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ARTICLE



## Resilience Only Gets You So Far: Volunteer Incivility and Burnout

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### ABSTRACT

Although multiple factors have been found to induce burnout in volunteers, studies examining relationships among volunteer coworkers as a potential stressor are sorely lacking. Through the lens of conservation of resources (COR) theory, we investigated coworker (i.e., from both paid and unpaid coworkers) incivility as a predictor of burnout in a sample of volunteers. COR theory postulates that environmental stressors lead to burnout or other negative outcomes by depleting an individual's resources. The present study also explored resilient coping as one factor that might help volunteers cope with the burnout emanating from incivility. Using regression, we found that incivility from paid and unpaid coworkers was positively associated with burnout. Resilient coping was tested and confirmed as a moderator of this relationship. Specifically, resilient coping was a useful buffer when the relationship between incivility and volunteer burnout was weaker, but was less effective at higher levels of incivility and burnout. Implications are discussed.

### KEYWORDS

Workplace incivility;  
volunteer incivility; burnout;  
resilient coping; coworker  
incivility

Incivility describes a less intense (i.e., than workplace bullying or abusive supervision) but much more prevalent form of counterproductive behavior. Its widespread incidence in the workplace (Porath & Pearson, 2013) and its association with many detrimental effects such as depression (Lim & Lee, 2011), reduced energy (Giumetti et al., 2013), lower reported well-being (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001), and poor memory, fewer helping behaviors, and reduced performance (Porath & Erez, 2007), have spurred research that has led to substantial progress in both understanding and theory. Although much research has verified an association between incivility and negative outcomes, investigations to date have focused largely on uncivil behavior occurring within samples of employees operating in for-profit organizations (Estes & Wang, 2008).

Given the damaging influence of incivility, with some research indicating that encountering even one uncivil “perpetrator” within an organization can induce embarrassment, isolation, and negative somatic health symptoms (Hershcovis, Ogunfowora, Reich, & Christie, 2017), a relevant question has to do with the dynamics of incivility in the broader organizational domain. Attempts at understanding incivility within organizations have assessed incivility experienced from paid coworkers (Sakurai & Jex, 2012), supervisors or managers (Reio, 2011), and even those outside of the organization, such as the clientele or customers of the

company (Walker, van Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2014). One unexplored but relevant consideration is how incivility might influence individuals who donate their time to organizations.

Although employees are financially compensated for their time and volunteers are not, previous investigations have noted that the quality of volunteer work is comparable to, and at times indistinguishable from, that of paid employees (Cnann & Cascio, 1999; Gidron, 1987; Liao-Troth, 2001). Further, the services provided by volunteers are substantial. In 2014, volunteers contributed 7.9 billion hours of work and saved an estimated \$184 billion to organizations operating in the United States (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2016). Although some nonprofit organizations do not solicit volunteers, others, particularly smaller organizations, would be unable to operate without them. Several studies have noted a high degree of overlap and interchangeability between volunteers and paid staff in nonprofit organizations, indicating that although some of the workforce is paid and some are not, they are often completing the same or similar tasks (Chum, Mook, Handy, Schugurensky, & Quarter, 2013; Handy, Mook, & Quarter, 2008). Volunteers also require a substantial amount of resources, and many organizations invest considerable time and effort into their training and development (Saksida & Shantz, 2014). This investment further highlights the relevance of studying individuals in the volunteer role.

Specifically, although volunteers may be emotionally attached to supporting a cause or an agency, there are other ways to do so (e.g., making a financial contribution) and an increasing number of nonprofits in the United States where they can do so (McKeever & Pettijohn, 2015). Thus, their lack of dependency on the organization, exacerbated by the competition of various agencies for what can be a limited pool of volunteers (Dolnicar & Randle, 2005), suggests that they may be more readily willing to leave an organization upon experiencing incivility.

Although no previous studies have examined incivility from the perspective of volunteers, other research has explored factors related to their retention. Many volunteers discontinue service due to burnout (Allen & Mueller, 2013; Chen & Yu, 2014; Cowlshaw, Evans, & McLennan, 2010; Scherer, Allen, & Harp, 2016). Prior antecedents of volunteer burnout include challenges associated with caring for the chronically ill (Akintola, Hlengwa, & Dageid, 2013), work–life issues (Huynh, Xanthopoulou, & Winefield, 2013), and the desire for salient extrinsic outcomes (Moreno-Jiménez & Villodres, 2010). One study to date has assessed volunteers' relationships with paid staff at the organization as a predictor of negative outcomes (Huynh, Winefield, Xanthopoulou, & Metzger, 2012). Specifically, the study examined the well-being of volunteers providing care to individuals in hospice through the lens of the Job Demands-Resources Model. Three demands (i.e., emotional, work–home conflict, and conflict with paid staff) were assessed as antecedents of volunteer burnout. All three were correlated with burnout and subsequent depression. In this case, the variable “conflict with paid staff” is particularly relevant to the current research, described by researchers to refer to a lack of mutual trust and respect between volunteers and paid staff. Though this is not precisely the same construct as incivility, the significant relationship between conflict with paid staff and burnout provides support for our hypothesized association between incivility and burnout. Several other investigations have documented the tension that sometimes occurs between staff and volunteers at an organization, which can result if paid staff members feel their jobs are being threatened (Brudney & Gazley, 2002; McCurley, Lynch, & Lynch, 1996), or from a lack of adequate communication and training (Paradis & Usui, 1989; Rogelberg et al., 2010). However, in general, research assessing volunteers' relationships with agency staff and with other volunteers, as well as research examining how those relationships might affect volunteer outcomes, is scant.

The current study proposes to address this gap and add to the literature on incivility and burnout in several

ways. First, it provides an initial investigation into the incivility experienced by volunteers. The expansion of explorations of incivility from different sources and within diverse organizational contexts, the frequent interchange between volunteers and paid staff, and the documented tensions that can sometimes occur between these two groups warrant opening study in this area. We also answer the call to advance research on deviant behavior in the nonprofit sector (Nair & Bhatnagar, 2011). Second, we investigate the relationship between incivility experienced by volunteers from both paid (i.e., agency staff) and unpaid (i.e., other agency volunteers) coworkers and their subsequent burnout. The study of both is relevant because volunteers may work with both other volunteers as well as paid staff to complete assignments. Further, Huynh, Metzger, and Winefield (2012b) only studied conflict emanating from paid staff members but did not consider conflict that could result from interactions with other volunteers. Finally, we explore whether resilient coping moderates the relationship between incivility experienced by individuals during volunteer service and burnout. Guided by conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011), we argue that incivility constitutes a drain on resources, which will induce burnout in volunteers. We also argue that the level of burnout will depend upon the extent to which volunteers report utilizing resilient-coping strategies.

### Introducing incivility

Incivility was defined in Andersson and Pearson (1999) seminal article as a type of “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (p. 457). They further elaborate that uncivil behaviors are rude and discourteous, and display a lack of regard for others. There are several key definitional elements of incivility. Elaborating from Andersson and Pearson (1999), the first is an ambiguous intent to cause harm. Ambiguity regarding intention essentially means that those involved (i.e., target, observers, and instigators) within an uncivil interaction may not know whether the instigator was deliberately or accidentally discourteous. For example, some instigators may attempt to justify or rationalize that they did not intend to be uncivil, or insinuate that targets are overly sensitive (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Likewise, those who have viewed an instance of incivility may be unsure whether the instigator meant to show rudeness to the target. Another clarification is that the behavior is of low intensity, which distinguishes incivility from more intense and overt negative workplace constructs such as

bullying, vandalism, sabotage, aggression, and violence. Finally, incivility is thought to be deviant, meaning that it violates workplace norms. This does pose a preliminary issue, because different work contexts and organizations may have different institutional norms, some of which could be considered uncivil by the standards of another, and some not. A further complication is that norms are more than just the commonly understood acceptable informal behaviors of those within the organization, but also include the formal policies and procedures, which vary by organization. Andersson and Pearson (1999) clarify that although there are certainly differences depending on the organization, culture, and industry, “in every workplace there exists norms for respect for fellow coworkers—a shared moral understanding and sentiment among the members of the organization that allow cooperation” (p. 455). On an intuitive level this makes sense, as without at a minimum basic respect, an organization containing more than one person would likely not be sustainable.

Researchers have explored incivility from the points of view of the target, various bystanders, and the instigator of the uncivil interaction. The most common type of incivility, and the type explored in this study, is experienced incivility (Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016), that is, incivility experienced by targets. Various attempts have been made to understand how frequently experienced incivility occurs in the workplace. Early work on incivility by Cortina et al. (2001) found that 71% of survey respondents reported being the targets of incivility in the past 5 years, with women experiencing greater incidences of incivility than men. More recent studies have identified higher percentages of incivility occurring among employees. For example, Reio and Sanders-Reio (2011) found that 81% had experienced incivility from colleagues over the past year. Kabat-Farr, Cortina, and Marchiondo (2016) found that 85% of study participants reported experiencing incivility from their supervisor, coworkers, subordinates, or customers in the past year. Finally, Porath and Pearson (2013) reported that 98% of employees surveyed over a period of 14 years in the United States and Canada indicated they had experienced incivility in some form. The high frequency with which incivility occurs in organizations further exacerbates the need to expand the examination of incivility and its associated outcomes within new populations of individuals.

In addition to occurring within different contexts, incivility comes from different sources. In the case of the volunteer, incivility might similarly come from the volunteer coordinator or manager, the recipients of

service, other individual volunteers, or the staff at the agency. Although in the workplace incivility from a supervisor has been identified as having a particularly nefarious influence, there are several reasons to believe that this may be a less relevant source for volunteers. Studies of individuals who lead volunteers show that successful coordinators typically adopt an interpersonal approach (Leonard, Onyx, & Hayward-Brown, 2004). In contrast to the salient need for coordinator friendliness, multiple studies have documented the difficult dynamics that can occur between volunteers and paid staff members at the agencies where they serve (Brudney, 1999; Huynh, Winefield, et al., 2012b), making incivility experienced from paid staff especially relevant for this group. In addition to potential incivility experienced by volunteers from paid staff members, an unstudied source of incivility is incivility coming from other individuals serving at the agency.

### ***Incivility and burnout***

Burnout, defined as a state of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion, is often characterized by feelings of hopelessness, negative attitudes toward one’s work, a decrease in productivity, and persistent fatigue (Pines & Aronson, 1988). It is especially likely to occur under stressful or emotionally taxing circumstances (Kulik, 2006) and has been associated with numerous detrimental outcomes in both employee (Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016; Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011; Rahim & Cosby, 2016) and volunteer research (Chen & Yu, 2014; Cowlshaw et al., 2010; Huynh, Xanthopoulou & Winefield, 2014; Scherer et al., 2016; Huynh, Winefield, Xanthopolou, & Metzger, 2012), a highly salient aspect of which in the volunteer literature to date is turnover (Harmon & Xu, 2018). We employ COR theory to explain this linkage.

The conservation of resources (COR) theory is a model of stress often used to help understand stressful work conditions and will serve as a lens through which to explore incivility as an emotional demand faced by volunteers. COR theory postulates that individuals strive to protect resources, and that the depletion or perceived depletion of such resources leads to strain, often embodied by burnout (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011). Resources are defined as personal characteristics or conditions valued by the individual that serve as a means for the attainment of objectives, and can be personal (e.g., traits), instrumental (e.g., proper tools for completing work), or physical (e.g., energy). Incivility from paid and unpaid coworkers likely causes burnout through a process of resource depletion in

which a volunteer experiences emotional strain from incivility over a period of time. Repeated exposure and subsequent stress may eventually outweigh volunteers' resources and lead to burnout and other negative consequences. Other studies that have utilized COR theory to further the understanding of incivility have found it to be useful in examining and explaining how incivility affects organizations (Sliter & Boyd, 2015; Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010; Sulea, Filipescu, Horga, Orțan, & Fischmann, 2012). For example, Sliter et al. (2010) found incivility from customers was related to employee burnout through emotional labor. In terms of volunteers, incivility from other individuals in the organization (i.e., other volunteers or paid staff members) is expected to lead to higher burnout through the expenditure of resources, leading to our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. Incivility from volunteers' coworkers will be positively related to burnout.

### ***Resilient coping as a moderator***

Resilient coping reflects strategies such as positive reframing that are optimistic, adaptive, and flexible (Sinclair, Wallston, & Strachan, 2016). Studies have identified resilience as a protective mechanism to deal with stress-related outcomes such as exposure to trauma (Wingo et al., 2010) or ostracism (Niu, Sun, Tian, Fan, & Zhou, 2016). The damaging effects of incivility make it crucial to identify protective factors that may help volunteers cope in organizations, as without effective coping mechanisms, volunteers experiencing stress from paid or unpaid coworkers at their agency may become burned out or even leave.

COR theory further highlights the importance of adequate resources in the reduction of burnout (Hobfoll, 2011). One study has explored two personal resources through which the effect of customer incivility on employee outcomes might be lessened, including trait empathy and engagement, with encouraging results (Sliter & Boyd, 2015). Specifically, both empathy and engagement were found to buffer the negative relationship between incivility from others and emotional exhaustion in a sample of firefighters. Engagement also moderated the relationship between incivility from others and physical symptoms (i.e., health symptoms that may be stress-induced or somatic). Another study by Cortina and Magley (2009) examined the various strategies employees utilized in response to an uncivil encounter with another employee. They found that

individuals employed a broad array of mechanisms to help deal with incivility, such as conflict avoidance, minimization of the encounter, confronting the uncivil individual, informal social support seeking, informal organization support seeking, and even making a formal complaint (Cortina & Magley, 2009). Data were not collected to determine which coping strategy led to the best resolution of the incivility, but some contextual differences were identified. In particular, employee coping mechanisms varied according to the longevity and frequency of the incivility, with employees being more likely to ignore the issue at first, before seeking more active strategies as situations progressed. As a general note, seeking formal organizational support (i.e., filing a complaint) was extremely rare.

As opposed to the approach employed by Cortina and Magley (2009), which examined the different ways employees respond to incivility, it may be of use to explore coping responses associated with positive outcomes. One potential resource for volunteers faced with incivility is resilient coping. Some studies describe resilience as a personality trait (i.e., ego resiliency) or a discrete ability possessed by individuals (Block & Block, 1980). In contrast to this approach, other researchers have argued that incivility can be considered a "state," in which individuals are able to thrive despite experiencing some form of stress or adversity (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007; Connor & Davidson, 2003). The type of resilient coping described by Sinclair and Wallston (2004) is more in alignment with the perception of resilience as a state and can be bolstered through effective training. Resilience can also be considered a personal resource within COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Sinclair and Wallston (2004) define resilience specifically as the tendency to cope with stress in a highly adaptive manner. This tendency can be broken down further to describe a pattern of "resilient coping" wherein an individual will show a commitment to using cognitive appraisal skills to facilitate flexible problem solving. The enhanced resources acquitted to individuals who tend to utilize resilient coping strategies may help to protect against burnout.

Hypothesis 2. Resilient coping will moderate the positive relationship between coworker incivility and volunteer burnout, such that the relationship will be stronger for volunteers lower in resilient coping compared to those higher in resilient coping.

## Method

### Sample and procedure

Participants were recruited from two nonprofit organizations located in the midwest United States. The organizations included one animal welfare group and one technology library. Volunteer coordinators from each agency e-mailed an electronic link to an online survey to their volunteers. Though coordinators sent the initial link, at no time did they have access to the data, which were collected through an online survey platform. Volunteers were asked to complete the survey within a 2-week time period, and all volunteers were sent a reminder e-mail from their coordinator after 1 week.

Several strategies were used to promote honest, accurate feedback from respondents, as well as to reduce the effects of common method variance characteristic of cross-sectional research. First, the study was endorsed by management (i.e., the volunteer coordinator) (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Survey respondents were also assured that their responses were being collected by an outside research team and were completely anonymous (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). The order of the predictor and criterion questions was counterbalanced. Finally, the instructions advised participants that the agency desired their honest feedback and responses would be used to help the volunteer coordinator understand the state of their volunteer workforce, as well as to identify areas for improvement.

In total, 846 volunteers were invited to take the survey. Of the 232 volunteers who clicked on the survey link, 28 did not continue beyond the first question. An additional 36 individuals were removed for completing fewer than 60% of focal items (Roth, Switzer, & Switzer, 1999), which led to a final sample of 168 volunteers. Female volunteers comprised the majority of the sample (78.0%), and volunteer ages spanned from 19 to 84 years ( $M = 47.52$ ,  $SD = 17.59$ ). This gender breakdown is not uncommon, as previous researchers have noted greater participation from women as both employees and volunteers in nonprofit organizations (Conry & McDonald, 1994). A majority of volunteers volunteered weekly (52.4%) or a few times per week (22.0%), and most reported being active within the organization at the time of answering the survey (89.9%). In terms of tenure, the largest group of volunteers had been with the organization for 6 months to a year (26.8%), followed by individuals who had been with the organization for more than a month but less than 6 months (25.6%), and finally those who had volunteered for 1 to 2 years (17.9%).

## Measures

### Coworker incivility

An adapted 7-item measure of coworker incivility was used to assess the frequency of incivility experienced among volunteer colleagues and between volunteers and paid staff (Workplace Incivility Scale; Cortina et al., 2001). Specifically, participants were asked to rate how often they had been in a situation where the paid staff or their fellow volunteers had been uncivil, as opposed to the original version of the questionnaire, which asks how often they had been in a situation where superiors or coworkers had been uncivil. All items retained the same language as the original scale (e.g., “put you down or were condescending to you?”) and participants answered using a Likert response scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*many times*). The scale showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

### Resilient coping

A 4-item measure of resilient coping (Sinclair & Wallston, 2004) was modified for a volunteer population and utilized to determine participants' level of resilience. Participants were asked to rate how well statements about how they typically approach difficult situations they encounter when volunteering described them using a Likert scale from 1 (*does not describe me*) to 5 (*describes me very well*). A sample item is “I believe I can grow in positive ways by dealing with difficult situations.” Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .83.

### Burnout

Burnout was assessed with five items from Pines and Aronson's (1988) Burnout Measure. The items were adapted to suit a volunteer population and were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A sample item is “I feel emotionally drained from volunteering.” Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .88.

### Demographics

Demographics were also measured, including gender, volunteer tenure, frequency of volunteering, hours per month volunteered, and age.

## Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for key scales are depicted in Table 1. Most volunteers indicated that instances of incivility did not occur often. As a result, incivility showed considerable skewness. To mitigate this issue, data were transformed using a natural

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations for key study variables and covariates.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Gender	1.78	0.41				
Frequency of volunteering	3.25	1.32	0.01			
Coworker incivility	1.26	0.52	0.13	-0.15		
Burnout	1.66	0.69	-0.18*	0.03	0.16*	
Resilience	4.08	0.76	-0.04	0.16*	-0.08	-0.18*

Note.  $N = 167$ . Reliabilities are on the diagonal. Frequency of volunteering was measured categorically as 1 = every day, 2 = a few times a week, 3 = weekly, 4 = two or three times a month, 5 = once a month, 6 = every other month, 7 = four times a year, 8 = twice a year, 9 = yearly. Gender was coded male = 1, female = 2.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

logarithm transformation, one recommended remedy for addressing positively skewed data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The transformation reduced skewness (i.e., from 3.45 to 2.03) and produced a closer approximation to the normal curve. Hypotheses were tested using both the transformed and nontransformed incivility variable. As the results generated with both incivility variables were very similar, analyses proceeded using the nontransformed incivility variable.

Both the direction and significance of the correlations provided initial support for the hypotheses. Two demographic variables (i.e., gender, frequency of volunteering) correlated significantly with key study variables and were included in subsequent analyses as covariates (Becker, 2005). Overall, 38.69% of volunteers reported experiencing incivility at least once or twice.

To check the measurement model and verify that common method bias was not a concern (Conway & Lance, 2010), a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to estimate the fit of a three-factor model (incivility, resilient coping, burnout). The three-factor model showed considerable improvement over the one-factor or two-factor model (see Table 2), and the fit indices suggested that the model acceptably fit the data.

### Hypothesis testing

All hypotheses were tested using regression analyses. Hypothesis 1 predicted that volunteers who

**Table 2.** Results of confirmatory factor analysis.

Measurement models	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
One-factor	638.61	88	.63	.56	.19
Two-factor	412.36	87	.78	.74	.15
Three-factor	222.35	85	.91	.89	.10

Note.  $N = 167$ . CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. The one-factor model included all items. The two-factor model separated incivility and burnout into factor 1 and resilient coping into factor 2. The three-factor model separated incivility, burnout, and resilient coping into distinct factors.

experienced higher levels of incivility from coworkers would also experience higher levels of burnout. To confirm this hypothesis, a simple regression was conducted in which burnout was regressed upon incivility. As hypothesized, incivility was positively related to burnout ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $p = .005$ , 95% CI [0.10, 0.52]).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that resilient coping would moderate the relationship between incivility and burnout, such that there would be a stronger relationship between incivility and burnout for volunteers lower in resilient coping compared to those higher in resilient coping. Hierarchical regression analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) was used to test this hypothesis, in which frequency of volunteering and gender were entered first as covariates, the predictors (i.e., incivility and resilient coping) were entered second, and the interaction term (i.e., product) was entered last (see Table 3). After controlling for frequency of volunteering and gender, and accounting for the main predictors, the interaction term still explained a significant amount of variance in volunteers' burnout ( $\beta = 1.15$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .13$ ,  $p = .004$ , 95% CI [0.12, 0.63]).

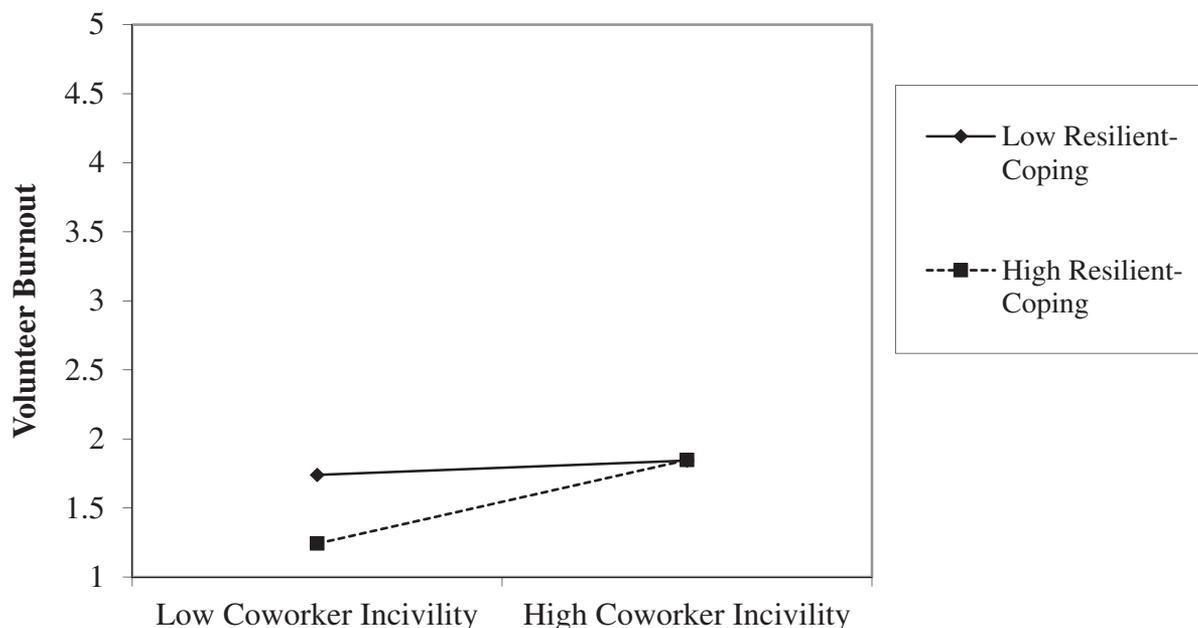
To examine the nature of the interaction, the regression analysis was graphed and is presented as Figure 1. In contrast to prediction, the shape of the interaction suggests that volunteers lower in resilient coping experience similar levels of burnout regardless of the level of coworker incivility. Volunteers higher in resilient coping appeared to experience less burnout, but only when coworker incivility was low. This finding suggests resilient coping can be an effective mechanism for volunteers to employ when dealing with minor incivility from coworkers. However, as the instances of incivility increase in frequency,

**Table 3.** Regression summary of the interaction of incivility and resilience onto burnout.

Model	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$B$	SE $B$	$\beta$
Step 1: Control	.04	.04			
Intercept			2.14*	.27	
Frequency of volunteering			.02	.04	.04
Gender			-.31*	.13	-.18*
Step 2: Main effects	.11*	.08*			
Intercept			2.14*	.26	
Frequency of volunteering			.05	.04	.10
Gender			-.36*	.13	-.22*
Incivility			.24*	.10	.18*
Resilience			-.17*	.07	-.19*
Step 3: Interaction	.14*	.11*			
Intercept			2.13*	.26	
Frequency of volunteering			.05	.04	.10
Gender			-.35*	.12	-.21*
Incivility			.34*	.11	.26*
Resilience			-.16*	.07	-.18*
Incivility $\times$ resilience			.32*	.13	.20*

Note.  $N = 163$ .

\* $p < 0.05$ .



**Figure 1.** Resilient coping as a moderator of coworker incivility on volunteer burnout.

resilient coping strategies are no longer useful in preventing burnout.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a preliminary investigation into the effects of experienced incivility within a volunteer population. We predicted that the frequency at which volunteers had encountered incivility from other volunteers or the paid staff members at the organization would positively predict burnout. In alignment with prediction and consistent with prior research in samples of employees, volunteers reporting higher incivility also reported greater burnout. COR theory aids in the understanding of these findings, as incivility can represent a threat to those who encounter it, depleting emotional resources.

Resilient coping was also assessed as a resource to mitigate the relationship between incivility and burnout. In terms of the interaction and contrary to expectation, resilient coping was only helpful in the reduction of burnout at low levels of incivility. As studies of employees have not examined resilience as a moderator of the incivility–burnout relationship, this presents a possible future avenue of research. In keeping with the findings, however, resilient coping may only be a useful strategy to employ when instances of incivility are rare. A final contribution of the current work is that in general, volunteers do seem to encounter incivility, though perhaps at lower rates than employees.

## Implications

This study represents the first investigation into volunteer incivility, with several notable findings for theory and practice. First this study adds to the growing body of literature demonstrating the applicability of research models including demands, strain, and resources to volunteers, which indicate that volunteers, like employees, are similarly affected by demands and can experience strain, and resources can bolster their experiences.

Second, there appears to be a clear difference with regard to the amount of incivility experienced by volunteers compared to other populations. Overall, volunteers experienced relatively few instances of incivility, with just 38.69% of volunteers reporting experiencing incivility at least once or twice throughout their service. This is very different from the incidence of incivility reported by other populations, such as employees, who have reported incidences of incivility to be around 71% (Cortina et al., 2001), or university students, who have reported incidences of incivility to be around 76% (Caza & Cortina, 2007). Although it may be possible that volunteers simply experience less incivility due to the type of work or organization, another explanation is that volunteers who do experience incivility leave the organization quickly, and as a result are difficult to capture in a cross-sectional sample. Within the current sample, 89.9% of volunteers identified themselves as currently active, indicating that a small number of volunteers were included who might be considered “former,” but

not many. To gain a better understanding of incivility experienced by volunteers, surveying more individuals who had already left the agency might provide a more realistic depiction. Another opportunity to do this would be in the provision of exit interviews offered to volunteers who have decided to discontinue service. The finding that coworker incivility in volunteers is related to burnout highlights the need for organizations to focus on strategies and resources that may help volunteers deal with such issues. Although resilience represents one such resource, the current study suggests that it may only be helpful for volunteers dealing with exceptionally low levels of incivility. Other promising resources may be those that foster positive relationships between volunteers, and between volunteers and paid staff members. One way to do this would be through the implementation of relevant management practices. Some researchers have highlighted the importance of providing training for all staff members who come into contact with or work alongside volunteers (Rimes, Nesbit, Christensen, & Brudney, 2017). Providing training for volunteers on how to work with staff members operating in different departments at the nonprofit may also help foster positive relations. Other strategies to facilitate positive interactions include providing social opportunities for agency volunteers and staff to get to know one another in an informal setting, including volunteers at staff meetings (or relevant staff at volunteer meetings), and inviting paid staff members to become more involved in the planning and development of the volunteer program.

### **Limitations and future research**

The foregoing study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional, self-report nature of this study makes it difficult to ascertain the direction of the represented relationships (e.g., incivility and burnout). There is also the possibility that incidences of incivility within this sample were underreported. In spite of these concerns, methods utilized in this study provided useful insight into the incivility that may be experienced by volunteers and an initial basis against which future researchers may compare their findings.

Although multiple steps were taken to reduce the biases that may have influenced results (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), there may still be some concerns about social desirability. For example, volunteers may not feel it is their place to point out issues occurring within the organization or to highlight conflict emanating from their paid and unpaid coworkers. There may also be concern that volunteers

responded in strictly positive ways when asked about their resilient coping. Including a short scale to assess social desirability would help to mitigate these concerns in future research.

It is possible that volunteers experiencing higher levels of burnout were more likely to perceive the actions of others as uncivil, rather than our hypothesized direction of the relationship. It should be noted that studies of incivility in employees have reported burnout as one outcome of incivility, and we feel confident that the relationships identified in the present research were supported from a theoretical standpoint. Further, assessing incivility in this way is appropriate because incivility depends upon each individual's perceptions (Conway & Lance, 2010). One limitation is of the sample itself. The current study utilized two organizations with volunteers, one digital library and one animal welfare organization. It is possible that volunteers at specific types of organizations may experience more incivility than others. There could also be contextual differences with regard to tenure. Next steps include examining potential antecedents of incivility in volunteers and assessing whether those antecedents and subsequent incivility occur more often at some organizations, such as nonprofits with volunteers working under high emotional demands (e.g., hospice volunteers), or particularly daunting constraints (e.g., court-appointed special advocates).

Other outcomes experienced by volunteers who encounter incivility represent one avenue for future research, such as volunteer effectiveness or continuance. Although burnout is typically associated with intentions to quit, it is possible that the relatively low level of incivility reported by volunteers would be insufficient to provoke such a response. One of the incivility items in the methods section was too problematic to be included in the current research (e.g., "Made unwanted attempts to draw you into a discussion of personal matters"). Further, all items presented at least some level of skewness. Although some volunteers did indeed report incivility, it is possible that specific details of such encounters do not align well with the Cortina et al. (2001) measure. A qualitative study of volunteer incivility might help clarify and characterize what such interactions look like.

A recent study identified differences with regard to the source of incivility. Specifically, employees tended to report greater incivility occurring from outside sources, like clients or customers, and lower levels of incivility emanating from inside sources, such as coworkers or supervisors (Sliter & Boyd, 2015). There may be some important nuances to consider here for volunteers. Specifically, it is possible that volunteers are less

likely to experience incivility from other volunteers and staff within the organization, but more likely to encounter rudeness from clientele. In terms of employees, future work could examine the extent to which employees report incivility from volunteers.

Finally, recent reviews highlighted “witnessed incivility” as an emerging topic of interest (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007; Schilpzand et al., 2016). Witnessed incivility refers to incivility viewed through a bystander perspective, and describes instances in which an individual sees the perpetrator behaving uncivilly toward a target. An experimental study found that just watching an uncivil exchange was associated with negative affect, lower performance, and reduced organizational citizenship behaviors (Porath & Erez, 2009). Although in our specific study volunteers did not report being heavily targeted, it is possible that working within the organization affords them opportunities to witness uncivil behavior.

## Conclusion

With this study, we have established that it is possible for volunteers to be targets of incivility. Further, volunteers experiencing incivility also experience increased burnout. Finally, resilient coping effectively buffers the incivility–burnout relationship when the instances of incivility experienced by volunteers are relatively few. We suggested future avenues of research such as exploring the extent to which volunteers witness incivility, rather than being the targets of such behavior, as well as exploring employee perceptions of incivility emanating from volunteers. As the efforts of volunteers provide irreplaceable assistance to many organizations, it is important to continue examining factors that may impact their experiences and service.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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