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Walking Away from Crisis and Scarcity Narratives

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Article abstract

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A Genealogy of Refusal: Walking Away from Crisis and Scarcity Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Why can't librarians "Just Say No"? To answer this question, we look at workplace refusal through the fine arts, literature, and popular culture to construct a genealogy of workplace refusal. In it, we also begin to trace a lineage of crisis narrative critique alongside the library profession's inheritance of vocational awe. We explore the librarian's role and voice through the lens of both popular culture and academic publications. In our companion multimedia, hypertextual Scalar project also titled A Genealogy of Refusal: Walking Away from Crisis and Scarcity Narratives, *we contextualize strategies of refusal in libraries through critical response to and annotations of film clips and illustrations. We examine gender differences in portrayals of workplace refusal. We laugh when in* Parks and Recreation *a stereotypical librarian ignores a stripper but warns noisy patrons: "Shh—This is a library!" We are horrified when aspiring librarians in Morgenstern's* Starless Sea, *hands tied behind their backs, have their tongues torn from their mouths. Elinguation as a job prerequisite? No, thanks. The implications of saying "No" are many. We explicate ways librarians are made vulnerable by crisis narratives and constructed scarcity. We advocate for asset framing and developing fluencies in hearing and saying "No." Looking forward, how long will it take librarians to reclaim "Yes" in a way that works for us?*

RÉSUMÉ

*Pourquoi les bibliothécaires ne peuvent pas être en « refus global » ? Pour répondre à cette question, nous examinons le refus en milieu de travail à travers les beaux-arts, la littérature et la culture populaire pour construire une généalogie du refus en milieu de travail. Dans ce geste, nous entamons également la tracée d'une généalogie de critiques narratives de crise aux côtés de l'héritage de la révérence vocationnelle (*vocational awe*) du métier de bibliothécaire. Nous explorons les rôles et la voix des bibliothécaires à travers le prisme de la culture populaire et des publications universitaires. Dans le projet Scalar hypertextuel et multimédia qui accompagne ce texte (également intitulé* A Genealogy of Refusal: Walking Away from Crisis and Scarcity Narratives *(Une généalogie du refus : abandonner des récits de crise et de rareté), nous contextualisons les stratégies de refus dans les bibliothèques à travers une réponse critique et des annotations de clips de films et d'illustrations. Nous analysons les différences genrées dans les représentations du refus en milieu de travail. On rigole quand dans* Parcs et Loisirs *une bibliothécaire stéréotypée ignore une strip-teaseuse mais réprimande les usagèr.e.s bruyant.e.s : « Chut !!!! - On est dans une bibliothèque ! » Nous sommes horrifiées lorsque dans* La Mer sans étoiles *de Morgenstern des bibliothécaires en herbe se font attacher les mains derrière le dos et arracher la langue. L'élinguation comme exigence professionnelle ? Non, merci. Les conséquences du refus sont nombreuses. Nous justifions comment les bibliothécaires sont rendu.e.s vulnérables par les récits de crise et la rareté calculée. Nous défendons la reconnaissance des acquis et le développement de l'aisance à entendre et exprimer le refus. Dans l'avenir, combien de temps faudra-t-il aux bibliothécaires pour réclamer un « oui » qui nous serve ?*

IN the exceptional present, with crisis as an impetus for change, libraries are often called upon to rise to the occasion, embrace opportunity, and adapt to survive. Library staff embrace a "hero in service" ethos across librarianship, whether during times of budget crunch or during the COVID-19 pandemic. These internalized hero narratives drive library staff to go above and beyond the call of service—and not without personal cost. Do library staff need to embrace this hero role? Or are there strategies of refusal we can adopt during crises—external or internal, real or constructed?

To explicate the role of crises and constructed scarcity narratives on libraries and librarianship, we explore examples of impactful workplace refusal. In this paper and

companion multimedia Scalar project,[1] we begin by investigating crisis narratives and our responses to scarcity, both real and constructed. To further our investigation, we created a genealogy of crisis narratives informed by art, music, dance, games, comics, film, television, and literature as an aid for examining explicit refusals in these narratives. In the Scalar genealogy, we include an accompanying ancestry chart that delineates, celebrates, and compares examples of workplace refusal and representations of the library workplace and the role of librarians in popular culture. We dive into literature and media to bring forward readily relatable, sometimes humorous, sometimes serious examples that can guide a productive discussion of impactful workplace refusal in the context of academic libraries. We move on from our exploration of workplace refusal in popular culture to thoughtfully consider how librarians can take up asset framing to avoid the common tropes presented in crisis and scarcity narratives. In this paper, we provide a framework for thinking about crisis narratives in libraries, summarize our methodology, and explore some of the prevalent themes we uncovered. We invite readers to explore our genealogy of refusal and the components of our multimedia project and to join us in our investigation of refusal strategies in literature, media, and academic librarianship. Let's consider together what refusals we can and should make room for in the practice of our profession.

Libraries and Crisis

Crisis narratives are often leveraged by libraries and library leaders in calls for both resilience and innovation, as identified by Emily Drabinski (2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic and the global political turmoil of 2020-2021, the invocation of crisis narratives has been relentless. Across librarianship, from public libraries to academic institutions, K-12 schools and the corporate sector, library staff have risked their lives during the pandemic to provide access to content, to embrace the service ethos, and to support patrons who may or may not acknowledge themselves as potential agents of the virus, thereby further endangering the lives of employees.

Our patrons within the academy continue to expect expanded library services, new releases in our collection holdings, and expensive journal subscriptions, without pushing back against funding cuts to library budgets, further endangering the financial stability of libraries and their employees. These intense budget cut "bust" cycles create, or perpetuate, tangible crises for libraries.

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1. All hyperlinks within this paper direct readers to different entry points into the companion Scalar project also titled A Genealogy of Refusal: Walking Away from Crisis and Scarcity Narratives. This born-digital scholarship format presents ideas in a non-linear collage approach using multiple paths and multimedia.
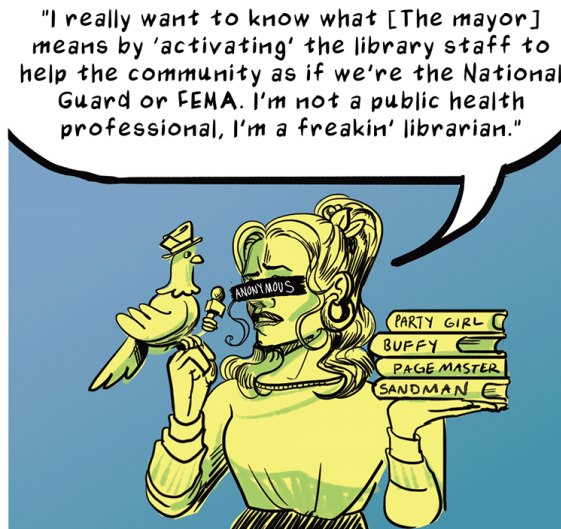
Libraries respond to crises in a way that mimics that of the private sector service industry—despite not being beholden to create profit or please shareholders. Library discourse often draws on the notion of the exceptional present, which requires immediate and exceptional attention to tackle crises; we use these repeated crises to advocate for innovation, resilience, and grit (Drabinski 2016, 34). Crisis narratives frame our response as library employees are called on to "do more with less" and "lean in" to meet the needs of patrons despite decreased staff and resources (Kendrick 2021), or even tasked with thinking about innovation in service amid a global pandemic (Smith et al. 2020). Incessant calls for doing more with less and the constant churn of one crisis after another have significant long-term consequences. Burdens such as low morale, increased anxiety and depression, and ultimately retention problems, disproportionately impact early career librarians, underrepresented minorities, and women (Kendrick 2021). This crisis mentality is an unsustainable future for libraries, their staff, and their users.

Crises, especially those which are constructed to tell a narrative, are "intended to attract attention and assert urgency" (Spector 2019, 22). While Bert Spector articulates several different types of crises narratives, he defines their unifying characteristic as

> the exercise of power built into the process of constructing a claim and embedding it in a narrative. That act of construction is intended to de-contest the meaning of a crisis by fixing the understanding of the narrative. When a particular narrative becomes nonnegotiable, it intends to assert itself as the controlling frame for any and all subsequent discussions and responses. (2019, 161)

In other words, in constructing crises and weaving a narrative, leaders leverage their power to control future conversations within the specific framework of the crises.

Of particular relevance to library literature is the crisis type Spector refers to as the "Once-glorious-kingdom-under-threat" narrative. As the name suggests, this narrative is used to suggest that the current state of things is (or recently was) illustrious and beneficial, yet is besieged by external forces. In addition to this premise is the implicit assumption that "the leader is the protagonist who will confront that threat and return the kingdom to its glory" (Spector 2019, 151). In academic libraries, this narrative likely feels familiar: in addition to claims that libraries were once noble, grandiose entities serving a higher purpose, there are calls for innovation at the hands of a protagonist, charged with changing things for the better. Spector further argues that leaders can use multiple crises to construct larger narratives in efforts to garner additional resources or support. For example, instead of leveraging only the "once-glorious-kingdom-under-threat" narrative, shrewd library leaders can compound it with others, such as the "forces-beyond-our-control" narrative, to reinforce both urgency and their claims for more power.

As emphasized by Drabinski (2016), debates that place librarianship in a state of crisis stem from a desire for power, resources, and the ability to wield those resources. In Naomi Klein's impactful work, *The Shock Doctrine*, she emphasizes how disaster-shocked people still reeling from natural disaster, war, or political unrest are ripe ground for corporate reengineering with chilling consequences (Klein 2007). In the academic community, Seale and Mirza (2019) further describe how library labour becomes feminized, invisible work because of its orientation towards service. Academic librarians feel compelled to compete with their tenured and tenure-track campus colleagues, seeking credit, respect, or prestige, even as time spent on their invisible labour is often under-acknowledged within their own library organizations (Seale and Mirza, 2019). This spirit of competition percolates within the library as well, where the incorporation of achievement culture into librarianship leads to a focus on short-term wins, productivity, and optimization resulting in "competition rather than cooperation" and "transactional relationships" (Farkas 2021). These power- and credit-seeking patterns themselves often appeal to scarcity and constructed crisis narratives for their justifications. Our "Genealogy of Refusal" traces select lineages of workplace refusal amidst this landscape and contextualizes the role of librarians within a cultural inheritance that acknowledges the impacts of constructed scarcity and crisis narrative in librarianship. We are not the first (or only ones) to do so. Eamon Tewell started long before us; his work "'Punk Ass Book Jockeys': Library Anxiety in *Community* and *Parks and Recreation*" includes

these observations by Comedian Amy Poehler, as provided in an *LA Times Magazine* interview (Clare 2011):

> The library represents that branch of government that's like the smart kid—the teacher's favorite…and the library always wins. People who work in the library think they are so much better than everyone else… And what's really funny is we've been doing Q&A's about our show, and people from local governments have said, "You guys nailed it about the library." We were just making it up as a joke, but I guess everyone hates the library. (Poehler in Clare 2011, quoted in Tewell 2014, 11-12)

Tewell and Poehler are onto something. It's long past time we look to thought leaders like Kendrick, quoted above, who teach us the importance of becoming fluent in refusing to compete and the value we get when we emphasize collaboration over competition (Kendrick 2021).

The Hero Narrative and Vocational Awe

The way generations of librarians uncomfortably wear the mantle of our benignant profession perpetuates a genre of hero narratives all its own. These are stories in which librarians as heroic first responders step into the wake of natural disasters, sifting through toppled stacks after earthquakes and salvaging materials after floods. These are stories where librarians rise to the occasion in life-saving acts, administering CPR for patrons having heart attacks or injecting life-saving medicine in the event of an overdose (e.g., King et al. 2020).

The mental, emotional, and physical toll of the hero narrative is hard to shake free from because of the pernicious way vocational awe encourages the librarian to assume the role of their noble profession without complaint. While library staff are engaging in important work of benefit to the communities that libraries serve, sustaining curated collections and knowledge that will be passed along to future generations, the "ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred" (Ettarh 2018). This inability or unwillingness to critique librarianship allows issues that percolate from constructed crisis and scarcity to undermine librarians' agency.

It is a slippery professional slope from hero or rockstar librarian, to martyr librarian, to burn-out. What happens when expectations cross the line? A hero mentality that relies on a vocational identity of self-sacrifice may manifest in library staff endangering themselves and their communities when they should not be, when they cannot effectively say "No." These are the library staff with inadequate protective equipment working in libraries that remained open during a pandemic and risked their lives so unmasked patrons could have access to library materials, or who used

their own cars and time to deliver books to quarantined students stepping out of pandemic isolation wards (Jennifer Parker, private interview, 2021).

This mindset is unsustainable, especially when library staff find themselves thinking of their work as a matter of life and death (a notion reinforced and celebrated by other colleagues, administrators, or local politicians). Using popular literature, our genealogy brings attention to characters like Anna at the onset of the novel *Hench*, who at first fail to critically analyze their situation (Walschots 2020) or understand the damage caused by the hero narrative. Ettarh encapsulates this issue:

> All of these librarians accept and continually re-confirm the expectation that the fulfillment of job duties requires sacrifice (whether that sacrifice is government intimidation or hot coals), and only through such dramatic sacrifice can librarians accomplish something "bigger than themselves" (2018).

The tension of keeping up the pretense that librarianship, like other service professions, requires a whole-hearted commitment to one's profession and gift of oneself to the community ultimately saps employees over time and contributes to rampant burnout (Nagoski and Nagoski 2019).

Vocational awe stifles candid conversations and valid critiques of the profession and the workplace, limiting library employees' ability to impact meaningful change at the local, national, and international levels. Despite growing recognition that librarianship across specializations is riddled with major issues, including racism and sexism, organizational critiques can be interpreted as attacks on Libraries (capital L intentional) and the greater, grandiose, higher purpose they serve. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for individuals who are not confidently well established in the profession to raise concerns without being shut down by traditionalists. Turning again to popular literature, library staff in this burnt-out state can readily identify with the Murderbot, protagonist of the award-winning *Murderbot Diaries* series, who features in our genealogy. Murderbot does not volunteer to take on more work or seek prestige; it instead works to create efficiencies so it has more time to enjoy personal time. Murderbot rejects vocational awe, yet is no less effective as it renegotiates its relationship with work and team members (Wells 2017). Perhaps librarians, like Murderbot, can learn to say "I am not your hero."

In order to better understand the academic librarian's inheritance of vocational awe we built a timeline in our Scalar project to help us visualize our profession's growing self-awareness. Looking at how scholarly and critical milestones intersect with librarianship and popular culture empowers us to craft a new language of the workplace—a language that encourages librarians to listen, say, and hear one another when they say "I prefer not to."

Just Say No

Calls for innovation, resilience, and courage in the face of crises are never-ending; so why don't librarians "Just Say No"? What happens when library workers choose to refuse these calls, and instead embrace the slow mentality set forth by Glassman (2017), Farkas (2021), and Christen and Anderson (2019)? These authors, while offering their own nuanced perspectives, all put forward the notion that the job of information professionals and stewards of cultural heritage is not to move quickly, but instead to move intentionally. In the embracing of *slow* we can provide better support to our patrons, be actively anti-oppression, and treat our work with the care it deserves. This work is complemented by the Maintainers movement, which concerns itself with concepts of maintenance, infrastructure, repair, and the expert labour that sustains human society. As with the slow movement, the Maintainers advocate for reflection and research to bring about a more caring environment. The founders of the Maintainers describe how "a big part of the problem around maintenance work and occupational roles that focus on maintenance is that they have low social status" (The Maintainers 2019). In learning to identify constructed scarcity, in learning to put aside the burdens of vocational awe, in becoming fluent in hearing and saying "No," we can instead say "yes" to collaborating with and incorporating the resonate concepts of the slow movement and The Maintainers.

Any account of librarians' difficulties in just saying "no" must consider how library work has been classified as "women's work" and explore how issues of gender operate in tandem with vocational awe to mute the voice of refusal in the library profession. Within librarianship "service is imbricated with value propositions, gender hierarchies, labor practices, and epistemologies" (Brown 2018, 262). While this statement was written about digital humanities work in particular, it resonates with librarianship, especially when examining the "ways that are deeply gendered, often irrespective of individual intentions, as consequences of systemic patterns of meaning, ways of knowing, and habits of feeling" (Brown 2018, 262). Although librarianship remains a heavily feminized profession, data shows that although most "library directors are women, the percentage of directors who are men exceeds the percentage of librarians who are men. Also, men's salaries tend to be higher than women's, even for the same position" (ALA 2007). The library and information studies literature has repeatedly demonstrated (e.g., Seale and Mirza 2019; Tillman 2018; Askey and Askey 2017; Nowviskie 2015) that women in librarianship more often take on roles (either through self-selection or matter of opportunity) related to care, emotional labour, organization, and coordination as they perform service-oriented duties like outreach, reference, liaison, and instruction.

A full review of the issues relating to gender and librarianship is beyond the scope of our work; however, we believe it critical to account for how gender and minority status is tied to power, position, and privilege, which combine to impact not only our experiences but also our ability to refuse. The authors, as cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied women, recognize that we have a significant amount of privilege and power. All of this impacts not only our ability to say "No," but also our worldview, the media we consume and identify with, and the strategies of refusal that feel most within reach for us. Librarians need to work on refusing to "innovate" simply for the sake of innovating and at the cost of maintaining essential services. We need to work on our refusal to do more with less at the cost to ourselves. How do we build a vocabulary that empowers us all to say "No"? But simply saying "No" is rarely easy or straightforward. In reality, crises in libraries (real or constructed) are multifaceted and therefore often require multifaceted responses. Attention to strategies of refusal is limited in the academic library literature. Professional development opportunities do not yet teach the fluencies we need. We must develop a robust support system and align fluencies to support refusal for those with differing levels of power, position, and privilege. We must also look beyond these traditional avenues of knowledge-seeking and skill-building to find other ways forward.

## Motivation and Methodology: Initiating a Genealogy of Refusal

In our companion multimedia project, we explore how fiction and popular culture could inform the way we promulgate or refuse crisis and scarcity narratives in librarianship. We interact with stereotypes and stories of workplace refusal, linking them together in the context of short multimedia essays that explore the outcomes of such refusals. This work emphasizes juxtapositions: a sort of collage. We make nonlinear and broad leaps across genres, disciplines, and topics to inspire and invite readers to explore new avenues. Those exploring our multimedia piece may find the approach disorienting at times. Nevertheless, we opted to introduce new topics and themes related to crisis and scarcity in librarianship using non-linear multimedia as our venue for exploring (rather than the familiar linear structure and analysis one might find in a book) because of the opportunities it provides for discovery. We hope our collage approach creates opportunities for new insights to be uncovered, even in spite of (or perhaps because of!) frustrations that may arise.

The genesis of our work is collaborative in nature. To explore our topic we co-created and curated a bibliography of works related to the topic of workplace refusal that we took up in both playful and thought-provoking ways through weekly discussions. Those recurring discussions allowed us to explore the interplay between the theory we were reading, our lived experiences, and the media we were

consuming, which ultimately culminated in the short essays and content selections that comprise our multimedia project. Throughout our Scalar multimedia project, we have drawn from references that resonate with us. As we will throughout this essay and the companion piece, we invite the readers to contribute: their personal stories; literature, movies, or other media that resonate with their lived experiences; or even just to reflect on what an intersectional approach to this piece—one that recognizes the gender and racial nuances that persist throughout our lives—might look like.

Drawing from refusal examples we were familiar with, we created a kinship diagram of workplace refusal featured below and in our companion multimedia project. The influencers and works depicted in the diagram of our "Genealogy of Refusal" rose to prominence based on how compelling, funny, or informative they were as a fit for our thought experiments about workplace refusal in academic libraries. But as Stuart Hall emphasizes, when we look to popular culture and media for examples of workplace refusal, we have to remember that the media we mine not only reflects reality but also "produces" it while at the same time it "reproduces" the dominant cultural order (Hall 2006).

While librarians have effectively used crises, both real and fabricated, to rally for change and resilience, far less attention has been paid to the efforts of refusal. Our genealogy chart is both an illustration of and a guide to how we explore strategies of refusal in our companion Scalar project. We emphasize gender across our kinship diagram. This is intentional; on the left side of our diagram, we illustrate how fictional examples of workplace refusal tend to take a male protagonist's point of view—where men are free to refuse. On the right side of our diagram, we position the *Parks and Recreation* "Shhh!" librarian (2015) and Morgenstern's elinguated acolyte (2019). These women librarian characters—the silencer and the silenced—are each burdened by the inheritance of vocational awe (as defined by Ettarh 2018). Unwilling or unable to refuse professional norms and practices, these librarians follow the expectations of their role to the level of absurdity: the former is ludicrously silencing a patron while her coworker dances nude, while the other is quite literally silenced by vocational awe and adherence to professional norms. While a full analysis of silence, fear, and gender as individual and intersecting concepts is beyond the scope of this project, these instances can be viewed as entries into the conversations around power and refusal (or lack thereof).

FIGURE 2 Genealogy of Refusal Kinship Diagram.
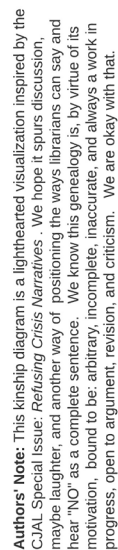
In popular culture and fiction, images of female professionals or librarians successfully refusing are few and far between. Radford and Radford posit that fear is "the fundamental organizing principle, or code, through which representations of libraries and librarians are manifest in modern popular cultural forms such as novels, movies, and television shows" and "the means by which the presence of the library setting, and the librarian characters within them, are to be understood" (2001, 300). Yet we see in the middle of our diagram other examples of feminist and un-gendered assertion. This bookended space for refusal between gendered stereotypes is one we particularly want to explore. Our genealogy therefore includes a wide-ranging look at the NO/YES manifestos in dance, alongside generations of gender-norm defying characters like Barbara Gordon's *Batgirl* (DC Comics, 1974), Parker Posey's character in *Party Girl* (1995), the Murderbot in *All Systems Red* (Wells 2017), and the protagonist Anna in *Hench* (Walschots 2021). This feminist middle ground is a space where librarians can develop collective responses to scenarios of constructed scarcity, where we can assert self-interest, where we can develop our fluency in hearing and saying "No."

Science fiction is a particularly important medium for analyzing the intersections of workplace refusal, crises, and scarcity narratives "because S[cience] F[iction] is so widely and popularly received— not just by a broad popular audience but also by significant business interests—as realistic projection or prediction" (McCutcheon 2016, 152). In "The Dangers of Cynical Sci-Fi Disaster Stories," Cory Doctorow pulls on this thread to describe how "made-up stories, even stories of impossible things, are ways for us to mentally rehearse our responses to different social outcomes" (2020). He remarks on how Daniel Dennett's conception of an intuition pump—"a thought experiment structured to allow the thinker to use their intuition to develop an answer to a problem"—suggests that fiction (which is, after all, an elaborate thought experiment) is not merely entertainment. While science fiction authors often engage in world-building, creating entire universes with rules that differ from those their audience are accustomed to, these thought-experiments often reflect current reality, even if shrouded in metaphor. As described by renowned science fiction and fantasy author Ursula K Le Guin (1979, 156),

> the purpose of a thought-experiment … is not to predict the future—indeed Schrodinger's most famous thought-experiment goes to show that the "future," on the quantum level, cannot be predicted—but to describe reality, the present world. Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive. All fiction is metaphor. Science fiction is metaphor….The future, in fiction, is a metaphor.

We explore the ways in which satire is rich for much the same reasons, to look at our present day situation through the lens of popular culture and extremes,

developing along the way an appreciation for the language of refusal. There is a long scholarly history surrounding satire. As a form of humour, satire has historically been employed as a call to moral change in society, a chance to reflect a critical lens back at the viewer to highlight shortcomings in individuals, governments, and companies (Gilmore 2018, 3-4). Satire is highly dependent not only on the creator and the target(s), but also the audience: whether or not something is satirical depends highly on those consuming the media (Gilmore 2018, 15). In this project, we employ the use of the term satire in a more colloquial fashion meant more to elicit laughter than larger changes and recognize that our examples draw heavily from the Western tradition.

As emblematic of the popular expression, "If you don't laugh, you'll cry," satiric representations of the workplace are often funny for how relatable they are: we identify with the character asked to go above the bare minimum; we understand the frustration of being critiqued when others act poorly (e.g., Parks and Recreation); we laugh as we play along as the intern learns to say "NO" (e.g., *Say No! More*). Or, in instances of refusal, these comedic depictions allow us to indulge our "what ifs": What if we could spend the day not working, like in *Clerks* (1994)? What if we could yell at our patronizing manager before storming out, like in *Office Space* (1999)?

"I Would Prefer Not To"

The founding family member in our kinship diagram of workplace refusal is Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1853). He anchors multiplicitous threads and lineages as we explore workplace refusal. The premise of the story is rather straightforward. Bartleby, a new hire in a legal firm, refuses to work and constantly repeats the phrase "I would prefer not to." With five simple words, Bartleby disrupts the workplace, causing a stir. Bartleby's continued refusals become allegorical as he eventually ceases work altogether and stands facing a brick wall. Bartleby at the wall is the ultimate metaphor of refusal. While his motivations are unclear, the story makes evident that Bartleby's refusal to work exposes uncomfortable truths about labour, capital, and human worth that his employer and co-workers have left unexamined.

Despite its brevity, the tale of Bartleby is rich for exploring workplace refusal: What does it look like to be an individual refuser? What does it mean to be a coworker of a refuser? What does it mean to supervise a refuser? How does refusal in fact become a term of acceptance? We move on from Bartleby to consider the library profession's readiness for a new workplace language where "No" is a complete sentence. Which begs the question of what refusal can we take up? What are the ways forward? Sara Ahmed reminds us that "You need more than a right to say no for no to be effective" (2017; emphasis in the original).

There's even a game for that now: *Say No! More* (Studio Fizbin 2021). In the virtual world, players are interns at a new company, where they are told to say "YES" to everything. The protagonist of *Say No! More* learns how to say "no," shocking coworkers and disrupting the status quo throughout the company. However, it is worth recognizing that this character cannot always say no— and in fact occasionally remains silent. The game puts players right into the scenario Sarah Ahmed writes about when she observes that

> if your position is precarious you might not be able to afford **no**. You might say yes if you cannot afford to say **no**, which means you can say yes whilst disagreeing with something. This is why the less precarious might have a political obligation to say no on behalf of or alongside those who are more precarious (Ahmed 2017).

FIGURE 3   Screenshot from video game *Say No! More* by Studio Fizbin, 2021. Screenshots by the authors.

The game's positive reviews often share stories of catharsis, proof that librarians will not be alone while we are developing our fluency in saying "No." Further developing a common acceptance of the language of "No" allows us to examine the dead-ends and false turns workplace responses to crisis narratives can take. Saying "No" can be a no-win game in the workplace. As Ahmed further describes:

> You might be free to say **no** but your **no** is heard as destructive; hearings have consequences (becoming a killjoy is a consequence)…. And then **no** becomes judged not only as how you stop others from doing something, but how you stop yourself from being something… They might not stop you from saying **no** but they make it costly for you to say **no**.

That is why we created a genealogy of workplace refusal in the first place. By learning together how to read the story of refusal, we can refer to a common narrative. We can instead write and think and negotiate other ways forward that are informed by fictional, feminist, anti-racist, pro-labour, and abundant points of view.

Walking Away

Here we, the authors, reject the normative article structure and end not with a concluding paragraph, but instead with a call to action. Come join us in our Genealogy of Refusal: Walking Away from Crisis and Scarcity Narratives. We invite you to interrogate crisis narratives through this interactive, multimodal project built on the Scalar platform. This open-source, semantic web authoring and publishing platform from the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture offers us a non-traditional avenue beyond text to explore ideas outside the structure of the academic paper and beyond the norms of the ivory tower. You may wish to navigate through our predetermined layout of the project using the Table of Contents—starting with an exploration of how crisis narratives frame our response, moving through avenues for developing fluency for hearing and saying "No," and concluding by advocating for asset framing, a way to shift narratives to focus on aspirations and contributions (Shorters 2018). This is the default path we curated in Scalar, but it is by no means the only one. Alternatively, you can approach our work through the multiple paths page, which provides different avenues for analyzing the various themes and content we have selected, such as navigating the project through the core concepts presented in the glossary. We encourage you to investigate the connections between the Scalar content—are there any connections that are missing or superfluous? Lastly, we invite you to explore the Genealogy of Refusal Timeline to see the temporal progression of the works we have chosen. From Melville's 1853 *Bartleby* to the 2021 video game *Say No! More*, saying "No" in the workplace has always been fraught. What can this tell us about refusal in librarianship, if anything?

We welcome contributions—suggest additional content for our Zotero library, or interact with the Scalar project using Hypothes.is, a tool that allows users to highlight and annotate the project. This companion multimedia project is meant to be more than just a multimedia piece—instead, this is a place where readers can become writers. Let's use it to embark on collaborative asset framing and learn how (and when!) to collectively and individually strategically refuse.

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