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# Grin and bear it: An examination of volunteers' fit with their organization, burnout and spirituality

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# Burnout Research

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A B S T R A C T

Volunteers are an essential asset to the success of nonprofits, government, business and philanthropic organizations. About 64.5 million people, or 26.5% of the U.S. population, volunteered at least once between September 2011 and September 2012, donating a median of 50 hours (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Despite these encouraging statistics, volunteer turnover presents a significant problem for nonprofits. Though considerable evidence has been amassed on antecedents and mechanisms predicting employees' intentions to quit, surprisingly few studies have examined volunteer intentions to quit. Based on both Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001, 2011) and person–organization (PO) fit theory (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005), this study begins to address this void by examining the extent to which poor PO fit between volunteer goals, personality and values with their organization influenced their intentions to quit through the mechanism of burnout. Further, we investigated whether the proposed mediated relationship depended upon volunteer daily spirituality, or the tendency to daily experience the transcendent dimensions of life. Using a sample of volunteers from a variety of nonprofit organizations (*N* = 355), poor volunteer fit positively predicted volunteer intentions to quit through their burnout. Further, the full mediation model was moderated by individuals' level of spirituality, with burned out volunteers reporting higher spirituality, indicating lower quitting intentions compared to those lower in spirituality. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Volunteers are an essential asset to the success of nonprofits, government, business and philanthropic organizations. About 64.5 million people, or 26.5% of the U.S. population, volunteered at least once between September 2011 and September 2012, donating a median of 50 hours (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). The 2010 Deloitte Volunteer Impact Survey reported that 84% of companies believe that volunteers are critical in helping nonprofits reach their long-term social goals (Deloitte Development, 2010).

Despite these encouraging statistics, a problem faced by nonprofits is volunteer turnover (Garner & Garner, 2011), defined as when volunteers leave an organization and need to be replaced (Skoglund, 2006). A sobering statistic reported by Eisner, Grimm, Maynard, and Washburn (2009) is that more than a third of the volunteers who volunteer in one year fail to volunteer the next year. Given the time and expense accrued by organizations in recruiting, screening and training volunteers, in addition to the possible toll on the volunteers who abbreviate their tenure with the organization, this volunteer turnover is both a social and business problem that merits our attention. One of the immediate precursors of turnover, and the focus of this investigation, is volunteers' intentions to quit (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Jaros, 1997), which is a cognitive manifestation of the behavioral decision to quit (Elangovan, 2001).

Though considerable evidence has been amassed on antecedents and mechanisms predicting paid employees' intentions to quit, surprisingly few studies have examined key predictors and processes driving volunteer intentions to quit. Though scholars can and should continue to investigate the applicability of employee models of turnover to volunteer populations, this study begins to investigate whether factors that influence employee intentions to quit also apply to volunteer intentions. It is possible that differences in the experience of intentions to quit for paid employees and volunteers exist. For example, job dissatisfaction of paid employees has generally been shown to be related to intentions to quit (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969), but volunteer samples have shown little relationship between dissatisfaction and intentions to quit (Kulik, 2006). Thus, this study continues to investigate intentions to quit among volunteers and acknowledges

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differences between volunteers and employees as they emerge. However, given the paucity of research on intentions to quit among volunteers, borrowing theory and findings from the employee literature as a starting point becomes necessary as discussed hereafter.

Specifically, the purpose of this study was to begin to address the general lack of research on volunteer intentions to quit by examining the extent to which the fit between volunteers and their organization influenced their intentions to quit through the mechanism of burnout. A second objective of this study was to explore whether volunteer spirituality attenuated the relationships between fit and burnout and burnout and turnover intentions, with spirituality defined as "the individual's perception of the transcendent in daily life" (Underwood, 1999, p. 11). Building upon the theoretical frameworks of person–organization fit and the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), this research has the potential to expand the volunteer literature in three meaningful ways. First, it introduces a new and different potentially relevant predictor of volunteer intentions to quit, poor volunteer fit with the organization. Second, this study suggests that COR theory, which has traditionally been applied to employee samples, has broad application within volunteer populations. Third, and finally, this study suggests a key individual difference, a volunteer's spirituality, conceptualized as a person-based coping resource, would buffer the effect of poor person–organization (PO) fit on volunteer burnout and attenuate the relationship between burnout and volunteer intentions to quit.

### 1.1. Person–organization fit and COR theoretical frameworks

Person–organization (PO) fit is historically rooted within psychological theories of person–environment (PE) interaction, including Terberg's (1981) interactional psychology theory and most notably Lewin's (1938) seminal theory of psychological forces, which posited that behavior is best understood as a product of the environment and the person's subjective experience of it. Person–environment (PE) fit can be viewed as a meta-theory encompassing theories of person–vocation fit, person–job fit, person–organization fit, person–group fit, person–supervisor fit, but is generally defined as "the compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well matched" (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005, p. 281). Over its nearly 100-year history, various conceptualizations of fit content have surfaced (e.g., values, goals, personality, and needs) as well as fit measurement strategies (e.g., direct vs indirect measures; objective vs. subjective methodologies; homogeneous vs. heterogeneous measures, and global or molar versus more micro approaches).

Among all the fit dimensions, PO fit has been the most extensively studied, with the vast majority of these studies testing employee samples to predict employee attitudes and work-related outcome, with two major meta-analyses summarizing this voluminous research. A meta-analysis by Verquer, Beehr, and Wagner (2003) focused on the PO–attitude relationship, finding that PO fit significantly predicted job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intentions to turnover, Hoffman and Woehr's (2006) meta-analysis on the effect of PO fit on work-related outcomes showed that PO incongruence predicted increased turnover, reduced citizenship behaviors and decreased organizational performance (Andrews, Baker, & Hunt, 2011), and some have reported these relationships even when controlling for cognitive ability (McCulloch & Turban, 2007) and the Big Five Personality traits (Tsai, Chen, & Chen, 2012).

Only two studies have empirically examined fit among volunteers. Van Vianen, Nijstad, and Voskuijl (2008) research, based on data from Dutch volunteers in six organizations, found that personality fit, defined as the similarity between volunteers' self-described personality and their perception of the personality of the prototypical volunteer in their organization, was positively related to volunteer satisfaction and affective commitment. Kim, Chelladurai, and Trail (2007) found that the relationship between PO fit and person–task (PT) fit significantly predicted both empowerment and intentions to continue volunteering among US soccer volunteers.

It is noteworthy that both employee and volunteer studies of fit focused on outcomes, consistently demonstrating that good fit was associated with both positive affective and behavioral outcomes. However, remarkably lacking in the organizational studies were explorations of how poor fit influences more proximal, psychological variables, such as strain and burnout, which could offer potential explanatory mechanisms for understanding the fit–outcome relationships. The six studies of the fit–strain relationship identified in a meta-analysis by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) showed that poor employee PO fit was significantly related to greater strain. More recently, poor PO fit has also been shown to be positively associated with burnout in a variety of contexts including Finnish teachers (Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Salmela-Aro, 2011), faculty physicians (Shanafelt et al., 2009), and Chinese manufacturing employees (Tong, Wang, & Peng, 2015). Finally, the scholarship within occupational health and burnout has long recognized and empirically demonstrated the role of poor fit on strain, burnout and ultimately compromised health (Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison, & Pinneau, 1980; Edwards & Van Harrison, 1993; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982; Maslach, 2003; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Thus, considerable research has documented myriad negative consequences of poor fit for both employees and volunteers, including strain, burnout, negative affective and behavioral manifestations and deleterious health outcomes. Poor PO fit appears to be a significant stressor with a capacity to facilitate burnout and other negative outcomes and as such, can be grounded in COR theory of stress. Further, COR theory fills a theoretical void characteristic of much of the PO fit research (Edwards, 2008), providing a parsimonious and elegant way to explain how the stressor of poor PO fit influences strain and burnout.

Hobfoll (2011) describes COR theory as a "fundamental theory to the field of burnout and the emerging field of positive psychology, especially where it has been applied to challenging work circumstances" (pp. 116–117). Indeed, considerable scholarly evidence has demonstrated the usefulness of COR theories in the prediction of burnout (e.g., Hobfoll, 2010; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993; Neveu, 2007). A primary premise of COR theory is that resources are positively valued, with resource gains leading to positive psychological, physical, and behavioral outcomes; in contrast, stressors are perceived negatively as they act to reduce resources, potentially resulting in burnout and negative outcomes (Hobfoll, 2001, 2002, 2010). Thus, when stressors confront a person, resources must be marshaled to address those stressors, leading to resource loss and risk of burnout.

Burnout, though conceptualized and measured in a variety of ways, from multifaceted approaches of Maslach and colleagues (Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewig, & Dollard, 2006; Benevides-Pereira & Das Neves Alves, 2007; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Schaufeli, Bakker, Hoogduin, Schaap, & Kladler, 2001) to the narrower conceptualization of Pines and Aronson (1988). Pines and Aronson's more focused definition of burnout as comprising elements of exhaustion better fits the volunteer population of this study as we assume that volunteers would quit before enduring long-term volunteer commitments that would produce cynicism, depersonalization, and other dimensions of burnout more characteristic of employees who often can't leave their organization. Pines and Aronson (1988) define burnout as a state of exhaustion encompassing three components: physical (e.g., low energy, chronic fatigue), emotional

(e.g., helplessness, hopelessness), and mental exhaustion (e.g., negative beliefs about self or organizational role) Burnout can occur through long-term, emotionally demanding situations (Pines & Aronson, 1988). A few studies of volunteers have shown burnout among social service volunteers, volunteer firefighters, emergency service workers and palliative caregivers (Huynh, Winefield, Xanthopoulou, & Metzer, 2012; Huynh, Xanthopoulou, & Winefield, 2013, 2014; Kulik, 2006; Lewig, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Dollard, & Metzer, 2007; Tuckey & Hayward, 2011).

Thus, volunteer roles can be stressful and demanding in and of themselves, requiring volunteers to often direct considerable resources to helping others. Integrating the PO fit literature with COR theory, we would expect exposure to poor volunteer–organization fit to further deplete volunteer resources. That is, poor PO fit is a stressor which requires volunteer resources to address the incongruence between their goals, values and personality with that of the organization, making them more vulnerable to burnout. Thus, we expect those with poor volunteer fit to experience greater resource loss and emotional depletion, leading to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.** Poor volunteer fit will be positively related to burnout.

### 1.2. Burnout and intentions to quit

Burnout and intentions to quit have been studied extensively among employees in organizations (e.g. Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Specifically, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) showed that burnout is positively related to intentions to quit among employees in a variety of settings, within a variety of occupations, and even when accounting for various other important organizational attitudes and resources. Research by Allen and Mueller (2013) on animal shelter volunteers and Chen and Yu's (2012) examination of museum volunteers represent the only studies to empirically examine the effect of burnout on turnover intentions among volunteers, with both studies finding that burnout was positively related to intentions to quit. The findings of these studies on the burnout–turnover intentions of volunteers are consistent with COR theory in that the experience of burnout, as a result of drained resources, would create a desire by the volunteer to escape the depleting experience. Thus, we believe that volunteers will consider quitting their volunteer job when they experience burnout as a result of resource drain. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 2.** Volunteer burnout will be positively related to intentions to quit.

By extension, if as proposed, poor volunteer fit relates to burnout and burnout relates to intentions to quit, there is the potential for a mediated model to exist. Furthermore, recall that research on PO fit has shown a significant relationship between poor PO fit and stress and burnout as well as between poor fit and turnover intentions, further suggesting that burnout might mediate the fit to turnover intentions relationship. Moreover, given that the stress and resource drain caused by coping with poor volunteer fit is expected to lead to higher levels of burnout, depleted or burned out volunteers may be more likely to think about quitting or seeking another volunteer opportunity. Thus, the fit between volunteers' goals and values relates to their desire to quit, but this relationship is indirect, operating through burnout. Therefore, the following mediation hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 3.** Burnout will mediate the relationship between poor volunteer fit and intentions to quit.

### 1.3. Volunteer spirituality as a moderating personal resource

Hobfoll (2002) considers the possibility that those with access to more resources may be less negatively affected by the resource drain caused by confronting stressful situations, stating that additional resources may substitute for those lost or absorbed by resource reserves. Based on discussions of resources offered by COR theory, we propose that spirituality, is a positively valued, person-based resource that could reduce the risk of burnout among volunteers identifying as being spiritual confronting poor PO fit. We utilize a broadly accepted and researched definition of spirituality proposed by Underwood and Terisi (2002) that avoids any reference to a particular religion or faith-based practices, namely, the tendency of a person to experience the transcendent or the spiritual dimensions of life on a daily basis.

We chose to examine spirituality as a personal resource for a number of reasons. First, spirituality has broad application across people with various demographic characteristics, religious affiliations and personality traits. Further, in comparisons of volunteers versus non-volunteers, people identifying as being spirituality or endorsing the importance of volunteering were more likely to choose to volunteer (e.g., Einolf, 2013; Markstrom, Huey, Stiles, & Krause, 2010), suggesting that spirituality might be a resource utilized by volunteers in dealing with stressful volunteer situations. Finally, a growing number of scholars (Bickerton, Miner, Dowson, & Griffin, 2014; Quick & Gavin, 2001; Patel & Cunningham, 2014) are using COR theory as an organizing theoretical framework for understanding spirituality as a resource, claiming that resources derived from religious faith or spirituality is interpretable within COR theory.

Several studies examining the direct effects of spirituality have shown that strain responses are reduced and well-being is enhanced, contributing to the growing body of research highlighting the importance of personal resources in reducing the risk of burnout (Emery, Wade, & McLean, 2009; Rupert, Miller, & Dorociak, 2015). Among employees, studies by Sprung, Sliter, and Jex (2012) and Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson (2003) showed that spirituality was associated with lower stress. Results from the 1998 and 2004 General Social Survey, a large cross-sectional survey of US adults, demonstrated strong evidence for the relationship between spirituality and well-being (Ellison & Fan, 2008). In a study of religious workers, spiritual resources were found to demonstrate a significant relationship with both work engagement and exhaustion in the presence of personality dimensions and work characteristics (Bickerton et al., 2014). Similarly, Galea (2014) found that spirituality was associated with lower levels of burnout among nurses in difficult situations, even after controlling for personality and well-being.

Research has also provided evidence for the moderating role of spirituality in reducing the negative effects of stress on a variety of emotional, attitudinal and health outcomes. Daeleman, Cobb, and Frey (2001) showed that among patients dealing with difficult situations, those higher in spirituality experienced fewer decrements in their mental and physical health. Kumar and Kumar (2014) found that workplace spirituality moderated the effect of workplace stress on health. Kim and Seidlitz (2002) found that among college students, the relationship between stress and adjustment was buffered by spirituality, even controlling for the use of multiple coping skills. A study by Csiernick and Adams (2007), using data from attendees at a Death and Dying conference, showed that individuals higher in spiritual well-being reported that their spirituality mitigated the effect of stress they felt at work. Volunteers higher in spirituality were more resistant to the stress from helping victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (Ai et al., 2013). Hence, spirituality seems to have a salutary effect in a variety of stressful situations.
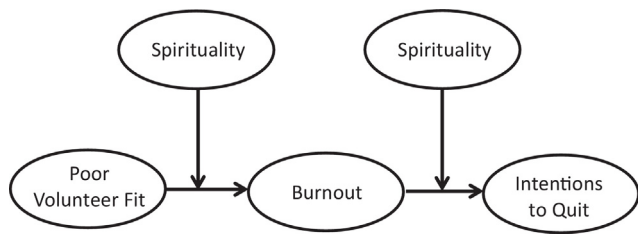
**Fig. A.** Complete proposed theoretical model.

Taken together, given our conceptualization of poor PO fit as causing stress through resource depletion and the notion that spirituality, experienced as daily spirituality may serve as a broad person-based resource within volunteer contexts, it is reasonable to suggest that spirituality will buffer the effect of perceived stress emanating from poor fit on burnout, leading to our fourth prediction:

**Hypothesis 4.** Spirituality will moderate the positive relationship between poor volunteer fit and burnout, such that the positive relationship will be weaker when spirituality is higher.

Similarly, our view of individual spirituality as a personal resource would also lead to our proposal that those higher in spirituality would be less likely to consider leaving as a result of experiencing burnout. COR theory would suggest that feelings of burnout would prompt volunteers to seek out additional resources to offset this resource depletion. As such, burned out volunteers would be expected to draw on their spiritual resources, which may be associated with some type of spiritual coping or meaning-making, ultimately reducing the volunteer's propensity to quit.

Thus, we propose the following moderation hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5.** Spirituality will moderate the positive relationship between burnout and intentions to quit, such that the relationship will be weaker when spirituality is higher.

Furthermore, we argued using conservation of resources theory that poor volunteer fit would be related to intentions to quit through burnout. If the mediation hypothesis finds support and either of the moderation hypotheses receive support, it is likely that the indirect effect of volunteer fit onto intentions to quit may be impacted by individual volunteer spirituality. Furthermore, this assertion is supported by both theories discussed. That is, if spirituality is indeed a resource and poor volunteer fit is a demand, spirituality may buffer that impact on intentions to quit. Thus, the following moderated mediation hypothesis is proposed (see Fig. A for complete theoretical model):

**Hypothesis 6.** Spirituality will moderate the strength of the mediated relationship between PO fit and intentions to quit via burnout, such that both the path between PO fit and burnout and the path between burnout and intentions to quit are weaker when spirituality is higher rather than lower.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Sample and procedure

Researchers worked with the volunteer coordinators of seven U.S. organizations, including three animal welfare groups, a hospital, a legal advocacy group, an urban renewal organization, and a health and wellness foundation. The volunteer coordinators emailed a link for an online survey to their volunteers, asking them to complete it within a 2-week time period. Of the 2022 volunteers contacted, 27.7% started the survey. Those missing all responses to one of the focal scales were excluded from further analysis,

resulting in a final sample of 355 volunteers and an overall response rate of 17.6%.

The volunteer sample consisted of 75% females, and the largest age group spanned between the ages of 51 and 70 (39%). The majority of volunteers (54%) were college graduates, and almost half (48%) were employed. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated that they are currently active in the organization, with 46% reporting a 1–4 year tenure with the organization. Most volunteers (63%) reported serving 10 hours or less each month at the organization.

### 2.2. Measures

*Poor volunteer fit.* We measured poor volunteer fit as poor goal, value and personality fit using Sekiguchi and Huber's (2011) measure, which they adapted from previous PO fit work (e.g., Kristof, 1996). Three items (e.g., "How similar are your personal goals and the organization's goals?") were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*low*) to 3 (*high*). The items were then reverse coded so that higher values indicated poorer volunteer fit.

*Burnout.* A five-item burnout measure adapted from Pines and Aronson (1988) was used to assess volunteer feelings on a 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) scale (e.g., "I feel used up at the end of the volunteer session").

*Intentions to quit.* Volunteer intentions to quit was measured using three items adapted from Hom and Griffeth (1991) and Jaros (1997). Items (e.g., "I often think of ending my volunteer work at this organization") were based on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale.

*Spirituality.* The six-item brief Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES; Underwood & Terisi, 2002) was developed to assess people's ordinary, everyday experiences, emphasizing spiritual awareness and feelings of interconnectedness and transcendence rather than people's belief structures or religious/spiritual practices. Both theistic items (e.g., I feel God's presence) and nontheistic items (e.g., I feel deep inner peace or harmony") are included in the scale, yet extensive psychometric examinations demonstrate high internal consistency, unidimensionality and high test-retest reliability (e.g., Loustalot, Wyatt, Boss, May, & McDyess, 2006; Underwood, 2006). Notably, the DSES has predicted a variety of physical and emotional health outcomes (Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010). Participants indicated their daily spiritual experiences using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale.

*Control variables.* Potential covariates included age, gender, and education, measured with one item each. In the analyses we only included demographic control variables that were significantly correlated with one or more of the focal variables in the study, which is consistent with current thinking and treatment of covariates (Becker, 2005).

All focal scales and items used in this study can be found in the Appendix.

## 3. Results

Means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and internal consistency reliability estimates of the focal variables are presented in Table A. Further, the supported model is presented in Fig. B for ease of interpretation.

Each measure exhibited acceptable internal consistency reliability of over .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The correlations between poor volunteer fit and burnout ($r = .39$, $p < .05$) and burnout and intentions to quit ($r = .41$, $p < .05$) provide preliminary support for the first two hypotheses. The potential gender covariate was not significantly associated with any of the focal variables. Consistent with Becker's (2005) recommendations, we did not include gender

**Table A**
Means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and internal consistency estimates for focal study variables.

| Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Poor volunteer fit | 2.61 | 0.45 | (.76) | | | | | | |
| 2. Burnout | 1.68 | 0.71 | .39* | (.90) | | | | | |
| 3. Intentions to quit | 1.92 | 0.87 | .21* | .41* | (.70) | | | | |
| 4. Spirituality | 3.91 | 1.08 | −.34* | −.28* | −.15* | (.96) | | | |
| 5. Age | 4.13 | 1.97 | −.25* | −.14* | −.09 | .32* | − | | |
| 6. Education | 3.64 | 1.63 | −.06 | .14* | .07 | .07 | .42* | − | |
| 7. Gender[a] | 1.25 | 0.43 | .07 | −.06 | .04 | −.04 | −.11* | .01 | − |

*Note.* N = 355.

[a] N = 351. Diagonal values are the internal consistency estimates for each scale.

* p < 0.05.
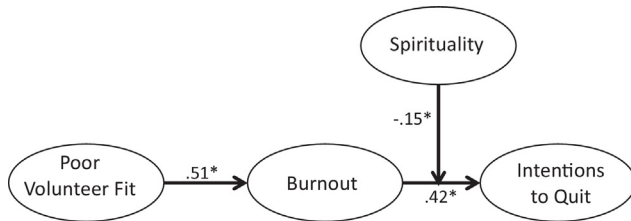


**Fig. B.** Moderated mediation model with unstandardized regression coefficients labeled. N = 355. *p < 0.05.

in any further analyses. Age and education, however, were included as control variables in our hypothesis testing.

### 3.1. Hypothesis testing

All hypotheses were tested by regression and bootstrapping analyses conducted using an SPSS macro (Hayes, 2012); see Table B for a summary of the results. Hypothesis 1 indicated that poor volunteer fit would be positively related to burnout. Controlling

**Table B**
Results from regression and bootstrapping analyses examining spirituality moderating the indirect effect of poor PO fit on intentions to quit through burnout.

| Predictor | B | SE | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Burnout** | | | | |
| Constant | −0.18 | 0.10 | −1.83 | .07 |
| Age | −0.04 | 0.02 | −1.87 | .06 |
| Education | 0.09 | 0.02 | 3.95 | .00 |
| Poor volunteer fit | 0.51 | 0.08 | 6.10 | .00 |
| Spirituality[a] | −0.10 | 0.03 | −2.78 | .01 |
| Spirituality × Poor Fit[a] | −0.01 | 0.07 | −0.19 | .85 |
| **Intentions to quit** | | | | |
| Constant | 1.92 | 0.12 | 16.01 | .00 |
| Age | −0.02 | 0.03 | −0.60 | .55 |
| Education | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.29 | .77 |
| Poor volunteer fit | 0.09 | 0.11 | 0.79 | .43 |
| Burnout | 0.42 | 0.07 | 6.14 | .00 |
| Spirituality | −0.01 | 0.04 | −0.23 | .82 |
| Spirituality × Burnout | −0.15 | 0.06 | −2.74 | .01 |

| | Boot indirect effect | Boot SE | Boot LLCI | Boot ULCI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burnout | .27 | .06 | .16 | .42 |

| Spirituality | Boot indirect effect | Boot SE | Boot LLCI | Boot ULCI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| −1.75 | .40 | .09 | .25 | .60 |
| −0.58 | .30 | .07 | .18 | .45 |
| 0.09 | .24 | .06 | .13 | .38 |
| 1.09 | .15 | .07 | .02 | .30 |
| 1.09 | .15 | .07 | .02 | .30 |

*Note.* N = 355. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 10,000. The 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentile values of spirituality are provided. The 75th and 90th percentile values are identical but are both listed for clarity. Poor volunteer fit, burnout, and spirituality are mean-centered.

[a] Excluded from the moderated mediation analysis (see Fig. B).

for age and education, poor volunteer fit positively related to burnout (B = .51, 95% CI [0.35, 0.68], p < .05) as hypothesized. The second hypothesis stated that burnout would be positively related to intentions to quit. Holding age and education constant, burnout positively related to intentions to quit (B = .42, 95% CI [0.29, 0.55], p < .05), as hypothesized.

Hypothesis 3 indicated that burnout would mediate the relationship between poor volunteer fit and intentions to quit. Finding that the initial hypotheses were supported provides preliminary support for this hypothesis (MacKinnon, Cheong, & Pirlott, 2012). To further test this hypothesis, the indirect effect of poor volunteer fit on intentions to quit through burnout was tested using the Sobel test, which was significant (ab = .27, z = −4.86, p < .05). In addition, a bias-corrected confidence interval for the indirect effect was derived from 10,000 bootstrapped samples. The bootstrapped 95% confident interval around the indirect effect excluded zero [.16, .42], confirming the Sobel test results. Altogether, these findings suggest that poor volunteer fit is significantly related to intentions to quit, but only through its relationship with burnout, thus supporting Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 indicated that spirituality would moderate the relationship between poor volunteer fit and burnout such that the negative relationship would be weaker when spirituality was higher. The mean centered interaction term did not significantly predict burnout (B = −.01, 95% CI [−0.14, 0.12], p = ns), thus failing to support Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 indicated that spirituality would moderate the relationship between burnout and intentions to quit such that there would be a stronger relationship between burnout and intentions to quit for volunteers lower in spirituality compared to those higher in spirituality. After controlling for the demographic variables and accounting for the main predictors, the interaction term was still significant, (B = −.15, 95% CI [−0.26, −0.04], p < .05). To verify that the interaction was in the predicted form, we plotted simple slopes at one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean of the spirituality measure (see Fig. C). Although the relationship between burnout and intentions to quit was positive and significant for both low and high spirituality volunteers, it was relatively stronger for volunteers with lower spirituality, B = .61, p < .05, 95% CI [0.46, 0.76], and weaker for volunteers with higher spirituality, B = .28, p < .05, 95% CI [0.08, 0.47]. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

The support found for the fifth hypothesis suggests we proceed to test Hypothesis 6 which stated that there is a conditional indirect effect of poor volunteer fit on intentions to quit through burnout (i.e., indirect effect moderated by spirituality). We did not include the non-significant interaction between poor volunteer fit and spirituality in this test of moderated mediation (see Fig. B). The index of moderated mediation, or the slope of the line relating the indirect effect to the moderator, provides a formal test of whether spirituality moderates the indirect effect (Hayes, 2013). A bias-corrected confidence interval for the index of moderated mediation
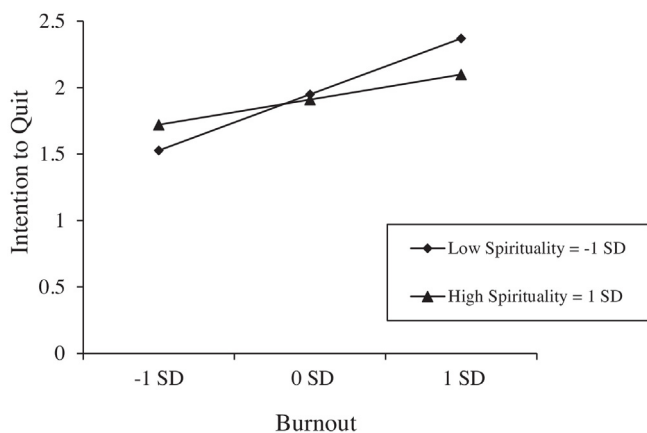
**Fig. C.** Moderating effects of spirituality on the relationship between burnout and intentions to quit. N = 355.

was derived from 10,000 bootstrapped samples. The bootstrapped 95% confident interval around the index of moderated mediation (−.09) excluded zero [−.17, −.03], therefore supporting Hypothesis 6. The macro provides the conditional indirect effects of poor volunteer fit on intentions to quit through burnout at the 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentile values of spirituality. As can be seen in Table B, the conditional indirect effect for poor volunteer fit was significant across high and low levels of spirituality, but was relatively stronger at low levels of spirituality (.40) and weaker at high levels of spirituality (.15).

## 4. Discussion

This study utilized the COR and PO theoretical frameworks to understand the relationships among fit, burnout, spirituality and turnover intentions. PO theory, as well as the themes emerging from the burnout research (Maslach, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001), suggested that poor fit is a stressor, producing strain and burnout, which could explain the numerous empirical findings linking poor fit with withdrawal behaviors as decreased organizational commitment and intentions to quit. Within the COR framework (Hobfoll, 2001, 2002, 2011; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993), resources, which are personal or situational, are paramount, with individuals being motivated to conserve them and striving to avoid their depletion. In this study, poor PO fit and burnout are viewed as resource depleting whereas spirituality was defined as resource-enhancing.

The results provide general support for the moderated mediation model. First, we found that poor volunteer fit positively related to burnout. Thus, the greater the incongruence between the volunteer's goals and values, and those of the organization, the more burnout was experienced. Second, burnout was positively related to intentions to quit; as burnout increased, volunteer intentions to quit also increased. Third, burnout mediated the relationship between poor volunteer fit and intentions to quit, supporting our hypothesis that one mechanism through which poor PO fit influences intentions to quit is through perceived resource depletion or burnout.

In addition to this mediated model, we investigated the extent to which these relationships were dependent upon a theoretically meaningful individual difference, daily spiritual experiences. The fourth and fifth hypotheses suggested that spirituality would moderate the direct relationships between fit and burnout and between burnout and intentions to quit. Spirituality failed to attenuate the relationship between poor fit and burnout, with volunteers experiencing burnout from poor PO fit across degrees of

spirituality; however, spirituality did attenuate the relationship between burnout and intentions to quit as predicted.

Finally, we investigated and confirmed that the moderated mediation model with spirituality moderating the indirect effect of fit to intentions to quit through burnout (Hypothesis 6). We found that the relationship between fit and intentions to quit through burnout differed at varying levels of spirituality, such that those higher in spirituality experienced a weaker connection between fit and intentions to quit through burnout. Thus, those higher in spirituality appear to simply think of quitting their volunteer position to a lesser extent regardless of the burnout they experience.

### 4.1. Implications for research and theory

It is also noteworthy that burnout resulted from poor PO fit, a factor we considered to be a resource-draining stressor (Hobfoll, 2011). Although this finding contributes to our understanding of volunteer burnout, future research should further determine which specific aspect of fit would best predict burnout. The overall measure of PO fit used here examined goal, value and personality congruence from the subjective experience of the volunteers. Other measures of fit including person–job fit as well as a comparison of objective measurements of fit might produce different results. Further, it would be important to know what factor within fit is most important to volunteers. More homogeneous measures of fit such as value fit may be less mutable than perhaps goal fit, it is yet to be determined whether a more homogeneous measure focusing on only one type of fit might exert more impact on volunteer burnout or the extent to which each type of fit dimension is moderated by the volunteer disposition or role contexts.

A second research challenge is to continue to explore the extent to which volunteers' spirituality and religiosity influences their response to stressors and responses. One of the issues plaguing spirituality research is the meaning of the construct and its relationship or overlap to other constructs. There is the natural association between religiosity and spirituality, with spirituality generally considered to be broader than religiosity (Liu & Robertson, 2011); that is, religious people usually consider themselves spiritual even though spiritual people do not necessarily consider themselves to be religious. Though evidence by Underwood (2006) and others have maintained that the DSES is unidimensional (Loustalot et al., 2006; Underwood & Terisi, 2002) despite the inclusion of both theistic and non-theistic items in their scale, recent research by Schuurmans-Stekhoven (2013) suggests that the theistic and non-theistic items show divergent associations with other variables. Moreover, it remains unclear whether spirituality or some corollary personality disposition or behavioral tendencies could explain these results. Research by Henningsgaard and Arnau (2008) suggest that more complex multivariate approaches show relationships among various subcomponents of religiosity constructs, spirituality dimensions and Big Five personality constructs. Supplementary qualitative inquiries and more complex quantitative approaches that disentangle spirituality, religiosity, and personality would be useful in understanding the unique contribution of each to the prediction of the psychological, physical and behavioral outcomes among volunteers as well as employees.

Finally, this research contributes to the small but growing number of studies showing that volunteer burnout not only exists but contributes to volunteer intentions to quit (Allen & Mueller, 2013; Chen & Yu, 2012). The few studies examining burnout in volunteers have exclusively focused on more intense and potentially more emotionally demanding volunteer roles as emergency workers, firefighters, and palliative care workers (Huynh et al., 2012, 2013, 2014; Tuckey & Hayward, 2011; Lewig et al., 2007). In contrast, this study included a wide variety of volunteer roles in seven nonprofits (e.g., urban welfare organization, health and wellness

foundation, hospital, animal welfare facilities) yet still found evidence of volunteer burnout. Further advances to theory would include systematic examinations of which type of volunteer roles are better suited to which volunteer goals, values and personality variables and thus lead to positive individual and organizational outcomes (e.g., engagement, health) versus volunteer roles would likely show poor fit to volunteer proclivities and needs.

### 4.2. Implications for practice

Given that nonprofit organizations heavily rely on volunteers and desire to retain them to provide stability and continuity of service for their clients, our study findings would suggest that avoidance of poor volunteer–organization fit and volunteer burnout would be advisable. Two approaches could lessen poor volunteer–organization fit: modifying volunteer recruitment, onboarding and placement to ensure a better match to volunteer goals, values and personality or changing the organizational environment to ensure a better volunteer–organization match.

The practitioner literature on volunteering suggests that careful recruitment and screening of volunteers is an exception rather than the rule (Bennett, 2013). Recruitment and screening offer the opportunity to listen to volunteer wishes, explain various volunteer roles in the organization, and describe the organization's culture and the volunteer role within the culture. As there are often multiple volunteer roles in nonprofit organizations, the organization could provide detailed descriptions of the responsibilities for each role and help place volunteers in roles that best suit them. If a prospective hospital volunteer has a goal of interacting with patients, for example, without high quality recruitment and screening, the volunteer might be placed in the hospital gift shop and experience poor fit. Nonprofits could also consider providing a realistic job preview for volunteers (Breaugh, 1983) and avoid poor fit and turnover. For example, a volunteer wanting to work at an animal shelter might have the goal of cuddling kittens and puppies rather than understanding other aspects of the volunteer role such as cleaning cages. Though this may and actually should result in some volunteers deciding not to onboard with a nonprofit, it prevents the time-consuming and stressful "revolving door" of volunteers (Allen & Mueller, 2013) as those that self-select into the organization anyway are likely to experience better fit and less burnout. Thus, initial screening may result in the identification of volunteers who do not fit well with any volunteer roles in the organization, resulting in the need for volunteer coordinators with requisite willingness and organizational support to decline the services of these volunteers, despite their typically high need for assistance.

Though one approach for maximizing fit is based on assessing and placing volunteers appropriately, nonprofits should consider what they could do to enhance volunteer fit and avoid volunteer burnout and turnover. One, nonprofits would be advised to ask volunteers for feedback through informal and formal means. Regularly surveying volunteers, having suggestion boxes, and occasionally involving them in meetings with staff are all relatively easy fixes to minimize volunteer–organization incongruence, burnout and turnover intentions (Lipp, 2015). Second, volunteers often have a goal of wanting to feel that they are contributing and are a valued part of something significant, but if they never feel appreciated or recognized, they could falsely conclude that their efforts are not important or valued, thus creating poor person–organization fit. Taking the time celebrate and recognize volunteer achievements, regularly expressing gratitude, posting volunteer achievement on the organization's social media outlets seem obvious but they are often overlooked methods for enhancing fit through meeting volunteer goals (Lehn, 2015).

The practical implications and questions regarding the findings for burnout and quit intentions are arguably the most interesting and controversial. What are the ethical implications of keeping volunteers, in this case the volunteers higher in spirituality, who are burned out in their volunteer position? On the one hand, nonprofits are eager to retain their volunteers but at what cost? Should burned out volunteers, assuming the nonprofit is aware of these individuals, encourage them to take a leave of absence until they recover, especially if they can't move them to another, more congruent role or if the role is inherently more stressful than the volunteer's resources can handle? Should these volunteers be encouraged to leave entirely for their own good or the good of the clients they serve? Occupational health research on recovery strategies for burned out employees should be applied in these contexts to determine if and how volunteers who are experiencing burnout for any reason can be helped (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005; Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnentag, & Mojza, 2011; Oerlemans & Bakker, 2014; Van Hooff & Geurts, 2015).

### 4.3. Limitations and future directions

The results of this study should be viewed as preliminary due to methodological limitations. Because this study relied on a single administration of a cross-sectional sample of volunteers, the ability to make causal, directional inferences is limited. Future research should employ diary studies that allow for multiple measurements of volunteer fit, burnout, and turnover intentions, which would help clarify the mechanisms through which burned out volunteers who are higher in spirituality report lower intentions to quit. A related suggestion would be to add measures of both positive and negative psychological, health, and behavioral indicators to be assessed over time. This approach would capture variations in the episodic volunteer experiences such as fluctuations in spirituality, burnout, engagement, satisfaction, health, and so on while simultaneously identifying key person and organizational factors contributing to such outcomes.

Given the more sophisticated longitudinal designs and data collection just suggested, an interesting area for future research is to investigate whether burned out, spiritual volunteers persist in volunteering without experiencing an abatement of burnout or whether they experience reduced burnout with time and reflection. Moreover, the mechanisms through which both paths occur should be explored. Research on meaning-making, though generally applied to those recovering from trauma and major negative life events, might be applicable to understanding how the burned out spiritual volunteer makes meaning from their experiences and whether their feelings of emotional exhaustion dissipate over time (Holland, Currier, Coleman, & Neimeyer, 2010; Lancaster & Carlson, 2014; Park, 2010). The meaning-making literature suggests that engaging in this process, which might be more likely among spiritual volunteers, would be associated with reduced negative outcomes.

If, on the other hand, spiritually burned out volunteers do not ultimately experience reduced burnout but persist in the organization, research should explore the mechanisms for the decision to remain. Are these volunteers potentially so engaged with their clients and the mission of the organization that they stay out of some sense of moral obligation? Research by Jimenez, Fuertes, and Abad (2010) found that a high level of affective and normative organizational commitment as well as emotional exhaustion was reported by long-term volunteers, suggesting the importance of further investigating the extent to which a sense of obligation is a possible explanation of why some volunteers stay despite burnout. A related mechanism to explore from the research on positive psychology is the extent to which these burned out, spiritual volunteers perceive they are "called" to remain with the organization

(Dik & Duffy, 2009; Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski, Dekas, & Rosso, 2009) or feel that volunteering provides them with a sense of purpose in life (Grant, 2007; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Again, however, it is not clear whether these alternative mechanisms and motives reduce burnout. If spirituality serves as a preventative resource, as suggested by Schwarzer's (2001) extension of COR theory, the cognitive and emotional energy expended in this search for meaning and other reflections is a process in itself that can lead to resource depletion, thus leaving fewer resources to cope with other stressors. Thus, if spirituality produces a tendency toward stoic perseverance and suffering rather than reduced burnout, the volunteers risk myriad well documented physical and mental health consequences (Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009) and perhaps compromised ability to effectively serve the volunteer organization (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004).

Second, common-method bias is another possible limitation of this study. This is due to the fact that the variables were assessed simultaneously on a common, single instrument (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Although we cannot definitively rule out the existence of this confounding factor, several steps were taken to mitigate this concern, including counterbalancing on the survey, ensuring anonymity of participants, and so on. However, researchers Conway and Lance (2010) refer to the idea that relationships between self-reported variables are routinely upwardly biased as a misconception. They reviewed previous studies and argued that the reality is much more complex. For example, one of their conclusions was that "same-method observed score correlations are actually quite accurate representations of their true-score counterparts" (Conway & Lance, 2010, p. 327). Further, moderation effects were hypothesized, tested, and found to be significant which suggests that a single common factor is unlikely to explain the relationships (Evans, 1985).

Third, although the sample included a variety of volunteers from several different organizations, the overall response rate was low, and the variability on some demographic factors (e.g., gender) was minimal. These factors limit the generalizability of the results. It should be noted that response rates in volunteer studies are relatively low and our response rate is consistent with previous literature using a similar methodology (Allen & Mueller, 2013). Thus, the forgoing hypotheses and some extension thereof should be studied again in a more representative sample. Further, the sample was from a single country, and therefore, generalizability across cultures is limited. Future research should consider investigating how these factors change in cultures where volunteering may be viewed differently.

Finally, though poor PO fit enhanced reported burnout among our sample of volunteers, volunteer spirituality, conceptualized as a person-based resource, failed to moderate this relationship. Though the widely used Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale has demonstrated evidence of wide applicability in the prediction of positive outcomes, no study to date has shown it to be a moderator of stressors on negative outcomes. Perhaps certain spiritualities serve as better resources for certain stressors and other spirituality concepts are more useful in combatting other stressors. For example, spiritual well-being, arguably a more robust resource compared with the ordinary daily experience of spirit might show greater promise as a moderator of stressors on strain and other negative outcomes. Future studies should compare different conceptualizations and operationalizations of spirituality and determine how they differentially influence a variety of individual and organizational processes and outcomes. Consistent with COR theory, future studies should focus on both health impairment and health promoting resources that help us understand the motivating processes influencing volunteers.

## 5. Conclusion

In sum, this study demonstrates the importance of recognizing the role of poor volunteer fit as a predictor of burnout and intentions to quit as well as the significant role of volunteer spirituality in attenuating the effect of burnout on intentions to quit. Given the economic contribution of volunteers to our society as demonstrated by the number of organizations relying on them to meet their needs, it is critical to better understand and ultimately improve the quality of the volunteer experience. Continuing research efforts to explore methods for improving volunteer onboarding, placement, socialization and training experiences to maximize fit within the organization and minimize burnout and turnover are essential.

## Appendix.

Measures of volunteer fit, burnout, intentions to quit, and spirituality

| Volunteer fit | Intentions to quit |
|---|---|
| How similar are your personal values and the [name of organization] culture? | I often think of ending my volunteer work at this organization. |
| How similar are your personal goals and the [name of organization] goals? | I intend to keep volunteering at this organization. (reverse-coded) |
| How similar is your personality and those of [name of organization]'s typical volunteers? | I may look for a different organization to volunteer with soon. |
| **Burnout** | **Spirituality** |
| I feel emotionally drained from volunteering. | I feel God's presence. |
| I feel used up at the end of the volunteer session. | I find strength and comfort in my religion. |
| I feel that volunteering is a strain. | I feel deep inner peace or harmony. |
| I feel burned out from volunteer work. | I desire to be closer to or in union with God. |
| I feel frustrated by volunteer assignments. | I feel God's love for me, directly or through others. |
| | I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation. |

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