved instead of the complaint being handled internally or the onus placed on the person making the complaint to address the problem.

More importantly, academic libraries must adopt a reporting and review process. This review and reporting process should serve two primary functions: to review a leader's performance and to ensure that an institution's policies and practices are not toothless. Review of leaders should be performed regularly and should not serve only as a check on a leader's power but also serve as another way to encourage staff to voice their concerns about troubling behaviors without fear of retaliation. This review process should also allow poor leaders to be held accountable for their actions and to be removed from their position through either termination or lowering their rank. Additionally, explicit language about misbehavior supplemented with consequences for such behavior demonstrates that the library is committed to enforcing its policies related to misbehavior.

## Resolve Conflict through Reconciliation

Another actionable next step to address favoritism and poor leadership at the institutional level is to build a culture of trust and align the values of LIS with institutional behaviors. This step is needed for an organization to be successful and combat signs of favoritism, but it is more complex than it sounds. For example, suppose a poor leader relies on favoritism to make organizational decisions. In such a case, a culture of distrust often forms because those who do not benefit from favoritism perceive that their role within the organization is diminished. Conflict often arises if favored and unfavored employees must collaborate with one another, share spaces, or even have limited formal communication. A breakdown in communication often precedes this conflict, and speculation is allowed to fester. Therefore, it is imperative that a reconciliation process be developed if workplace relationships have deteriorated to the point where coworkers do not trust each other. A neutral campus entity should oversee reconciliation, encouraging or requiring employees to acknowledge any harm that has been done and ensuring that they understand how a good working relationship can be built going forward. Additionally, leaders need to be aware of the concept of social capital and how it can be used to build a culture of trust.

## Improve Performance via Social Capital

Social capital or buy-in is a transactional or reciprocal relationship between leaders and their employees; employees imitate the positive behaviors modeled by leaders and are willing to invest in an organization's mission, values, and objectives. This social capital can be intrinsically tied to trust, as employees who have leaders with positive traits are more willing to trust those leaders and the organizational structure. Social capital, therefore, minimizes exploitation and encourages reciprocal relationships. Therefore, if employees trust their leaders, they have greater morale and greater workplace satisfaction. Greater morale and greater workplace satisfaction could potentially lead to higher rates of employee retention. Additionally, academic libraries must realize that poor leadership, favoritism, and poor work-life boundaries are also related. Many working in academia have assumed an identity related to their positions, which means that they often perform tasks without remuneration and do not have healthy boundaries within the workplace.

## Protect Work-Life Boundaries

Academic librarians often have strained work-life boundaries, especially if they are also faculty. Academic librarians who have faculty status (tenured or nontenured) must focus on librarianship in addition to mentoring, committee assignments, research, other professional activities, and sometimes teaching. Additionally, faculty librarians, while having faculty status, often do not have the same privileges or receive the same recognition as teaching faculty—for example, being able to take sabbaticals or working nine-month instead of twelve-month contracts. Therefore, many academic librarians already have poor work-life boundaries, and favoritism only allows easier exploitation of unfavored employees if they are used to performing more work without proper compensation. To remedy the persistent poor work-life boundaries in academic libraries, leaders must be aware of the workloads that faculty already have and need to refrain from increasing or decreasing tasks for those who they prefer. All workloads must be regularly examined (at least annually) on a case-by-case basis to ensure the workload allows a life outside of the library.

## Reframe Favoritism as Equity Issue

Academic libraries also need to reframe favoritism as an equity issue. When examining favoritism through an equity lens, it is perceived as unfair, biased, or unjust. Favorites or cronies “get privilege in the appraisal, reward allocation,

and other organizational affairs, but non-cronies are discriminated against in all the stated aspects.”<sup>35</sup> Due to this reason, employees who encounter discrimination may respond with impaired job satisfaction, commitment, and trust in the manager as well as in the organization. All these negative factors have an eventual adverse impact on employees’ performance.

Because favorites often unfairly advance on an unmerited basis, higher-skilled workers often are not properly acknowledged or promoted and receive less mentoring or fewer professional development opportunities. These employees could have aspects of their position reassigned to a favored employee or have their job duties completely phased out. Unfair changes in duties like this erodes trust in the leader and the institution and contributes to the cycle of low morale, less job satisfaction, less motivation, more isolation, and greater employee attrition.

## Train Leaders in Cultural Competence

In the context of LIS and the demographics of the profession (mostly white), favoritism is even more detrimental for the disfavored employees from underrepresented groups. These employees may already feel disconnected from the profession and their institutions because they do not share the same lived experiences as their colleagues. For example, non-white academic librarians may feel isolated, overlooked, and overworked. They may also feel excluded from social activities or often do not know how they fit in with their colleagues or within the institution. In this environment, the outdated concept of fit, perpetuated as favoritism, can encourage workplace homogeneity and an assimilationist culture. Therefore, it is important that libraries become culturally competent to understand that favoritism is just as much of an equity issue as it is a facet of poor leadership. Academic library staff should be aware that favoritism can be interpreted as looking out for those with whom you are more culturally aligned instead of those with whom you are not and that being culturally competent can be used to identify blind spots in leadership by checking such biases as favoritism.

## Prioritize Self Care

Finally, employees must prioritize themselves and take time for self-care. If academic librarians or other library staff are at institutions where they do not have autonomy and where a toxic workplace culture exists, they must assess their job standards and reexamine what role they were hired for. If disfavored employees notice that they are being overextended, they must understand that they have the right to decline extra duties. If employees sense they are being



exploited they can take the necessary measures to redress their concerns with human resources. There is also nothing wrong with slowing down, especially if overworked employees notice that their peers are underperforming or do not have heavy workloads. Most importantly, saying no or not taking on additional work helps to establish healthy work-life boundaries and allows for self-care. Employees must be able to maintain their identity outside of work and not make the library profession their sole identity.

## Conclusion

While this chapter addresses the issue of poor leadership and favoritism and how to identify and ameliorate favoritism at academic libraries, it still has its limitations. For instance, we were unable to perform our own evaluations about the interrelationship between poor leadership and favoritism in academic libraries. Instead, we relied heavily on Ortega's surveys on traits of toxic leaders, and even Ortega realized that her own study was limited because of the self-selection process of completing the surveys and the sensitive nature of discussing or even recognizing toxic leadership in academic libraries. We are unsure if we would have gotten the same or different responses as Ortega if we used similar methodologies. Additionally, we also had reservations when writing this chapter in case we were to expose problems within our own institution or to expose those we perceive as having benefitted from favoritism and leaders who have engaged in favoritism. Therefore, more research needs to be done in this area to ascertain the impact that favoritism has in academic libraries and how it intersects with poor leadership.

## Notes

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