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A Burning Issue in Teaching: The Impact of Perceived Teacher Burnout and Nonverbal Immediacy on Student Motivation and Affective Learning

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A Burning Issue in Teaching: The Impact of Teacher Burnout and Nonverbal Immediacy on Student Motivation and Affective Learning

Qin Zhang and David Alan Sapp

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of teacher burnout on student state motivation and affective learning and to test the moderating effect of teacher nonverbal immediacy. Utilizing a 2 x 2 factorial experimental design, 172 college students were exposed randomly to one of four written scenarios manipulating levels of teacher burnout (high or low) and nonverbal immediacy (high or low). Results of MANOVA indicated that teacher burnout adversely impacted student state motivation and affective learning, and teacher nonverbal immediacy mitigated the negative effect of teacher burnout on students. Students reported the highest motivation and affective learning with low burnout and high immediacy teachers, and the lowest motivation and affective learning with high burnout and low immediacy teachers.

Keywords: teacher burnout; teacher nonverbal immediacy; student motivation; affective learning

Teacher burnout is a frustrating and devastating experience. About 30 percent of new primary and secondary teachers leave the profession within five years (Archer, 1999; Boreen, Niday, & Johnson, 2003). The number of teachers reporting considerable job-related stress increased from 43% in 1951 to 78% percent in 1976, and the numbers seem to be still on the rise with approximately 93% of teachers reporting some of the feelings

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associated with burnout (Farber, 1984, 1991; Gregorian, 2001). Despite widely-held perceptions that burnout is a challenge facing only primary and secondary teachers, it is experienced by college professors as well (Hamann, Daugherty, & Sherbon, 1988; Hamilton, 2005; Jamal, 1999; Kanervo & Ferrier, 1998). As a front-line profession being "overworked and underappreciated" (Tifft, 1988, p. 58), teachers, regardless of level, are vulnerable to burnout (Farber, 1991) and susceptible to experiencing dark emotions such as anger, anxiety, failure, and estrangement (Newkirk, 1992; Ray & Miller, 1991; Winograd, 2005).

Despite the devastating effects of teacher burnout, empirical research conducted on the topic of teacher burnout has been inadequate in the field of instructional communication. Most of the existing research focuses on the causes and symptoms of teacher burnout, its deleterious effects on the stressed teacher and the institution, and coping strategies (Dillon & Tanner, 1995; Ray, 1991; Ray & Miller, 1991; Starnaman & Miller, 1992), such as teacher empowerment, social support, and individual relaxation training (Farber, 1991; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The moderating effect of teacher communication variables (e.g., teacher immediacy) on students has never been investigated. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the effects of teacher burnout on student motivation and affective learning in university settings and to test the mitigating effect of teacher nonverbal immediacy.

Burnout in the Workplace

The term *burnout* was coined by Graham Greene (1961) in his novel, *A Burn-Out Case*, which describes a spiritually tormented, despondent, and disillusioned architect who withdraws into the African jungle. The best seller did not make burnout a household word; it was popularized instead through the work of psychologists such as Freudenberger (1974), Maslach (1982), Pines (1982), and Cherniss (1980). Freudenberger used the term to identify the feeling of exhaustion often experienced by human services workers. In these settings, burnout was defined as a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that resulted from chronic job stress, attrition, and frustration (Maslach, 1993, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout manifests in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is characterized by feelings of frustration, anger, depression, and dissatisfaction. Depersonalization involves a dehumanized and impersonal view of others and treating them like things or animals rather than people. Reduced personal accomplishment suggests a loss of self-efficacy on the job and the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively (Maslach, 1982, 2003).

Utilizing a grassroots approach from people's workplace experiences, burnout research has gone through two consecutive phases—the pioneering phase and the empirical phase—each involving different research methodologies (Maslach et al., 2001). In the pioneering phase, the work was largely exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative. Researchers

used interviews, case studies, and field observations to identify symptoms of burnout and to examine the individual and situational causes of burnout. In the empirical phase, the work was largely quantitative. Researchers utilized questionnaires and surveys to assess burnout and to investigate the link of burnout to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover (Maslach et al., 2001).

People working in the caring professions (e.g., teachers, nurses, social workers, and legal-aid workers) tend to be most prone to burnout (Senior, 2006). Sources of burnout are recognized at individual, organizational, and societal levels (Farber, 1991; Maslach et al., 2001; Starnaman & Miller, 1992). Freudenberger's (1974) clinical approach views burnout as an inability to cope with job stressors. It focuses on individual factors that give rise to burnout and ascribes its occurrence to its victims (Dworkin, Saha, & Hill, 2003). From this perspective, burnout occurs most frequently in highly motivated, dedicated, and committed workers who react to stress by working too intensely, which leads to their collapse.

Maslach's (1982) social-psychological approach views burnout as mental exhaustion leading to an organizationally-induced loss of enthusiasm and idealism. This approach attempts to identify specific elements in organizational work environments that trigger burnout (Cherniss, 1980; Maslach, 1982, 2003). Like Freudenberger's (1974) approach, Maslach (1982) contended that burnout typically afflicts those who start out being the most idealistic, caring, enthusiastic, and zealous (Farber, 1991) but become mentally exhausted by the conjoined effects of organizationally-induced alienation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness (Dworkin et al., 2003).

Sarason's (1983) social-historical approach examines the conditions at large that are conducive to burnout. From this perspective, burnout is triggered by "features of the larger society" (p. vii) rather than by individual or organizational factors. Integrating these approaches, Farber (1991) argued that burnout is the gap between expectation and reward, which "is essentially triggered by feelings of inconsequentiality—a sense on the part of professionals that their efforts to help others have been ineffective, that the task is endless, and that the personal payoffs for their work (in terms of accomplishment, recognition, advancement, or appreciation) have not been forthcoming" (p. 25). In sum, burnout is primarily caused by a mismatch between what people feel they are giving and what they feel they are receiving in return (Cherniss, 1980).

Burnout is not an overnight occurrence. As a prolonged response to chronic stress, burnout is a process with physical and psychological symptoms (Farber, 1991): exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Related symptoms include anxiety, fatigue, frustration, depression, powerlessness, hopelessness, failure, detachment, and inability (Pines, 1982). Professionals experiencing burnout might feel like "a dry teapot over a high flame [or] a drained battery that can no longer hold its charge" (Senior, 2006, p. 27). As a result, burnout can be a career killer with deleterious consequences to stressed individuals and their organizations, and can lead to poor job performance, turnover, drug and alcohol

abuse, and emotional and psychosomatic illnesses (Farber, 1991; Ray, 1991). As early as 1983, burnout and other stress related costs were already being estimated at $50 to $70 billion each year (Wallis, 1983).

Teacher Burnout

The notion of teacher burnout has received considerable attention in the fields of psychology and education. Teaching is inherently frustrating and stressful because there always seems to be a gap between teaching goals and students' actual learning outcomes (Smylie, 1999; Winograd, 2005). Therefore, teaching is considered a profession that is highly vulnerable to burnout. Teacher burnout is a function of societal, organizational, and individual factors, combined to produce a perception of inconsequentiality in teachers (Farber, 1991). At the societal level, the erosion of public respect for and support of teachers—provoked by media criticism since the late 1960s—laid the foundation for the emergence of teacher burnout (Farber, 1991). At the organizational level, teachers face increasing challenges from more diverse and needy student populations (Smylie, 1999). In this profession, particularly, burnout tends to be triggered by work overload and stress inflicted by role conflict and ambiguity (Dillon & Tanner, 1995). Farber (1991) summarized an array of work-related stressors to teacher burnout, including classroom discipline, apathy, administrative insensitivity, bureaucratic incompetence, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate salaries. In addition, individual variables, particularly personality factors, also contribute substantially to teacher burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

Teacher burnout is depicted as a new academic disease (Melandez & de Guzman, 1983). Typical teacher burnout syndromes include emotional and physical exhaustion, anxiety, and depression (Farber, 1991), which are often manifested in behavioral reactions such as tardiness, absenteeism, poor job performance, and lack of interest and commitment. Teachers who are burned out often distance themselves from students physically or emotionally, feel less sympathetic toward students, teach class less enthusiastically and creatively, and their teaching effectiveness often declines as a result (Farber, 1991; Weiskopf, 1980).

Teacher Nonverbal Immediacy

Immediacy is the extent to which communication behaviors enhance closeness and reduce physical or psychological distance between communicators (Mehrabian, 1969). Nonverbal immediacy behaviors generally involve kinesics, proxemics, vocalics, haptics, and oculesics, but the most salient teacher nonverbal immediacy behaviors typically include smiling, vocal variety and expressiveness, eye contact, gestures, and relaxed body position (Andersen, 1979). Numerous studies have demonstrated that teacher nonverbal immediacy

is related positively to teaching effectiveness, student state motivation, and affective or cognitive learning outcomes (Allen, Witt, & Wheeless, 2006; Christophel, 1990; Rodríguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006).

Research also has indicated that teacher nonverbal immediacy can interact with other communication variables to alleviate negative effects and moderate verbal messages (Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen, 1988; Mottet, Parker-Raley, Cunningham, & Beebe, 2005; Mottet, Parker-Raley, Cunningham, Beebe, & Raffeld, 2006). The neutralizing effect of nonverbal immediacy was first suggested by Kearney et al. (1988), who found that students perceive nonverbally immediate teachers who use antisocial behavioral alteration techniques (BATs) as using prosocial BATs. Teacher immediacy was also found to soften the negative impact of teacher misbehaviors on perceived teacher credibility (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998). Likewise, Mottet et al. (2005) found that teacher immediacy increases students' tolerance for teacher unavailability. Further, immediacy can help teachers overcome the negative effects of heavy workload demands by preserving students' affect for the course and teacher (Mottet et al., 2006).

In addition, research also has suggested that teacher nonverbal immediacy can interact with other positive communication variables to strengthen positive effects (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998, 2001; Pogue & AhYun, 2006). Chesebro and McCroskey (1998) found that the combination of teacher nonverbal immediacy and clarity generated more desirable learning outcomes to an even greater extent than the presence of either individually. These outcomes exist because clear teaching helps students process messages, and immediate teaching gains students' attention. Similarly, Pogue and AhYun (2006) found that teacher nonverbal immediacy and credibility interacted to impact student motivation and affective learning. When combined, teacher nonverbal immediacy and credibility generated more motivation and affective learning than either one by itself.

Student State Motivation

Motivation is conceptualized as a force with directive and stimulating properties (Brophy, 1983). Student motivation to learn can be characterized as state or trait (Brophy, 1983). Trait motivation is an enduring predisposition toward general learning, whereas state motivation involves the transient and contextualized properties toward a specific class (Christophel, 1990). This study focuses on student state motivation to learn, featuring the stimulation that directs students to have a positive attitude toward a course and the instructor and to learn cognitively.

Student state motivation has been found to be affected by a variety of teacher communication variables, such as verbal and/or nonverbal immediacy (Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1994), clarity (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Chesebro & Wanzer, 2006; Zhang & Zhang, 2005), socio-communicative style (Martin, Chesebro, & Mottet, 1997), credibility

(Pogue & AhYun, 2006), self-disclosure (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007), and affinity-seeking (Richmond, 1990).

Affective Learning

Learning is a process involving the acquisition of cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes (Bloom, 1976; Christophel, 1990). Affective learning concerns the student's attitude and feelings toward the subject matter or the teacher, while cognitive learning focuses on the comprehension, retention, and recall of knowledge and information (Bloom, 1956). Traditionally, affective and cognitive learning have been perceived as parallel learning goals, but more recently, scholars (Rodriguez et al., 1996; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006) argued that cognitive learning is the ultimate end, and affective learning is only a means to the end. In this study, we focus on the effect of teacher burnout and nonverbal immediacy on affective learning because teacher communication variables (e.g., immediacy) are found to be a stronger predictor of affective learning than cognitive learning (Allen et al., 2006; Mottet & Beebe, 2006; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006; Zhang, Oetzel, Gao, Wilcox, & Takai, 2007).

Teaching typically has been regarded as a rhetorical and relational communication process in which teachers use messages and relational cues to influence students and their behaviors (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). It is well-documented that teacher communication behaviors (e.g., immediacy, clarity, and misbehaviors) can affect student state motivation and affective learning (Allen et al., 2006; Andersen, 1979; Christophel, 1990; Rodríguez et al., 1996; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006; Zhang et al., 2007; Zhang & Zhang, 2005). Meanwhile, teaching can also be described as an emotional process in which teachers manage, monitor, and regulate their emotions to achieve effectiveness and to create a positive learning environment (Boyer, 1987; Gates, 2000). However, instructional communication scholarship has largely ignored the emotional aspect of teaching, and little research has investigated the effects of teachers' emotions on their instruction and their students' learning.

McPherson, Kearney, and Plax (2003) found that inappropriate anger displayed by teachers is associated with negative teaching evaluations, and their aggressive expressions are related negatively with students' affect. No direct link among teacher burnout, student motivation, and affective learning has been established, but given the inverse relationship of negative communication behaviors (e.g., teacher misbehaviors) and dark emotions (e.g., teacher anger) with student motivation and affective learning (Banfield, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997; McPerson, Kearney, & Plax, 2006; Zhang, 2007), it seems reasonable to assume that teacher burnout will have a negative effect on student motivation and affective learning. In addition, based on previous research indicating the mitigating effect of teacher

nonverbal immediacy (Kearney et al., 1988; Mottet et al., 2005, 2006), the following hypotheses are offered:

> H1: Teacher burnout and nonverbal immediacy will interact to influence student state motivation.
>
> H2: Teacher burnout and nonverbal immediacy will interact to influence student affective learning.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a 2 x 2 factorial experimental design. The two independent variables were teacher burnout and nonverbal immediacy, both of which were operationalized using high and low conditions. The dependent variables were student state motivation and affective learning. Two manipulation checks were conducted before the experiment.

Manipulation Check

Two separate manipulation checks were conducted to assess the effectiveness of the manipulation of the two independent variables: teacher burnout and nonverbal immediacy. Taken together, 110 students from a small university in the Northeast (who were not used in the major experiment) were randomly exposed to one of the four scenarios depicting a level of teacher burnout (high vs. low) or nonverbal immediacy (high vs. low). Participants were recruited from history and sociology classes.

Teacher burnout. Two teacher burnout scenarios were constructed to describe high and low burnout conditions (See Appendix). Each scenario consisted of three sentences, with each representing one of three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982). The sentences were either directly from the Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) items or slightly modified to fit the instructional context. Students were asked to read one of two scenarios and then complete the 22-item, 5-point Likert-type (*5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree*) burnout scale (Maslach et al., 1996). All items were prefaced by the phrase, "The teacher seems…." Wording of the items was adapted to fit the instructional communication context (e.g., "to feel emotionally drained from teaching" and "to feel frustrated by teaching").

Fifty-two students were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: high and low teacher burnout. An independent samples t-test was performed to test the validity of the conditions described in the scenarios. The scale yielded a Cronbach of .96. Students reported a significantly higher level of teacher burnout in the high burnout condition (M = 4.11, SD = .54) than in the low burnout condition (M = 1.58, SD = .57), t (50) = 16.01, p < .001. The results indicated that the high and low burnout conditions were manipulated correctly.

Teacher nonverbal immediacy. Two previously validated high and low teacher nonverbal immediacy scenarios (Kearney et al., 1988) were used. Fifty-eight students were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: high and low teacher nonverbal immediacy. Students were asked to read one of two scenarios and then complete the revised 10-item, 5-point Likert-type (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree) Nonverbal Immediacy Measure (McCroskey, Richmond, Sallinen, Fayer, & Barraclough, 1995), which was based on the original Nonverbal Immediacy Measure (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987). An independent samples t-test was performed to test the validity of the conditions described in the scenarios. The scale yielded a Cronbach of .96. Students reported a significantly higher level of teacher nonverbal immediacy in the high immediacy condition (M = 4.35, SD = .40) than in the low immediacy condition (M = 2.40, SD = .88), t (56) = 11.15, p < .001. These results indicated that the high and low teacher nonverbal immediacy conditions were manipulated correctly.

Participants

Participants for the major experiment included 172 college students at a small comprehensive university in the Northeast, which has a predominantly Euro-American student population. The sample included 58 male and 114 female students. The average age of the participants was 19.62 (SD = .78). Most of the participants were communication, English, and business majors.

Instruments

State motivation. Student state motivation was measured with Christophel's (1990) State Motivation Scale, which consisted of 12-item, seven-point, bipolar adjectives (e.g., *motivated/unmotivated, 1 = motivated, 7 = unmotivated*) designed to measure students' motivational attitude about taking a specific course. Cronbach's alpha for the scale has generally been over .90 in prior studies (Christophel, 1990; Rodríguez et al., 1996). For this study, the reliability of the scale was .94.

Affective learning. The Affective Learning Scale (Christophel, 1990) was employed to measure the affect toward the course content, instructor, and course behaviors. This study

measured only students' attitude toward course content and the instructor. The scale consisted of eight-item, seven-point, bipolar adjectives (e.g., *good/bad, 1 = good, 7 = bad*). For this study, the reliability of the scale was .98.

Procedures

Most participants were recruited during a registration event for communication majors and minors. Other participants included students enrolled in introductory English and business courses. In both situations, after the researchers briefly introduced the study, participants were exposed randomly to one of four written scenarios manipulating the levels of teacher burnout (high or low) and nonverbal immediacy (high or low). After reading the scenario, participants were asked to imagine taking a class from the particular teacher described in the scenario and respond to the questionnaire, assessing their motivation to learn and their affect for the course and instructor. Participation was confidential and anonymous. Appreciation was expressed to the students, but no extra credit was given. The questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes for the students to complete.

RESULTS

H1 predicted an interaction between teacher burnout and nonverbal immediacy on student state motivation. The results of MANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect on student motivation, F (1, 158) = 10.32, $p < .01$, partial $ç^2 = .06$, as well as significant main effects for teacher burnout, F (1, 158) = 196.47, $p < .001$, partial $ç^2 = .55$, and nonverbal immediacy, F (1, 158) = 157.06, $p < .001$, partial $ç^2 = .50$. Students with a low burnout teacher were more motivated (M = 3.05, SD = 1.49) to learn than students with a high burnout teacher (M = 5.30, SD = 1.27). Students with a high nonverbal immediacy teacher reported higher motivation (M = 3.14, SD = 1.63) than students with a low immediacy teacher (M = 5.18, SD = 1.27). Thus, H1 was supported. Means and standard deviations for the variables are reported in Table 1.

Tukey post hoc mean comparisons were conducted to see if the four conditions differed significantly in motivating students to learn at the .05 level. The low burnout and high immediacy condition was found to generate the highest motivation (M = 2.01, SD = .97) among students, and high burnout and low immediacy condition produced the lowest motivation (M = 6.01, SD = 1.10). No significant difference was found between the conditions: low burnout and low immediacy condition (M = 4.37, SD = .82) and high burnout and high immediacy condition (M = 4.59, SD = 1.02). This finding suggests that teachers who are experiencing high burnout can compensate for it with high immediacy behaviors to maintain student state motivation.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Student Motivation and Affective Learning by Teacher Burnout and Nonverbal Immediacy

	Teacher Burnout					
	High		Low		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Motivation						
High Immediacy	4.59	1.02	2.01	.97	3.14	1.63
Low Immediacy	6.01	1.10	4.37	.82	5.18	1.27
Total	5.30	1.27	3.05	1.49	4.11	1.79
Affective Learning						
High Immediacy	4.69	1.24	1.32	.84	2.83	1.98
Low Immediacy	6.12	.90	4.30	1.30	5.19	1.44
Total	5.40	1.29	2.67	1.83	3.95	2.10

H2 predicted an interaction between teacher burnout and nonverbal immediacy on student affective learning. The results of MANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect on affective learning, F (1, 158) = 21.46, $p < .001$, partial $ç^2 = .12$, as well as significant main effects for teacher burnout, F (1, 158) = 269.70, $p < .001$, partial $ç^2 = .60$, and nonverbal immediacy, F (1, 158) = 167.49, $p < .001$, partial $ç^2 = .52$. Students with a low burnout teacher reported higher affective learning ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.83$) than students with a high burnout teacher ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.29$). Students with a high nonverbal immediacy teacher reported higher affective learning ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.98$) than students with a low immediacy teacher ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.44$). Thus, H2 was supported. Means and standard deviations for the variables are reported in Table 1.

Tukey post hoc mean comparisons were conducted to see if the four conditions differed significantly in student affective learning at the .05 level. The low burnout and high immediacy condition was found to generate the highest affective learning ($M = 1.32$, $SD = .84$) among students, and the high burnout and low immediacy condition produced the lowest affective learning ($M = 6.12$, $SD = .90$). No significant difference was found between the conditions: low burnout and low immediacy condition ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.30$) and high burnout and high immediacy condition ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.24$). This finding indicates that teachers who are experiencing high burnout can compensate for it with high immediacy behaviors in order to maintain student affective learning.

DISCUSSION

This study attempts to extend research on teacher burnout limited to investigating the causes, symptoms, and negative effects on the stressed teacher and offering coping strategies (Dillon & Tanner, 1995; Farber, 1991; Maslach et al., 2001; Ray, 1991; Starnaman & Miller, 1992) to examining its effects on students and the buffering effect of communication variables on burnout. Specifically, the study investigated the effect of teacher burnout on student state motivation and affective learning and tested the mitigating effect of teacher nonverbal immediacy.

As hypothesized, the findings revealed a significant interaction between teacher burnout and nonverbal immediacy on student motivation and affective learning. Perceived teacher burnout was found to have a negative effect on student motivation and affective learning. Students experienced significantly less motivation and affective learning with high burnout teachers than with low burnout teachers. This finding provides confirmation of the deleterious effect of teacher burnout (Farber, 1991; Ray & Miller, 1991). The findings also indicate that perceived teacher nonverbal immediacy can alleviate the negative effect of teacher burnout on student motivation and affective learning, which provides support for the neutralizing effect of teacher nonverbal immediacy (Kearney et al., 1988; Mottet et al., 2005, 2006; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998).

Previous research suggests that teacher nonverbal immediacy can alleviate the negative effect of teacher antisocial BATs (Kearney et al., 1988), misbehaviors (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998), and unavailability (Mottet et al., 2005) on students. However, the neutralizing effect of teacher nonverbal immediacy has been somewhat inconsistent. Mottet et al. (2006) found that teacher nonverbal immediacy failed to neutralize the negative impact of teacher course workload demands on students' willingness to comply. But this finding echoes Mottet et al.'s (2006) argument that immediacy neutralizes affectively-based constructs (e.g., affection and motivation).

These findings offer some interesting theoretical and practical implications and research directions. First, the study indicated that teacher burnout significantly lowers student motivation and affective learning. Given the adverse impact of teacher burnout and teacher anger (McPherson et al., 2003) and the prevalence of emotional expression in teaching (Winograd, 2005), emotion management in the classroom should become an important topic in instructional communication deserving more scholarly attention. Current instructional communication research mostly focuses on teacher communication behaviors such as immediacy, clarity, misbehaviors, affinity-seeking, and their effects on students. However, teaching is not only a rhetorical and relational communication process (Mottet & Beebe, 2006) but also an emotional process (Boyer, 1987; Gates, 2000). Winograd (2005) observed: "Teaching was a profoundly, all encompassing emotional endeavor. Just as in emotional life outside school, I emoted it all as a teacher: guilt, joy, embarrassment, sadness,

anxiety, depression, satisfaction, and anger" (p. 199). Thus, instructional communication research needs to explore more about the emotional aspects of teaching and their effects.

Second, since teachers' expressions of dark emotions (e.g., burnout and anger) affect students negatively and students seem to be unforgiving of teachers when they express such emotions (McPherson et al., 2003), teachers should try to reduce their expressions of negative emotions in the classroom. Instead, they should try to adopt positive emotions to promote positive learning environments. Popular images of ideal teachers tend to show them as enthusiastic, happy, confident, self-assured, passionate, and satisfied (Winograd, 2005). Emotion is an indispensable part of teaching, playing an important role in teaching and learning processes. Thus, the effective management of emotion in the classroom can be beneficial to teachers, students, and institutions.

Third, the finding that teacher nonverbal immediacy can temper the negative effect of teacher burnout on students seems to offer a promising direction to cope with burnout and reduce its impact. Traditionally, coping strategies for burnout have involved broad-based school reform and social support (Farber, 1991; Maslach et al., 2001). However, teachers' communication behaviors have not been examined as a possible coping strategy to burnout. This study suggests that teachers experiencing burnout can utilize nonverbal immediacy behaviors to alleviate the negative impact of burnout on students. The use of immediacy behaviors (e.g., smiling, eye contact, vocal variety) can increase student motivation and affect for the instructor and the course, which may make teachers feel more valued, hence mitigating the feelings associated with burnout and engaging in a virtuous circle of mutual affect with students. Thus, the use of appropriate teacher communication behaviors could be a viable and effective strategy to deal with burnout and moderate its negative effects.

Despite research that suggests otherwise (Hamann et al., 1988; Hamilton, 2005; Jamal, 1999; Kanervo & Ferrier, 1998), some might argue that teacher burnout is less likely to occur at the college level than at the pre-college level, due to the soothing effect of some built-in factors, such as sabbatical leaves for college professors. While it may be true that sabbaticals can, to some extent, relieve burnout in college teachers, they are not a panacea. Further, sabbaticals are generally only available to tenured professors. It should be noted that, of the 1.1 million college teachers in the U.S., more than half are contingently-employed (Dubson, 2001; Schell, 2002). In other words, over half of college courses are taught by part-time instructors and untenured faculty, many of whom are overworked, undercompensated, and have no sabbatical benefits (Sapp, 2006; Schell & Stock, 2001). Thus, while it is important to continue to study burnout experienced by primary and secondary school teachers, burnout remains an important issue to study at the college level.

Two limitations in the study warrant brief discussion. The first limitation involves the approach of experimental design utilized in the study. The use of hypothetical scenarios and fictitious teachers can minimize the influences of other extraneous variables, but hypothetical conditions might not reflect the actual teacher burnout and nonverbal

immediacy behaviors per se in a naturalistic environment (Pogue & AhYun, 2006). Examining the behaviors of teachers in a real instructional setting might provide us with more valid and accurate results regarding the impact of teacher burnout and nonverbal immediacy on student motivation and affective learning. In addition, the two scenarios were constructed to operationalize high and low teacher burnout, but the presentation of two extreme poles might not fully capture the processual and ongoing nature of teacher burnout. Given the experimental nature of this study, the results should be interpreted with caution.

The second limitation concerns the use of the convenience sample from a private comprehensive university in the Northeast, where the students are predominantly from middle- or upper-class Euro-American families. The nature of small class sizes and the emphasis on teacher-student interaction associated with the small university setting might make the students' expectations and their interpretation of teacher burnout and immediacy behaviors different from the students at a large public university. Thus, we need to consider that the results may not be generalizable to other student populations.

In conclusion, this study found that teacher burnout produces a negative effect on student motivation and affective learning, and that teacher nonverbal immediacy can moderate the adverse effect on students. Given that teaching is an emotional process and teacher burnout is prevalent and has a negative impact on students, this study calls for more scholarly attention to investigating teacher emotion management. Future research could consider examining more about teacher emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety, and enthusiasm) and their impact on students and teachers (e.g., affect and credibility), and investigating specific teacher communication behaviors that could be used as possible coping strategies.

Burnout is a devastating experience afflicting many stressed-out teachers, impacting not only their professional lives but also their students and institutions (Ray & Miller, 1991). However, considering the fact that burnt-out teachers are often those who are the most enthusiastic, dedicated, caring, and hardworking (Farber, 1991; Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1982, 2003), it is unfair to blame teachers for the burnout they experience. Rather, we need to advance research to identify coping strategies to help some of our most passionate colleagues as they struggle to deal with burnout more effectively.

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Appendix

Scenarios

High Burnout. You are taking a class from a teacher who seems fatigued, frustrated, and emotionally drained during class lectures and discussions. This teacher treats students as if they were impersonal objects rather than as human beings, and does not care what happens to students. This teacher does not know how to create a relaxed atmosphere with students and has difficulty in dealing with the problems of students.

Low Burnout. You are taking a class from a teacher who seems energetic, passionate, and emotionally engaged during class lectures and discussions. This teacher cares what happens to students and treats students as human beings rather than as impersonal objects. This teacher creates a relaxed atmosphere with students and deals very effectively with the problems of students.