Burnout among teachers: theoretical setting, top-down innovation, and social relations
Evers, W.J.G.

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CHAPTER 5

The moderating effect of equity sensitivity on the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and teacher burnout

Abstract

The present study focuses on a relatively unexplored topic, namely the influence of equity sensitivity on the relationship between self-efficacy and teacher burnout.

The primary aim of this study was to examine the moderating effect of equity sensitivity on the relationship between self-efficacy and the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievement.

The second aim was to investigate possible ways of strengthening teachers' self-efficacy to enable them to adequately cope with burnout.

A total of 271 secondary school teachers (65% male and 35% female) participated in this study. Three questionnaires dealing with burnout, self-efficacy, and equity sensitivity were administered.

The findings show that equity sensitivity has a significant though small moderating effect on the relationship between perceived self-efficacy and two dimensions of burnout, i.e. emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. No empirical evidence was found for the moderating effect of equity sensitivity on the relationship between self-efficacy and depersonalization. Implications of the study's findings will be discussed.

Introduction

Burnout

Burnout is a construct composed of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. People working as human service professionals are the most likely

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victims of burnout (Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996; Freudenberger, 1974; Glass & McKnight, 1996; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Many researchers regard burnout as the individual's response to negative job stressors (Burke et al., 1996; Byrne, 1991; Cherniss, 1980; Friedman, 1993; Jayaratne & Chess, 1986; Jenkins & Calhoun, 1991; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Miller, Reesor, McCarrey, & Leikin, 1995; Parkay, Greenwood, Olejnik, & Proller, 1988). Burnout is found to be related to negative outcomes for the individual, the organization, and society in general (Burke & Richardsen, 1996; Burke et al., 1996; Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Buunk, 1998).

Research on burnout is still very necessary, for although the definition cited above has gained widespread acceptance, there is no general agreement on whether burnout is the cause or the result of depression (Glass & McKnight, 1996), on its antecedents (Burke et al., 1996), or on the group of people to which it applies (only human service workers? Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, p. 10, 1993). With respect to the latter remark, there is one category of human service workers, i.e. teachers, who are prominently afflicted by burnout (Albertson & Kagan, 1987; Burke & Greenglass, 1993; Friedman, 1996; Merseth, 1992; CBS [Statistics Netherlands], 1999; Van Horn & Van Dierendonck, 1998).

Burnout and self-efficacy in teaching

In attempting to alleviate the consequences of burnout, many studies have tried to develop and test interventions that would help burned out individuals to recover from the symptoms of this syndrome. One prerequisite for an intervention is the availability of instruments in order to be able to diagnose who is on the verge of falling victim to burnout.

Perceived self-efficacy ("...beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments", Bandura, 1997, p. 3) appears to be significantly related to someone's future actions, i.e. intended actions that can be manipulated. Many other researchers have supported Bandura's findings (Deforest & Hughes, 1992; Parkay et al., 1988; Rich, Lev, & Fisher, 1996; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Vrugt, 1995). Low levels of self-efficacy appear to be related to relatively high levels of burnout, and high levels of self-efficacy to low levels of burnout (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1997; Borg & Falzon, 1993). With respect to the teaching profession, too, a significant relationship has been found between burnout and perceived self-efficacy, specified for the domain of classroom management activities (Brouwers & Tomic, 1998; Evers, Brouwers,
Tomic, & Van Alphen, 2001; Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, in press; Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990).

Enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997) may strengthen or weaken an individual’s self-efficacy level and consequently influence the individual’s actions. These two features of the perceived self-efficacy construct that stand out, i.e. predictability of future behavior and malleability may be very useful when devising intervention programs. Self-efficacy beliefs are malleable in that they can be lowered or raised depending on cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes of the individual, they are domain specific, and can be trained with the help of others. Studies referring to successful interventions in the human service professions are manifold (Bandura, 1997; Eden & Aviram, 1993; Kaufman Kantor, Caudill, & Ungerleider, 1992; Maddux, 1995; Vrugt, 1995). For that matter, perceived self-efficacy manipulations even appeared to be successful when providing false efficacy feedback (Neufeld & Thomas, 1977).

**Equity sensitivity**

It would be presumptuous to claim that one theory could explain human behavior in all its complexity. We have therefore turned to Adams’s (1965) equity theory, which sheds light on the way someone compares the experienced inputs and outcomes of his own behavior to the input/output ratio of comparable others. In other words, this theory offers an explanation for the personal consequences in all those situations in which people consider their own input/output ratio as being unfair.

In the case of the *perception* of inequity, people sometimes experience feelings of distress (Sprecher, 1986; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). As these feelings are unpleasant, individuals try to redress the situation of perceived inequity (Adams, 1963, 1965; Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1985; King, Miles, & Day, 1993). It was found that individuals differ in their perceptions of and reactions to inequity depending on their sensitivity to inequity, conceptualized as *equity sensitivity* (Huseman et al., 1985, 1987; Miles, Hatfield, & Huseman, 1989; Patrick & Jackson, 1991). Consequently, each individual can be categorized on an equity sensitivity continuum as a benevolent, an equity sensitive, or an entitled person. Huseman et al. (1985, 1987) posited that the first category prefers inputs to exceed outcomes, or has a greater ‘tolerance’ for inputs (King & Miles, 1994). Equity sensitive persons prefer inputs to equal outcomes, and entitled persons prefer outcomes to exceed inputs. Benevolent
persons, compared with entitled persons, seem to be less vulnerable to feelings of distress when they perceive that their inputs exceed their outcomes when contrasted with comparable others.

**Equity sensitivity and self-efficacy**

Equity sensitivity findings are interesting within the context of explaining and understanding someone’s future behavior. The equity sensitivity theory appears to be linked with job satisfaction, future behavior, and social environments, for example (Huseman et al., 1985; King et al., 1993; Miles, Hatfield, & Huseman, 1994), all of which are also important issues within the self-efficacy construct.

The main difference between the two constructs is the fact that someone's self-efficacy beliefs can be lowered or raised, and that they vary across activity domains (Bandura, 1997, p. 53), whereas someone's equity sensitivity is a fixed personality trait. The present study explores the significance of the moderating effect of the personality trait equity sensitivity on the correlation between self-efficacy and teacher burnout.

If we look at the difficulties researchers encounter when trying to determine the antecedents of burnout, it will be clear that a refinement of the existing instruments would be very welcome. Besides by measuring someone's self-efficacy level, it would be helpful to understand the onset of burnout by determining someone's place on the equity sensitivity continuum. Someone's equity sensitivity has already been found to be related to such issues as job satisfaction, an important indicator of burnout (Van Yperen, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1992; Wu & Short, 1996).

The present paper posits that a teacher’s equity sensitivity moderates the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout and by measuring this moderating effect, it becomes possible to improve the applied instruments' prognostic value with respect to the origin and development of burnout. As a result, future intervention programs may be better attuned to the participating teachers.

**Equity sensitivity, self-efficacy, and the dimensions of burnout**

**Emotional exhaustion**

Benevolent teachers are inclined to give. However, the more benevolent low-efficacy teachers are the greater risk they run of suffering from emotional exhaustion. The explanation is that benevolents who have a low level of self-efficacy will experience many failures in their
attempts to give. Feelings of distress leading to emotional exhaustion are likely to develop. Entitled teachers are not inclined to give and do not perceive the lack of inputs owing to their incompetence as a problem, so they do not have feelings of distress leading to emotional exhaustion.

Depersonalization

According to the equity theory (Huseman et al., 1985), it is likely that low-efficacy benevolent teachers wish to cease having a relationship with their students. Since that is professionally impossible, they are forced to perceive the unwanted relationship differently and develop a coping strategy of depersonalization characterized by negative and callous behavior. Compared to benevolent teachers, entitled teachers prefer an outcome/input ratio in which outcomes prevail, so they will probably be concerned not only about their relationship with their students, but about other work-related outcomes as well. These work-related outcomes may be quite satisfying and thus help maintain their original behavior in relations with their students.

Personal accomplishment

Benevolent teachers who have high levels of self-efficacy will perform successfully, i.e., successfully contribute inputs to the educational and social relationships with their students, and thus strengthen their feelings of competence. The entitled teachers, who are not focused on giving, will mainly benefit from a high level of personal accomplishment through material or financial rewards to heighten their self-efficacy level. As these rewards are mostly absent in a teacher's career, there will probably not be strong moderating effect of equity sensitivity on personal accomplishment.

In view of the theoretical reflections in the preceding parts, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Equity sensitivity has a stronger moderating effect on the relationship between self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion in benevolent teachers than in entitled teachers.

Hypothesis 2: Equity sensitivity has a stronger moderating effect on the relationship between depersonalization and self-efficacy in benevolent teachers than in entitled teachers.

Hypothesis 3: Equity sensitivity has a stronger moderating effect on the relationship between personal accomplishment and self-efficacy in benevolent teachers than in entitled teachers.
Chapter 5

Method

Participants

We asked 545 teachers of 12 secondary schools in the Netherlands to participate in our study. As our country consists of twelve Provinces (comparable to counties), we selected 1 school at random per Province. The total number of respondents was 271; 175 participants were male (64.6%) and 96 were female (35.4%). Their average age was 45.57 years (SD = 8.39), with a range of 23 to 62 years. The average teaching experience in years was 18.99 (SD = 9.25) with a range of 1 to 39 years. Dutch secondary education employs teachers of the first (academic training), second and third degree (teacher training colleges). 41.1% of our respondents were first degree teachers, 44.1% second degree, and 14.3% third degree teachers, while 0.4% of our respondents were not qualified at all. The average number of hours spent in the classroom was 21.6 (SD = 5.87), ranging from 7 to 33 hours.

In comparison with a recent national study among secondary school teachers, with 3004 respondents, (Berkhout, Zijl, & Van Praag, 1998) the sample of the present study was representative in terms of sex ($\chi^2(1) = 0.66, p > .05$, and in terms of age ($t(3273) = 0.06, p > .05$).

As 545 teachers were approached and 271 teachers participated, the response rate was 50%, which is not only adequate according to Babbie (1994), but also in accordance with the findings of Asch, Jedrzewski, and Christakis (1997).

Procedure

We first at random called several school principals per Province to explain the purpose of our study and asked for their cooperation. When the principals agreed, we at random selected one school per Province and sent self-report questionnaires on burnout, self-efficacy, and equity sensitivity to the selected school. The teachers were asked to complete the questionnaires. To ensure a high response rate, the teachers were sent a written reminder. They were asked to return the completed forms anonymously in postage-paid envelopes. We used telephone reminders for school principals, for according to Asch et al. (1997) telephone reminders are associated with higher response rates.

To obtain the highest possible response rate, we followed the suggestions made by Green and Hutchinson (1996) as far as possible.
Measures

Burnout

Burnout was measured using the Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory for teachers (MBI-NL-Ed, Schaufeli & Van Horn, 1995; Schaufeli, Daamen, & Van Mierlo, 1994; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The questionnaire has been shown to be reproducible and valid (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Leiter & Durup, 1994; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996, 1997). The questionnaire consisted of 20 items divided into three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion (8 items), Depersonalization (5 items), and Personal Accomplishment (7 items). The items are measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 'never' to 'every day'. Scores on the scales are added separately. High scores on the scales Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization, and low scores on the Personal Accomplishment scale are indicative of burnout. Examples of Emotional Exhaustion items are: “I feel emotionally drained because of my work”; “I feel burned out because of my work”. Examples of Depersonalization items are “I’ve become more callous toward people since I took this job”; “I feel students blame me for some of their problems”. Examples of Personal Accomplishment items are “I feel encouraged after working closely with my recipients”; and “I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job”. In a study among secondary school teachers (N = 916), Schaufeli and Van Horn (1995) found Cronbach’s alphas of .87, .71 and .78, respectively. Cronbach’s alphas of the MBI_NL-Ed in the present study were .87, .71, and .80, respectively, which is adequate according to the criterion of .70 suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy was measured using the Dutch version of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) developed by Sherer, Maddux, Mercandante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs, and Rogers (1982). The original scale consisted of 17 items that were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Later, 5 items were removed (Woodruff & Cashman, 1993). Bosscher and Smit (1998) translated the 12-item scale into the Dutch language (GSES-12) and found among 2860 elderly participants a Cronbach’s alpha of .69. Examples are “When I make a mistake I am just going to do my utmost”, and “I suffer from self-doubts”. Cronbach’s alpha of the GSES-12 in the present study was .78.

Equity Sensitivity

Equity sensitivity was measured by the Equity Sensitivity Instrument (ESI) developed by Huseman, Hatfield, and Miles (1985). The scale was adapted for the teaching profession in
such a way that the word ‘organization’ was altered to read ‘school’. The instrument consists of five items, with each stem being followed by two statements. The participants are asked to divide 10 points between the two statements in each set. One example is “It would be more important for me to: A. Help others; B. Watch out for my own good”. The added scores of the items decide a person's place on a continuum ranging from highly benevolent (having scored a theoretical maximum of 50 points) to highly entitled (having scored a theoretical minimum of 0 points). Previous studies using ESI yielded Cronbach’s alphas of .80 (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1985) and .86 (O’Neill & Mone, 1998). Cronbach’s alpha of the ESI in the present study was .81.

**Results**

Only completely filled out questionnaires were analyzed (N = 271).

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>45.57</td>
<td>8.39</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>(.81)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Experience</td>
<td>18.99</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.79**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Equity</td>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>28.09</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>(.79)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>41.48</td>
<td>6.51</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>(.79)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Depersonalization</td>
<td>6.96</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>(.70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Emotional</td>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
<td>17.66</td>
<td>8.23</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>(.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Personal</td>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>25.80</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>.43**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P < .05; **P < .01

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, the correlations between the variables and Cronbach's alphas. The reliability of the variables is for depersonalization .70, for self-efficacy .79, for personal accomplishment .80, for equity sensitivity .81, and for emotional...
exhaustion .87. Except for depersonalization (.70) the internal consistency of the questionnaires is sufficient for group research in the present study, which is, moreover, correlational in nature. The reliability of all the variables appears to be .70 or higher, meaning that their internal consistency is sufficient for research purposes (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Equity sensitivity and self-efficacy are positively correlated. Self-efficacy is negatively correlated with two of the three burnout dimensions, i.e. depersonalization and emotional exhaustion, and positively correlated with personal accomplishment. Equity sensitivity is negatively correlated with depersonalization, positively with personal accomplishment and has no significant correlation with emotional exhaustion.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicting Variable</th>
<th>Depersonalization</th>
<th>Emotional Exhaustion</th>
<th>Personal Accomplishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.07**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity Sensitivity</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE X ES</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall F for Equation</td>
<td>8.03**</td>
<td>6.02**</td>
<td>16.77**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R is the standardized regression coefficient of the full regression equation with all predictor variables. The increase of R² for the variables in one step is based on the F-test for the step in question.
Hierarchical regression analysis was applied to examine the moderating effect of equity sensitivity on the relationships between self-efficacy and the burnout dimensions. For each burnout dimension, we entered the control variables age, gender, and experience in the first step of the regression equation. The independent variables equity sensitivity and self-efficacy were entered in the second step. Finally, in the third step, we computed the product of these variables, describing the interaction between the two variables.

The first regression equation tested the hypothesis that equity sensitivity moderates the effect of self-efficacy on emotional exhaustion. The interaction term (self-efficacy X equity sensitivity) showed a significant effect on emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .01$), which indicates that equity sensitivity influences the effect of self-efficacy on emotional exhaustion in the direction suggested in the hypothesis (Table 2).

![Figure 1. Equity Sensitivity as a Moderator of Self-Efficacy and Emotional Exhaustion](image)

To show the interaction effect in diagram form, Figure 1 plots the relationship between self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion at high and low levels of equity sensitivity, i.e. half a standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively. Figure 1 demonstrates that the significant relationship between self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion was stronger for benevolent teachers than for more entitled teachers.
In the second regression equation, we examined the hypothesized moderating effect of equity sensitivity on the relationship between self-efficacy and depersonalization. Table 2 shows that the interaction term (self-efficacy X equity sensitivity) was not significant ($\beta = -0.08$, non-significant) and that there was no incremental change in $R^2$.

Third, the hypothesis was tested that equity sensitivity moderates the effect of self-efficacy on personal accomplishment. The interaction term (self-efficacy X equity sensitivity) showed a significant effect on personal accomplishment ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$), which indicates that equity sensitivity influences the effect of self-efficacy on personal accomplishment in the direction suggested in the hypothesis (Table 2). The significant incremental change in $R^2$ was .03, significant for $p < .01$.

![Equity Sensitivity as a Moderator of Self-Efficacy and Personal Accomplishment](image)

Figure 2. Equity Sensitivity as a Moderator of Self-Efficacy and Personal Accomplishment

To show the interaction effect in diagram form, Figure 2 plots the relationship between self-efficacy and personal accomplishment at high (half a standard deviation above the mean) and low levels of equity sensitivity (half a standard deviation below the mean). Figure 2 shows that the significant relationship between self-efficacy and personal accomplishment is stronger for more benevolent teachers than for entitled teachers. In conclusion we can say that
for benevolent teachers, the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout seems to be more negative than for teachers with a low sense of equity sensitivity (the entitleds).

**Discussion**

The aim of the present study was to examine whether equity sensitivity has a moderating effect on the relationships between self-efficacy and the three dimensions of burnout, i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment.

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that equity sensitivity moderates the relationship between self-efficacy and two dimensions of the burnout construct. In the case of hypothesis 1, we found a significant, though small effect of equity sensitivity on the relationship between self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion, indicating that efficacious benevolent teachers run a greater risk of getting emotionally exhausted than entitled teachers do.

When someone shows symptoms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization is not far behind. However, in our study we found that hypothesis 2, the effect of equity sensitivity on the relationship between self-efficacy and depersonalization, was not confirmed. According to the equity theory, feelings of distress and frustration lead to the termination of a particular cognitive or actual relationship, in this case with students (Huseman et al., 1985). As actual withdrawal from the relationship is unlikely to take place, because it would mean the loss of a job and income, the only alternative is to adopt the cognitive, distress causing withdrawal. In the literature, however, only a relationship has been found between equity sensitivity and the tendency to leave a job (O'Neill & Mone, 1998; Wolpin, Burke, & Greenglass, 1991). We suggest a few explanations for our erratic results with regard to depersonalization. First, the MBI uses only 5 items to test depersonalization and results show that the depersonalization dimension is occasionally somewhat less reliable than the other two dimensions of burnout. We came across low reliabilities for the MBI depersonalization scale of only .46 (Betgem & Scheppink, 1993; Van Gorp, Schaufeli, & Hopstaken, 1993) and .52 (Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers, 2001). The question is whether the depersonalization score truly indicates depersonalization in so far as it is caused by students only. Iwanicki (1983), for instance, incorporates relationships not only with students, but also with parents and colleagues into the depersonalization dimension. Second, teachers often call their jobs a vocation. Cherniss (1995) found that people in the human services who harbor a set of confirmed ideals, e.g.
nuns, do not show symptoms of burnout. A teacher knows and morally accepts that inequity in his relationship to students is an essential part of the job. Teachers focus on and are trained in conveying knowledge, and in assisting students. Consequently, just like equity feelings, the sense of duty towards students may be so ingrained in the teacher’s personality that it prevents feelings of depersonalization from developing. Support for this supposition can be found in Van Dierendonck et al. (1998). They discovered that a cognitively oriented burnout intervention program did not affect depersonalization, i.e. the participants' feelings of inequity in their relationship with the recipients of their care were not influenced by the program.

Our findings show a significant, though small moderating effect of equity sensitivity on the relationship between self-efficacy and personal accomplishment (hypothesis 3). Cherniss (1980) found that doubts about personal accomplishment were important stressors in the lives of new professionals. When someone performs actions, they are evaluated by the agent of the actions (Bandura, 1997). Satisfactory evaluations that give rise to self-enhancing feelings raise someone's self-efficacy. Applied to the equity sensitivity of a benevolent teacher, it means that a lack of success will lead to negative self-evaluations, which in turn results in lower levels of efficacy. Doubts about personal accomplishments will crop up because of past failures, and gradually the benevolents' personal accomplishment will strongly diminish. Entitled teachers, however, do not only benefit from successes in the classroom, but probably also from positive evaluations in other domains of their job, thus preventing a decrease of their personal accomplishment.

Our study shows that the moderating influence of equity sensitivity on the relationship between self-efficacy and two dimensions of burnout is to be taken into account when attempting to understand the development and presence of burnout. Although the three dimensions of burnout are universally recognized, described and determined, burnout itself develops in a way that is unique to each individual. General antecedents appear to have serious, less serious or no serious influence at all on the development of burnout in a particular person. If feelings of inequity obscure the relation teacher and school, it is a matter of course to first restore the balance of perceived investments and outcomes. Only after that programs aimed at enhancing the teachers' skills and self-efficacy are believed to be successful (Brouwers & Tomic, 1999). That is why we recommend measuring the teachers' well-being in the schools in the field of equity sensitivity, self-efficacy, and burnout. By doing so, it becomes possible to tailor preventive measures to persons in need of help.
This study probably suffers from the same problems as do many studies in which the data are obtained from self-reported information. In spite of that, response bias may be of little importance in our study, as the respondents were granted anonymity. A more serious limitation is the lack of longitudinal data, or data from comparable studies. The reliability of our instruments would benefit from critical studies involving a larger group of respondents in different job settings and over a longer period. Finally, this study, being a cross-sectional study, probably suffers from a lack of generizability. However, the results were obtained from a nation-wide random sample of schools, which may partly settle doubts about this limitation.

In conclusion, we would recommend developing a multi-theoretical approach to understanding and measuring social and individual problems such as burnout. When a person’s well-being is at stake, theoretical barriers should be leveled.
REFERENCES


Burnout among teachers: Theoretical setting, top-down innovation, and social relations


Chapter 5


