



# Effect of Workplace Incivility on OCB Through Burnout: the Moderating Role of Affective Commitment

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## Abstract

In the current study, we used a time-lagged design to examine burnout as a potential mediator in the relationship between workplace incivility and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and affective commitment as a moderator on the relationship between workplace incivility and burnout. Results based on data from 168 full-time employees in North America showed that workplace incivility had a significant indirect effect on OCB through burnout. In addition, the positive effect of workplace incivility on burnout was stronger for individuals with higher affective commitment, suggesting that workplace incivility could be more detrimental to individuals who are more committed to their organizations. Our findings contribute to the literature by demonstrating the mediating role of burnout and the moderating role of affective commitment in the relationship between workplace incivility and OCB.

**Keywords** Workplace incivility · Organizational citizenship behavior · Burnout · Affective commitment

Workplace incivility refers to rude and discourteous behaviors in the workplace that violate norms of mutual respect. Example behaviors of workplace incivility include disrespectful and condescending remarks, silent treatment, and hostile stares (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Although workplace incivility is not associated with as much legal attention as other workplace mistreatment constructs such as sexual harassment (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008), it is more prevalent in the workplace than other mistreatment constructs (Rosen, Koopman, Gabriel, & Johnson, 2016), and research has demonstrated that its prevalence has been increasing. In 2001, Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001) found that 71% of 1180 public sector employees had been incivility targets in the previous 5 years. In 2013, results from thousands of sampled employees showed about 98% of them had experienced workplace incivility, costing organizations approximately \$12 million per year (Porath & Pearson, 2013).

Besides financial costs, incivility is also related to various negative employee outcomes, such as increased negative emotions, work-family conflict, and counterproductive work behavior, as well as impaired job attitudes, health, and well-being (for reviews, see Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Magley, & Nelson, 2017; Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016).

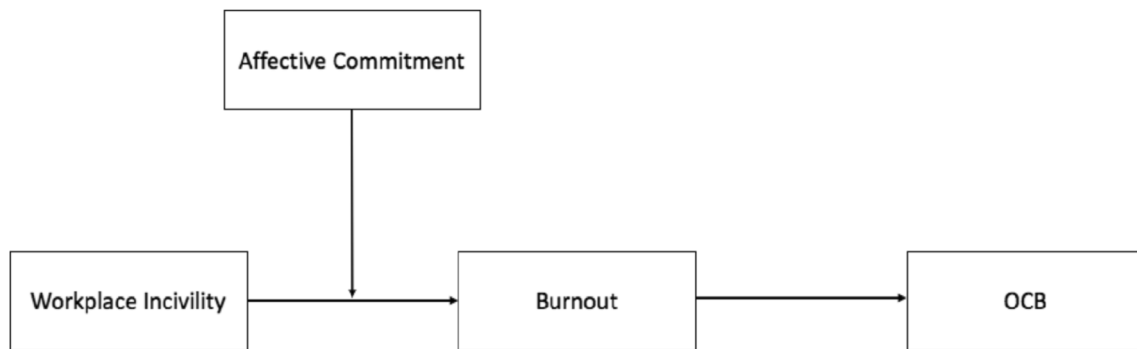
Building on previous findings, we aim to broaden our understanding of the mechanisms through which workplace incivility might affect organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)—an understudied outcome of workplace incivility. Based on the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we identified burnout as a potential mediator in the relationship between workplace incivility and employee OCB. In addition, we examined affective commitment as a moderator of the relationship between workplace incivility and burnout. Figure 1 summarizes the proposed relationships in our study.

Our study makes two main contributions to the literature. First, we expand the scant literature that examines the underlying mechanism through which workplace incivility might affect employee OCB. While the processes through which workplace incivility affects its outcomes are generally understudied (Schilpzand, De Pater, et al., 2016), it is particularly true for the relationship between workplace incivility and OCB. Previous research used the *tit for tat*

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**Fig. 1** Summary of proposed relationships

framework of incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) as the theoretical foundation to explain the link between incivility and OCB, suggesting that incivility targets may retaliate against the instigators or their organizations by withholding OCB efforts (Taylor, Bedeian, & Kluemper, 2012). However, Porath and Erez (2007, 2009) found that incivility experience also decreased targets' helpfulness toward an innocent person that was unrelated to the incident, suggesting that the tit for tat explanation may not be adequate to explain a target's reduced citizenship behaviors as reactions to workplace incivility experiences. Another recent study found that work engagement also mediated the relationship between incivility and OCB (Jawahar & Schreurs, 2018). Therefore, based on previous research, it is likely that targets of workplace incivility might reduce their OCB for more than one reason. Thus, additional research is needed to explore other potential mechanisms through which incivility might affect OCB.

To address this question, the current study uses a resource-based perspective to examine burnout (defined as an affective state of repeated resource loss without counterbalancing resource recovery; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004) as a mediator in the relationship between workplace incivility and target's OCB. We use conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), a resource-based theory to explain incivility's impact on OCB because it has been widely used to understand workplace stress processes, including workplace incivility (Taylor, Bedeian, Cole, & Zhang, 2014). Based on the COR theory, we predict that workplace incivility can deplete individuals' resources and lead to increased burnout, which will, in turn, lead to decreased OCB efforts. We believe examining this new mechanism will add to the established tit for tat and work engagement explanations of the relationship between workplace incivility and OCB, and help researchers gain a more holistic picture on why targets of workplace incivility might engage in less OCB.

In addition, by empirically testing the mediating role of burnout, we hope to provide additional knowledge on how to mitigate the negative effect of workplace incivility on OCB because OCB is important in the contemporary

work environment. Despite recent efforts in promoting civility in organizations, workplace incivility is still pervasive and may be difficult to dissuade (Schilpzand, De Pater, et al., 2016; Schilpzand & Huang, 2018). By examining burnout as a mediator of the relationship between workplace incivility and OCB, we hope to provide insights to organizations on possible ways of stopping the chain of events from workplace incivility to OCB. If burnout indeed mediates the relationship between workplace incivility and OCB, counterbalancing the negative effect of workplace incivility on burnout might be a feasible practice to mitigate the effect of workplace incivility on OCB.

Our second major contribution pertains to the exacerbating effect of affective commitment, which addresses the question of *to whom* workplace incivility might cast a stronger effect. Previous studies have found that affective commitment is related to various favorable personal and work-related outcomes (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002) and that affective commitment is a resource for employees to cope with stressors, suggesting organizations should strive to promote employees' affective commitment (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). Yet, some suggest that high affective commitment might exacerbate the positive relationships between stressors and strain outcomes because highly committed employees are more invested in and identified with organizations, and thus are more vulnerable to stressor experiences (e.g., Irving & Coleman, 2003; Kabat-Farr, Cortina, & Marchiondo, 2016; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). We thus theorize and test whether workplace incivility may be more strongly associated with burnout for more affectively committed employees, examining the boundary condition that may strengthen the effect of workplace incivility (Schilpzand, De Pater, et al., 2016). This contribution will inform researchers and practitioners about the potential double-edged effect of affective commitment in employee management such that affectively committed employees are likely to be more vulnerable to stressful experiences like workplace incivility.

## Workplace Incivility

Although workplace incivility overlaps with other workplace mistreatment constructs such as workplace aggression and abusive supervision (Hershcovis, 2011), it is distinct from other mistreatment constructs based on a few characteristics (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). First, incivility has low intensity. For example, excluding a coworker from a friendship circle, speaking to an organizational member in a demeaning tone, or interrupting others during a meeting are all examples of low-intensity uncivil behaviors in the workplace. Although of low intensity, incivility behaviors usually violate the workplace norms of mutual respect.

Second, the instigators of workplace incivility are not constrained to supervisors only; coworkers or customers can also be the instigators of workplace incivility (Cortina et al., 2001). This distinguishes incivility from abusive supervision, where the power and unequal organizational status is associated with the instigator (Tepper, 2000). Thus, incivility can be from multiple sources in the workplace, and employees may be more likely to encounter workplace incivility than other mistreatment constructs (Cortina et al., 2001).

Lastly, unlike other mistreatment constructs with which the purpose is to harm the target, incivility instigators' intent of the behavior is ambiguous (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). While an instigator might be intentionally rude, it also could be simply an oversight on the instigator's side. Therefore, after uncivil encounters, incivility targets may invest a lot of time and effort into determining instigators' intentions. The time and effort spent on processing the uncivil encounters might pull the targets' attention from job-related tasks, depleting their cognitive resources (e.g., Sulea, Filipescu, Horga, Orțan, & Fischmann, 2012) and decreasing their job performance (Chen et al., 2013).

## Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

### Conservation of Resources Theory and Workplace Incivility

We employed the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to explain *how* incivility might impact employee outcomes in the current study. The COR theory posits that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect resources that support their social connections and relationships (Hobfoll, 1989). However, when these resources are threatened, lost, or not sufficiently replenished, people will experience stress reactions such as burnout (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014). The COR theory identifies four types of resources, including objects (e.g., cars and houses), conditions (e.g., job security), personal

characteristics (e.g., mastery of skills and self-esteem), and energies (e.g., time, money, and knowledge). Additionally, the COR theory posits that social relations are a type of unique resource that can either provide or deplete the aforementioned types of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, workplace incivility as a social stressor (Kern & Grandey, 2009) signals threats to healthy work relationships (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) that is an essential type of social relationship to people's everyday work routine and career advancement (Karasek & Theorell, 1992). Therefore, workplace incivility may threaten employees' social relations in the organization and potentially depletes other types of resources. For example, incivility targets may view the uncivil encounter as a threat to their workplace social status or self-esteem (Caza & Cortina, 2007), perceived self-worth in the organization, or perceived job security and economic stability (Cortina & Magley, 2009).

Additionally, because incivility instigators' intentions are ambiguous (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), incivility may also exhaust targets' personal resources when they process the uncivil encounters. Previous studies have provided empirical support for this notion, such that workplace incivility threatened personal resources and was positively related to burnout (e.g., Sulea et al., 2012; Wang, Ding, & Gu, 2014). Further, incivility experience is cognitively and emotionally taxing (Kern & Grandey, 2009). Employees need to invest time and energy in coping with these unpleasant encounters, taking up their limited resources reserved for job-related tasks.

Using this theoretical framework, below we first proposed, consistent with prior studies that there would be a relationship between workplace incivility and burnout. Building on this relationship and previous findings on the relationships of workplace incivility and burnout with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), we then proposed that burnout would be a mediator in the relationships of workplace incivility with OCB.

### Workplace Incivility and Burnout

The COR theory can be used to explain the relationship between workplace incivility and burnout. Burnout is defined as an affective state of repeated resource loss without counterbalancing resource recovery (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Traditionally, burnout includes three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). However, empirical findings repeatedly showed the third dimension—reduced personal accomplishment—is not a core dimension of burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), and it is the weakest dimension in terms of its relationships with other variables (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Moreover, reduced personal accomplishment might be more of the consequences of negative emotional experience of burnout than a sub-dimension

(Shirom, 1989). Based on these findings, Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) excluded reduced personal accomplishment as a burnout dimension and included exhaustion and disengagement as the two dimensions of burnout. In addition, Demerouti et al. (2001) expanded the conceptualization and operation of exhaustion in Maslach's model (Maslach et al., 2001) to include affective, physical, and cognitive aspects of exhaustion to apply it beyond service sector employees. Thus, we adopted this conceptualization of burnout in the current study and used their measure to assess burnout (Demerouti, Mostert, & Bakker, 2010). Specifically, exhaustion is the results of "intensive physical, cognitive, and affective strain," while disengagement describes "distancing oneself from the work in general, work object, and work content" (Demerouti et al., 2010, p. 210).

According to the COR theory, when work demands increase, people may expend resources to cope with such demands, which might lead to strain reactions such as exhaustion. At the same time, when a loss or a potential loss of resources happens, people may conserve what is left to protect themselves from future resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, disengagement may be a self-protective mechanism that prevents people from depleting further resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Workplace incivility is often perceived as a workplace stressor that can potentially deplete employee resources and increase their experiences of burnout.

Specifically, incivility targets are typically frustrated, offended, and emotionally exhausted from the uncivil encounters (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007). As targets' emotional resources are depleted, they cannot maintain resources at the desired level. Thus, the targets may experience burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Moreover, when a person is suffering from resource loss as a result of workplace stressors, he/she may try to conserve and restore resources through a variety of means, including disengagement from work (Leiter, 1991) and/or reducing performance (Hobfoll, 1989). Incivility is a social stressor that targets may not be able to avoid or prevent for future reoccurrences (Hershcovis, Cameron, Gervais, & Bozeman, 2017). Thus, incivility targets may feel the need to disengage or withdraw from their work to protect and restore their resources. Indeed, previous research has linked incivility to disengagement (Chen et al., 2013) and absenteeism (Porath & Pearson, 2013). Besides resource loss, incivility targets are less likely to engage in after-work recovery activities to replenish their resources (Nicholson & Griffin, 2015), leading to an imbalance between resource loss and gain.

These considerations together suggest that workplace incivility targets may deplete their physical, emotional, and cognitive resources, and thus have higher burnout. Prior research provided empirical support for the positive effect of workplace incivility on burnout (e.g., Kern & Grandey, 2009; Miner-Rubino & Reed, 2010). In addition, Taylor et al. (2014) used the COR theory to propose a dynamic model of

workplace incivility and burnout; they found that the increase of workplace incivility positively predicted subsequent burnout increase. Therefore, we propose to replicate this previously established relationship, and then use this relationship as the basis for our proposed mediation relationships.

*Hypothesis 1:* Workplace incivility will positively predict burnout.

## Workplace Incivility, Burnout, and OCB

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) refers to employees' discretionary behaviors that go above and beyond their prescribed job responsibilities to help others in the workplace in achieving the organizational goal (Organ, 1988). OCB is beneficial because it contributes to a positive work environment and job performance for employees (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). However, when experiencing unfavorable workplace interactions, employees might respond with reduced OCB. For example, studies of other workplace mistreatment constructs such as abusive supervision and workplace aggression found that people who experienced more workplace mistreatment were less likely to engage in OCB (e.g., Greitemeyer & Rudolph, 2003; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). Research examining incivility's effect on employee OCB is still limited. Among the few exceptions, Porath and Erez (2009) showed that merely witnessing workplace incivility incidents made the employees engage in less OCB, and Mao, Chang, Johnson, and Sun (2017) found that incivility negatively predicted individuals' OCB. To further explore the underlying mechanisms, Taylor et al. (2012) found that incivility experience negatively predicted employees' OCB through organizational commitment, and argued that workplace incivility might negatively predict employee OCB because they feel the social exchange relationship between them and the organization is damaged (Taylor et al., 2012). However, this interactional justice explanation may not be the only mechanism for the relationship between workplace incivility and OCB. For example, Jawahar and Schreurs (2018) argued that the mediating role of engagement in the relationship between incivility and OCB can be explained by other theories such as COR. Thus, we propose that burnout can be another potential mediator in this relationship from the resource-based perspective.

Based on the COR theory, incivility experience may act as a social interaction demand in the workplace, consuming targets' resources and leaving them with less energy to fulfill other obligations. As discussed previously, incivility targets' resources may be drained from the uncivil workplace interactions, leading to increased burnout (e.g., Kern & Grandey, 2009; Miner-Rubino & Reed, 2010; Taylor et al., 2014). After one's resources are depleted, he/she may engage in



coping activities to conserve the resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001; Hobfoll & Shirom, 1993). In the workplace, one of the coping strategies may be to withdraw from non-task-related activities (e.g., OCB) to conserve resources in favor of task-related activities (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2005). In addition, incivility targets may not have enough extra personal resources to expend because they already spent the resources for job-related tasks and for processing and regulating their responses to uncivil encounters (Rosen et al., 2016). Thus, incivility targets who experience increased burnout may not be able to engage in OCB even if they would like to. Previous research has supported this notion by finding that burnout negatively related to OCB (e.g., Bergeron, Schroeder, & Martinez, 2014; Gaudet, Tremblay, & Doucet, 2014; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2005), and mediated the relationship between structural empowerment and OCB toward organizations (Gilbert, Laschinger, & Leiter, 2010).

Combining the aforementioned resource-based perspective and previous findings on the relationships between workplace incivility and burnout and between burnout and OCB, we propose that incivility targets are more likely to experience increased burnout because of resource loss; when feeling burned out, employees will either withhold OCB to prevent further resource loss, or fail to engage in OCB due to lack of resources.

*Hypothesis 2:* Burnout will mediate the negative relationship between workplace incivility and OCB.

### The Moderating Role of Affective Commitment

In addition to hypothesizing that burnout will mediate the relationship between incivility and OCB, we further predict the first stage of this mediation effect to be moderated by affective commitment, which explains *to whom* incivility may cast a stronger effect. Affective commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in their organizations (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Employees with higher affective commitment are more invested in their work roles and more likely to internalize the goals and values of the organization (Mayer & Schoorman, 1992). While the main effects of affective commitment on various employee personal and work-related outcomes have been favorable (Meyer et al., 2002), some suggest that affective commitment might magnify the positive relationships between stressors and strain outcomes because more committed employees are more invested in and identified with organizations, and thus more vulnerable to stressor experiences (e.g., Irving & Coleman, 2003; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Maltin, 2010). With workplace incivility as a detrimental workplace stressor, examining how boundary conditions such as affective commitment might affect its

relationship with outcomes is a reasonable next step. Therefore, we aim to address what Reilly (1994) referred to as the paradox of commitment to examine how affective commitment may strengthen employees' reactions to workplace incivility.

Individuals with higher affective commitment tend to identify themselves with the organization, and they strive to achieve and maintain their organizational identities by defining themselves with the same attributes as they define the organization (Burke, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to the social identification theory, for individuals to identify with their organizations, they need to first internalize their organizational membership as part of their self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals that identify with the organization perceive a oneness between themselves and the organization, and *who they are* in the organization shapes part of their self-identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). For example, a professor that identifies with Harvard would describe himself/herself as "a Harvard professor" instead of "a professor in a university" (Rousseau, 1998). This organizational identification is a basic mechanism leading to commitment (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004), such that identifying with an organization provides belongingness that enhances commitment to the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Thus, committed employees are strongly identified with the organization, assimilate organizational goals as their own, value what the organization values, and they view organizational matters as their own matters (Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006).

Based on social exchange theory, research showed that higher employee affective commitment is also associated with more social support in the workplace (e.g., perceived organizational support and perceived supervisor support) because employees who felt supported by the organizations would be more likely to feel obligated to "repay" the organization with affective commitment (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Thus, highly committed employees may have more social resources than employees with low commitment, but also expect continued higher levels of such resources. Moreover, high organizational identification tends to increase the exchange of social resources and expectations of such resources (Rousseau, 1998).

Based on the above argument, because highly committed employees value their organizational identity and expect to receive more social resources, the threat to this identify and potential loss of social resources due to workplace stressors such as incivility might be more salient to them. According to the COR theory, a loss or potential loss of valuable social resources are perceived to be stressful to individuals (Hobfoll, 1989). Workplace incivility is associated with losses of respect, dignity, and quality of professional relationships (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), and isolates employees from

their organizations (Hershcovis, Ogunfowora, Reich, & Christie, 2017). Therefore, workplace incivility may jeopardize organizational identities that are extremely important to highly committed employees and threaten people's continued reception of social resources in the workplace. Therefore, highly committed employees may react more negatively to workplace incivility than those who are less committed to the organization. This exacerbating effect of affective commitment has been supported in previous research. For example, Reilly (1994) found that nurses who are highly committed to their career reported higher emotional exhaustion when a stressor distracted them from their career ideals. Irving and Coleman (2003) found that employees with high affective commitment experienced more job tension when role ambiguity acted as a threat to their organizational identities. Most recently, Kabat-Farr et al. (2016) found that the relationship between workplace incivility and employee negative emotion (e.g., guilt) was stronger for individuals of high commitment. Therefore, based on the COR theory and previous research findings, we believe that the positive relationship between workplace incivility and burnout would be stronger for employees with high affective commitment because they may view incivility as a threat to their organizational identities that might block their access to social resources. We thus propose that:

*Hypothesis 3.* The relationship between workplace incivility and burnout (first-stage) of the burnout-mediated relationships between workplace incivility and OCB will be moderated by affective commitment; the indirect effect of workplace incivility on OCB will be stronger for individuals with high affective commitment.

## Method

### Participants and Procedures

We recruited our participants from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. In order to minimize common method bias, data were collected over two time points with 3 months in between (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

At time 1 (T1), similar to studies using the same approach (e.g., Matthews & Toumbeva, 2015), we only allowed participants with a 95% approval rate (meaning 95% of their previous tasks were successfully approved) and a completion of at least 500 tasks before our study to participate our T1 survey. Two attention check questions were embedded in the survey (e.g., "My supervisor works fourteen months per year", and "I can run two miles in two minutes") (Huang, Bowling, Liu, & Li, 2015) and we asked them to indicate if they were willing to participate in a follow-up survey 3 months later (if they agree,

they would leave their email address). Four hundred and twenty-five eligible participants clicked on our survey, but 183 were excluded in the final data set for the following reasons: 23 indicated that they were not in North America or failed to respond to that question, 12 did not answer any survey question, 69 failed to pass the attention check questions, 13 people's IP address were not from North America, 16 did not complete the majority of the survey questions, five reported working fewer than 30 h per week, and 45 indicated that they would not participate in the follow-up survey. The remaining sample included 242 full-time employees at T1. On average, it took 13 min for T1 participants to complete all survey questions, and participants were rewarded with \$1.50 for completing all survey questions and passing attention check questions.

At time 2 (T2), we only sent the survey to the 242 participants at T1, and 217 started the survey. Among them, 23 did not answer any survey question, seven failed to pass the attention check question ("I can run two miles in two minutes"), and 19 did not provide valid responses to match their T1 surveys. It took on average 12 min for T2 participants to complete all survey questions, and participants were rewarded with \$1 for completing all survey questions and passing the attention check question. Because only 168 people's data could be matched to their T1 survey, our final sample included their matched data for final analyses (valid response rate at T2 = 69%). Among the final sample, 58% of them were male, with the majority (81.5%) being white. They were from various industries, including service (20.8%), finance (12.5%), education (11.3%), and manufacturing (10.7%). Their average age was 39.1 years ( $SD = 10.9$  years), and their average tenure was 7.7 years ( $SD = 6.1$  years).

## Measures

Workplace incivility and affective commitment were measured at T1. Also, participants' demographic information was considered as time invariant, so this information was also obtained at T1. Burnout and OCB were measured at T2. Responses to all survey items were summed and then divided by the number of items each scale had, such that higher scores reflect higher levels of the constructs assessed. We temporally separated the measurements of the predictor and criterion variables to decrease common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

**Workplace Incivility** Workplace incivility was assessed using a 7-item scale developed by Cortina et al. (2001). Participants rated the items using a 7-point frequency scale (1 = never; 7 = everyday). A sample item is "How often have you experienced the following behaviors at work? Your supervisors or coworker ignored you" ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Affective Commitment** Affective commitment was measured using a 6-item scale from Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993). The participants indicated the extent of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). An example item is “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization” ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Burnout** Burnout was measured using a 16-item scale from Demerouti et al. (2010). This instrument measures two core dimensions of burnout: exhaustion (physical, cognitive, and affective) and disengagement from work. The participants indicate the extent of agreement with each statement on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 4 = *strongly agree*). A sample item is “There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work” ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Organizational Citizenship Behavior** OCB was measured using a 10-item scale from Spector, Bauer, and Fox (2010). Participants rated the items using a 5-point frequency scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *everyday*). A sample item is “Pick up meal for others at work” ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Control Variables** We also measured age, gender, tenure, and race at T1 survey as control variables (Table 1). Previous research showed that incivility targets’ gender and race (0 = minority, 1 = white) might have effects on their vulnerability to uncivil treatment on the job (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013), so we controlled for participants’ gender and race. Moreover, because having a longer tenure and an older age may expose a person to more opportunities of experiencing workplace incivility, we controlled for these two variables as well.

**Data Analysis Strategy**

To test our hypotheses, we used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) to run a mediation model (hypotheses 1 and 2) and a

moderated mediation model (hypothesis 3), respectively, while controlling for age, gender, tenure, and race in both models. We also calculated the indirect effects with 5, 000 bootstrapped samples for both models. Table 2 shows results of the mediation model (model 1) and the moderated mediation model (model 2).

**Results**

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

We first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the construct validity of our four measures (workplace incivility, affective commitment, burnout, and OCB). We first loaded items onto the latent constructs they corresponded to, but the CFA model did not converge. This is likely due to our small sample size because the parameter-to-sample size ratio was larger than the recommendation of 1:5 by Bentler and Chou (1987). Thus, we followed recommendations by Little, Cunningham, Shahar, and Widaman (2002) and used three item parcels for each latent construct. The three item parcels for each latent construct were generated by randomly combining items from the same scale. CFA results showed that the 4-factor model fitted the well with  $\chi^2(48) = 67.86, p < .05, CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .05$ . Thus, we are confident about the construct validity of our measures.

**Hypothesis Testing**

As model 1 in Table 2 shows, workplace incivility at time 1 positively predicted burnout at time 2 ( $b = .33, p < .001$ ), thus supporting hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that burnout would mediate the negative effect of workplace incivility on OCB. The bootstrapped indirect effect of workplace incivility on OCB

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of study variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Workplace incivility <sup>1</sup>	1.60	0.81							
2 Commitment <sup>1</sup>	4.55	1.83	-.46**						
3 Burnout <sup>2</sup>	2.21	0.63	.45**	-.67**					
4 OCB <sup>2</sup>	2.84	0.67	-.04	.40**	-.31**				
5 Age <sup>1</sup>	39.08	10.87	-.13	.13	-.17*	.08			
6 Gender <sup>1</sup>	0.42	0.50	-.12	.16*	-.07	.00	.16*		
7 Tenure <sup>1</sup>	7.45	6.14	-.18*	.30**	-.21**	.19*	.50**	.02	
8 Race <sup>1</sup>	0.19	0.39	-.01	.03	.03	.09	-.09	-.08	

Note. *N* = 168. <sup>1</sup> Time 1, <sup>2</sup> Time 2; OCB, organizational citizenship behavior. Gender was coded 1 = female; 0 = male. Tenure was measured in years. Race was coded 1 = minority, 0 = white

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

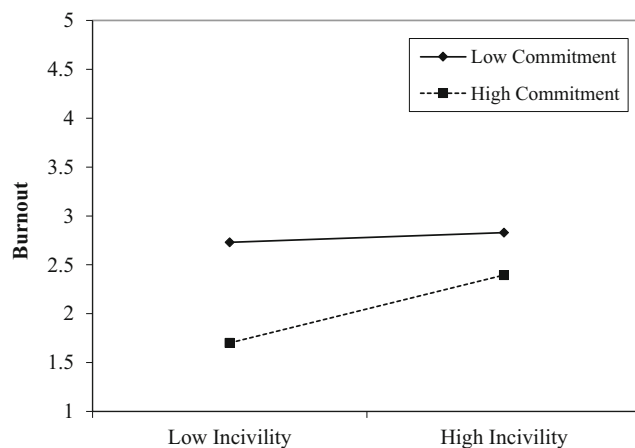
**Table 2** Regression coefficients for mediation and moderated mediation model

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		
	Burnout	OCB	Burnout		OCB
Age	-.004	-.002	-.01	-.01	-.002
Gender	-.01	.002	.08	.08	.002
Tenure	-.001	.002*	.001	.001	.002*
Race	.04	.20	.08	.09	.20
Workplace incivility	.33***	.12	.13**	-.21*	.12
Burnout		-.37			-.37***
Affective commitment			-.21***	-.36***	
Workplace incivility × affective commitment				.10***	
R <sup>2</sup>	.22***	.13***	.49***	.53***	.13***
ΔR <sup>2</sup>			.27***	.04***	
			(vs. model 1)	(vs. previous step)	

Note.  $n = 168$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. OCB, organizational citizenship behavior. Gender was coded 1 = female; 0 = male. Tenure was measured in years. Race was coded 1 = minority, 0 = white  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

through burnout in the mediation model (model 1) was  $-.12$  with a 95% confidence interval of  $[-.21, -.06]$ . Because the 95% CI excluded zero, the indirect effect was statistically significant, supporting hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the effect of workplace incivility on OCB through burnout was conditional on employees' affective commitment. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown in model 2 of Table 2. Affective commitment significantly moderated the relationship between workplace incivility and burnout ( $b = .10, p < .001$ ). Figure 2 shows that the positive relationship between workplace incivility and burnout was stronger for individuals with high commitment. We estimated the bootstrapped conditional indirect effects following suggestions from Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) at three levels of affective commitment: one *SD* below the mean, the mean, and one *SD* above the mean. We also

**Fig. 2** The moderating role of commitment on the relationship between workplace incivility and burnout

constructed bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals around the indirect effects. As showed in Table 3, workplace incivility had significant negative indirect effects on OCB at the mean level (indirect effect =  $-.09$ , 95% CI  $[-.17, -.04]$ ) and 1 *SD* above the mean (indirect effect =  $-.16$ , 95% CI  $[-.29, -.07]$ ) of affective commitment, but not at 1 *SD* below the mean (indirect effect =  $-.02$ , 95% CI  $[-.08, .02]$ ) of affective commitment. Taken together, hypothesis 3 was supported.

## Discussion

In this study, we examined an underlying mechanism and a boundary condition of the relationship between workplace incivility and OCB. Specifically, building on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we proposed and found that workplace incivility had a negative indirect effect on OCB through burnout. Moreover, we found that this relationship was conditional on employees' affective commitment such that the relationship

**Table 3** Indirect effect of workplace incivility on OCB at selected values of affective commitment

Affective commitment	Bootstrapped indirect effect	Boot SE	L 95% CI	U 95% CI
OCB				
-1 <i>SD</i>	-.02	.02	-.08	.02
Mean	-.09	.03	-.17	-.04
+1 <i>SD</i>	-.16	.06	-.29	-.07

Note.  $n = 168$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5000. L, lower limit; U, upper limit; CI, confidence interval; SE, standard error



between workplace incivility and burnout was stronger for individuals with high affective commitment.

Our findings demonstrated a new mechanism in explaining workplace incivility's impact on OCB, such that targets of workplace incivility might feel burned out and have fewer resources to engage in OCB. The finding of burnout as the new mediator between workplace incivility and OCB contributes to the literature by suggesting that reduced personal resources as an additional mechanism that is different from the previously established tit for tat mechanism in the workplace incivility-OCB relationship (Taylor et al., 2012). Based on a social justice perspective, previous research found a negative association between workplace incivility and OCB through commitment, such that targets withheld their efforts as a way to “get even” with the uncivil person (Taylor et al., 2012). However, our finding supported another mechanism, such that targets might be too exhausted to exert efforts in engaging in OCB. This finding contributes to our understanding of how workplace incivility might affect employee extra-role behaviors. It also echoed the recent call on moving beyond the tit for tat response of incivility to other response patterns, because incivility spirals might not always be present (Miner et al., 2018). While previous research found that targets retaliate against incivility instigators by withholding efforts (Taylor et al., 2012), we suggest that incivility targets are also likely to be too burned out to put forth efforts to engage in OCB.

Surprisingly, we did not find a significant correlation between workplace incivility and OCB in Table 1 despite that we found a significant indirect effect of incivility on OCB through employee burnout. This suggests that the relationship between workplace incivility and OCB might be more complicated, and it is likely that workplace incivility might affect employee OCB via different competing mechanisms. For example, Schilpzand, Leavitt, and Lim (2016) found that rude treatment positively predicted self-blame. Thus, while Taylor et al.'s (2012) and our study both argue that workplace incivility might *decrease* OCB through both social exchange and resource-based processes, respectively, workplace incivility might positively affect OCB through increased self-blame because targets may engage in citizenship behaviors to reduce the feelings of self-blame. We suggest future research continue examining additional mechanisms of this process.

In addition to potential competing mechanisms, it is likely that our use of a self-reported measure of OCB with frequency response options might also contribute to this difference from Taylor et al. (2012), which used supervisor ratings with agreement response options. In a meta-analysis research, Carpenter, Berry, and Houston (2014) found that the correlation between self-reported and other-reported OCB was significantly higher when the study used agreement response (e.g., Taylor et al., 2012) than frequency response. In addition, previous research demonstrated that the agreement response format might capture the general tendency to engage in OCB, while the

frequency response might be more likely to capture OCB behaviors (Carpenter et al., 2014; Dalal, 2005; Spector et al., 2010). Thus, our self-reported OCB might have limited overlap with the supervisor-rated OCB in Taylor et al. (2012) because of the use of different response options and different sources of ratings for OCB. While this design issue might not directly lead to the non-significant relationship between workplace incivility and OCB, this result suggests that more research is needed to understand the effect of workplace incivility on OCB, and how the effect unfolds over time.

Our examination of affective commitment as a first-stage moderator sheds light on the boundary conditions of the effects of workplace incivility, showing that the effect of workplace incivility on burnout is moderated by employee affective commitment. Through the lens of the COR theory and social identification, our findings suggest that workplace incivility might be more detrimental to employees with high affective commitment because they view organizational identity an important part of their personal identity. Being the targets of workplace incivility may threaten highly committed employees' connections with the organization and deplete their social resources at the workplace, making them more sensitive to this experience and react more strongly in terms of strain reactions such as burnout. This finding is particularly interesting, as affective commitment is usually considered as a positive characteristic that is beneficial to job-related stress outcomes (Irving & Coleman, 2003). For example, affective commitment was negatively associated with burnout (Table 1), and employees with high affective commitment reported having a generally lower level of burnout than those with low affective commitment (Fig. 2). Despite these positive outcomes of high affective commitment, our results support Irving and Coleman's (2003) notion that affectively committed employees are more susceptible to stressors that threaten their organizational identities. While highly committed employees identify strongly with the organization and generally are less burned out, threats to their organizational identities may have stronger effects on them.

## Practical Implications

The current study also has several practical implications. First, our findings speak to the need for organizations to identify whether workplace incivility is prevalent within their organization and whether employees perceive workplace incivility as an issue. Our findings suggest that workplace incivility may adversely influence employees' OCB through exhausting employee's personal resources. In order to build a sustainable workforce, responsible employers may take steps to prevent workplace incivility before it occurs (Pearson & Porath, 2005). For example, managers may initiate zero-tolerance expectations of uncivil interactions in the workplace, and such expectations should be repeated regularly, verbally and in

writing. Also, organizations may avoid hiring habitual incivility instigators by checking their job candidates' references thoroughly. Employers may check their candidates by talking to people at various organizational levels with whom the candidate has worked. This investment is time consuming but effective, and companies that are good at maintaining a civil workplace environment considered this strategy effective in avoiding hiring habitual incivility instigators (Pearson & Porath, 2005). If workplace incivility is identified as a potential issue within the organization, appropriate interventions should be implemented to promote civil interactions in the workplace. An example intervention is the Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace program (Osatuke, Moore, Ward, Dyrenforth, & Belton, 2009) that has been found to effectively reduce workplace incivility occurrence (Leiter, Day, Oore, & Spence Laschinger, 2012).

Second, the current study suggests that workplace incivility might exert its effects on OCB through burnout. Given that workplace incivility is a prevalent phenomenon which may not be reduced within a short timeframe, our results suggest that immediate solutions for managers in addressing workplace incivility's effect on OCB can focus on counterbalancing the effect of workplace incivility on burnout. For example, managers can focus on reducing demands such as hindrances or roadblocks that employees must cope with, and employees might be able to have more resources to deal with workplace incivility experiences or recover faster from workplace incivility experiences. In situations where work demands cannot be alleviated, managers may strive to provide additional resources (i.e., supervisor support) to employees to reduce their burnout level (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). Moreover, managers can encourage employees to participate in employee assistance programs to reduce their burnout level. Implementations of support related to the job itself such as increasing job autonomy and decreasing role ambiguity and situational constraints may also decrease employees' burnout (Fox & Spector, 1999).

Third, we found that employees with high affective commitment are likely to be more negatively influenced by workplace incivility. Thus, while previous research suggests that highly committed employees may cope with workplace stressors better than others (Meyer & Maltin, 2010), it is not true when the stressor is workplace incivility. Our findings suggest that employers should provide sufficient support and training to all employees regardless of their commitment level, to help them appropriately cope with experiences of workplace incivility. Moreover, affectively committed employees might be more likely to file complaints about incivility incidents given their strong identification with the organization. Thus, managers need to take employees' complaints of incivility incidents seriously, and investigate, correct, or curtail the incidents so employees feel safe to speak up about their experiences (Pearson & Porath, 2005). Moreover, only

implementing organizational-wide policies as suggested in previous research (e.g., Pearson & Porath, 2005) to address workplace incivility may not be enough. Our results revealed that managers should expect their highly affectively committed employees to react more strongly to uncivil encounters than their less committed employees, rendering more management involvement in addressing the issue. Thus, our results will assist managers in anticipating employees' responses to workplace incivility and help them better manage employees on an individual basis.

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations of the current study should be noted. Firstly, data were collected from a single source, making our results vulnerable to single source bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, single source variance is unlikely to affect the interaction effect (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991), and the temporal separation of the predictor (workplace incivility) and outcome variables (OCB) can potentially reduce this concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, although Carpenter et al. (2014) found that both self-reported and other-reported OCB showed similar patterns of relationships with some common correlates, there was a significant difference on relationships of conflict (another social stressor) with self-reported OCB and other-reported OCB. Thus, despite our efforts to address this concern, future studies collecting data from multiple sources (e.g., OCB from supervisors) can provide more empirical evidence on the proposed relationships.

Second, we did not distinguish the source of incivility. In other words, we are not sure if the uncivil encounter was instigated by the supervisor or coworker. It is likely that supervisor incivility may have a larger impact on the outcomes than other sources because supervisors have direct power over their employees (Schilpzand, De Pater, et al., 2016). However, prior research found that regardless of the source, workplace incivility led to lower task and creative performance (Porath & Erez, 2007) and lower OCB (Porath & Erez, 2009). Yet, it is likely that employees with a higher commitment to supervisors (or coworkers) might react more strongly to experienced incivility from supervisors (or coworkers). Future research may measure the sources of incivility separately, adopting a social network perspective to clarify if the source of incivility makes an impact on the outcomes.

Third, we used a between-person design to test our hypotheses. However, workplace incivility is a dynamic construct that might change from day to day and might influence fluctuations in employees' burnout level and OCB frequencies. Taking the dynamic nature of incivility into consideration, future studies should take a daily diary approach to examine whether within-person variances of incivility might influence their burnout and OCB.

Lastly, our results are based on an online panel sample of workers who are paid for their responses, which posits concerns about the validity and generalizability of our data. Nevertheless, we took proactive actions to ensure data quality by using several screening criteria. Moreover, research supported that data obtained from online panels are at least as reliable as those obtained through traditional methods (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013). Additionally, previous reviews established evidence of data generalizability based on studies using online panels (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Goodman et al., 2013). One of the benefits of using online panels is increasing the heterogeneity of our sample because participants are more diverse than those recruited from traditional methods (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). This heterogeneity helps to strengthen the generalizability of our findings. Another advantage is that we can recruit a large sample of participants from an online panel (Ford et al., 2014). Nevertheless, future studies should compare response patterns of online panels to respondents recruited through other methodologies, and examine the degree of difference between the responses.

## Conclusion

The current study found that workplace incivility had a significant negative indirect effect on OCB through burnout and that the indirect effects were stronger for individuals with high affective commitment. Taken together, our findings highlight the detrimental effects of workplace incivility on employee OCB through burnout, and the importance of affective commitment in exacerbating the negative effects of stressors (incivility) on strains.

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