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A Comparison of Burnout Between Undergraduate Music and Non-Music Majors

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Abstract

The principal purpose of the study was to compare perceived burnout levels (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment) of college students by year in school (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior), and academic major (music or non-music). The secondary purpose was to examine relationships among perceived burnout, academic, and personal variables (average number of hours per week of academic credit, classes, homework, exercise, sleep, work, and relaxation). Subjects were 320 undergraduate students from a liberal arts university in the northeast United States.

While no significant differences in burnout were reported based on year in school, music majors reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization than non-music majors. Additionally, for combined subjects, moderate to weak relationships were observed among emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, hours of classes, homework, sleep, and relaxation.

Researchers and practitioners have reported recent increases in the number of college students with severe psychological problems and in the demand for school counseling services (e.g., Kitzrow, 2003). Ross, Niebling, and Heckert (1999) surveyed 100 university students to determine perceived sources of stress and found that sleeping habits, vacations and breaks, changes in eating habits, increased academic workload, and new responsibilities were significant factors. In a study of college students' social interactions, Edwards, Hershberger, Russell, and Market (2001) found that negative social interaction was the most significant predictor of physical ailments. Similarly, Jacobs and Dodd (2003) studied relationships among burnout, social support, personality,

and workload of 149 college students and found that high levels of burnout were related to negative personality and perceived workload, while low levels of burnout were related to positive personality, peer support, and participation in extracurricular activities.

Other scholars have suggested that, in addition to these typical college factors, music majors may face unique sources of stress including performance anxiety, perfectionism, career concerns, and lack of respect (e.g., Bernhard, 2005; Raeburn, et al., 2004). Hamann and Daugherty (1985) surveyed burnout among 248 music majors and found that “university music students do report significant varying levels of burnout” (p. 6). Specifically, they found that music majors were concerned by “(a) lack of recognition by teachers, peers, administration, and parents; (b) lack of personal goals and unclear goals from university administrative levels; (c) lack of coordination among areas of curriculum, lack of cooperation among teachers in areas of study; and (d) too many irrelevant classes outside of music or too many academic classes in general and not enough actual experience with projected professional roles” (p. 7). In a similar study, Bernhard (in press) surveyed 203 music majors and found that, on average, subjects reported high levels of emotional exhaustion, moderate levels of depersonalization, and only moderate levels of personal accomplishment. Despite these studies, no known research has been conducted to determine whether there might be differences in perceived burnout between music and non-music majors.

The principal purpose of the current study was to compare perceived burnout levels (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment) of college students by year in school (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior), and academic major (music or non-music). The secondary purpose was to examine relationships

among perceived burnout, academic, and personal variables (average number of hours per week of academic credit, classes, homework, exercise, sleep, work, and relaxation). Burnout was measured using Gold, Bachelor, and Michael's (1989) *College Student Survey (CSS)*, while academic and personal variables were measured using a researcher-constructed adaptation of Hamann and Daugherty's (1985) *Demographic Data Form (DDF)*.

Method

According to Vandenberghe and Huberman (1999), burnout is “a crisis of overworked and disillusioned human service workers” (p. 1). This syndrome has been extended to members of the teaching profession and has been categorized into three distinct and measurable components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Maslach, Jackson, and Schwab (1986) created and tested a survey instrument to measure these three categories of burnout among professional educators. Gold, Bachelor, and Michael (1989) then developed and tested a college student version of the original instrument and titled it the *College Student Survey (CSS)*. The *CSS* is identical to the original burnout measure except that the term “work” was replaced with “school,” “students” was replaced with “friends and classmates,” and “job” was replaced with “college” (Table 1). Survey items are rated on a six-point scale in order to create composite scores. Items one, two, three, six, eight, thirteen, fourteen, sixteen, and twenty are indicators of emotional exhaustion (a fatigued feeling that develops when energies are drained), resulting in scores ranging from 0 – 54. Items five, ten, eleven, fifteen, and twenty-two are indicators of depersonalization (a lack of positive feelings toward other humans), resulting in scores ranging from 0 – 30. Items four,

seven, nine, twelve, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, and twenty-one are indicators of low personal accomplishment (a feeling of disappointment due to perceived lack of productivity), resulting in scores ranging from 0 – 48. High scores for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as well as low scores for personal accomplishment are considered indicators of burnout. Categorization levels for emotional exhaustion are: “High” (27 or above), “Moderate” (17 – 26), and “Low” (0 – 16). Categorization levels for depersonalization are: “High” (14 or above), “Moderate” (9 – 13), and “Low” (0 – 8). Categorization levels for personal accomplishment are: “High” (37 or above), “Moderate” (31 – 36), and “Low” (0 – 30) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Based on a study of 147 elementary education majors, Gold, et al., (1989) found the *CSS* to be a reliable measure of all three components of burnout ($r = .89, .76, \text{ and } .73$, respectively). Permission was consequently obtained from Dr. Gold to use the *CSS* as a measure of burnout in the current study (Table 1).

The *Demographic Data Form (DDF)* was developed by Hamann and Daugherty (1986) for a study of student burnout. While permission was obtained to use Hamann and Daugherty’s *DDF* in the current study, the original version of the form was not available. The researcher thus reconstructed and adapted Hamann and Daugherty’s form to survey variables of interest in the current study (hours per week of academic credit, classes, homework, exercise, sleep, work, and relaxation) (Table 2).

During the spring semester of 2006 the *CSS* and *DDF* were distributed to volunteer students in the campus activities center of a public liberal arts university in the northeast United States. Three hundred twenty students completed surveys out of a campus population of approximately 5,000 students (6.4 percent of total student

population). Of the 320 respondents, 48 were music majors and 272 were non-music majors (15 percent music majors), a similar percentage to the 600 music majors on campus (approximately 12 percent of the overall student population). Volunteers received as much time as needed to complete the surveys, typically taking between 10 and 15 minutes, and all responses were treated anonymously.

Table 1
College Student Survey (CSS)

<u>How Often:</u>	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

How Often
0 – 6

Statements:

1. _____ I feel emotionally drained from school.
2. _____ I feel used up at the end of the school day.
3. _____ I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day of school.
4. _____ I can easily understand how my friends and classmates feel about things.
5. _____ I feel I treat some friends and classmates as if they were impersonal objects.
6. _____ Working with people all day is really a strain for me.
7. _____ I deal very effectively with the problems of my friends and classmates.
8. _____ I feel burned out from school.
9. _____ I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work at school.
10. _____ I've become more callous toward people since I started college.
11. _____ I worry that school is hardening me emotionally.
12. _____ I feel very energetic.
13. _____ I feel frustrated by school.
14. _____ I feel I'm working too hard at school.
15. _____ I don't really care what happens to some friends and classmates.
16. _____ Working with people puts too much stress on me.

17. _____ I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my friends and classmates.
 18. _____ I feel exhilarated after working closely with my friends and classmates.
 19. _____ I have accomplished many worthwhile things in college.
 20. _____ I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.
 21. _____ At school, I deal with emotional problems very calmly.
 22. _____ I feel friends and classmates blame me for some of their problems.
-

Table 2
Demographic Data Form (DDF)

-
1. Year in school (e.g., freshman, sophomore, etc.) _____
2. Academic major _____
3. Number of official credit hours this semester _____
4. Average number of hours in classes per week _____
5. Average number of hours of homework per week _____
6. Average number of hours of exercise per week _____
7. Average number of hours of sleep per week _____
8. Average number of hours of paid or volunteer
work per week _____
9. Average number of hours relaxing or socializing
per week _____
-

Results

Descriptive data were computed for all *CSS* responses, including means and standard deviations for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment, by levels of year in school and academic major (Tables 3 & 4). According to Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter's (1996) categorizations, means for combined subjects were "High" for emotional exhaustion (28.63), "Moderate" for depersonalization (8.78), and "Moderate" for personal accomplishment (32.49). Descriptive data were also calculated for *DDF* variables, including means and standard deviations for music, as well as non-music majors (Tables 5 & 6).

Comparisons of perceived burnout levels by year in school and academic major were determined using a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), with year and academic major serving as the independent variables, and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment serving as the dependent variables. Results of the MANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences by year or interactions between year and academic major ($p > .05$), but did reveal a statistically significant effect for academic major ($F = 5.51$; $df = 3, 310$; $p < .01$). Music majors reported significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion ($F = 12.48$; $df = 1, 312$; $p < .01$) and depersonalization ($F = 9.10$; $df = 1, 312$; $p < .01$) than non-music majors.

Relationships among perceived burnout, academic, and personal variables were determined using Pearson product-moment correlation analyses, with *CSS* and *DDF* data serving as measures of the respective variables. Results of the correlation analyses for combined subjects revealed positive relationships between emotional exhaustion – depersonalization ($r = .51$), emotional exhaustion – hours of homework ($r = .31$), and

emotional exhaustion – hours of classes ($r = .18$). Negative relationships were observed between emotional exhaustion – hours of relaxation ($r = -.35$), emotional exhaustion – hours of sleep ($r = -.32$), depersonalization – personal accomplishment ($r = -.19$), and depersonalization – hours of sleep ($r = -.17$).

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations for Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment by Year in School

	N	EE Mean/ <i>SD</i>	DEP Mean/ <i>SD</i>	PA Mean/ <i>SD</i>
Freshman	87	26.71/9.92	8.83/6.49	32.25/7.06
Sophomore	87	28.79/9.79	8.99/6.05	31.90/6.27
Junior	90	30.61/10.08	8.52/6.09	32.78/6.65
Senior	56	28.27/9.89	8.76/6.44	33.21/6.18
Total	320	28.63/9.98	8.78/6.22	32.49/6.57

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations for Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment by Academic Major

	N	EE Mean/ <i>SD</i>	DEP Mean/ <i>SD</i>	PA Mean/ <i>SD</i>
Music	48	34.53/10.47	11.33/7.19	33.05/7.35
Non-Music	272	27.58/9.54	8.33/5.93	32.39/6.44
Total	320	28.63/9.98	8.78/6.22	32.49/6.57

Table 5
*Means and Standard Deviations for Demographic Data Form Variables
 Music Majors (N = 48)*

	Mean	SD
Number of credits per semester	15.72	2.37
Hours of classes per week	21.69	5.81
Hours of homework per week	16.99	12.78
Hours of exercise per week	3.21	2.84
Hours of sleep per week	41.73	10.67
Hours of work per week	1.98	3.92
Hours of relaxation per week	14.10	7.86

Table 6
*Means and Standard Deviations for Demographic Data Form Variables
 Non-Music Majors (N = 272)*

	Mean	SD
Number of credits per semester	15.19	2.35
Hours of classes per week	15.77	6.25
Hours of homework per week	10.99	8.57
Hours of exercise per week	4.60	4.10
Hours of sleep per week	45.90	10.45
Hours of work per week	7.55	9.72
Hours of relaxation per week	23.45	14.99

Discussion

According to Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter's (1996) categorizations, means for combined subjects were "High" for emotional exhaustion (28.63), "Moderate" for depersonalization (8.78), and "Moderate" for personal accomplishment (32.49). These findings support the research of Bernhard (in press), and suggest the need for further study to determine whether similar trends would be observed on other college campuses and to examine possible causes of the "High" emotional exhaustion levels reported by current subjects. No significant differences in perceived burnout were observed by year in school, suggesting that the potentially dangerous syndrome is not affected by age or college experience during the undergraduate years.

Music majors reported significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization than non-music majors, providing statistical support for previous reports (Bernhard, 2005; Hamann & Daugherty, 1985; Raeburn, et al., 2004). According to descriptive data from the *Demographic Data Form*, music majors reported substantially more hours per week of class and homework and less hours of exercise, sleep, and relaxation than non-music majors. Further research should be conducted to determine possible causes for these discrepancies (such as greater academic and performance requirements for music majors and potential psychological problems including performance anxiety, perfectionism, and career concerns).

Regarding the secondary purpose of the study, moderate relationships were observed among emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment, supporting Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter's (1996) premise that these three components of burnout are interrelated. Relationships among emotional exhaustion and hours per week

of homework and classes support previous research by Ross, Niebling and Heckert (1999), as well as Jacobs and Dodd (2003), although it is interesting to note that Jacobs and Dodd found that *perceived* academic workload was related to burnout, but that *actual* academic workload was not. Caution may be needed when interpreting results of the current study, as all responses were self-reported by subjects.

Relationships among emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and hours per week of sleep support the research of Bernhard (in press), as well as Ross, Niebling, and Heckert (1999). Relationships among emotional exhaustion and relaxation may support the research of Edwards, Hershberger, Russell, and Market (2001), as well as Jacobs and Dodd (2003), although specific information about how subjects “relaxed” was beyond the scope of the current study.

Summary and Implications for Practice

Collectively, results from the current study provide evidence that, while no significant differences in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment exist between freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors, music majors likely experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization than non-music majors. Additionally, moderate to weak relationships may exist among emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, hours of classes, homework, sleep, and relaxation. Although these results should be interpreted with caution (data were self-reported by 320 volunteer students from a single, public liberal arts university), time and resources are needed to address concerns of burnout as a component of undergraduate music curricula.

Instructional units during freshman introductory classes might be particularly effective, to help new students make the transition from high school to the demands of music school. Specific topics could include strategies for responsible intrapersonal (e.g., sleep, diet, and exercise), interpersonal (e.g., collegiality and respect for diversity), and professional health (e.g., performance anxiety, perfectionism, career concerns, and balance between musical expectations and other academic coursework). As music majors continue through the program these topics should be reinforced in other classes, and opportunities should be available for mentoring and support from faculty, administrators, and professional counselors. Finally, undergraduate music curricula should be examined to consider ways in which required coursework and musical expectations might be streamlined to offer a comprehensive education, while also helping music majors to reduce burnout and make the most of their academic and personal lives.

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