

Passion for teaching, transformational leadership and burnout among physical education teachers

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PASIÓN POR LA ENSEÑANZA, LIDERAZGO TRANSFORMACIONAL Y BURNOUT EN PROFESORES DE EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA

KEYWORDS: Physical education, teachers, passion, burnout, transformational teaching.

ABSTRACT: The purpose of the study was to examine the associations between physical education (PE) teachers' passion and their perception of burnout, testing the mediating role of teachers' transformational teaching behaviours in this relationship as a coping resource. Participants (161 PE teachers; $M = 40.59$; $SD = 8.36$) were asked to complete a multi-section questionnaire tapping the variables of interest. Results showed that harmonious passion and transformational teaching were negative predictors of burnout, whereas obsessive passion was a positive predictor of burnout. Results also indicated that teachers' transformational behaviours partially mediated the relationship between harmonious passion and burnout, and they totally mediated the relationship between obsessive passion and burnout. In conclusion, lower levels of burnout in PE teachers appear to be related to whether teachers perform more transformational behaviours in their job, and whether they feel in control of their passion for teaching.

Teaching has long been considered one of the professions with the highest level of job stress (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011). As a result of chronic stress (Jennett, Harris and Mesibov, 2003), teachers have to develop teaching strategies to deal successfully with this stressful context in order to avoid emotional exhaustion (Maslach, Jackson and Leiter, 1996). Emotional exhaustion refers to the feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted at work, and it has been shown to be the best indicator of burnout (Vallerand, Paquet, Philippe and Charest, 2010).

Therefore, teachers need tools in the classroom that will enable them to cope with this situation. Transformational teaching has been suggested as a valuable coping strategy for teachers (Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012). The notion that passionate teachers have an important and positive impact on their students is widely accepted (see Day, 2004). Passion has been identified as an antecedent of burnout in school teachers (Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet and Guay, 2008; Fernet, Lavigne, Vallerand and Austin, 2014). It has been defined as a

strong inclination toward a self-defining activity that one likes and finds important, and in which one invests his/her time and energy (Vallerand et al., 2003). These authors proposed two types of passion, harmonious passion (HP) and obsessive passion (OP). On one hand, HP results from an autonomous internalization of the activity into the person's identity, where the activity occupies an important but not overwhelming space. In other words, in HP, the activity remains under the person's control. On the other hand, OP results from a controlled internalization of the activity into the person's identity, and individuals are not completely in control of the activity and experience an uncontrollable urge to engage in it. Both types of passion have been found to correlate with burnout. Specifically, HP reduces burnout, whereas OP positively predicts burnout (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Fernet et al., 2014).

Recently, transformational leadership behaviours have been suggested as a prophylactic style against leaders' burnout (Arnold, Connelly, Walsh and Martin-Ginis, 2015). Based on transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985),

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transformational teaching (TT) has been considered a broad framework for understanding how teachers in the classroom can interact to maximize students' potential for intellectual and personal growth, the role teachers may play in transforming students' attitudes, and values and beliefs about learning. TT provides teachers with a valuable tool to improve their self-efficacy in their teaching by using transformational behaviours (see Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012). Later, TT was adapted to the PE context (Beauchamp and Morton 2011). TT is composed of four teacher behaviours: idealized influence, that is, the teacher as a positive role model; inspirational motivation, which consists of the leader's ability to inspire students to create a shared vision, aligned to each student's personal needs; individual consideration, which is the teacher's ability to understand students' individual strengths and needs and treat them as individuals; and finally, intellectual stimulation, which consists of challenging students to think in different ways, innovating and contributing to their personal growth. In this regard, passionate teachers who exhibit transformational behaviours will inspire students and make them interested in and even excited about what they are learning. More importantly, transformational behaviours may help teachers to prevent burnout.

Based on the research discussed above, the aim of the study was to examine the associations between PE teachers' passion and their perception of burnout, testing the mediating role of teachers' TT behaviours as a coping resource in this relationship. No previous research to date has explored these relations.

Method

Participants

Participants were 161 PE teachers (108 males, 53 females) between 24 and 63 years old ($M = 40.59$; $SD = 8.36$) from 75 high schools in the Valencian Community (Spain). They had been involved in their profession for 13.95 years ($SD = 8.39$) and working in their current school for a mean of 6.36 years ($SD = 6.42$).

Measures

PE teachers' passion was assessed using the Passion Scale (Vallerand et al., 2003), adapted to the teaching domain for this study. This scale is composed of two six-item subscales assessing HP ('Teaching is in harmony with other things that are part of me') and OP ('Teaching is so exciting that I sometimes

lose control over it'). The scale ranged from 1 (*not agree at all*) to 5 (*very strongly agree*). The Passion scale has shown evidence of validity and reliability (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Vallerand et al., 2003).

PE teachers' perceptions of their own transformational behaviours were assessed using an adapted version (Alvarez et al., 2017) of the transformational teaching questionnaire (Beauchamp et al., 2010). The questionnaire has 16 items divided into four dimensions of transformational teaching (four items per subscale: individualized consideration, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation). Items begin with the stem 'In my physical education classes...'. An example item is 'I show that I care about students'. The scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*frequently*). In this study, the higher-order measure of transformational teaching was used. Evidence for the reliability and validity of this questionnaire has been provided in the educational context with PE students (e.g., Álvarez et al., 2017; Beauchamp et al., 2010).

Burnout was assessed using the emotional exhaustion subscale from the Spanish version (Gil-Monte, 2002) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1996) adapted for the teacher population. This subscale has nine items, and responses are provided on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never or almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). An example item is 'I feel emotionally drained by my work as a teacher'. Evidence for the reliability and validity of this subscale has been provided in the educational context (Maslach et al., 1996).

Procedure

Approval for the study was obtained from the ethical committee of the University of Valencia. A sample of high schools in the Valencian Community (Spain) was randomly selected from the list provided by the Ministry of Education, Research, Culture and Sports. PE teachers were invited to participate in the study by contacting the head of each high-school (100% agreement). Participants were provided with verbal information about the investigation and gave their informed consent before data collection. PE teachers were encouraged to answer honestly, voluntarily, and anonymously, and ask for assistance by phone or e-mail when required. They were asked to complete the multi-section questionnaire during a maximum period of one day.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics and two multiple regression analyses were conducted. The assumptions for regression analysis were

tested, and the required conditions were met. In order to determine the extent to which leadership contributes to predicts burnout above and beyond the types of passion, in the first regression model, the two types of passion were introduced as predictors of TT, and in a second regression, the two types of passion and TT were introduced as predictors of burnout. To test the hypothesized mediated effects, we used the test proposed and investigated by Taylor, MacKinnon and Tein (2008). This test finds evidence for mediation if each of the paths involved in the mediated relationship is statistically significant.

Results

As Table 1 shows, teachers perceived themselves to be relatively high in harmonious passion, they exhibited transformational behaviours, and they indicated that they experienced relatively low burnout. Reliability was acceptable for all measures ($\alpha > .74$). HP was positively related to TT and negatively related to burnout, whereas OP was negatively related to TT and positively related to burnout. Finally, TT was negatively associated with burnout.

As Figure 1 reveals, results showed that TT was positively predicted by HP and negatively by OP, accounting for 18% of the variance in TT. In the second model, HP and TT were negative predictors of burnout, whereas OP was not statistically significant. These variables accounted for 15% of the burnout variance. Finally, our results suggested that transformational behaviours partially mediated the relationship between HP and burnout, and totally mediated the relationship between OP and burnout.

Discussion

Teaching has become one of the most stressful jobs (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011). One possible consequence of chronic stress is emotional exhaustion (Jennet et al., 2003). In order to cope with this idiosyncratic stress, teachers have to develop effective classroom-management tools/strategies. TT has been suggested as a valuable framework to deal with the mission of the teachers' job (Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012). This study explores the extent to which PE teachers' type of passion

is prospectively related to their burnout (emotional exhaustion), and the extent to which their TT behaviours mediate these relationships.

Our results show that the teachers in the sample are well-adapted to their jobs. They report high levels of HP and TT behaviours, and low levels of OP and burnout. This sample is mostly composed of teachers with medium-high levels of experience, coinciding with their perceptions of greater self-efficacy (Klassen and Chiu, 2010).

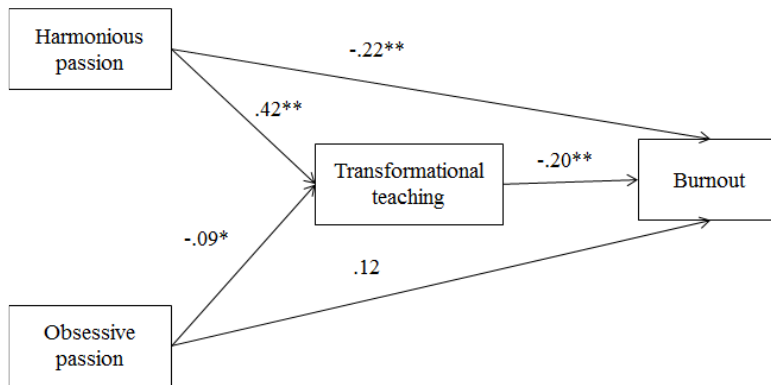
Overall, the results revealed that when teachers felt HP for work, they reported less emotional exhaustion, whereas when teachers had obsessive passion, they reported being emotionally exhausted. These results coincide with previous research conducted in the education domain (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Fernet et al., 2014). However, when teachers made use of TT behaviours, they were more likely to report feeling less emotionally exhausted with their school work. Similar results were found by Arnold et al. (2015), supporting the hypothesis of the protective role of TT against leaders' burnout. As Fernet et al. (2014) suggested, although a lack of job autonomy may increase burnout, in a job that has great significance for the person's identity (i.e., vocational jobs such as teaching school), a lack of resources considered valuable for facing this job may cause employees to turn to suboptimal strategies, such as an obsessive investment in their jobs. Over time, these defensive strategies in stressful contexts may trigger emotional exhaustion. TT has been considered a valuable tool for teachers in interacting, preparing, and coping with their important job (Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012), minimizing the effects of OP on burnout. That is, although OP is typically related to burnout, when teachers use TT, the consequences of OP are cancelled out.

To conclude, this is the first study to present TT behaviours as an explanatory mechanism for the effect of obsessive passion on PE teachers' burnout. We recommend designing interventions to teach TT behaviours in order to increase these behaviours, which may result not only in students' well-being, but also in less teacher burnout and greater well-being in the classroom.

	Alpha	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Harmonious passion	.75	4.46	.43	1			
2. Obsessive passion	.76	2.14	.79	.02	1		
3. Transformational teaching	.89	4.32	.42	.42**	-.09*	1	
4. Burnout	.87	1.48	.49	-.31**	.14*	-.31**	1

Note. Scales were assessed on a 5-point scale. ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, internal consistency and correlations among the study variables



** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Figure 1. Standardized beta coefficients indicating the relationships between types of passion, transformational teaching and burnout (one-tail test).

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PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación física, profesores, pasión, burnout, estilo transformacional de enseñanza.

RESUMEN: El objetivo del estudio fue examinar las asociaciones entre la pasión en profesores de educación física (EF) y su percepción de burnout, testando el rol mediador de sus conductas transformacionales de enseñanza como recurso de afrontamiento. 161 profesores de EF ($M_{edad} = 40.59$; $DT = 8.36$) respondieron a una batería de cuestionarios que recogía las variables de interés. Los resultados mostraron que la pasión armoniosa y el estilo transformacional de enseñanza predijeron negativamente el burnout; mientras que la pasión obsesiva lo predijo positivamente. Asimismo, las conductas transformacionales de los profesores mediaron parcialmente la relación entre la pasión armoniosa y el burnout, y mediaron totalmente la relación entre la pasión obsesiva y el burnout. En conclusión, en la medida que los profesores de EF sean más transformacionales, y sientan un mayor control sobre su pasión por la enseñanza, sus niveles de burnout serán más bajos.

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