University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

2011

Feeling the Burn: A Discursive Analysis of Organizational Burnout in Seasonal Wildland Firefighters

Whitney Eleanor Marie Maphis
The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Running Head: FEELING THE BURN

FEELING THE BURN: A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL

BURNOUT

IN SEASONAL WILDLAND FIREFIGHTERS

By

WHITNEY ELEANOR MARIE MAPHIS

Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in Communication Studies

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

May 2010
Approved by:
Sandy Ross, Associate Dean of the Graduate School
Graduate School

Dr. Greg Larson, Chair
Communication Studies

Dr. Joel Iverson
Communication Studies

Dr. Ronald Wakimoto
Ecosystem and Conservation Sciences

Abstract

Maphis, Whitney M.A., Spring 2011   Communication Studies

Feeling the Burn: A Discursive Analysis of Organizational Burnout in Seasonal
Wildland Firefighters

Chairperson: Greg Larson

This qualitative study of seasonal wildland firefighters examined stress and burnout in
firefighters, the discourse that helps to systematically form firefighters'
conceptualizations of burnout, and what factors enable firefighters to manage or mitigate
burnout. Traditionally, burnout is studied in long-term, year-round positions, and this
study took a unique angle in considering a temporary/seasonal workforce. A discursive
lens was used to investigate the enduring systems of meanings that firefighters draw
upon in their everyday talk to more comprehensively understand burnout. Three main
Discursive resources emerged from the data: teamwork, a "can-do" attitude, and
bureaucracy. Teamwork and a can-do attitude serve as double-edged swords in
firefighters' experience of burnout, both enabling and constraining the firefighter
experience, while bureaucracy emerged as a hindering force in firefighters' conceptions
of burnout. This paper will discuss the causes of burnout, as well as the ways firefighters
manage burnout.

Table of Contents

Rationale

This is a culture where people compete to do more than their share . . . that's just such an uplifting, positive world to live in.

—Marshall, 40-year veteran of fire[1]

Wildland firefighters are elite manual laborers. Work hours are determined by a 2:1 ratio (National Interagency Fire Center [NIFC], 2009). In other words, for every two hours working, they are required to rest for one hour; thus, at some points during the fire season, they work 16 hours, rest for eight, and continue that cycle 14 days in a row. Firefighters work anywhere from sea-level to 6,500 feet in elevation, in high ambient temperatures often exceeding 95 degrees Fahrenheit, all while breathing air that contains above-average levels of smoke and dust (Mangan, 2002). Typically, an individual works 2,000 hours in a work year, given that they work 40 hours a week. A firefighter, in a busy fire season, can work those 2,000 hours (or more) in only six to eight months. Because of the atypical nature of their work, firefighters pose an interesting and meaningful population to study in relation to organizational burnout.

The emotional and physical stresses that firefighters live, eat, and breathe every day have become "just a part of the job." Many firefighters are proud of the hard work they do, and because only a chosen few are allowed to work full-time, year-round positions with the Forest Service (or other agencies that employ seasonal firefighters), most take all the work they can possibly get. Norman Maclean (1992) talks about the can-do attitude of firefighters in his book *Young Men and Fire*. Maclean's book describes smoke jumpers—wildland firefighters that parachute out of airplanes to fight fire—and their innate sense of self-sufficiency, which enables

---

[1] All names used in this paper are participant or Google's random name generator supplied aliases. To ensure confidentiality, no real firefighters' names were included.

them to do the dangerous work that wildland firefighting requires. Although their work is

seasonal, there are sacrifices that have to be made in an intense and labor-filled job such as

firefighting. According to the American Institute of Stress (2010, para. five), burnout from stress

is most likely to be observed in employees who "think they are superhuman." This criterion

could easily describe many firefighters, just as Maclean does with his can-do label of

firefighters.

  The unique culture of firefighting puts these workers at risk for experiencing burnout.

However, if one does happen to know a wildland firefighter, initially it may be difficult to deem

their job as stressful due to the eagerness to work that is apparent in many firefighters. Most of

the firefighters I know make constant jokes about "praying for fire" in the summer months.

They are willing and ready to work countless hours without a break in order to make as much

money as possible. Some desire the intense work because it is an easy way to make a decent

living in just a few months. Others are in school or have other part-time seasonal jobs, such as a

ski patrolman, and are thus happy to work as much as possible in the summer when the fire

season calls. Due to the intensity of the work they do, firefighting can be an extremely tiring,

demanding, and stressful job. Because firefighters work in intense yet short-lived seasons, their

management of stress and burnout is paramount to their physical, emotional, and psychological

well-being. For this reason, this study will examine the stress and burnout in firefighters, the

communication surrounding their stress and burnout, the discourse that helps to systematically

form firefighters' conceptualizations of burnout, and what factors enable firefighters to manage

or mitigate burnout.

  Much of the research on the human factors of firefighting is directly, and appropriately,

studied in relation to safety on the fire lines, given that firefighters work in extreme conditions.

Most work out in the woods on steep mountain slopes, digging fire lines in hot summer heat and watching their backs so they do not get caught in the blaze they are attempting to subdue. Historically, there have been numerous occupational deaths due to fire, and constant efforts have been made to make firefighting safer (Findings from the Wildland Firefighters Human Factors Workshop, 1996). However, few have examined the stresses that firefighters encounter on the job and the specific effects resulting from stress and burnout.

This lack of scholarship creates a niche for valid and important study. Because firefighting is such a mentally and physically demanding job, one may assume that firefighters are indeed more prone to being burned-out. However, little scholarship has examined the construct of burnout in wildland firefighters specifically. Burnout and stress can have negative consequences for individuals, coworkers, organizations, and even the larger community as a whole. Maslach and Nelson (2005), arguably two of the world's leading experts on the subject, state the consequences of burnout:

> The costs to individuals, enterprises, and society are staggering. Consider the cost of frequent use of health facilities to treat alcoholism and stress-related illnesses. Then there is absenteeism, high employee turnover, new hiring, training and re-training. And when employees are error-prone the quality of the product or service provided is going to suffer. (Maslach & Nelson, 2005)

Most scholars have only considered burnout in long-term employment. Because the fire season is traditionally shorter than what a more typical job time commitment would entail, burnout is not intuitively linked with firefighting. Therefore, gaps remain in our knowledge about the link between burnout and firefighting.

Looking at nontraditional forms of employment in relation to burnout furthers the

understanding of burnout as a whole. According to Gossett (2006), "Given the rapid growth of this industry [temporary workers] and its significance for our overall economy, it seems important for scholars to examine the impact of temporary work arrangements on our current theories of organizing and communication" (p. 379). Consequently, several questions arise: Does burnout occur in these types of jobs? How do people in nontraditional jobs, like firefighting, manage burnout? What factors contribute to burnout in an intense but temporary position? What do firefighters do differently that helps them mitigate burnout? After answering these questions, the U.S. Forest Service—and countless other organizations that employ nontraditional workers—will be able to apply the findings from this research to help reduce the cost of burnout for individuals and the organizations for which they work.

Due to the emotional and physical stresses of firefighting, the extreme conditions in which the firefighter works, and the inherent nature of firefighter shift work, burnout occurs despite the temporary nature of the job. As of late, no scholarship has been devoted to the effects of stressors on a job that while not year-round is indeed very intense. There may be other causes of burnout that are associated with temporary work that have yet to be studied. There may be factors specific to temporary workers (such as the pressure of finding a job outside their temporary employment with the U.S. Forest Service, or the stress of working away from their families and homes for extended periods of time year after year) that contribute to burnout. This study not only adds a missing component to the body of knowledge, but also provides information that may impact firefighters' safety, given that burnout puts firefighters at risk. Safety is one of the most studied aspects of the human factors of fire in recent research, and rightfully so. However, because no one has studied burnout in the context of wildland fire, the connection between burnout and safety has yet to be examined. From the well-established area

of organizational scholarship, many different strategies have emerged in decreasing and coping with burnout (Halbesleben, Osburn, & Mumford, 2006; Hatinen, Kinnunen, Pekkonen, & Kalimo, 2007; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Therefore, not only does this research attempt to add a more comprehensive understanding of burnout in a wildland firefighting setting in particular, it may also contribute to safety literature within the wider firefighting community

This study engages the types of stress and burnout firefighters experience, as well as the discourses that firefighters use to manage burnout. Looking at burnout through a discursive lens will advance burnout scholarship, given that it does not simply arise from an individual person independent of other factors. It is a function of organizational, cultural, and societal functions interacting with each other, and a discursive approach enables an examination of these concepts. A discursive analysis facilitates an examination of what enables, mitigates, and constitutes burnout as it functions in a specific context, in this case, wildland firefighting. Discourses generally refer to the mediums for social interaction such as talk and social texts that are loosely coupled with meaning used in everyday activity, but it can also refer to the general and enduring systems of thought that influence talk and social text (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). Burnout is considered a felt state. Therefore, the discursive construction of those feelings/emotions expressed through firefighter communication can be linked to their experience of burnout (Tracy, 2000). The following is an examination of how communication helps to shape the conceptualization of burnout in firefighters, what contributing factors result in burnout symptoms, and how communication plays a part in the overall understanding of burnout in firefighters.

Review of Literature

As a metaphor for the draining of energy, burnout refers to the smothering

of a fire or the extinguishing of a candle. It implies that once a fire was burning,

but the fire cannot continue burning brightly unless there are sufficient resources

that keep being replenished. Over time, employees experiencing burnout lose the

capacity to provide the intense contributions that make an impact. If they continue

working, the result is more like smoldering—uneventful and inconsequential—

than burning. From their own perspective or that of others, they accomplish less. In

summary, the metaphor describes the exhaustion of employees' capacity to

maintain an intense involvement that has a meaningful impact at work. (Schaufeli,

Leiter, & Maslach, 2009, p. 205)

Burnout can be defined as physical, emotional, and/or mental exhaustion that results from

involvement in work situations that are demanding or stressful (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001).

Most consider burnout to relate directly to the social environment at work (Cox, Tisserand, &

Taris, 2005). It is considered a psychological response to chronic work stress that is linked to

many negative consequences for the individual, organization, and society (Halbesleben &

Demertouti, 2005). However, much more information is needed to fully conceptualize the topic.

To fully conceptualize burnout in firefighters for this study, it is necessary to examine previous

findings on burnout, temporary employees, and discourse.

Most can likely identify with feeling burned-out at one time or another. While one could

argue that burnout occurs in most jobs, the history and origins of organizational burnout

highlight a richer explanation of the concept. Some scholars consider burnout to be, in part, a

product of social and cultural contexts. Schaufeli et al. (2009) argue that after the 1950s there was a transformation in the work world where smaller, more traditional types of employment considered a "calling" transformed into more modern, large-scale, and formal employment organizations. Because of this shift it is argued that employees felt more personally removed from their jobs, which led to increased stress, and, eventually, burnout. Supporting this notion, Cherniss and Kranz (1983) discovered that there was relatively no burnout in Montessori schools, monasteries, and religious care centers. Others equated the lack of burnout in these organizations to shared values, social commitment, and a sense of communion (Schaufeli et al., 2009). They also noted that many in those professions felt the work was their "calling" rather than what one could consider simply an occupation. In the seventies, the United States economy began to shift from an industrial society to a service-based society (Killingsworth & Palmer, 1996). Due to the shift to a more human service-oriented society, burnout was initially studied within the context of "people work." In other words, studies included those whose employment required direct contact with clients in the majority of their work.

H. J. Freudenberger was the first to coin the term "burnout" in a publication in 1975. He was working in an alternative health care agency and noticed that he and others were experiencing emotional depletion and a loss of commitment and motivation (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter 2001; Iacovides, Fountoulakis, Kaprinis, & Kaprinis, 2003). Because the symptoms that he and others were feeling mirrored some effects of chronic drug abuse, he decided to use the term "burnout." A short year later, in 1976, Cristina Maslach published an article on burnout after studying human service workers vis-à-vis the emotional stress of their jobs (Maslach, 1976). Both Freudenberger and Maslach found that burnout was an uncommon response to work (Maslach, 1976), and noted the necessity of further scholarship on the matter; thus, the study of

organizational burnout was born.

Currently, burnout is a well-established academic subject. From accountants (Sweeney & Summers, 2002) to nurses (Greenglass, Burke, & Fiksenbaum, 2001) to teachers (Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers, 2004) to correctional officers (Lambert, Hogan, & Jiang, 2010), stress and burnout are well-studied concepts that are associated with many professions (Hochschild, 1983; Lambert, et al., 2010). It is estimated that more than 6,000 books, chapters, journal articles, theses, and dissertations have been published on burnout (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Burnout is also a phenomenon that occurs globally. While the United States was indeed the forerunning country to study burnout, burnout has been studied and noted in most places around the world, including India, China, Europe, Latin America, parts of Africa, Australia, and New Zealand (Schaufeli et al., 2009).

Although burnout is a widespread concept in organizations worldwide, the perceptions of burnout differ culturally. In some countries burnout is considered a clinical condition. For example, in Sweden and the Netherlands, burnout is considered a medical diagnosis (Schaufeli et al., 2009). In these countries, specific symptomatic criteria have to be met in order for the individual to be diagnosed with burnout. In other parts of Europe, if one happens to suffer from this type of clinical burnout, the diagnosis opens the doors to the possibility of compensation claims and treatment programs. In contrast, in North America burnout is considered in a much different way. Some attribute the popularity of the use of the term burnout in North America to the increasing perception of burnout a nonmedical, socially accepted label. Burnout from this mindset does not carry as much of a stigma as a psychiatric diagnosis may (Shirom 1989: as cited in Schaufeli et al., 2009). Regardless of the different conceptions of burnout, it is a phenomenon acknowledged throughout the world.

Connections between Stress, Burnout, and Its Consequences

In most, if not all jobs, there are parts of the work that are unpleasant. Whether it is the pressure of making money, dealing with an unruly client, having a pressing deadline to meet, or countless other situations, stress has become a normal part of the work world. The basic premise of the stress process is that some aspects of the environment, referred to as stressors, create strain on the individual (Miller, 1999). These stressors, in turn, can lead to burnout, and burnout can be linked to certain outcomes at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and even community level (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004).

Due to the fact that burnout is a term that is accepted worldwide, "stress" and "burnout" are often used synonymously. It is important, however, to consider the difference between the concepts of stress and burnout in order to conceptualize burnout accurately. In general, burnout is a reaction to work stress. Stressors lead to stress, and stress can lead to burnout. Some stressors come directly from the job, such as workload, role conflict, and/or role ambiguity, while others can come from different life events, such as home/work conflicts (Miller, 1999). Stressors come in many different forms for a firefighter, such as an increase in fire complexity, pressures of multiple assignments, long fire seasons, and so on (Sharkey, Miller, & Palmer, 2008). Stressors, and how people cope with stressors, depend on values, experiences, and adaptability. Sometimes one experiences a lone stressor or a culmination of numerous stressors, but if the stress stays unresolved it can lead to burnout. Stress can be considered a perceived imbalance between situational demands and the ability of one to respond to those demands. Considered an internal state, stress focuses on the emotional or physiological reaction one has to stimuli (Sharkey et al., 2008). Burnout is associated with chronic day-to-day stressors that occur on the job (Daugherty, 2002; Etzioni, 1984).

"Stress is used to define burnout, in this sense, because stress is at the root of burnout; burnout is a reaction to stress" (Daugherty, 2002; Reinardy, 2006; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Similarly one can conceptualize stress's relationship to burnout in that burnout is a reaction to stress. Burnout, then, is considered a long-term stress reaction occurring in many occupations (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). According to Sharkey et al. (2008), when speaking about firefighters specifically, they state, "stress has been implicated in the deterioration of job performance (p. 11)." Therefore, though different, stress and burnout are symbiotic concepts.

Though a discursive approach to observing burnout is applied in this study, conceptualizing burnout through three dimensions, in accordance with the Maslach Burnout Inventory, contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was created 30 years ago and has been extended and modified to encompass and measure burnout in many different types of occupations (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 2001). The MBI defines burnout through three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy (Halbesleben & Demertouti, 2005; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Kitaoka-Higashiguchi et al., 2004; Schutte, Toppinen, Kalimo, & Schaufeli, 2004). Exhaustion is considered the "stress" dimension of burnout. Because stress is at the core of burnout, it is usually the dominant symptom reported by those who suffer from burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Stress is perhaps the easiest dimension to relate to firefighters due to the mental, physical, and emotional demands of their job. In the context of burnout, exhaustion is considered the catalyst that can prompt one to distance oneself emotionally and cognitively from his/her work as a response to the exhaustion felt (Maslach et al., 2001). A second facet of burnout to consider is depersonalization/cynicism. Depersonalization involves social relationships and as such, represents a distancing from people. Cynicism, then, is

considered as distancing that is directed toward the context of the job itself (Salanova et al.,

2005b). In this vein, cynicism is an indifference or distant attitude toward work in general

(Schutte et al., 2004). Third, professional efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her capability

to accomplish specific goals or tasks. The professional efficacy dimension may include social

and nonsocial aspects of occupational accomplishments but overall assesses the employee's

expectations of continued effectiveness at work (Schutte et al., 2004). Efficacy beliefs play a

moderating role between job demands and coping behaviors (Salanova, Grau, & Martinez,

2005a). The burnout dimension of professional efficacy more specifically assesses a reduction of

perceived effectiveness at work.

After understanding the components that make up burnout, it is important to examine the

possible ways burnout may manifest in firefighters. One may feel exhaustion because one has

worked long hours, such as ten days in a row, and needs a day to recuperate and rest before

starting the intense work cycle all over again. Or perhaps a crew has been assigned to dig a fire

line on a particularly steep incline slope instead of a milder part of the mountain. Cynicism may

be apparent because the crew drove for numerous hours to get to the fire only to find it

contained, and they have to return home again. A lack of professional efficacy could stem from a

firefighter who has worked ten seasons in a row and cannot keep up with fellow employees that

are younger and new to the crew. These are just a few of the possibilities of the dimensions of

burnout that firefighters may exhibit.

Burnout symptoms may also manifest themselves in the high stakes that firefighters deal

with specifically. Firefighters are responsible not only for their own safety, but are also required

to be aware of the safety of those around them. According to NIFC (2009), "The commitment to

and accountability for safety is a joint responsibility of all firefighters, managers, and

administrators" (p. 07-01). In addition, many firefighters juggle where the next few months will take them as permanent positions in the U.S. Forest Service are few, and this can add pressure to the job. These scenarios represent just a few possible stressors that may contribute to burnout in firefighters.

Burnout and its effects can manifest in many different ways depending on the individual and his or her specific occupation, as well as the social dynamic present in his or her work environment. Negative psychological, physiological, and organizational outcomes are all linked to burnout (Miller, 1999). Negative consequences are suffered not only on the individual level but the organizational and societal level as well. Social withdrawal, depression, lack of motivation, and lack of personal investment are just a few expressions of the burnout phenomenon as observed within an individual. For a burned-out individual, symptoms may also include diminished sense of personal accomplishment, decrease in efficiency at work, and increased feelings of cynicism and hostility (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Maslach & Nelson, 2005; Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout manifestations created by work are also associated with a decreased quality of life at home (Lambert et al., 2010). Burnout and stress can have negative consequences that not only affect the individual experiencing the feelings, but their coworkers and the larger organization as well. Stress and burnout have been linked to increased employee turnover, increased intention to leave, reduced levels of performance, and both physical and psychological illness (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Schaufeli & Greenglass 2001). This creates not only an unpleasant environment for the burned-out individual at work, but also places greater responsibility on coworkers (Lambert et al., 2010). Stress and burnout have been linked to a decrease in work production, which in turn places a greater workload on coworkers who may have to pick up the slack for the employee suffering from burnout symptoms. Additionally, there

are monetary consequences of burnout. Stress and burnout are responsible for workplace costs

that total more than $300 billion a year for U.S. corporations (American Institute of Stress, 2010,

para. 5). Not only are the consequences of burnout serious to the individual's

mental/physical/emotional state, but also, especially in firefighting, to the safety of that

individual, those they work with, and the surrounding community the fire may be threatening.

Firefighters embody distinct qualities that set them apart from traditional employment. In

short, firefighters have very specific tasks they are hired to carry out. Consequently, most of their

work tasks are dissimilar to those of an accountant, architect, or typical business-related job. One

function in particular that sets firefighters apart from "typical" workers is the temporary nature of

seasonal wildland firefighting.

A New Realm of Burnout Scholarship: Seasonal/Temporary Employees

The previous literature discusses burnout as an effect of long-term employment, but this

study examines it in a different context. As previously stated, wildland firefighters create a

unique niche for burnout study given that they may not be considered full-time employees. For

this study, it is necessary to consider burnout as a temporary condition, because in many ways,

firefighting cannot be considered a traditional form of employment. As mentioned above, many

firefighters are temporary employees of the U.S. Forest Service, some working for just a few

months at a time. While the traditional definition of burnout relates to repeated stresses built one

upon another over time, burnout can be considered temporary due to the length and intensity of

the fire season and the fact that many do return to the fire line year after year. Firefighters do not

work from nine to five, five days a week; rather, they are employed for a handful of months at a

time, work 8−16 hours per day, 14 days in a row, and then receive two days off. Consider, for

example, a typical work year that usually consists of about 2,000 hours, if one is working 40

hours a week. A permanent seasonal firefighter can work those 2,000 hours (or more) in seven to eight months, if it happens to be a busy fire year. Therefore, the traditional conception of burnout may not apply to this group in the same way, but that does not mean that burnout does not occur.

While the actual "firefighting" part of the job only runs for a handful of months, this does not mean that the individual is not working in the "non-firefighting" months as well. Some firefighters are designated to be out on fire calls during the fire season and have different work to do for their organization when they are not needed on a fire. Most firefighters have other jobs in which they are employed during the off-season. Whether it is for the U.S. Forest Service, the ski patrol, or even a university, many firefighters work or are occupied by school year-round. In other words, they may be doing temporary work, but most do not just sit around in the off-season twiddling their thumbs. In fact, in the United States, 80% of temporary workers work on a full-time basis (Gosset, 2007).

The title "temporary worker," which is given to some firefighters, requires a qualification of the "temporary worker" definition, as firefighters may not be considered "traditional" temporary workers in the purest sense. Traditional temporary workers are usually those who help maintain flexible workforces that need to be expanded or contracted as the business world requires (Gossett, 2006). While most firefighting positions are determined by the weather and the season, rather than the economy or business market, firefighters still have to adapt as the fire season deems necessary. While firefighters and other types of traditional employees are trained in specific job tasks, traditional temporary workers can work for many different types of organizations, for example, someone who is trained as an accountant. Hospitals, large and small businesses, law firms, and the like can employ accountants, but firefighters are usually employed by only one organization, such as the Forest Service, the

Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the like. Furthermore, seasonal firefighters work only when needed during the fire season, rather than having the option of working year-round as a firefighter. Equipped with specific skill sets and required to pass physical exertion tests, firefighters are essential to the Forest Service during the summer months, but these skills are desired by only a handful of organizations. They may be on call or even off duty when a fire call comes in (thus temporary), but they are not the type of employee that can be "loaned out" to other organizations.

Avenues toward a Discursive Approach

Communication scholars have taken note of burnout in connection to existing communication theory and have focused on burnout and its relationship to other facets of organizational life. For example, communication scholars Ronen and Mikulincer (2009) assessed burnout individual attachment and found that there was a connection between a perception of low team cohesion and burnout. Others have studied the relationship between burnout and humor (Avtgis & Taber, 2006), coworker and supervisor social support (Snyder, 2009), and communication competence (Wright, Banas, Bessarabova, & Bernard, 2010). Avtgis, Thomas-Maddox, Taylor, and Patterson (2007) took a unique angle in looking at the verbal expression of organizational dissent and burnout. They found that those who reported high levels of the dimensions of burnout (exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy) also reported low levels of articulated dissent. In other words, those who did not communicate that they were unhappy with work were more likely to report high levels of burnout. In this study burnout was not found to be an abstract function of work life but a product of the interaction between different facets of that organizational context. It is this notion of communication that I used as a foundation to look at firefighter burnout through a discursive approach.

A discursive approach enables an examination of burnout as a result of social, cultural, societal, organizational, and group functions. A discursive analysis highlights the fundamental role that text and talk play in the everyday reproduction of organizations, groups, societies, and cultures (van Dijk, 2007). The lens of sensemaking facilitates a deeper understanding of burnout in a discursive assessment of firefighter communication. Examining what firefighters say about burnout will shed light on how they understand burnout as well. According to Taylor and Robichaud (2004), "Sensemaking, invokes language as members call forth knowledge of previous events through recollections and understandings of an appropriate response, given the situation. They use language to name events and to influence each other as they act; but they also use it to stand back from it and understand it" (p. 397). In this study, examining firefighter communication will help uncover the framework that firefighters utilize to comprehend, manage, and act (thus make sense of) burnout through their communication.

Because discourse is observed through talk and language, the language used to describe experiences can both enable and constrain experience through socially constructed discourses. Through language, communication helps to create underlying meanings that individuals depend on in sensemaking. On the other hand, communication limits sensemaking because what is not communicated, or is not described adequately in the language available, can affect the overall meaning of the concept as well. Tracy (2000) highlights the dual functions of discursive formation through the works of Foucault and his view on discourse: "The discursive production of self is both constraining and liberating; organizational discursivities both provide possibilities for and determine the limits of self-understanding" (p. 98). Through communication, organizational members decipher what is appropriate (or not appropriate), that information becomes knowledge, and as knowledge it becomes understood as apparent "truth" that members

can reconstruct as needed in future interactions (Barker, 1999). In the context of this study, assessing the communication that firefighters use to recollect and describe burnout in their lives allows for a glimpse at the discourses utilized in their conception of burnout. Burnout through this lens will examine enduring meanings and understandings created by firefighters through communication.

Farihurst and Putnam (2004) highlight the interactive nature of communication, discourse, and sensemaking through an identification of two different types of discourse: "d" discourse and "D" Discourse. Fairhurst and Putnam describe discourse as a medium for social interaction as well as talk and social texts that are loosely coupled with meaning. Discourse (with a capital letter "D") refers to general and enduring systems of thought (Farihurst and Putnam 2004). Take, for example, a firefighter that feels burned-out and expresses that sentiment to one of his coworkers. The expression of feeling burned-out would be considered discourse, and both firefighters' understanding of what burnout is would be considered Discourse. Perhaps the coworker then tells him to "suck it up and just deal with it," as they are all going through the same thing (discourse). But, the coworker is also relying on and offering a structure for dealing with burnout (Discourse). The burned-out firefighter must then reassess what he is feeling, since his words were deemed inappropriate (according to the coworker's perception of the Discourse of burnout). Now his understanding of burnout (in a Discursive sense) may be changed due to the reaction of his coworker, and that in turn could change the discourse he uses to communicate about burnout.

Here, according to Fairhurst and Putnam (2004), discourse creates and reinforces Discourse and vice versa. However, it must be noted that discourse only creates and reinforces Discourse when discourse endures, repeats, compliments, and adds to itself over time. Both "d"

and "D" forms of discourse help to create and maintain the other in a constantly modified and reinforcing process that forms the foundation of our understanding. One more concept is required in order to contextualize the Discourses (big D and little d) that affect burnout in firefighters.

A third way to look at discourse is through Kuhn's (2006) notion of locale-specific Discourses. Locale-specific Discourses are generally used to understand decision making in delimited communities, such as wildland firefighters. Locale-specific Discourses serve as mediums for and outcomes of interactions in cite-specific publics (Kuhn, 2006). These Discourses help to develop reflexive meaning for individuals within a defined population, as well as the resources and elements of the natural world within that defined population. Locale-specific discursive resources are inherently social and reflexive in practice, therefore aiding firefighters in understanding explanations for past feelings and behaviors, as well as providing a guide for future feelings and behaviors. Locale-specific Discourses are broad and all-encompassing Discourses (similar to "D" discourse); however, locale-specific Discourses are applied to firefighting culture specifically through its enactment and understanding. Furthermore, over time discourses "work" to shape appropriate images of occupations, guiding behavior within those occupations (see Ashcraft, 2007). On the imaginary "discursive scale," if you will, locale-specific Discourse falls somewhere between Discourse and discourse, residing closer to Discourse. Locale-specific Discourses then offer localized structures for understanding burnout in firefighting.

Research Questions

Job burnout affects many workers every year. It is associated with numerous negative consequences and has been studied extensively in a quantitative approach in many traditional forms of employment. There has been little study, however, pertaining to jobs that are potentially

very intense, but seasonal, like firefighting. Additionally, a qualitative look at burnout through a discursive approach has the potential to highlight facets of the contextual factors constituting burnout in firefighters. This will provide insight not only for firefighters, but also for temporary/seasonal workers and burnout scholarship as a whole. Through an examination of previous literature, it has become clear that a better understanding of burnout through a discursive approach will add to this body of knowledge. As a result, three research questions emerge:

> RQ1: How is burnout discursively constructed among firefighters?

> RQ2: What overarching Discourses contribute to/mitigate burnout in firefighters?

> RQ3: How do firefighters communicatively manage the effects of burnout?

Methods

In the first section, I provided a rationale for the proposed study, reviewed relevant literature, and presented three research questions that were used as a guide to conduct this study. Next, I will address the methodology that was utilized by giving a brief overview of the participants, data-gathering strategies, and planned analysis.

Participants

Typically, there are six main agencies that employ firefighters: the Forest Service, the Department of Resource Conservations, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, National Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Each agency is a member of the National Interagency Fire Center and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, which serve as the nation's support centers for wildland firefighting (National Interagency Fire Center, 2010). Additionally, there are private contract crews that assist in wildland fire management.

Participants consisted of those currently employed as firefighters or those who had been

employed as a firefighter within the last five years. Interviewees in this study are (or were)

employed by the U.S. Forest Service, Montana's Department of Resource Conservation (MT

DNRC), private contract crews Greyback Forestry and Bush Fire, the National Park Service, and

the Bureau of Land Management. Participants hailed from many states, including California,

Massachusetts, Arizona, Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming and ranged from Type I and II crew

members, such as hand crew members, engine crew members, hotshots, and smoke jumpers to

Incident Command-3 (IC3) managers. Both Type I and Type II crews consist of about 18–20

men and women firefighters (Fire & Aviation Management, 2010). IHC crews (Type I, hotshots)

have to have at least seven full-time (career) firefighters; consequently, hotshots consist of both

career and seasonal firefighters. Type II crews are often made up of mostly seasonal firefighters

(Fire & Aviation Management, 2010), and IC3s are upper-level fire management. Therefore, a

range of different types of firefighters was included in this study.

        Selection of participants was based on availability and willingness to be interviewed. A

network sampling technique was used (see Granovetter 1976). Firefighters were contacted first

through personal contacts, groups, and clubs on the University of Montana campus, and through

an IC3 training class (called S-300), then by referrals from previous interviewees. Permission to

be interviewed was formally recorded through signed consent forms. All participants were

assured their contribution to the data was confidential and each participant was given the

opportunity to submit a personal pseudonym, or alias, for their name to ensure confidentiality. If

no such alias was provided, I used Google's random name generator to create an alias for the

participant.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected through 20 in-depth, semistructured interviews (see Appendix A). Interviews were chosen for this study for many reasons. First, interviews or "interview talk is the participant's rhetorical construction of their experience" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). In other words, interviews help the interviewer to understand the experience and perspective of the participant as well as reveal the interviewee's discursive construction of the topic. Second, interviews can capture the "language of the people" (Tompkins & Cheney, 1983). It is vital in social science that "to the extent possible the description and analysis of the behavior of those actors should be couched in *their* terms rather than the terms of the researcher" (p. 129 Third, the words of firefighters encapsulate their discursive formations, so their words help us better understand the way firefighters construct and negotiate meanings about organizational issues (and burnout specifically) (Larson & Pepper, 2003). Last, interviews enable the researcher to understand the experience of the participant through stories, accounts, and explanations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), which help to create a more complete and comprehensive understanding of burnout.

Twenty interviews lasting from 13 to 53 minutes were completed. They took place over the winter and spring of 2011 (outside of typical fire season) at locations designated easiest for the interviewee to access in and around Missoula, MT. These sites included various coffee shops, the University of Montana's University Center, a food court, and even one participant's home. Four interviews were conducted on the phone, as these interviewees were willing to participate but resided out of the state of Montana. Initially, some firefighters had a hard time understanding what I meant by burnout, as burnout is a term used in fire management and not necessarily intuitively linked with the mental/physical/emotional state I was referring to. The three

dimensions of burnout supported by the MBI (exhaustion, cynicism, professional efficacy) were

used to frame the interview questions. However, I was open to and interested in other possible

ways to conceptualize burnout outside the realm of the above-mentioned dimensions as well. As

interviews can be considered the "digging tool" of social science, interviews were

semistructured, and elaboration within the interviews was allowed and encouraged (Lindlof &

Taylor, 2002, p. 183).

Analysis

After the data was gathered, I self-transcribed the interviews. I recorded 197 pages of

single-spaced transcripts. Once transcription began, a grounded theory approach was utilized to

assess and code the data. Two features of grounded theory were key to coding data: (1) theory is

grounded in the relationships between data and the categories into which they are coded; and (2)

codes and categories will be adaptable until late in the project, because the "researcher is still in

the field and data from new experiences continue to alter the scope and terms of his or her

analytic framework" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 218). In other words, as I transcribed and coded

and new themes emerged from the data, I modified the categories and themes as the study

progressed. An open coding technique was then used in the data analysis to capture as many

themes and ideas as time would allow (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). NVivo coding software

was utilized to assess the data and aid in a systematic and organized analysis of the data. As the

study and the analysis proceeded, a constant comparison model was applied to the grounded

theory technique. As different incidents were noted, they were compared and contrasted to

similar/different others over time. Past concepts were used to challenge new data, and if there

was modification required to include data, the categories were shifted or modified accordingly

(Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This strategy was utilized to guard against bias.

Each of the themes discussed in the following sections were mentioned by at least 11 of the 20 interviewees. This includes the three major Discourses presented, as well as the themes that are included to support the major Discourses. Additionally at least 11 out of 20 of the participants described the causes and mitigation strategies presented. Each firefighter did not necessarily use the exact terminology presented in the write-up, however, interviewees' responses clearly related to the themes included in this work.

Qualitative research values the researcher's personal involvement and interpretation in order to more deeply understand the phenomena at hand, but qualitative researchers must employ strategies to ensure rigor in data collection and analysis. To ensure rigor in qualitative research, the researcher must delicately balance between involvement in a phenomena and allowing herself to be removed enough to analyze the phenomena. Janesick (2000) describes this striking-of-balance as a "dance." She describes the selection of research strategies, including the "identification of the researcher's own beliefs and ideology" (p. 385), and "to honestly probe his or her own biases at the onset of the study" (p. 389). Thus, I constantly examined my own emotions and cognitive responses to ensure rigor in data collection and analysis. Further, to ensure rigor, member validation will be carried out. Researchers, when appropriate, ought to report subjects' responses to the results and conclusions of the research (Tompkins, 1994). Last, the rigor of my research was dictated according to Tompkins's (1994) strategy of representativeness. He states, "organizational studies . . . ought to be concerned with messages generated at the bottom of the pyramid as well as the top," and "from all classes and sexes" (p. 47). For my research, any seasonal/temporary firefighter willing to participate was included, and all interview responses were considered to ensure representativeness of the results and conclusions. Through these strategies of qualitative rigor, I ensured that the data collected and

analyzed was accurate and representative to the best of my ability.

Results

The major Discourses that emerged from the data answered my research questions and thus will be used to guide the following section. In the following analysis I will present a general overview of firefighters' construction of burnout, followed by a section on the Discourses that enhance and support firefighter's construction of burnout. The last section of the results provides a description of how burnout is caused by as well as managed through the Discourses of teamwork, a can-do attitude, and bureaucracy.

Burnout in Firefighting

In answering my first research question (How is burnout discursively constructed among firefighters?), firefighters' initial descriptions of burnout were typically described in simple one- to two-word answers. For example, many firefighters portrayed burnout as snapping, breaking, checking out, or spiraling out of control. One hand crew member, in true raunchy firefighter style, described burnout as the "fuck its." Complacency is a word used to describe burnout as well. Complacency asserts that an individual may feel content in his or her work or situation without being aware of the potential for danger or deficiencies in their work. Firefighters are typically very aware of the dangers that their job can entail. Therefore, many firefighters maintain a mentality that being aware of what is going on with themselves and their crew is of vital importance. Complacency, then, is viewed as something to be avoided. While these simple and usually one-worded descriptions are meaningful in firefighter culture, the behavior of burned-out individuals is also observed as a sign of burnout.

It was often reported that those who were burned-out acted withdrawn from the group and sought out space away from the action. Burned-out individuals were quiet, kept to themselves, were nontalkative, disengaged, isolated, and the like. Further, a "snappy" or "edgy" behavior was commonly reported in firefighters who were burned-out. Firefighters who were burned-out were observed to be quick-tempered and not in a joking mood. These behaviors significantly contrast the way firefighters typically act (engaging, upbeat, connected, etc.). Here, firefighters' definitions of burnout and the behaviors they attribute to burnout are consistent.

The simple descriptions provide a brief look into burnout in firefighting. However, burnout is a much more complex concept. While the words firefighters use to describe burnout are important to firefighter culture, firefighters also describe burnout in much richer and elaborate ways. The discourse firefighters use to describe burnout help to reinforce the larger Discourses that preside over burnout in fire, and vice versa. Both discourse and Discourse affect the manifestation of burnout in firefighting and the experience of burnout for firefighters. Next, a description of the Discourses that influence firefighter talk (discourses) are presented to further understand burnout in firefighters.

Overarching Discursive Resources and Burnout

As previously stated, the analysis yielded three major Discursive resources that influenced the experience of burnout in wildland firefighters: teamwork, can-do attitude, and bureaucracy. Each Discourse that emerged from the data set is presented as a locale-specific Discourse as described by Kuhn (2006). The "locale" in the context of this study is considered the wildland firefighting culture that encompasses all of those who fight wildland fire seasonally (i.e., individuals employed by the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and private contract crews).

When making decisions, thinking, or generally behaving in organizational life, one draws upon Discourses that are significant to the individual as well as to the organization. Teamwork, a can-do attitude, and bureaucracy are important discourses not only to firefighting in general but, more specifically, to the experience (or lack thereof) of burnout in firefighting. The following section will explain the Discourses of teamwork, can-do attitude, and bureaucracy. Each of the Discourses presented has been linked to previous fire literature. However, rather than repeating previous findings, this analysis builds upon the previously supported Discourses and extends their understanding to encompass burnout in firefighters. The Discourses that emerged from the data (previously supported by scholars) act as a double-edged sword when considering burnout. The following Discourses both contribute to as well as mitigate burnout in wildland firefighters.

Teamwork. The ideals of teamwork serve as a foundation for firefighters in work life and in how they experience burnout. Teamwork is simply joint activity performed by individuals with a desired outcome or goal. According to Barker (1999) the team metaphor can conjure up feelings of intensity, shared work, sacrifice, commitment, and success. The Discourse of teamwork is vital in firefighting culture. In firefighting, teamwork is an important concept to develop in order to keep firefighters safe. Developing "team cohesion" is a way to increase safety on the fire line (Dreisen, 2002). However, the teamwork Discourse is not only important to the safety of firefighters, it is also related to organizational burnout.

A strong sense of camaraderie exists within the teamwork Discourse of firefighting. Camaraderie is comprised of the trust that develops between crews that are required to be responsible for the safety of one another and also from the friendly bonds that form among crews that spend a lot of time together. Given that most firefighters work on some type of crew, whether it is a four- to six-person engine crew or a 22-person hotshot crew, firefighters typically

work in very close proximity to one another. Take, for example, a hotshot crew that consists of 22 firefighters who work, eat, and sleep together. According to the 2:1 work ratio, they will work 16 hours, rest for eight, and continue that cycle for 14 days. When their 14 days are up, they receive a mandatory two days of rest. During a busy fire season, this cycle can run six months long or more. Because of the nature of fires, sometimes the crew is taken far from the home base and days off are spent in a foreign town; consequently, they often spend their days off together. Due to the confounding factors of firefighting, hotshot crews can become very close, so close that they even consider themselves family—a family that helps them deal with the stressors of a very demanding job:

> And really, like I said from my point of view, working with 22 people side by side, living with them, eating with them, crapping with them, traveling with them, literally for six months with little breaks in time, you become such a large family that as dysfunctional as it can be, it is still very functional and, um, each individual has different ways that they deal with stuff, and by the end of it you know how they are going to deal with it, so it's kind of the ebbs and flows of individuals that I guess affect how you deal with that kind of stress or burnout.
>
> (Rick Ross, personal communication)

Here the crew is aware of the different ebbs and flows that one person can have while fighting fire, and the family metaphor describes camaraderie of the crew. An overall team awareness of individuals within the crew enables crew members to help out if one of the members is feeling burned-out. A veteran firefighter of thirty-eight years tells a story about the ability of one of his team members (and coworker) to remotivate him and keep him from quitting:

I was working, working as a safety officer and I got to this fire and it was, uh, it was real cold, it was toward the end of the season, and it was snowing and, uh, but we still had some fire out there, but it was miserable. And I got out there on my first shift and like I said, it was toward the end of the season, so I had already been fighting a lot of fires, and I got done with the end of the shift and I was cold and I was miserable and I was thinking, you know, I'm just going to go back into the main camp and talk with the head safety officer and I'm going to tell him that I want to go home . . . you know, and I just thought, you know, I'm done, I'm done fighting fire this year, and I was burned-out, I was tired and burned-out from the whole season and I did think about the fact that I have never done that before, I'd never said I wanted to go home, I never wimped-out like that, but I thought I don't care, I'm cold and I'm tired and, you know, I'm going to go home.

So I went and they [safety officers] were in a meeting, and I was sitting in the back of the room and I was waiting and finally they got done and then this safety officer, he comes back to me and he comes up to me and he has this big smile on his face and he goes, "Wallace, how did it go out there!? Did you have a good day?!" and I stood there and I looked at him and I went, "Yeah, it was okay," and he goes, "That's great! That's great! Tell me about it!" and I go, "Well . . ." and started telling him about it, and I never said anything to him and I ended up staying on the fire and two days later the sun came out, and, um, and I ended up working like 14 days. So . . . he just popped me out of it, you know, I didn't have the heart to say, "I'm miserable, I'm cold, I'm tired, I'm hungry, I'm lonely, and I want to go home" . . . he just re-set me. (Wallace, personal communication)

This example shows a firefighter with feelings of burnout so strong that he considered quitting altogether. However, the camaraderie that Wallace felt with the safety officer helped to "reset" his feelings and enabled him to continue on with the job. Wallace did not want to let one of the members of his crew down, and the camaraderie gave him the strength to continue.

Many firefighters I interviewed find a strong sense of camaraderie in their work. The family/team mentality means working together toward something that is larger than individuals and getting the job done no matter what. Some even pride themselves in being able to help each other out. One hotshot describes coping with burnout, even if that means piling on extra work:

> It's like, you don't try to strive for that point but when that point comes, everyone else flexes where that person broke, so when they break no one else breaks, and you kind of pick up their hardship, and if they are having that much more of a shitty day, 99 times out of 100 whoever is working next to them will pick up their little bit of extra and give them time to wind down, and the rest of us flex while that person breaks. So it kind of keeps the balance that way. (Rick Ross, personal communication)

Again, the members draw upon the Discourse of teamwork to assist a member that has had a rough bout. Even though some may have to share in extra work, the goal must be achieved. So together the team or crew allows flex time for the individual suffering, all while working toward a goal of putting the fire out. When asked about how she deals with burnout within her crew, this firefighter stated, "It's really good to have a lot of support . . . at least my crew is really aware, I feel like I'm a part of a family now, not just [in] a job" (Buttons, personal communication). Family metaphors are used often to describe the camaraderie and trust that firefighters come to depend on when coping with the stresses of firefighting.

Pride also threads itself throughout the teamwork Discourse in firefighters. Pride in firefighters is not limited to individuals alone, but also extends to the crew that one works with. Pride is a driving force behind what firefighters do and affects the ways firefighters consider burnout. Often firefighters feel they can push their own personal boundaries so they do not "let their team (or crew) down." According to Marshall, a veteran of 40 years in fire, "it's a skill to be a good firefighter, it's a skill to be a good sawyer, and a lot of people just really focus on those skills and they are proud of those skills and they, um, a lot of that pride is what counteracts the fatigue and the burnout." Leigh, a female engine crew member, adds, "but there is that kind of sense of pride almost that you want to do well for your crew and for yourself." Teamwork instilled through a sense of pride for one's self and one's crew members is a common theme in wildland firefighting.

In addition to pride in one's work, there is often a sense of accomplishment. One way to consider accomplishment is through a comparison to an "other" that may not be as skilled. Here a competitive theme contributes to the teamwork Discourse in firefighting. The competitiveness appears when firefighters compare themselves or their crew to other individuals or crews. Often firefighters talk about the importance of reputation. Crews are concerned with their own performance compared to other crews' performance and strive to be better than other crews. Each individual crew serves as a miniature team in this sense. This sense of competition propels crews to compete for a better reputation than other crews. The crew that works harder/faster/longer has a better reputation than a team that works slower or is considered lazy or unskilled. Competition serves as a catalyst for firefighters to "tough it out" and push though feelings of burnout in order to beat the "other," because firefighters want to set a good example

of themselves. The competitive notion is illustrated well below as this hotshot describes how his

crew's work is assessed:

> It is your name attached to it, and you don't want to look bad in other crews' eyes.
>
> Essentially because there is a lot of what is called the proverbial "dick swinging"
>
> between hotshot crews or other crews, um, you don't want to look bad to another
>
> crew, you don't want to look bad to overhead, um, you want to be very much the
>
> "go-to" crew and have a good sense of pride and a job well done. (Rick Ross,
>
> personal communication).

Most firefighters are mentally cognizant of the quality of work that they do and they take pride in

accomplishing, especially exceeding, goals on a personal and team (crew) level, especially when

the achieved goals earn their crew a good reputation. The competitive force behind and within

the teamwork Discourse helps to drive firefighters in the work that they do.

Teamwork is indeed "acted out" in firefighting but ultimately serves as a foundation for

the job itself. Camaraderie and family metaphors are common in firefighting culture and help to

create a framework through which firefighters see themselves and their crew. Firefighters bond

through their sense of pride and even competition. Teamwork is vital to organizational life in

firefighting. Firefighters are enabled by the teamwork Discourse to work and work hard.

However, another Discourse is vital to understanding burnout in firefighters. Part of what sets

firefighters apart in their experience of burnout is the particular attitude that firefighters embody.

A can-do attitude, like teamwork, is also foundational to firefighting culture, and thus, burnout.

The next section will detail what it means to be "can-do."

Can-do. Often I found myself asking, how is it that these firefighters do not report the

physical aspects of the job as a main cause of burnout? The physical demands of firefighting are

often mentioned as a challenge of the job, however, physical challenges are not the main, or even close to the main, contributor to burnout. Then what is it about firefighters that enable them to work 16-hour days, six months in a row, and yet return to the work year after year? Part of the answer lies in the can-do attitude that firefighters embody.

There is some controversy surrounding the term "can-do," given that a can-do attitude has been related to firefighters in a negative context. In 1994 there was a tragic fire on Storm King Mountain in Colorado that killed fourteen firefighters. In the official report written on the fire, the can-do attitude of firefighters and supervisors was blamed for the compromise of basic safety rules (South Canyon Fire Investigation, 1994). In other words, some of the firefighters who died were blamed for a lack of safety sense that led to their own demise. Because of the ill feelings felt in the fire community from this single statement, two years after the report was released one fire official qualified the above statement by saying it was only meant to "describe an 'overly aggressive' attitude" and that "crews should have a 'can-do' attitude" (Maclean, 1999). Currently, the can-do attitude of firefighters is a supported ideal and is well accepted in fire circles.

A can-do attitude in firefighters is a dominant Discourse related to firefighting as a whole, as well as to burnout specifically. A can-do attitude in firefighting culture not only guides firefighters in what they do, but also contributes to many firefighters' sense of identity. Some refer to can-do people as type-A, active, those who like to be busy, high-energy, macho, and the like. Often, when describing their own characteristics, firefighters describe themselves using a functional "we." For example, one hotshot describes the firefighter type: "with all the other bullshit that happens, we love working, we're doers" (Aragorn Son of P. Diddy, personal

communication). This hotshot not only views himself as a part of a whole, but he also assumes that other firefighters are like him both in work ethic and personality.

A can-do attitude exists in a mentality that is related to the identity of a firefighter. In other words, there is a perception of a firefighter "type." This ideal type facilitates an understanding of ways in which firefighters should behave and act in their work. Most firefighters perceive themselves as busy and active, high-energy, and always ready to do more, even if they feel burned-out. Marshall, a veteran smokejumper and firefighter of forty years says:

> I would have to think a fatigue-fighting phenomenon [is] the more people rise and
>
> do more. In the smoke-jumping world, one friend said it well he said, "This is a
>
> culture where people compete to do more than their share"; that's just such an
>
> uplifting, positive world to live in. Doctors love smoke jumpers, and I can't speak
>
> to the firefighters . . . I assume it's the same, but people come to the doctor to get
>
> out of work, these guys [smoke jumpers] are coming in trying to get back on the
>
> jump list. (Marshall, personal communication)

It is desirable in firefighter culture to be a "go-to" type. A firefighter can be counted on to complete the task at hand, but a can-do attitude is also present when you consider the appropriate response to not completing a task:

> For instance if someone doesn't get the job done, it's almost rewarded to joke
>
> about the kind of job you didn't quite get done as opposed to making an excuse of
>
> why it didn't get done. You're better off, you're far better off to come in and
>
> announce that you didn't get the job done and say, "I'm going to take another day
>
> at it," then to start to lining up excuses on why it didn't get done. That's more

rewarded than someone coming up and saying, "I don't know how to do this."

(Smoke-hazer, personal communication)

A can-do culture frowns upon excuses and lack of knowledge. Sometimes go-to or can-do attitudes are aspects of the competitive nature of firefighting, but often these attributes are inherent in the type of individual who chooses firefighting as a career. Eleven out of the 20 interviewees noted that specific characteristics (related to a can-do mentality) seem to be existent in most firefighters and that those characteristics helped them cope with the stressors of the job. A firefighter is willing and able to get the job done. The characteristics present in the type of person that the firefighting culture attracts and the can-do-ness of those individuals enables them in their work.

Part of the can-do attitude is manifest in the identification firefighters feel with fighting fire. Firefighters live to fight fire. Fighting fire is viewed as fun and sometimes even referred to as "playing." Second- and third-year seasonal employees I interviewed talked extensively about their first fire, as the previous fire season(s) had been inactive due to rainfall, other weather factors, and so on. In the slower seasons these interviewees were given other tasks rather than getting to fight fire, such as thinning or forest maintenance. As a result, when they actually got out and on a fire, it was almost like coming of age, and they were elated. Most of the second- and third-year firefighters looked back on their first fire with certain awe about their experience. Fire becomes a part (or is already a part) of who firefighters are. Wallace, speaking about fire, mentioned, "It's something that gets in your blood and you just love going out. You love being out in the woods and seeing country you have never seen before, beautiful country, and they let ya play with fire." Wallace was quick to mention that he did not mean for the word "playing" to be mentioned without the utmost safety precautions in mind, but playing and fire are similar to

him nonetheless. Firefighting is more than an occupation for him and many others; fighting fire is a passion. A few firefighters even remarked that those that do not have a passion for fire do not last long in the fire world.

The passion that stems from a can-do attitude is a result, in part, of a feeling of competency. It is vital that firefighters feel they are capable and contributing to the work they do. Can-do attitude comes with a necessity for competency in work life, and if competency is questioned, a can-do mentality is as well. For example, one firefighter described how his friend and coworker received a promotion. His friend had been working mostly out in the field and was promoted to an upper-management position. He worked in the new job for a year or so and decided that it required too much responsibility and that he felt overwhelmed and stressed with his responsibilities. So he decided to "demote" himself, in a sense, and take a position on a hotshot crew instead. My interviewee reported that his friend ended up much happier on the hotshot crew rather than in his management position. The promoted (then self-demoted) firefighter did not feel he could adequately complete the duties of the management position. His can-do attitude was being questioned in that he felt like he *could not* do the job competently. Additionally, competency also seems to relate to the sense of pride that was present in the teamwork Discourse, as pride seems to follows competency through the accomplishment of tasks.

A can-do attitude also facilitates a "tough" mentality in firefighters. The physical challenges of firefighting are viewed as a normal and natural. Nonetheless, firefighting can be a physically demanding job. Firefighters often discussed the physical challenges as a part of the job, but a can-do attitude helps to usurp physical challenges. When discussing the demanding physical aspects of the job, one firefighter said, "I've seen people just try to push through and

finish strong, which is, I think, the best way to go." A can-do attitude pushes firefighters to "tough it out," even when they are feeling burned-out.

Can-do is much more than the way that firefighters act; like teamwork, a can-do attitude is a part of who they are. It seems that there is a specific type of person that is attracted to firefighting in the first place, and the culture of firefighting helps to cultivate the can-do behavior that accompanies the already can-do individuals. Next I would like to briefly touch on a third Discourse, bureaucracy, and its relationship to burnout in firefighting.

Bureaucracy. Bureaucratic control is noted as a prevalent force in the U.S. Forest Service (Bullis & Tompkins, 1989), thus the Discourse of bureaucracy can be intuitively linked to the experience of burnout in firefighting. Numerous other firefighters from different fire agencies (BLM, MT DNRC, etc.), voiced similar concerns with bureaucratic control. The Discourse of Bureaucracy in firefighting, however, requires some qualification, as it is different from the previous two Discourses discussed. In discussions about burnout, bureaucracy represents a negative hindering force rather than the seemingly positive enabling qualities given in the Discourses above. Fourteen of the 20 interviewees noted bureaucracy as a contributor to burnout in firefighting. Though bureaucracy is different than teamwork and a can-do attitude, it serves as a discursive resource in firefighting.

Bureaucracy affects burnout in firefighters in two ways: (1) through a perception of red tape that inhibits work; and (2) through a general lack of understanding of the purpose of some tasks. It is no real surprise that in a federal-government-dominated organization, red tape is perceived as a hindering force. Red tape is an all-encompassing term for obstacles that firefighters perceive hinders their work. Veteran participants often spoke about the increase in regulations during their years in firefighting from the different government organizations that

firefighters work with and for. A good example of this type of increase in the amount of red tape

that firefighters have to deal with would be the change in "burn plan" paperwork. When a

prescribed burn is necessary to preserve and protect an area, a written burn plan report is

required prior to any burning. Parameters of the burn are included in the report, as well as the

time of day the burn will take place, what area the burn will be started from, and so on. Veteran

firefighter Wallace remembers a time when burn plans were only one page long, and the burn

could be carried out that very day, but now burn plans range anywhere from 25 to 50 pages in

length and require computer confirmation and assistance to complete, which equates to a much

longer timeline for the actual burn. Not all regulations are viewed as red tape in a negative sense;

many are important for the safety of both firefighter and the land. What is important to highlight

is the complexity of bureaucratic forces in firefighting. Though they may be in place for safety,

the perceived bureaucratic control of fire agencies still wears on firefighters. Bureaucracy also

seems to be a double-edged sword, both protecting firefighters and causing stress for them.

When the bureaucratic forces contribute to a lack of understanding or purpose in

firefighters, the general consensus is that firefighters then feel that they are not contributing.

When bureaucracy affects a firefighter's sense of competency (or contribution to the job), a

tension forms between the Discourse of bureaucracy and the Discourse of can-do. Here, a hand

crew member highlights a time where she "was at the end of her rope" because of a prolonged

and unnecessary mop-up task assigned to her crew:

> The Brown fire was like 40 acres, and we just reinforced line and wetted it down,
>
> and then the next day, the fire jumped our line. So that was pretty exciting, like
>
> bad, but exciting that we were fighting live fire. Then the next day it rained, so we
>
> were like "Oh, okay, we are going home." NO! We just mopped it up and mopped

it up for seriously 14 days, and they would have us just do the same route over

and over and over again, and it was just really degrading 'cause it was like what is

my purpose even? I don't feel like I'm doing anything at this point; I'm getting

paid but I'm not helping, so that was really frustrating to me. (Buttons, personal

communication)

Here, confusion regarding the necessity of the work assigned to her crew caused feelings of

frustration and stress. The first few days of the mop-up were worthwhile, according to Buttons,

but there was not adequate purpose in fourteen full days of mop-up. Buttons mentioned after she

didn't think those higher up (in the bureaucracy) knew where else to send her crew, so they kept

them doing mop-up. Buttons felt that her skills were not being used as they should be, and it

resulted in frustration with those giving the fire orders (what she considered bureaucracy).

Busywork and tasks with unseen results or purpose that are required by bureaucracy wear on

firefighters' well-being.

Often, firefighters view bureaucracy as the "thing" that gets in the way of fighting fire.

This conception is directly related to firefighters' "live for fire" mentality. Administrative work

and paperwork, or bureaucracy, get in the way of what they are really trying to do: "If you have

too much admin stuff on your workload, you're not going to be able to go play in fire, your boss

is going to say, 'You're not done here, Smoke-hazer [firefighter alias], you need to stick here and

you can't go play.' You can't get all of those things that fires let you do" (Smoke-hazer, personal

communication). This firefighter considers bureaucracy the force that stands between him and

what he really wants to do.

Often firefighters feel that the bureaucracy, usually hierarchy of leadership or required

paperwork, hinders them from getting things done. Fighting fire is viewed as a straightforward

activity. For the most part, firefighters feel that they can get what they need on the ground during a fire, but the paperwork that surrounds the pre and post parts of fighting fire, brought on by bureaucracy, is "pretty frustrating at times, and it's getting worse, it gets worse every year" (John, personal communication). General consensus is that if the actual fighting of fire was the single task assigned in the duration of work, there would be little burnout in firefighters. Bureaucracy is viewed as a blockade to what firefighters really want to do: fight fire.

Discourses both help to enable and constrain organizational life. According to firefighters, bureaucracy is a force that hinders their work and is viewed as negative. Teamwork and can-do attitudes are innately more positive and enabling Discourses. However, teamwork and a can-do attitude can be double-edged swords. When teamwork and a can-do attitude are pushed too far, organizational burnout can result. In the next section, I will present the main contributors of burnout in seasonal wildland fire.

Burnout's Contributing Forces

Because bureaucratic control is a prevalent force in the Forest Service and other fire agencies (as noted by Bullis & Tompkins, 1989 and above interviewees), bureaucracy seems to be a rather obvious contributor to burnout. However, there are two main causes of burnout in firefighting that are less intuitive: interpersonal conflict and a lack of fire. Interestingly, both interpersonal conflict and a lack of fire can be linked to the influences of the Discourses of teamwork and a can-do attitude, respectively, as well as vice versa.

It is apparent that firefighters become very close during fire season, as was previously described with the teamwork Discourse. Whether this is observed through picking up slack for a fellow crew member, venting to one another, or using humor, firefighters begin to depend on one another, not simply to get the job done, but to enjoy the job they are doing. However, this team

cohesion can also contribute to burnout. The most dominant contributing factor of burnout

reported by participants was interpersonal conflicts within the fire crew. Seventeen of the 20

interviewees reported interpersonal conflict to be a stressor of the job. The "interpersonal

conflict" category for firefighters in this sense encompasses an assortment of conflicts. Conflicts

range from simply being around the same crew for too long and needing a break to episodes that

escalate to the point of physical fights or requested transfers. Regardless of the type of conflict,

crew member conflicts are a leading cause of burnout in firefighting. When asked what the cause

of burnout may be in firefighting, one hotshot responded:

> Probably being with the same 19 people day in and day out and, you know,
>
> you've been around people that just rub you the wrong way, that annoy you, after
>
> even just a few days you can't even, can't even imagine how bad it gets after,
>
> like, a few tours where you are constantly with [the same people] . . . I think the
>
> interpersonal dynamic burns people out more than anything. (Aragorn Son of P.
>
> Diddy, personal communication)

Usually the interpersonal dynamic that causes burnout in firefighters is due to constantly

engaging with the same group of people for extended periods of time. Interpersonal conflicts

occur between crew members, supervisors, supervisor and crew members, and even between

supervisors, supervisees, and those higher up in the hierarchy (bureaucracy) of leadership. It is

important to highlight here that teamwork can be both a way to *relieve* stress and burnout, as

well as a *source of* stress and burnout.

The second main contributor to burnout in firefighting is lack of fire, or boredom. Fire

activity ranges from season to season, and when fires are less frequent, so is the necessity of

firefighters to be fighting fire. Typically (with the exception of private contract crews), seasonal

employees that fight fire are guaranteed pay for 40 hours a week as long as the season goes.

However, this does not mean that they will be fighting fire 40 hours a week, just that they will be

working and paid for 40. When there is no need for firefighting in its essence, organizations that

employ firefighters put firefighters to work in other ways. Activities range from thinning timber

in forests and other "outside" jobs to cleaning or aiding in the packing and moving of

administrative fire offices. Very few, if any, of the "other" activities are desired, and the

boredom and monotony of tasks wears on firefighters.

Monetarily it makes sense that boredom wears on firefighters, since they make overtime

as well as hazard pay when fighting fire. So, when one is fighting fire, one is also making more

money. But the stress from boredom goes much deeper than monetary reward; boredom directly

conflicts with a can-do attitude. The can-do, action-oriented, type-A, high-energy individual that

is attracted to fire in the first place does not want to waste time with thinning and mopping; the

individual wants to be in the midst of the blaze. According to this hotshot:

> When you are in the middle of the actual firefight stuff, that's usually the bread
>
> and butter, that's the cream, that's what everyone likes, and if you could do that
>
> all year round minus the stuff that comes with it, most people would probably be
>
> okay; it's a lot of the other stuff, the downtime, the cleaning, and the training.
>
> (Rick Ross, personal communication)

Interestingly, some of the non-firefighting activities that cause boredom are subsequently blamed

on bureaucracy. Monotonous tasks are assigned to firefighters that do not have anything to do

with fighting fire. One crew member describes a time when she had to move administrative

offices when she was employed as a firefighter, and she did not even see a fire that season:

> We were moving the entire Kalispell unit, including all the foresters' offices, all
> of like the admins offices, and the fire offices, to a new building so pretty much
> all I did for that summer was box stuff, put it on palates, and Saran wrap it and
> dodge a forklift. So that got really old; that was like "oh god, when are we going
> to get to do something else?" and that was what went on the entire summer . . .
> from June through the time I left they were still trying to figure out, like, where
> everything was going to go in this new place. And you know I moved the same
> stuff probably like six different times just to temporary locations to get it out of
> the way. (Sylvia, personal communication)

When a firefighter views the firefighting part of the job as what they really want to do, tasks that force them to do otherwise cause them to feel burned-out.

Also, interpersonal conflict and boredom can combine to cause stress in firefighters. When firefighters feel they are being underutilized (thus not embodying a can-do attitude) and they are tasked with boring and seemingly less important tasks (than fighting fire), they sometimes lash out at each other. Sylvia describes the summer mentioned above when her crew was tasked with moving administrative offices:

> But as things progresses and as we kind of had a lack of fire, people kind of got a
> little bit gritty at each other, and people were kind of cabin fever, sick of like
> being stuck with the same people all the time, not traveling, being, doing the same
> work all summer long so. I would say that some of the people I worked with
> really kind of suffered from burnout. (Sylvia, personal communication)

Interpersonal conflict and a lack of fire contribute to burnout separately and sometimes in combination.

Burnout occurs in firefighters in dynamic ways. This analysis has examined the Discourses that serve as resources to firefighters as well as the main contributors to burnout in firefighting. Next, I shift the discussion to detail the communicative strategies that firefighters use to mitigate the effects of burnout in firefighting culture and how those mitigating strategies are linked to the major Discourses previously discoursed.

Mitigation of Burnout

While teamwork and a can-do attitude can create stresses for firefighters, overall these Discourses mitigate burnout more than exacerbate burnout. Firefighters manage burnout through drawing upon specific Discourses (mainly teamwork and a can-do attitude). They also mitigate burnout in intuitive ways, such as various communicative strategies, taking breaks, and knowing personal limitations. However, burnout is also mitigated in out-of-the-ordinary ways, such as "just dealing" and reverting back to the completion of simple tasks.

Utilizing communicative strategies is the most relied-upon method for managing burnout, as reported by firefighters in this study. Four specific communicative strategies are used to mitigate burnout in firefighting: (1) venting; (2) energy regulation; (3) humor; and (4) conveying a positive attitude. Stemming from the familylike mentality the teamwork Discourse enables, crew members can confide in one another to vent about stressors. Sawyer teams provide a good example of this type of communication:

> These are two-person teams and they are the sawyers, they are at the front of the
> crew . . . and you are with that person, you are tied to their hip, in and out, to the
> point where you probably know them better than you know your own parents on
> some things, you know? Um, so talking with that person, having someone else to
> just vent [to] is huge; if you have to, you goof off a little bit, I mean, not unsafely,

but you have to have someplace to put that stress and tension. You have to learn

how to vent that in the correct way; if you don't, it will bottle up and you will

snap, but even if it's down to making dirty jokes, or taking an extra ten minutes of

a break and just venting, or talking, whatever you have to do to get that tension

released. (Rick Ross, personal communication)

Firefighters trust members of their crew, and venting to someone who understands what one is

going through seems to be a healthy place to relieve tension.

Energy-regulating communication enables firefighters to keep their physical strength up.

Because of the physical demands of firefighting, it is vital that every firefighter drink enough

water and consume enough calories (usually, around 3,000 to 4,000 calories a day). It is very

common for crew members to encourage one another to eat and drink throughout the day if they

begin to fade mentally or physically. Teamwork is manifest in this type of regulatory

communication in that crew members are concerned with the success and well-being of other

members. One engine boss, Jesse Roods, encourages water-chugging contests within his crew

when they are out on a fire. "That way," he states, "you get two or three bottles out of the way!"

When working with a can-do attitude, firefighters are not always their own best friend. When it

comes to fighting fire, they can get caught up in the work they are doing and often forget to take

care of themselves. However, crew members are very good about keeping tabs on one another

and encouraging one another to stay hydrated and energized.

For firefighters, another way to manage burnout that is worthy of mention is the amount

of humor that is apparent in the culture. Drawing upon the teamwork Discourse, crew members

become so close that they can joke around with one another without causing conflict between

members. In fact, joking around with one another is viewed as a place to put some of the stress

and tension that comes with the job. There is a healthy amount of "shit-giving" in firefighting culture. The shit-giving represents a way to cut tensions that arise, yet also provides an avenue for closeness among members. Humor and joking contributes to the team cohesion that exists in firefighting culture.

Humor has been noted as an antidote for jobs that are difficult, chaotic, or threatening (see Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006). Firefighters seem to utilize a similar strategy using humor. For example, when mopping up a fire, firefighters are often required to crawl around on their hands and knees feeling for hotspots that may have been burned and left behind by the fire (this is called cold trailing). In the process of mop-up, firefighters often get covered in soot from head to toe, and it becomes a very cumbersome, tedious, and undesired job. However, it is very common for firefighters to joke around with one another in these types of situations to lighten the mood. One firefighter reported that one of her crew members has a habit of singing Disney or Katy Perry songs to brighten the mood during mop-up. While it may seem silly from the outside, to firefighters it makes a dirty, undesirable job less taxing to do. For firefighters, being able to laugh at a crew member or joke around with one another can help reduce stress, tension, and burnout.[2]

Furthermore, it is important for a firefighter to portray a positive attitude. In part, conveying a positive attitude comes from having a good sense of humor, but it is a more complex

---

[2] The importance of humor in firefighter culture was also apparent in the aliases that firefighters gave themselves for this study. As noted above, interviewees were given the option of choosing their own alias for the purposes of confidentiality. Some waived the option and asked me to come up with an alias for them, but several chose humorous names. "Blaze West" and "Smoke-hazer" were among the few fire-referenced aliases, while "Aragorn son of P. Diddy (reference to *Lord of the Ring*s and hip-hop/rap artist P. Diddy) and "Edward" (in reference to the *Twilight* series character) were representative of humor in mimicking popular culture. "Bob" was chosen as a deliberate irreverence to the idea of having to come up with an alias in the first place.

concept than this. Conveying a positive attitude helps to motivate other firefighters and

reinforces the can-do and teamwork Discourses firefighter culture represents. Many firefighters

discussed the importance of conveying a positive attitude in order to not bring others down. This

firefighter discusses the consequences of a negative attitude: "If you are super negative other

people are going to be pissed off, it's going to destroy the teamwork dynamic that you have

going, and in a job like this that's all you have" (Sylvia, personal communication). Firefighters

take it upon themselves to portray an upbeat attitude to keep others from feeling burned-out.

Also, embodying a positive attitude facilitates a can-do attitude. As mentioned above, firefighters

are cognizant of the mental and physical challenges that any given season can/will present; they

are viewed as normal, natural, and expected. This does not mean that the challenges that occur

on the job are made easy. So, by portraying a positive attitude, firefighters can overcome

physical challenges. This firefighter states:

> I think the trick to not getting burned-out is to just always keep a positive attitude,
>
> I mean things suck that you have to do, but you're already out there, and if you're
>
> part of the problem then you can't fix it. (Jesse Roods, personal communication)

Despite the challenges that firefighting presents, a positive attitude helps to enable firefighters to

do their job. A positive attitude can come from the can-do attitude Discourse, but it also exists as

evidence of the teamwork Discourse in that firefighters encourage one another through

maintaining positive attitudes.

Knowing and acknowledging personal limitations is also an important way that

firefighters mitigate the effects of burnout. It is vital that a firefighter know how to pace himself

or herself, but the pace must also be up to par with the rest of the crew's work. Here, Sylvia

highlights the importance of knowing her limits while also embodying a can-do firefighter and

team player attitude: "You give as much as you can, but I mean you have to do it within your own boundary, because you're not, you don't want to be the liability, and you don't want to be the weakest link" (Sylvia, personal communication). If Sylvia was not aware of what she could not complete, she would be letting the team down by not delegating the work to someone who could complete the task. An awareness of her limits ensures the success of the team.

Knowing when one needs to take a break is a vital strategy in mitigating burnout. The second most referred-to strategy in the mitigation of burnout behind communicative strategies was taking breaks. Taking a break is important both on the small scale, that is, on a fire, but also on a larger scale, as in the off-season and on days off in-season. Small-scale breaks usually involve refueling in some way. Firefighters reported sitting down and drinking water, eating a snack, going out for a brisk walk, sleeping, or taking a break from their crew by putting on sunglasses or listening to music. One participant joked with me (though he was also serious) that sometimes firefighters go on H and H, also known as "hide and hunker." He was quick to qualify that when he goes on H and H he has already completed the tasks he was assigned to during the day, so he feels content with disappearing and taking a break somewhere out in the woods. Breaks serve as a way for firefighters to take a load off mentally and physically.

Larger-scale breaks are the times when firefighters receive days off or the time off they have from firefighting when the fire season is over altogether. Firefighters reported the importance of separating themselves from work or fellow firefighters. When the crew has been working close to home, that break usually means going home for a few days, sometimes to see family, other times to just zone-out in front of the television. The main purpose of the break is to do something different from fire in order to recharge.

Breaks are especially important when a firefighter has a significant other or children, as many firefighters reported how hard the job can be not only on the individual but the family members of that individual as well. When the season is over, it is typical for a firefighter to completely disengage for a time. One firefighter in particular called it going "de-techno." In "de-techno" mode, this firefighter left his cell phone, laptop, and all other modes of communication at home and went with his fiancée to camp for six weeks out in the woods.

Traveling is a common break-taking method that firefighters use to cope with burnout. Sometimes travel takes a firefighter to a neighboring town to visit friends or family, while other times it is cross-continental or even worldwide journeys. Marshall, the 40-year veteran of fire, in the true spirit of can-do culture, once went on a bike ride across the western United States after having a very tough fire season. The season was tough on him not only because it had been an uncharacteristically busy fire season but also because he was going through a divorce at the time. To blow off steam, he rode his bike from Missoula, Montana, and down and around the state of California before looping back to Montana on a six-week bicycle adventure. He reported that he came home a refreshed man after the ride. It was evident that home-life stressors (his divorce) and workplace stressors contributed to his feelings of burnout in that particular season. And though he was mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted, Marshall decided to set out on a physically demanding bicycle trip to relieve himself of his pent-up feelings.

Breaks and travel are often seen as a light at the end of the tunnel. The proverbial light may be the required two days off and knowing a break is near, or thinking about the fact that the season is coming to a close soon and the winter will provide time to recuperate. Conceptualizing that a break is near helps firefighters to cope when feeling burned-out. Here, a hotshot and crew boss talks about what he considers when burnout is near: "I think when I was a seasonal

firefighter, I always knew that hey, come September 30 or October 30, I'm going to be on a

plane to Southeast Asia and hey, I can make it till then" (Neil, personal communication).

Regardless of the type of break a firefighter receives, the mental and physical intermission serves

as a way not only to cope with burnout but also to prevent it from happening in the first place.

The previously mentioned mitigation strategies seem fairly intuitive. Two strategies

firefighters utilize to mitigate burnout seem unique in regards to firefighters specifically. One

interesting concept that emerged in relation to the can-do attitude and teamwork Discourses is

the tendency of firefighters to repress or "just deal" with feelings that surround burnout.

Firefighters reported that most get burned-out, but they do not always have the opportunity to

cope with burnout. In other words, they just deal with it, or they feel they should not always

show that they felt burned-out. Perhaps it is not wanting to let the team (crew) down, or even the

fact that it may seem out of character in a can-do culture to report feelings of burnout, but

firefighters reported that pushing through feelings of burnout happens often on the job. Many

reported that they would not be surprised if there was burnout in the culture that was not reported

or observed by others. Similarly, many firefighters reported that some situations do not allow

mitigation of burnout at all. For example, in an aggressive fire situation:

> Yeah, if you are in a critical portion that you know it's the middle of the day or
>
> whatever, like a prescribed burn, if you are the burn boss for it, you can't like
>
> pack up and say, "Well, see ya." I mean, you're responsible for the smoke, you're
>
> responsible for the fire, you're responsible for people that are out there still
>
> watching it so. Yeah, you think about all of that stuff and maybe even though
>
> you're not there, you are still there . . . Even if a person, like I said, even if a
>
> person does kind of start getting burned-out or fatigued or stressed or freaks out or

whatever there just, there is not really much room for that. And so a lot of guys

like to, you know, push the feelings and push everything down and you deal with

the situation, and then deal with things afterward. (Kurt, personal communication)

This is a good example of the fact that there is not always a lot of time to think deeply about the

way one is feeling. When lives or properties are on the line, sometimes firefighters just have to

suck it up. Firefighters reported that they felt that sometimes the easiest thing to do when

feeling exhausted was simply to just deal with it. With the can-do attitude comes a discourse of

pushing through or toughing it out. Mind over matter is a way of life in the true spirit of can-do

culture. The feelings of burnout exist; they are simply disregarded in order to complete the task

at hand.

Further, reverting back to the completion of simple tasks is a mitigation strategy that

draws upon the can-do Discourse in a unique way. As previously mentioned, competency in

work tasks is in an important value for firefighters. When a firefighter is feeling overwhelmed

with the task at hand, referring back to completing a simpler task helps to relieve stress. It is not

atypical for a firefighter to take a break from intense stressful action and engage in an activity

that they know they can complete with ease, skill, and accuracy. One hotshot spoke about a time

where she felt as though she was at the end of her rope. She was tired, exhausted even, and did

not feel like completing the task she was assigned to do due to overwhelming feelings. Her way

of dealing with the feelings was, of course, first to push through an additional half hour of work,

but then she stopped, sat down, and began to sharpen her chainsaw. This seemingly simple task

helped her to refocus on her goals while also contributing to her ability to continue to fight fire.

Simple tasks allow firefighter to collect themselves and reassess their feelings while allowing

them to complete a task or contribute to the job they were assigned to do.

Discussion

This study was intended to examine burnout in firefighters in order to extend the topic of burnout to a new context and to shed light on what causes and mitigates burnout in firefighters. The analysis explores the Discourses that contribute to the manifestation of burnout in wildland fire. The results demonstrate how Discourses intersect with the behavior and actions of firefighters and their understanding of burnout. Teamwork, can-do attitude, and bureaucracy enable and constrain firefighters in organizational life, as well as create avenues that contribute to and mitigate burnout. Through a discursive approach, I examine burnout and its manifestations to better understand the dynamic and complex concept of organizational burnout in an equally dynamic and complex population: seasonal wildland firefighters.

The seasonal aspect of firefighting serves as an advantage to firefighters, rather than a disadvantage, when considering burnout. Firefighters get burnout seasonally. At the end of a season, most firefighters feel at the end of their rope and are ready for some well-earned rest and relaxation. However, the seasonal aspect of firefighting helps to mitigate burnout more than contributing to burnout. The end of the season is seen as the light at the end of the tunnel. Firefighters are equipped with the knowledge that come the end of September or October, they will be sent home, and that knowledge enables them to push though feelings of burnout at work to get to that point. Some return to school, while others have a few months to be with their families or travel, but in one way or another firefighters get a break, and the knowledge that that break is coming up helps to mitigate burnout. Having a light at the end of the tunnel as a mitigation strategy has implications for firefighters in-season as well. Setting a goal of just getting through the day or to the next mandated break (two days off after 14 worked required of

firefighters) creates a more tangible and manageable goal and helps to reduce stress. The temporary or seasonal aspect of employment benefits firefighters in mitigating burnout.

I was surprised that the physical aspects of firefighting were not a main contributor to burnout in the individuals in this study. Firefighters did discuss the physical aspects of the job as a challenge, but it was understood that firefighting is a physical job. Pushing physical limits is part of the job, and that notion is assumed going into each season. Further, firefighters have a strong sense of teamwork and take strength in the fact that they are all in it together, whatever the task may be. After a close examination of the type of people involved in firefighting, pushing physical limits does not seem out of the ordinary to them and thus would not contribute to burnout. Firefighters, equipped with a can-do attitude, are ready to work insane hours, because it is what they love to do and they know in time it will come to an end. The intensity of the job ends up being more normal than stressful.

As mentioned previously, communication scholars Ronen and Mikulincer (2009) found a connection between a perception of low team cohesion and burnout. My findings seem to support this connection. Burned-out individuals were perceived as acting removed from the action, on their own, and disengaged with their crew. This type of withdrawn behavior was seen as divergent from the norm and was easily observed by fellow crew members as a sign of burnout. Teamwork is a vital Discourse in firefighting culture, and a strong sense of team (or crew) cohesion is viewed as normal and natural. Burned-out individuals were then viewed as those who had removed themselves from the crew. Therefore, those engaged in strong team cohesion could be arguably less burned-out, as Ronen and Mikulincer (2009) found. Teamwork is a Discursive structure that helps to prevent/mitigate burnout.

Team cohesion has been studied previously in fire. However, in fire, "previous recommendations to pay more attention to problems in fire crew team cohesion have been very general" (Dreissen, 2002, p. 10). Similar to the Discourse of teamwork in this study, team cohesion has been found to be a double-edged sword. Intracrew cohesion (cohesion within a single crew fighting fire, different from intercrew cohesion, which is cohesion between different crews and managers) has been linked to saving lives and to causing fatalities in fire (for example, Mann Gulch, South Canyon, and Thirty Mile fires; see Driessen, 2002). Not only does this study expand on the importance of team cohesion in the context of mitigating burnout, it provides some communicative strategies that expand on the previously general literature. Humor (or "shit-giving"), venting, and portraying a positive attitude are parts of the teamwork Discourse that seem to improve team cohesion, as well as mitigate burnout. Further, taking pride in one's team and participating in some healthy competition also seems to help bolster team cohesion. These strategies can be utilized in firefighter culture to facilitate team cohesion.

Teamwork must, however, be considered in moderation (Dreission 2002). One significant finding was the seemingly contradictory connection between the mitigating and contributing forces the teamwork Discourse facilitates. When burnout is considered, teamwork can be a strong mitigating force, but too much of a good thing can have adverse effects. When individuals spend too much time together, it can create tension. Interpersonal conflict as the number one contributor to burnout in firefighting is a result of an overdependence on the teamwork Discourse.

This study highlights a locale-specific Discourse in action. Teamwork emerges as a specific framework that firefighters draw upon in work life. Whether it is dealing with burnout specifically or more generally in everyday work tasks, a teamwork Discourse is a necessity for

firefighters. Teamwork, as a locale-specific Discourse, becomes a structure that firefighters utilize in understanding and behaving at work. Drawing upon Discourse becomes a resource for enacting teamwork.

Further, this study provides an example of the "work" (Ashcraft, 2007) of locale-specific Discourses. Can-do attitude functions as a locale-specific Discourse that allows firefighters to better cope with burnout. A can-do mentality serves as a reframing tool for stressors. Take, for example, the desire for a firefighter to be a go-to individual. When a firefighter feels burned-out on the job, he or she could easily reframe the feelings of burnout in order to be consistent with the desire to be a go-to person. Rather than quitting (burning out completely) the firefighter reframes whatever stressor is present by drawing upon the can-do Discourse in order to be go-to. Perhaps the firefighter thinks to himself or herself, "This is who I am; this is what I love to do." The stressor then is reframed through the locale-specific Discourse (can-do) serving as a discursive reframing tool. The stressor is no longer a stressor when it is considered part of the identity of the firefighter. Thus, perhaps resilience emerges as another locale-specific Discourse. The "work" of Discourse is apparent when a firefighter draws upon the locale-specific discourse of can-do to cope with burnout and enable the firefighter to continue working.

Burnout in firefighting is also a product of the mundane and boring. Firefighters deal with intense and dangerous situations in their work, but ironically these situations do not wear on them as much as the paperwork does. Previous scholarship has noted the mundane as a contributor to burnout, as narrow task assignments reduce workers' motivation (Hsieh & Chao, 2004). However, the boring and mundane seems to conflict more with the general attitude of firefighters (being can-do) than simply a lack of motivation. Further, because the job is seasonal, if firefighters are not on a fire, they are not making as much money as they possibly could in the

season. Boring tasks cause stress by conflicting with firefighters' identities, as well as their ability to make a living.

While mundane tasks wear on firefighters, some firefighters are already enacting strategies that help them to cope with the stresses that a mundane job brings. One well-supported source of job satisfaction is the informal interactions shared by members (Roy, 1960). In a study of factory workers, Roy (1960) observed that talk, fun, and humor helped to keep them from "going nuts" in a monotonous job. One such interaction was called "banana time." Every day one worker would steal the banana out of his coworkers' lunch box and eat it. This tradition was carried out every day and enabled the workers in the factory to overcome the mundane nature of the job. Firefighters (through singing Katy Perry songs during mop-up, telling jokes, etc.) utilize the same strategies of informal interaction in mundane situations. This type of group interplay brings job satisfaction and helps to fight two of the leading causes of burnout: boredom and monotony.

Previous scholarship has not supported venting as a way to relieve stress; however, firefighters found it very useful. In previous studies, venting frustrations has been linked not with reducing anger and stress but increasing it (Tarvis, 1989). Venting angry feelings only kept those feelings active and in turn made the individuals angrier. Bushman (2002) found that people were better off doing nothing at all than venting anger. The findings in this study suggest otherwise. In firefighting, venting used in moderation serves as a way to relieve stress and tension, as well as providing avenues for increased trust and cohesion among crew members. Despite other research findings, firefighters advocate venting as mitigation to stress, which perhaps suggests an area for future research.

Firefighters did not seem to suffer from decreased professional efficacy when burned-out. One previously studied and well-supported symptom of burnout was decreased professional efficacy (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Maslach & Nelson, 2005; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), however wildland firefighters did not demonstrate this. Firefighting attracts individuals with high self-efficacy, stemming from a can-do attitude/culture, so decreased efficacy is not usually an issue in firefighting. Firefighters take immense pride in the work they do, and the pride they feel drives them to complete their work and complete it well. A can-do mentality enables firefighters to cope with job demands even when they are exhausted; thus, doing a mediocre job does not often occur. Furthermore, because of the close-knit nature of crews (acting upon the teamwork Discourse), not completing a task effectively or efficiently is viewed as letting the team down, and this is to be avoided. Competency is a norm in firefighting, and people who choose to fight fire value competency in their work. Therefore, decreased professional efficacy in firefighting is rare.

Practical Applications

This study both confirms and expands upon previous research. Because this study expands on previous fire literature, some practical applications emerge for organizations and individuals alike, including acquiring a balance in the teamwork Discourse, the notion of reverting back to simple tasks while avoiding complacency, and the importance of an end point. Finding a balance within the teamwork Discourse would be a good next step in mitigating burnout. As previously stated, teamwork in firefighting is important but it can be a double-edged sword. Teamwork creates cohesion and camaraderie, which can facilitate firefighters to complete the tough work they do. Embracing the social nuances of crew members helps bolster teamwork. Informal social talking, joking, and using humor helps with the psychological survival of

mundane situations. On the other hand, teamwork can also force firefighters to work too closely

and too often with one another, which can result in conflict, stress, and burnout. It is important

that crew members are aware of their own social limitations, as well as the limitations of their

crew members so that teamwork does not lead to conflict and burnout. This notion begs the

question: What are the best ways to incorporate the ideals of the teamwork Discourse?

Firefighter culture should actively support the positive aspects of teamwork, such as camaraderie

and trust, but it should also provide training in interpersonal conflict management in order to

equip firefighters with mental tools that can diminish the negative effects the teamwork

Discourse can cause.

Additionally, the notion of reverting back to simple activities when feeling burned-out

deserves more attention. Competency in tasks is not desired in firefighters alone; a feeling of

competency is desired in other work life as well. Stress occurs in most jobs and often results in

employees feeling overwhelmed or even burned-out. When one can revert back to a simple task,

it has an enabling quality on an individual's psyche, especially when that individual works in a

can-do culture. Knowledge that completion of the task is possible results in a feeling of

competency. Satisfaction comes from feeling competent, and competency reduces feelings of

burnout. While stopping the process of work and completing a simple task may seem to halt

work progress, the feeling of competency that results in the completion of a simple task will

enable a burned-out individual to return to the work they are doing and complete the task. As

previously discussed, taking breaks is a good way to mitigate burnout, so combining a break with

completion of a simple task related to work may help to relive stress and burnout.

It is important, however, to be aware of the potential dangers that surround an individual

when reverting back to simple tasks to relieve stress. Like the double-edged Discourses noted

above, reverting back to well-known skills can be helpful and harmful. Weick (2002) links fatalities in fire to firefighters regressing to habitual, first-learned, or overlearned responses when under pressure. For example, Don Mackey, in the South Canyon Fire, went from acting like a crew leader who was watching out for situational dangers his crew would encounter to digging a fire line with his head down, unaware of the dangerous blowup that soon occurred (Weick 2002). In the context of burnout, complacency should be avoided when reverting back to simple tasks in hopes of relieving stress. A firefighter should take stock of the potential dangers surrounding him or her prior to engaging in this type of stress-relieving activity.

The importance of a designated end point to the season should not be underestimated. The temporary or seasonal aspect of firefighting serves as a mitigating force for burnout. The knowledge that a mandatory two-day break is coming up or that the entire season will soon come to an end helps can-do firefighters focus on localized and possible goals. It is not out of the ordinary for a can-do individual to push emotional, physical, and mental limits. Often firefighters are not cognizant of pushing limits until it is too late, and burnout results. Thus, focusing on a "light at the end of the tunnel" creates breathing space for firefighters and helps them refocus on the task at hand. It helps them to continue working until the next stopping point allows them to rest and recuperate.

Future Research

While this study has hopefully shed some light on a previously untouched topic, there is much to be learned in the dynamic phenomenon of burnout in firefighting. It would be useful to look at the positive effects bureaucracy can have on burnout. Much of the talk about bureaucracy in firefighters was negative in nature. Bureaucracy gets in the way of what firefighters feel they need to do, it can slow down progress, and it can cause paperwork headaches. But bureaucracy

also serves as a positive force when it comes to burnout. Taking breaks was a vital strategy in mitigating burnout, as proven by the responses of so many firefighters. Large or small, taking a break helped to reduce stress. Few, if any, firefighters mentioned the fact that some of the breaks they participate in are organizationally sanctioned. It could be the rule of two days off after 14 days on or the fact that firefighters are let go at the end of each season, but bureaucratically sanctioned breaks also mitigate burnout in firefighters. This positive role of bureaucracy, as well as other possibilities of bureaucracy enabling work life, could be an interesting area of study.

Furthermore, an analysis of the consequences of repressing feelings of burnout to complete the work at hand deserves further attention. As previously discussed, some firefighters deal with burnout by simple ignoring or "just dealing" with his or her feelings. While some situations do not lend themselves to taking a break, for instance, when fire behavior is aggressive, the consequences of "just dealing" or toughing it out in work tasks is unknown. Does "just dealing" with stressful situations lead to an eventual meltdown or complete burnout? Or is toughing it out a constructive mitigation strategy for dealing with burnout? Further knowledge expanding on repressed feelings of burnout has much to offer scholarship.

Conclusion

Firefighting culture can both be a "trap" and a "tool" (Thackaberry, 2004). The Discourses that firefighters draw upon help mitigate burnout (used as a tool) but also enable situations that cause burnout (used as a trap). This analysis has highlighted the dual power of Discourse in firefighting culture, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of firefighter culture. Firefighters fill a unique niche in the work world in that they can work the amount of hours a "normal" person may work in a year (around 2,000 hours) in just six months. Rather than increasing burnout, the intensity and the seasonal nature of that work motivates firefighters,

especially when equipped with the knowledge that the season will eventually come to an end. When considering burnout, teamwork, a can-do attitude, and bureaucracy work both for and against firefighters. The teamwork-based mentality of firefighters creates camaraderie, pride, and a sense of accomplishment. This closeness also creates a family feel, and firefighters take strength in the fact that they can depend on one another when feeling burned-out. But when firefighters become too close, the teamwork Discourse causes interpersonal conflict and contributes to burnout. Further, a can-do culture helps to motivate firefighters when they are feeling stressed, exhausted, or burned-out. But when a can-do individual encounters an inactive fire season, the monotony of work becomes a major stressor. Also, bureaucracy is important to consider because it can create stress, but it also enforces mandatory rules that protect firefighters. The Discourses related to burnout in firefighting must continue to be managed in order to find optimum balance when experiencing burnout.

This study draws attention to organizational burnout that is manifested in a variety of discursive and material practices that are communicatively managed. It suggests that burnout is not only a result of overarching structures of knowledge, but also a result of the simple interactions that occur between firefighters on a daily basis. Further, this study highlights the specific characteristics of a locale-specific culture that creates and maintains its own standards for behavior and thought. In this study I encountered the Discourses of teamwork, a can-do attitude, and bureaucracy, and drew connections to how these Discourses affected organizational burnout. It is my hope that this study has contributed to an understanding of burnout and highlighted some ways that firefighting culture can be used a "tool" rather than a "trap."

References

American Institute of Stress. (n.d.). Stress in the workplace. Retrieved September 18, 2010,

     from www.stress.org.

Ashcraft, K. L. (2007). Appreciating the "work" of discourse: Occupational identity and

     difference as organizing mechanisms in the case of commercial airline pilots. *Discourse*

     and Communication, 1 (1), 9−36.

Avtgis, T. A., & Taber, K. R. (2006). "I laughed so hard my side hurts, or is that an ulcer?" The

     influence of work humor on job stress, job satisfaction, and burnout among print media

     journalists. *Communication Research Reports,* 23 (1), 13−18.

Avtgis, T. A., Thomas-Maddox, C., Taylor, E., & Patterson, B. R. (2007). The influence of

     employee burnout syndrome on the expression of organizational dissent. *Communication*

     Research Reports 24 (2), 97−102.

Barker, J. R. (1999). *The discipline of teamwork: Participation and concertive control.*

     Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brotheridge, C. M., & Grandey, A. A. (2002). Emotional labor and burnout: Comparing two

     perspectives of "people work." *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 60, 17−39.

Bullis, C. A. & Tompkins, P. K. (1989). The forest ranger revisited: A study of control practices

     and identification. *Communication Monographs*, 56 (4), 287−306.

Bushman, B. J. (2002). Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, rumination,

     distraction, anger, and aggressive responding. *Personality and Social Psychology*

     Bulletin, 28 (6), 724−731.

Cherniss, C., & Kranz, D. L. (1983). The ideological community as an antidote to burnout in the

human services. In *Stress and burnout in the human services professions*. New York:

Pergamon Press.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and

Evaluative Criteria. *Qualitative Sociology,* 13 (1), 3−23.

Cox, T., Tisserand, M., & Taris, T. (2005). The conceptualization and measurement of burnout:

Questions and Directions. *Work & Stress*, 187−191.

Daugherty, J. (2002). Burnout: How sonographers and vascular technologists react to chronic

stress. *Journal of Diagnostic Medial Sonography*, 18, 305−312.

Driessen, J. (2002). Crew cohesion, wildland fire transition, and fatalities. USDA Forest Service

technology and development program. Retrieved from www.bss.sfsu.edu.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes.* Chicago:

University of Chicago Press.

Etzioni, D. (1984). Moderating effect of social support on the stress-burnout relationship.

Journal of Applied Psychology, 69 (4), 615−622.

Evers, W. J., Tomic, W., & Brouwers, A. (2004). Burnout among teachers: Students' and

teachers' perceptions compared. *School of Psychology International*, 25 (2), 131−148.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Putnam, L. (2004). Organizations as discursive constructions.

Communication Theory, 14 (1), 5−26.

Findings from the wildland firefighters human factors workshop. (1996). Technology and

Development Program: Forest Service, 5100-F&AM.

Fire & Aviation Management. (2010). About handcrews. Retrieved October 28, 2010, from,

http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/people/handcrews/about_handcrews.html.

Granovetter, M. (1976). Network sampling: Some first steps. *American Journal of Sociology*, 81

(6), 1287−1303.

Gosset, L. (2007). On members, clients, and passersby: Examining the organizational

identification and communication implications of different temporary worker identities.

Conference papers, National Communication Association, 1−51.

Gossett, L. M. (2006). Falling between the cracks: Control and communication challenges of

temporary workforces. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19 (3), 376−415.

Greenglass, E. R., Burke, R. J., & Fiksenbaum, L. (2001). Workload and burnout in nurses.

Journal of Community and Applied Psychology, 11, 211−215.

National Interagency Fire Center. (2009). Standards for fire and fire aviation operations. Boise,

ID: National Interagency Fire Center.

Halbesleben, J. R., & Demertouti, E. (2005). The construct validity of an alternative measure of

burnout: Investigating the English translations of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory.

Work & Stress, 200−208.

Halbesleben, J. R., Osburn, H. K., & Mumford, M. D. (2006). Action research as a burnout

intervention: Reducing burnout in the federal fire service. *Journal of Applied Behavioral

Science*, 42, 244−263.

Halbesleben, J., & Buckley, M. R. (2004). Burnout in organizational life. *Journal of

Management*, 30 (6), 859−879.

Hatinen, M., Kinnunen, U., Pekkonen, M., & Kalimo, R. (2007). Comparing two burnout

interventions: Perceived job control mediates decreases in burnout. *International

Journal of Stress Management*, 14 (3), 227−248.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Los

Angeles: University of California Press.

Hsieh, A. & Chao, H. (2004). A reassessment of the relationship between job specialization, job

    rotation and job burnout: Example of Taiwan's high-technology industry. *International*

    Journal of Human Resource Management, 15 (6), 1108−1123.

Iacovides, A., Fountoulakis, K., Kaprinis, S., & Kaprinis, G. (2003). The relationship between

    job stress, burnout, and clinical depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 75 (3),

    209−221.

Janesick, V. J. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design: Minuets,

    improvisations, and crystallization. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook*

    of qualitative research (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Killingsworth, M. J., & Palmer, J. (1996). In C. G. Brown (Ed.), *Green culture: Environmental*

    rhetoric in contemporary America. Madison: University of Wisconsin.

Kitaoka-Higashiguchi, K., Nakagawa, H., Morikawa, Y., Ishizaki, M., Miura, K., Naruse, Y., et

    al. (2004). Construct validity of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey. *Work*

    & Stress, 20, 255−260.

Kuhn, T. (2006). A "demented work ethic" and a "lifestyle firm": Discourse, identity, and

    workplace time commitments. *Organization Studies*, 1339−1358.

Lambert, E. G., Hogan, N. L., & Jiang, S. (2010). A preliminary examination of the relationship

    between organizational structure and emotional burnout among correctional staff.

    Howard Journal, 48 (2), 125−146.

Larson, G. S., & Pepper, G. L. (2003). Strategies for managing multiple organizational

    identifications: A case of competing identities. *Management Communication Quarterly,*

    16 (4), 528−557.

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods.* Thousand

      Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Maclean, J. (1999). *Fire on the mountain*. New York: Washington Square Press

Maclean, N. (1992). *Young men and fire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mangan, R. J. (2002). Injuries, illnesses, and fatalities among wildand firefighters. *Fire

      Management Today*, 62 (3), 36−39.

Maslach, C. (1976, September). Burned-out. *Human Behavior*, 16−22.

Maslach, C., & Goldberg, J. (1998). Prevention of burnout: New perspectives. *Applied &

      Preventative Psychology*, 7, 63−74.

Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of

      Occupational Behavior*, 2, 99−113.

Maslach, C., & Nelson, J. (2005, April). How to prevent burnout. *New Zealand Management*,

      40−43.

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W., & Leiter, M. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52,

      397−422.

Miller, K. (1999). *Organizaitonal communication.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

National Interagency Fire Center. (n.d.). About NIFC. Retrieved November 8, 2010, from

      www.nifc.gov.

Reinardy, S. (2006). It's gametime: The Maslach Burnout Inventory measures burnout of sports

      journalists. *J & M C Quarterly*, 83 (2), 397−412.

Ronen, S., & Mikulincer, M. (2009). Attachment orientations and job burnout: The mediating

      roles of team cohesion and organizational fairness. *Journal of Social and Personal*

Relationships, 26 (4), 549−567.

Roy, D. F. (1960). "Banana Time": Job satisfaction and informal interaction. *Human Organization*, 18 (4), 158−168.

Salanova, M., Grau, R. M., & Martinez, I. M. (2005a). Job demands and coping behavior: The moderating role of professional self efficacy. *Piscothema*, 17 (3), 390−395.

Salanova, M., Llorens, S., Garcia-Renedo, M., Burriel, R., Breso, E., & Schaufeli, W. (2005b). Towards a four-dimensional model of burnout: A multigroup factor-analytic study including depersonalization and cynicism. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 65 (5), 807−819.

Schaufeli, W. B., & Greenglass, E. R. (2001). Introduction to special issue on burnout and health. *Psychology and Health*, 16, 501−510.

Schaufeli, W. B., & Peeters, M. C. (2000). Job stress and burnout among correctional officers: A literature review. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 7 (1), 19−48.

Schaufeli, W. B., Leiter, M. P., & Maslach, C. (2009). Burnout: 35 years of research and practice. *Career Development International*, 14 (3), 204−220.

Schutte, N., Toppinen, S., Kalimo, R., & Schaufeli, W. (2004). The factorial validity of the Maslach Burnout Inventory: General survey across occupational groups and nations. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 73, 53−66.

Schwarzer, R., & Hallum, S. (2008). Perceived teacher self-efficacy as a predictor of job stress and burnout: Mediation analysis. *Applied Psychology*, 57, 152−171.

Sharkey, B., Miller, T., & Palmer, C. (2008, March/April). Stress Relief. *Wildfire*, 10−15.

Snyder, J. (2009). The role of coworker and supervisor social support in alleviating the

experience of burnout for caregivers in the human service industry. *Southern*

   Communication Journal, 74 (4), 373−389.

South Canyon Fire Investigation. (1994). Retrieved June 8, 2011 from

   http://www.wildfirelessons.net/documents/S_Canyon_AIReport_1994.pdf.

Sweeney, J. T., & Summers, S. L. (2002). The effect of the busy season workload on public

   accountants' job burnout. *Behavioral Research in Accounting*, 14, 223−245.

Tarvis, C. (1989). *Anger: The misunderstood emotion*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Taylor, J. R., & Robichaud, D. (2004). Finding the organization in the communication:

   Discourse as action and sensemaking. *Organization*, 11, 395−413.

Thackaberry, J. A. (2004). Discursive opening and closing in organizational self-study: Culture

   as a trap and a tool in wildland firefighting safety. *Management Communication*

   Quarterly, 17 (3), 319−359.

Tompkins, P. K. (1994). Principles of Rigor for assessing evidence in qualitative

   communication research. *Western Journal of Communicaiton*, 85, 44−50.

Tompkins, P. K., & Cheney, G. (1983). Account Anaysis. In L. L. Putnam (Ed.),

   Communicaiton and organizations: An interpretive approach (pp. 123−146). Thousand

   Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Tracy, S. J. (2000). Becoming a character for commerce. *Management Communication*

   Quarterly, 14 (1), 90−128.

Tracy, S. J., Myers, K. K., & Scott, C. W. (2006). Cracking jokes and crafting selves:

   Sensemaking and identity management among human service workers. *Communication*

   Monographs, 73(3), 283−308.

van Dijk, T. A. (2007). *Discourse & Communication*: A new journal to bridge two fields.

    Discourse & Communication, 1 (1), 5−7.

Weick, K. (2002). Human factors in fire behavior analysis: Reconstructing the dude fire. *Fire*

    Management Today, 62 (4), 8−15.

Wright, K. B., Banas, J. A., Bessarabova, E., & Bernard, D. R. (2010). A communication

    competence approach to examining health car social support, stress, and job burnout.

    Health Communication, 25, 375−382.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Background Information

What is your age? How many seasons have you been employed as a firefighter? What organization(s) have you worked for as a firefighter? Do you plan on working next fire season?

Construction of Burnout

What are the most challenging things about your job?

Can you give me an example of a time when you or someone you work with felt exhausted?

> Cynical toward other coworkers or the job itself?

> Felt they were not doing a good job?

Do firefighters get burned-out? What do you think is the main cause of stress/burnout in seasonal firefighting?

If you were to describe one of your coworkers as burned-out, how would you describe them? How would they act? What would they do?

Does each season wear on you in a different way?

What do you think about when considering work next season?

Managing/Mitigating Burnout

If you start to feel tired/exhausted/wiped out, what do you do to make yourself feel better?

Is there anything you do that helps you to avoid feeling burned-out?

Can you tell me about a time when you've been at the end of your rope pushing your personal boundaries at work?

What happened after that?

What have you seen other firefighters do when they are stressed, tired, or burned-out?

Is there anything that the organization you work for tells you that helps you deal with being tired/stressed-out/bitter?

A rule?

General common understanding of what firefighters are/do?

Anything coworkers tell you when you start working?

Have you ever observed someone overcoming feelings of burnout by talking/doing something? What did they do?

Have you ever observed a person who doesn't appear to get burned-out? What sets them apart and helps them avoid it?

Is there anything else regarding organizational burnout in your profession that I should know about?