WHAT MAKES THE JOB TOUGH?
THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESPECT ON BURNOUT IN THE HUMAN SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

The influence of organizational respect, job demands and trait negative affectivity on burnout was examined in this longitudinal field study within the human services field. Employees’ perceptions of organizational respect at Time 1 were found to negatively influence burnout 16 months later. This effect occurred above and beyond the influence of job demands and personality traits on burnout. Additionally the effect of organizational respect on burnout was moderated by employees’ level of work autonomy. Implications of the influence of contextual variables, and organizational respect specifically, for the understanding of burnout and the management of human service organizations are discussed.

Key words: Burnout, Organizational Respect, Trait Negative Affectivity, Job Demands, Human Services, Long Term Care
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The image of idealistic workers entering human and social service jobs, seeking to “do good” but then “burning out,” retains a strong hold on our collective imagination. Traditionally, the nature of the work is considered an important cause of this phenomenon (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Particularly in the human services, a central focus is on the demands of the job that human service workers perform (Cherniss, 1980). In addition to the often difficult physical demands of this work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Trinkoff, Lipscomb, Geiger-Brown, Storr, & Brady, 2003), the emotional work or labor of interacting with clients is seen as highly demanding and thus contributing to burnout (Cordes & Dougerty, 1993; Leiter & Maslach, 1988). A second important explanatory factor is the influence of individual differences, such as individual personality characteristics that are related to a greater propensity to burnout (Beasley, Thompson, & Davidson, 2003; Carroll & White, 1982; Zellars, Perrewé & Hochwarter, 2000). Although job demands and personality factors are clearly important, as has been argued by Johns (2006), understanding organizational context can be critical to having a more complete view of organizational phenomenon. In this case, the organizational context within which the employee works, particularly the values and procedures in place that reflect the respect with which the organization treats its employees, are also predicted to influence burnout.

The idea that organizational context also has an influence on burnout is a fairly recent development (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), particularly as compared to job demands and individual differences. In the present longitudinal study we examined a component of the organizational context that may be particularly relevant to employee burnout – organizational
respect, that is, the level of respect employees feel they are receiving from the organization. Additionally, to confirm that this construct indeed has added value above and beyond the more frequently studied individual and job characteristics, we explicit examine the added explanatory value of organizational respect on burnout.

**ORGANIZATIONAL RESPECT AND DISRESPECT**

Receiving and giving respect is understood in philosophy and ethics to be a fundamental right and duty of being human (Kant, 1993). Respect communicates recognition of one’s existence (Honneth, 1992), and conveys positive views of the self to which all human beings are entitled (Rawls, 1971). Similarly, according to Mead (cited in Honneth, 1992 and Hornstein, Michela, Van Eron, Cohen, Heckelman, Sachse-Skidd, et al., 1995), an individual’s self, that is their identity and integrity as a human being able to function in the world, is a reflection of the approval and recognition that is gained from others. Likewise, Goffman (1967) argues that the sacredness of the self is affirmed through others’ expressions of regard. This is evidenced in organizations as well. Workers judge their self worth through the respect they obtain (Hodson, 2001), and respect and/or dignity confirms an individual’s worth as a human being (Margolis, 2001). Research on identity in organizations also supports the idea that respect communicates critical information about one’s self and influences one’s self-definition (de Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Tyler, 1999; Smith & Tyler, 1997). In this context, respect can be defined as the approval and recognition of the self by others. If giving and receiving respect is a fundamental right and duty of humans, conversely, lack of respect can negate our very existence (Goffman, 1959). As Honneth (1992: 189) argues, we are all implicitly vulnerable to disrespect, and “the experience of disrespect poses the risk of an injury that can cause the entire identity of a person to collapse.” In many cases, disrespectful behavior indicates that the individual is not worthy of minimal common courtesies that may be due to others as members of
the same community (Hornstein et al., 1995). Furthermore, when treated disrespectfully, individuals' feelings of self-worth are negatively impacted (Miller, 2001). Thus, disrespect is a type of interpersonal treatment which communicates disapproval and/or devaluation (Hornstein, et al., 1995) of the self or another target person.

In an organizational setting, respect can be a powerful signal to individuals regarding their standing not only as employees but as people. Respect in organizations can have important consequences. Empirically, in a health care setting respect has been shown to positively impact nurses' trust in management (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005) and individuals' feelings of disrespect have been shown to influence both intentions to quit and actual turnover (Pinel & Paulin, 2005). Also relevant within organizations, respectful and disrespectful treatment can be perceived as a collective phenomenon via vicarious learning (Bandura, 1977) or other indirect effects (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; La Bianca, Brass, & Gray, 1998). As information comes from a variety of sources, one's perceptions of respect and disrespect are not only based on how one views one's own treatment but also by how others are treated. For example, when team members see someone else on the team being treated unfairly, they alter their own perceptions of the fairness of the team (Colquitt, 2004). Likewise, the extent to which others, not just the self, are treated, in accordance with commonly understood standards of respectful treatment can then influence an individual’s own perceptions of respect (Hornstein et al., 1995). Therefore, organizational respect connotes the extent to which employees in general (including but not limited to the self) are treated with respect, dignity, and care for their positive self-regard through approval and positive valuation, while organizational disrespect connotes the opposite.

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1 While not part of an employment relationship, but within the health domain we study here, Blanchard & Lurie (2004) report that patient perceptions of disrespect by doctors negatively influenced health outcomes.
As there has been little research in the area of organizational respect or disrespect, and none yet related to burnout, we first examined theoretically related constructs in other areas of organizational behavior to help understand the possible impact of respect on burnout. In the justice literature, the closest constructs to organizational disrespect are likely interactional and interpersonal justice, both of which reflect the quality of communication between the employee and the direct source of justice (e.g., supervisor or manager) (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, 2001). Injustice perceptions are not the same as perceptions of disrespect, but they could diffuse into feeling a lack of respect (Miller, 2001). Perceived organizational support (POS) could also lead to feelings of organizational respect, and this construct has also been related to lower burnout (Rhodes & Eisenberger, 2002). Thus, while the relationship between organizational respect and burnout has not yet been examined specifically, there is good reason to believe organizational respect/disrespect would be particularly relevant to burnout. We discuss the specific mechanisms by which organizational respect may influence burnout below.

**ORGANIZATIONAL RESPECT/DISRESPECT AND BURNOUT**

The pervasive perception of organizational respect or disrespect could influence employee burnout in several ways. First, as organizational disrespect is the perception that the organization does not treat employees with respect or dignity, burnout can occur from employee demoralization. Disrespected employees may need to mask their true emotional reaction regarding how their organization treats them while they assist their clients. This masking and suppression could increase emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003), a major component of burnout studied in the human service

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2 However, POS and organizational respect are not identical. The theoretical basis of POS is the individual’s own exchange relationship between him or herself and the organization whereas the underlying basis for perceptions of organizational dis/respect is an expectation of what is commonly due to all members of the organizational community. That is, one could imagine a workplace in which one individual is treated quite well and perceives high organizational
Organizational respect and burnout have been studied extensively in various industries (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Cherniss, 1980; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Disrespectful behavior has also been shown to influence stress (Lim & Cortina, 2005) which in turn can lead to greater burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Lack of respect could also influence burnout by negatively influencing feelings of trust towards the organization. Although they did not examine it empirically, Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe and Umphress (2003) describe an organizational climate for respect, defining it as “organizational members’ shared perceptions regarding the extent to which individuals within their organization are esteemed, shown consideration, and treated with dignity.” They argue that when employees feel they are respected by their organizations they will reciprocate in kind by respecting organizational values. Empirically, the salience of organizational respect to employees is supported by O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell’s (1991) finding that “Respect for People” was one of seven meaningful organizational values to people at work. Respect for individuals may be seen as a particularly important value espoused by organizations in human service settings (Fuqua & Newman, 2002; McCormack & Reed, 2005). If disrespectful attitudes and behaviors are perceived by employees, the apparent hypocrisy of the organization can lead to cynicism and burnout (Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003). Conversely, treating employees with respect has been shown to increase trust in management (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005), which could help reduce burnout.

Respect has also been shown to positively influence one’s self-regard while disrespectful behavior calls one’s self-regard into question (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Greenberg, 1993; Miller, 2001). Self-regard, in the form of core self-evaluations (defined as the deepest assumptions individuals hold about themselves), when positive, influences job and life satisfaction positively (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998), while negative core self-evaluations lead to negative outcomes including greater burnout (Best, Stapleton, & Downey, 2005). Although core self-evaluations are typically support but may also perceive that many others in the organization may not be treated as well in general and so also perceives high organizational disrespect.
conceived of as a dispositional construct, it is possible that situational self-evaluations raised by organizational respect or disrespect could have similar effects. For example, by facing a pervasive sense of disrespectful treatment, individuals’ self-regard may falter as they question why they continue to work in a place that does not respect them. However, no matter how difficult work is in an organization, if employees feel respected, the congruence of what is felt toward the organization and then expressed to the clients could reduce the burnout they might otherwise feel. Finally, as discussed earlier, respectful treatment acknowledges one’s identity. Respect for self-identities has been shown to increase the likelihood of identification with a super-ordinate social group and cooperation with super-ordinate group goals (Barretto & Ellemers, 2002). Indeed, research indicates that individuals who feel respected by their organizations are more likely to expend effort on behalf of the organization (Smith & Tyler, 1997). Since burnout is exemplified by the difficulty of continuing to do one’s work, employees who feel respected are less likely to exhibit burnout. As such, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1. Organizational Respect will be negatively associated with employee burnout.

THE MODERATING INFLUENCE OF AUTONOMY ON THE JOB ON ORGANIZATIONAL RESPECT AND BURNOUT

Organizational respect may not operate in isolation; other structural variables within the organization may interact to moderate the influence of organizational respect on burnout. According to theories of stress and burnout (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992; Karasek, 1979), autonomy, defined as the discretion that one has to determine the processes and schedules involved in completing a task (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), has a buffering effect on stress. Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner (2005) found in samples of both American and French customer service workers that the positive relationship
between frequency of emotional regulation (a stressor) and increased burnout was moderated by job autonomy. Specifically, they found that for employees with high job autonomy the stress of emotional regulation was less related to burnout, but for employees with lower job autonomy, the stress of emotional regulation was more strongly related to burnout. Employees who had lower autonomy were more vulnerable to having their use of emotional regulation correlated to subsequent burnout. We explored the possibility that there would be a similar vulnerability to the impact of organizational disrespect on burnout if employees do not have autonomy over their tasks. Conversely, employees who have greater autonomy may be less vulnerable to the impact of disrespect on burnout, as autonomy may serve as a proxy for respect in that the employee is trusted enough to be given a degree of independence. Thus, similar to the moderating effect found by Grandey et al. (2005), we predict the following:

Hypothesis 2. Autonomy is a moderator in the relationship between organizational respect and burnout, such that the influence of organizational respect on burnout will be greater for employees with lower autonomy than it will for employees with higher autonomy.

JOBD DEMANDS AND PERSONALITY INFLUENCES ON BURNOUT

Job Demands

Although the focus of this study is the exploration of the role of organizational respect on burnout, the influence of job demands and personality on burnout must also be taken into account. A common idea and finding in the burnout literature is that job demands, particularly the frequency and intensity of client interactions in human services, lead to burnout (Cherniss, 1980). Job demands are aspects of the job that “require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (e.g., exhaustion)” (Demerouti, Bakker,
Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Consistent with Karasek (1979), we examined those job demands that are part of the regular demands related to accomplishing one’s tasks (although some researchers have focused on job demands which go above and beyond one’s normal tasks, e.g. Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). Job demands can increase burnout through sustained physical or psychological overtaxing of individuals at work (Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreuers, 2003). Among job demands that are commonly studied are role conflict, role overload and role ambiguity (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoeke, & Rosenthal, 1964;; Jackson, Turner & Brief, 1986). In meta-analytic studies (i.e. Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Lee & Ashforth, 1996), these job demands positively influence burnout. Other job demands such as emotional demands and physical demands are also related to increased burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge, & Bakker, 2003). Following Brotheridge and Grandey (2002), we specifically examined job demands that are inherent in employee-client interactions, as these form a critical portion of a human service employee’s tasks.

In human service jobs, burnout can arise from the types of physical and role taxing behaviors described above, as well as through emotional job demands. Role conflict typically arises when expectations of a role are incompatible or incongruent with the actual role or other prescribed roles (Netemeyer, Johnston, & Burton, 1990; Rizzo, House, & Litzman, 1970). Human service employees often act as care-takers, providing services to a client, while also acting as a friend or relation (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). Work-role conflict in particular has been shown to lead to work overload and burnout in the human services (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991). For example, Bacharach et al. (1991) found that work-role conflict predicted perceptions of both work overload and work-home conflict in a sample of public-sector nurses, where work-home conflict mediated the relationship between work role conflict and burnout. In addition, the emotional job demands of client interactions are also thought to influence burnout in the human services.
For example, Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) found that emotion-related job demands influence burnout through emotional display rules that force employees to engage in surface acting, which can lead to emotional exhaustion. Therefore, we propose that:

**Hypothesis 3.** Job demands will be positively associated with employee burnout.

**Personality**

Past researchers have also shown a robust effect of personality factors such as the Big Five and other individual differences on burnout (Beasley, Thompson, & Davidson, 2003; Höge & Büssing, 2004; Zellars & Perrewé, 2001). Negative affectivity is one of the most widely cited personality variables relating to burnout (Burke, Brief, & George, 1993; Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge, & Bakker, 2003). In particular, Iverson, Olekalns, and Erwin (1998) and Zellars, Perrewé and Hochwarter (1999) found that trait negative affect was positively related to burnout in samples of healthcare employees. Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, and de Chermont (2003) in a meta-analytic review of affect on job attitudes found robust support for the positive influence of trait negative affectivity on burnout. The rationale for these findings is that negative affectivity (NA) can work in two ways to influence stress, and hence burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), first, individuals high in NA may perceive greater negative events and stress than individuals low in NA, and second, individuals high in NA may engage in less self-deception and have less of a buffer when negative events and stress occur than individuals low in NA (Judge, Erez, and Thoresen, 2000). Therefore, we predict that:

**Hypothesis 4.** Trait negative affectivity will be positively associated with employee burnout.
Does Organizational Respect Matter Above and Beyond Job Demands and Personality?

While we know from other studies that organizational context can be an important predictor of myriad psychological and behavioral outcomes at work (Carr, Schmidt, Ford, & DeShon, 2003; Parker, Baltes, Young, Huff, Altmann, Lacost, et al., 2003; Johns, 2006), it is only recently that research examining burnout has begun to include organizational factors in understanding this phenomenon (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Rhodes & Eisenberger, 2002; Moliner, Martínez-Tur, Peiró, Ramos, & Cropanzano, 2005). Although we expect that the organizational context of respect will have an influence on burnout, both individual and job factors are also critical antecedents to burnout. Thus, given the weight of past research, it is important to consider all three variables (individual trait negative affectivity, job demands and organizational respect) together to confirm that organizational respect indeed is able to predict above and beyond the already established constructs of individual and job factors in predicting burnout. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5. Organizational respect will be negatively associated with employee burnout above and beyond job demands and trait negative affectivity.

The purpose of the present longitudinal study is to explore the influence of a particular organizational context variable, organizational respect, on burnout. Specifically, we argue that employee perceptions of respect, in terms of how the organization treats its employees in general, and how employees treat each other, will be an important influence on employees’ work experience and feelings of burnout. In addition, we examine whether autonomy can serve as a moderating factor in the organizational respect–burnout relationship. We integrate this perspective with prior
research on burnout that has examined personality and job factors, arguing that perceptions of organizational respect will predict burnout above and beyond the more traditionally examined variables of personality and job demands. We test our hypotheses in a longitudinal study in the human services industry.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

The participants were full-time certified nursing assistants (CNAs) from thirteen units across three sites of a large long-term-care facility in the New York City region. Data was collected in two waves. The first started in September 2003 (Time 1) and the second started in January 2005 (Time 2). The response rate was 75% for Time 1 and 67% of those who responded in Time 1 also responded in Time 2, with a final sample of 108 CNAs. The participants mean tenure with the organization was 10.30 years (S.D. = 8.69). 82% were female and 88% had greater than a high school education.

**Measures**

Independent variables. *Organizational Respect* was measured at Time 1 with a five-item “Respect for the Individual” scale for which participants rated each statement on a five point scale ranging from 1=not at all characteristic to 5=very characteristic of their unit. This scale was based on one of the primary organizational values in the organization’s culture statement with items generated based on the specific important components that members of the organization felt reflected “respect for the individual on the part of the organization and its employees.” The scale consisted of the following five items: “Staff members respect each other;” “Staff members are treated with dignity;” “Cultural diversity of the staff is valued;” “Supervisors pay attention to staff members’ ideas;” “Staff members
are encouraged to be creative when solving problems.” The mean of the scale was 2.63 (s.d. = .86), with a Chronbach’s alpha of .82.3

Time 1 Job Demands consisted of employees’ reports of how often they engaged in typical care-taking behaviors for clients in their jobs. The specific items in the scale were generated based on interviews and focus groups with organizational members about tasks that constituted the primary job activities that should occur in both physical and socio-emotional care for residents. The scale consisted of the following nine items, which were: “answer call bells;” “assist in dining/ snacks;” “perform minor housekeeping duties;” “socialize with residents;” transport residents;” “conduct activities with residents;” “personal shopping for residents;” “communicate with residents families;” “read to/ with residents.” Responses were measured on a Likert scale from 1=never to 5=always. The mean of the scale was 3.60 (s.d.= 0.65), with a Chronbach’s alpha of .72.4

Employees responded to a three-item scale assessing their Time 1 perceptions of Autonomy and control at work. The items consisted of the following questions: 1) “In general, how much say or influence do you feel you have in what goes on in your unit?” 2) “Do you feel that you can influence decision-making in your unit regarding things about which you are concerned?” 3) “Does your supervisor ask your opinion when a problem comes up which involves your work?” Responses were measured on a Likert scale with 1= not at all to 5=very much. The mean of the scale was 3.01 (s.d. = 1.04), with a Cronbach’s alpha of .74.

Trait Negativity Affectivity was measured at Time 2 using eight items from Watson, Clark, & Tellegen’s (1988) PANAS scale. This is a dispositional measure, on which employees rated their

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3 A confirmatory factor analysis showed that our main independent and dependent variables of interest, organizational respect, job demands, autonomy, NA and burnout were distinct constructs. Variables were tested in pairs due to the sample size. Chi-square difference tests and various fit indices indicated that all the two factor models were significantly better than the one-factor models (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Results and factor loadings are available from the first author.

4 These job demands mirror the conditions discussed in prior literature of having both physical work as well as work involving emotional labor (Leiter, Harvie, & Frizzell, 1998). For example, while there are many positive components to socializing with residents, staff may find this emotionally exhausting because of the distress involved in forming close
general tendency to feeling irritable, upset, nervous, afraid, and guilty on a 1-5 Likert scale ranging from 1=not at all to 5=extremely. The mean was 1.66 (s.d.= .67), with a Cronbach’s alpha of .81.

Dependent variable. **Burnout** was measured at Time 2 with four items from the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Scale (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The items were, “I feel emotionally drained from my work;” “I feel used up at the end of the workday;” “I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job;” and “I feel burned out from my work.” The responses were measured on a Likert scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The mean of the scale was 2.90 (s.d. = 0.87), with a Chronbach’s alpha of .76.

Control variables. **Organizational Change Units**: At the time of this study the participating long-term health care facility was beginning a change process to become more resident centered in the delivery of their care. Some units were assigned to undergo change while others were control units. As the organizational change effort included some human resource changes that could have an influence on the study variables, a dummy for units that were exposed to change was included. Units were either coded as having been involved in organizational change or not. Seven out of 13 units in the study had undergone organizational change.

**Site**: Since there were three different sites in this long term health care facility, a dummy variable for location was included. 42.5% of the sample was from Site 1, 39% was from Site 2, and 18.5% was from Site 3.
Tenure: Tenure data was provided by the Human Resource department and was calculated as the number of months the employee had been employed by the organization (mean = 133.93, s.d. = 111.26).

Sex (Male): This was a categorical variable indicating 0 if female and 1 if male.

RESULTS

Please see Table 1 for the zero-order correlations among the study variables.

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses. There was a significant influence of employee perceptions of organizational respect at Time 1 on burnout at Time 2 (Beta=-0.27, p<.000), supporting Hypothesis 1 (please see Table 2, Model 1). To test Hypothesis 2, the interaction of autonomy with organizational respect, all variables forming the two-way interactions were centered to minimize multi-collinearity among the interaction terms and the component variables (Aiken & West, 1991). There was a significant interaction effect (Beta=0.21, p<.05) between organizational respect and autonomy on burnout in the direction predicted (please see Table 2, Model 3). As seen in Figure 1, the impact of organizational respect on burnout was felt most strongly when autonomy was low. Employees with lower autonomy over their tasks were the most influenced by the level of organizational respect - with the highest level of burnout occurring for employees with both low autonomy and low organizational respect. However, at higher levels of autonomy, the impact of respect on burnout was less influenced by autonomy. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.
As shown in Table 2, Model 2, there was a marginally significant negative influence of Time 1 employee job demands on burnout at Time 2 (Beta= -0.17, p<.10), the opposite of Hypothesis 3 that job demands would be positively related to burnout. There was the predicted significant influence of trait negative affectivity on burnout at Time 2 (Beta=0.32, p<.000, see Table 2 – Model 2), supporting Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 5, which predicted that Time 1 organizational respect would lead to decreased Time 2 burnout above and beyond job demands and trait negative affectivity, was also supported (Beta= -0.22, p<.05) and the overall model with burnout as the dependent variable was significant, F (8, 90) = 6.42 (p<.000, please see Table 2 – Model 3).

DISCUSSION

In this longitudinal study we expand on existing perspectives regarding what influences employee burnout in the human services, by examining the organizational context – specifically, organizational respect and disrespect towards employees. In doing so, we found support for our hypothesis that organizational respect would be negatively related to burnout, and that as predicted, organizational respect influenced burnout above and beyond the effects of job demands and negative affectivity. Interestingly, while negative affectivity had the predicted positive relationship with burnout, job demands had a marginally significant negative relationship to burnout, opposite from the direction predicted, which we discuss at greater length below. Last, offering additional
support for the role of organizational structure on burnout, there was a significant interaction showing that the less autonomy employees reported, the more vulnerable they were to the influence of organizational disrespect on burnout. The longitudinal design of this study allowed us to test our hypotheses over time showing clear temporal effects of organizational respect, which influenced burnout one year and four months later. This would suggest that respect, or lack thereof, is not just a momentary phenomenon that causes a dip in employees’ satisfaction in the short term, but is a consistent experience that is pervasive and pernicious in its long-term effects. Some comments from our study participants can help illuminate this phenomenon:

Disrespect: “…. [you] are expected to get work done which is impossible with all the work you do and it is not appreciated, you are not respected as a person, you are talked down to, looked down on, and very disrespected for what you do as a person…”

Respect: “… is a wonderful floor to work on, we work as a team. Our supervisor is great with us. We are treated with respect, we love our residents and I think we all do a good job working with them…”

Existing literature has traditionally conceptualized burnout as arising from the job or the individual. This paper, by showing that context is important to burnout, indicates why this may be a problematic conceptualization. By conceptualizing individual differences as a major cause of burnout, the “problem” from a managerial perspective is the person. Succumbing to burnout becomes a private affair of the employee, and not something of concern to the organization as a whole. Employees may thus be encouraged to engage in emotion-focused coping or other personal means of dealing with burnout (van Dierendonck, Garsen, & Visser, 2005; Giardini & Frese, 2006) which ignore the contextual sources of the problem. Similarly, by conceptualizing job demands as a
primary cause of emotional exhaustion, the “problem” becomes the nature of the work, without consideration of the multiple sources of an employee’s work experience. Human service jobs may be difficult, but the presumption that the demands are due to client interactions means that very little can be done about changing the negative parts of the experience of human service interactions. This view moreover ignores the possibility that job demands can potentially be enriching (supported by the marginally significant negative relationship between job demands and burnout).

Although this result may seem counter-intuitive and is not considered in the past burnout literature, there is some evidence in other areas of organizational research that the regular job demands of human service employees may not necessarily lead to burnout, but can be enriching. For example, if human service employees feel that they are helping a client and progress is being made, this could lead to positive affect and less burnout (Zellars, Hochwarter, Perrewé, Hoffman, & Ford, 2004), as well as a reduction in any dissonance or discrepancy between felt and displayed emotion (Lewig & Dollard, 2003) lessening subsequent burnout. Similarly, from a job enrichment perspective, positive client interactions can provide direct feedback to the human service worker (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001), which is important for engagement and motivation, negatively related to burnout. Research on roles and spillover also show that in some circumstances having multiple roles can certainly be an enriching, rather than depleting, situation (Rothbard, 2001). In the particular case of client interactions in human services, this could mean that being friendly or familial with clients (when enacting the friendship role, for example) can provide positive emotion and engagement, which can spillover to engagement when doing arduous care-taking tasks (e.g. enacting the professional helper role). It may also be that the framing of one’s job is critical in its influence on burnout. Although the care-taking aspect of the work can carry both physical and social taint in the outside world (Hughes, 1962), employees who perform “dirty work” have been shown to develop protective mechanisms that provide identity and meaning to the work such that it becomes a source
of pride and engagement (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). We have some indirect support for this phenomenon in our zero-order correlations (Table 1) showing a significant positive relationship of job demands with both perceptions of respect and autonomy. However, given the weight of prior research, this marginally significant result should be interpreted with caution, but opens a promising avenue for future study, including the search, perhaps, for curvilinear effects of job demands on burnout, as well as the importance of more carefully considering the context of job or industry in which this phenomenon is being examined.

Another interesting issue here is how much of the organizational respect phenomenon is an individual experience versus a collective experience. While we examined individuals’ perceptions of how respected they were, we were also interested in how widely shared this was as a collective phenomenon, a shared organizational culture of respect. To better understand this, we calculated unit-level perceptions of organizational respect which showed an ICC(1) value of .14 (significant at $p=.01$), about average for group level constructs in field research (Bliese, 2000). The ICC(2) was .57 and the within-group agreement, $rwg(j)$ (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1993) for ten of the thirteen units was above the generally accepted value of .7 (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). This offers preliminary support that in addition to being an individual level perception, the respect with which an organization treats its employees is a pervasive organizational level phenomenon that employees can recognize and agree upon. Further study of other organizations and industries should examine the influence of organizational respect at various levels and in connection to other organizationally relevant outcomes such as productivity, cooperation, or in the case of organizational disrespect, on conflict, counter-productive work behaviors and deviance.

The implications for the management of human service organizations in the above study derive directly from some of the hypotheses. Although it is likely that disrespect is experienced across industries, disrespect for individuals may be particularly problematic in the helping
professions where concern for individuals is supposedly paramount (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005). Thus, if it is not only the demands of the job or something dispositional about the employee that are the primary contributors to burnout in the human services, but it is also the organizational environment that is important, then there is a point of entry for human resource management. This study argues and provides evidence that good versus poor management, in the form of organizational respect, for example, may therefore have a clear and critical role in stemming burnout in human service organizations. From a managerial perspective, understanding the influence of the organizational context above and beyond the job and the person on burnout can help provide an important set of levers managers can put in motion to make the job “less tough.” Recent work shows that managers of employees in “dirty work” occupations, for instance, may be able to offset the negative effects of the job on employees by providing social validation and other normalizing tactics (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, forthcoming). Equally important, by improving the management in these organizations we may have a chance to improve the quality of care given to the clients of those in the human services. For example, Garman, Corrigan, & Morris (2002) found that high levels of burnout at the group-level had severe implications for patient care and satisfaction and Leiter, Harvie, and Frizzell (1998) showed that patients on units with more emotionally exhausted nurses were less satisfied.

Last, we need to consider a possible phenomenon in which human service workers may have mentally “turned over” but are still physically present. Cropanzano and colleagues show that burnout is related to lower organizational commitment and higher turnover intention (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003), although burned out individuals may not actually turnover (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). For example, in our study, we found that being a longer tenured employee was significantly correlated with higher burnout (please see Table 1). From a managerial perspective, withdrawal behaviors are perhaps more important to human service organizations than turnover.
because withdrawal may be the response taken by employees that do not have high quality job alternatives (Withey & Cooper, 1989). Thus, in the worst case, disrespectful organizations can be left full of neglected and neglectful individuals who have figured out how to cope or survive in the organization by mentally turning over, while those with better job alternatives, or more commitment to their profession rather than the organization, end up leaving (Hughes, 2001).

What makes a job tough and leads to burnout? Above and beyond the person and job, the study of organizational context, specifically the influence of organizational respect and disrespect on burnout, can help broaden our understanding of this question. In doing so we seek to not only understand how burnout occurs, but also to increase our understanding of how respectful and disrespectful work environments influence employees. This paper adds an important dimension to the study of burnout, namely the influence of the organizational context, and in particular, organizational respect. For employees committed to the human service professions, finding an organization that is more respectful might be an avenue of hope in what otherwise could lead to a high burnout situation. Our results indicate that treating employees with respect and dignity may go a long way in making even the hardest jobs less tough.
REFERENCES


TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS AMONG STUDY VARIABLES

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** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed test).
### TABLE 2
REGRESSION ANALYSES PREDICTING BURNOUT (TIME 2) FROM JOB DEMANDS AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESPECT (TIME 1) MODERATED BY AUTONOMY (TIME 1)

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Note: All tests are two-tailed

+p<0.10  * p<.05  ** p<.01  *** p<.000

N=98 after listwise deletion
FIGURE 1

INTERACTION OF AUTONOMY AND RESPECT ON BURNOUT

- High Org. Respect
- Low Org. Respect

Burnout

High Autonomy | Low Autonomy