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THE MODERATING ROLE OF AGREEABLENESS AND CONSCIENTIOUSNESS ON  
THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BURNOUT AND WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIORS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Nikoo Samee

August 2020

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled  
THE MODERATING ROLE OF AGREEABLENESS AND CONSCIENTIOUSNESS ON  
THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BURNOUT AND WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIORS

by

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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August 2020

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## ABSTRACT

### THE MODERATING ROLE OF AGREEABLENESS AND CONSCIENTIOUSNESS ON THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BURNOUT AND WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIORS

by Nikoo Samee

It has been shown that employees who experience burnout are more likely to engage in withdrawal behaviors, which are behaviors that harm the morale of employees and the bottom line of an organization. There has been some research on the moderating effect of situational variables (e.g., leadership style) on the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors, but there is a lack of research on how personal characteristics may play a role in such relationships. The purpose of this study was to examine the moderating role of agreeableness and conscientiousness on the relationship between burnout and three withdrawal behaviors: lateness, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. A total of 159 individuals participated in an online survey. Results showed that the two personality traits did not play a moderating role in these relationships. However, conscientiousness was negatively related to burnout, lateness, and absenteeism, and burnout was positively related to lateness and turnover intentions. Based on these results, it is suggested that organizations should hire conscientious individuals and/or develop conscientiousness in employees because they may be more resistant to burnout, lateness, and absenteeism. Additionally, organizations may find it beneficial to invest in multi-pronged wellness initiatives that address underlying cultural issues paired with education and incentives to help employees cope with burnout and thus help reduce the rates of withdrawal behaviors due to burnout.

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## **Introduction**

Withdrawal behaviors, which are defined as actions such as absenteeism, lateness, and turnover that reduce the amount of time working to less than is required by the organization (Penney & Spector, 2005), have been shown to negatively affect businesses. These negative business consequences include revenue loss and extra payments to other employees as well as reduced efficiency, increased turnover, and decline in morale among the remaining workers (Birati & Tziner, 1996; Jamal, 1984; Koslowsky, Saige, Krausz, & Singer, 1997). The cost of employee withdrawal as a whole was estimated to be about 16.5% of a company's pre-tax revenue (Sagie, Birati, & Tziner, 2002).

Because of the costs associated with withdrawal behaviors, many researchers (e.g. Johns, 2011; Koslowsky, 2000) have attempted to identify antecedents of withdrawal behaviors in hopes of reducing these factors and ultimately reducing the costs associated with withdrawal behaviors. Throughout the years, research has shown many different antecedents for withdrawal behaviors, including job dissatisfaction (Johns, 2011), lack of work-life balance (Kowolsky, 2000), and perceived overqualification (Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013).

Burnout has also been identified as an antecedent of withdrawal behaviors. Burnout is defined as a syndrome characterized by feeling exhausted by, indifferent to, and unaccomplished in one's work (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Burnout has shown to be positively related to lateness, absenteeism, and turnover (e.g., Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010; Lee, Lim, Yang, & Lee, 2011; Parker & Kulik, 1995; Weisberg, 1994). The relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors has also been shown

to be influenced by moderators. For example, an employee's trust in the organization and the leadership style of a manager have been shown to moderate how much an employee engages in withdrawal behaviors when experiencing burnout (Green, Miller, & Aarons, 2011; Trusell, 2015).

The literature described above shows that an employee's work environment can lead to an employee engaging in withdrawal behaviors. However, not every person is likely to react the same way to a given situation. Personality is one reason for this variety of behavioral reactions. Because personality traits differ among individuals, it is reasonable to argue that the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors may depend on the personality trait of the individual. That is, even if employees feel burnout, they may not necessarily engage in withdrawal behaviors because of their personality traits.

There is evidence that work stressors lead to greater counter-productive work behaviors (including lateness and absenteeism) for those low on conscientiousness or high on negative affectivity (Bowling & Eschleman, 2010). It is then reasonable to propose that a personality trait may moderate the relationship between burnout and the withdrawal behaviors of lateness, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. While there is research on the moderating role of personality traits on the relationships between burnout and withdrawal behaviors, there has not yet been research that has examined the personality traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness as moderators of such relationships. Because of this, the present study examined the moderating effects of agreeableness and conscientiousness on the relationship between burnout and the withdrawal behaviors of lateness, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. The following

sections describe literature regarding withdrawal behaviors, burnout, and possible moderators of the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors, with a focus on personality.

### **Withdrawal Behaviors**

As mentioned earlier, withdrawal behaviors are defined as behaviors that employees may engage in which reduce the amount of time they are working (Penney & Spector, 2005). Examples of these behaviors are lateness, absenteeism, and turnover.

**Lateness.** Lateness, also called tardiness, is when an employee fails to arrive to work on time. Blau (1994) found it important to distinguish between various types of lateness behaviors: unavoidable lateness, stable periodic lateness, and increasing chronic lateness. Unavoidable lateness is defined as lateness that has a random pattern, frequency, and duration, and typically occurs when there are unforeseeable situations such as transportation issues, illness, and accidents. Stable periodic lateness is characterized by a nonrandom pattern of stable frequency and duration. This type of lateness is usually due to non-work events in an employee's life that begin to take precedence over their work, whether they be leisure or family-related. For example, employees may prioritize taking their child to their sports game rather than getting to work on time. Finally, there is increasing chronic lateness, the typical definition of lateness used in research. Increasing chronic lateness is characterized by a nonrandom pattern of increasing frequency and duration, and often occurs when an employee has low job satisfaction, low job involvement, and low organizational commitment.

**Absenteeism.** Absenteeism occurs when individuals miss an extended, unexcused period of time from their work. The simplest way to conceptualize absenteeism is through Leonard and Dolan's (1990) measures: frequency and time lost. With this framework, frequent absences with a short duration are typically considered voluntary and controllable, while non-frequent and long-term absences are usually considered out of the employee's control (e.g. an illness) (Darr & Johns, 2008). Researchers are typically interested in voluntary and controllable absences.

**Turnover.** Employee turnover is when an employee leaves an organization, and can be either voluntary or involuntary (Price & Mueller, 1986). Voluntary turnover, which is the type of turnover this study focused on, occurs when employees decide to leave their company for their own reasons, whether these reasons are dissatisfaction with their current organization or the perception of greater opportunity at a different organization. Involuntary turnover occurs when the organization forces an employee to leave the company, whether it be as a part of a layoff or because of poor performance.

Since turnover can be difficult to capture and measure, this paper focused on turnover intentions, which is defined as the cognitive process of thinking of quitting, planning on leaving a job, and the desire to leave the job (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). Steel and Ovalle's (1984) meta-analysis found a corrected correlation of  $r = .50$  between turnover intentions and actual turnover. This strong relationship suggests that studying the predictors of turnover intentions is reasonably similar to studying the predictors of actual turnover.

**The costs of withdrawal behaviors.** Withdrawal behaviors have been of concern to organizations because of the costs associated with them. The cost of employee withdrawal as a whole was estimated to be about 16.5% of a company's pre-tax revenue (Sagie et al., 2002). These researchers also looked at each withdrawal behavior separately.

Sagie et al. (2002) found that the direct costs associated with lateness could vary due to the ability of other employees to complete the work being missed by the late employee. They found that, typically, the cost of lateness was not substantial compared to the costs of absenteeism or turnover because late employees could stay behind and finish their work. The indirect cost of lateness, however, is different because one employee's lateness can cause other employees to wait on the late party for deliverables or be less productive.

Saige et al. (2002) also found that the direct cost of absenteeism varied depending on which employee was absent, and by extension, what work that employee did. On the one hand, if the work done by an employee was not time-sensitive or could be done by others, the cost of absenteeism was minor. On the other hand, the absence of an employee with more responsibilities led to missing opportunities, falling behind on project timelines, or losing customers, which resulted in a substantial cost. The indirect costs of absenteeism were found to be the reduced effectiveness of others and encouraging other employees to be absent from work – if one colleague was absent, others perceived it as an acceptable behavior.

Finally, Saige et al. (2002) found that the direct cost of turnover might range from a negative value if the employee was a poor performer to a high positive value if the

employee had very specific knowledge, skills, and abilities, or was in a key position in the organization. The organization also has to consider the costs associated with advertising the position, recruitment, and training a new employee. The indirect costs of turnover would include reduced effectiveness, reduced performance, and increased turnover intentions among other employees (Saige et al., 2002). Considering how costly withdrawal behaviors are, it would be valuable to identify the potential predictors of these withdrawal behaviors in an effort to reduce those causes.

**Antecedents of withdrawal behaviors.** Because withdrawal is made up of three individual behaviors, some research has focused on only one of the behaviors (e.g. Koslowsky, 2000), while other research has focused on two or all three of the behaviors (e.g. Somers, 1995). In terms of lateness, Koslowsky (2000) proposed a model that explains two routes to an employee's lateness. One track shows lateness stemming from work attitudes, while the other track shows lateness stemming from personality, commute, organizational culture, and work-family conflict. In his model, Koslowsky argued that work attitudes (e.g., dissatisfaction with one's organization) on their own may not be the only reason employees are late to work – other issues particular to each person may be factors as well (e.g., work-family conflict).

In an effort to test this theory, Elicker, Foust, O'Malley, and Levy (2016) conducted a study on the relationship between culture of lateness at the organization and employee lateness and found that if an employee perceived the culture of the organization to be lenient in regards to arriving late, they arrived late more often, even if the employee did not have a favorable view towards lateness. This research stresses the fact that lateness

can be caused by contextual issues and does not necessarily reflect an employee's feelings about their work.

In researching antecedents of employee absenteeism, Johns (2011) found that absenteeism was positively associated with task significance (the impact of an employee's job on others and the broader importance of the job), perceived absence legitimacy, and family-to-work conflict (when family responsibilities interfere with work), but was negatively related to task interdependence (the extent to which coworkers are dependent on a job incumbent's work activities or output) and work-to-family conflict (when work demands negatively impact family life). These results indicate that if an employee believes his or her reason for being absent is legitimate or if they have family responsibilities to attend to, it is reasonable for them to be absent more often. It also follows logically that an employee who has a non-interdependent job would be absent more often as he or she can afford to be absent without derailing others' work, and that if an employee has an increase in work responsibilities, he or she would avoid being absent so that they can better handle these responsibilities. An interesting finding, however, was that if an employee found his or her work to be significant, they were more likely to be absent, specifically using their sick days. Johns reasoned that this might be because those who viewed their work as significant wanted to ensure they were in top health so that they could continue to engage in their work.

Maynard and Parfyonova's (2013) research on turnover showed that employees who believed they were overqualified for their position – that is, believed they had surplus education, skills, and knowledge, relative to the requirements of their position – were

four times more likely to have voluntarily left the company after six months. They also found that perceived overqualification was related to turnover intentions.

When considering all dimensions of withdrawal behaviors as a whole, research suggests that employees tend to engage in withdrawal behaviors because of negative work attitudes, typically as a response to low commitment to the organization (Hulin, 1991; Rosse & Hulin, 1984, 1985). Somers (1995) examined the relationship between three types of organizational commitment and withdrawal behaviors and found that affective commitment, defined as an emotional attachment to an organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1982), was a consistent predictor of the three withdrawal behaviors, such that the greater the affective commitment of employees, the less they engaged in withdrawal behaviors.

The causes of withdrawal behaviors appear to have a wide range, as evidenced by the studies described above. One more antecedent to withdrawal behaviors is a syndrome called burnout. The following section defines burnout and how its dimensions are related to withdrawal behaviors.

### **Burnout**

The term burnout first appeared in a psychology journal in 1974 when Herbert Freudenberger wrote an article about volunteer workers at a clinic for drug addicts. The article outlined the mental and behavioral signs of burnout, describing how an employee suffering from burnout is “quick to anger,” has “feelings of exhaustion and fatigue,” and “looks, acts, and seems depressed” (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 160).



**Burnout inventories.** In 1981, Maslach and Jackson created the Maslach Burnout Inventory (also known as the MBI), the first widely used tool to assess burnout for those in the human services industry. They defined burnout as a multidimensional construct made up of three separate but related dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment. The related dimensions for industries other than human services are exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy, respectively (Maslach, Jackson, Leiter, & Schaufeli, 1996). The definitions of these dimensions are essentially interchangeable with the only difference being the population to which they are applied (Leiter & Maslach, 2016).

Emotional exhaustion, or exhaustion for those not in the human services industry, is characterized by lacking energy, feeling like one's emotional resources are used up, feeling debilitated, and feeling fatigue (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Depersonalization, or cynicism, occurs when an employee feels indifferent or impersonal towards the recipients of their work or their work in general (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Reduced personal accomplishment, or professional efficacy, is characterized by reduced productivity or capability, feeling incompetent about one's work, feeling a lack of achievement or progress, and a decline in perceptions of conducting meaningful work (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Leiter & Maslach, 2016; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010).

The MBI is the most widely used burnout inventory. More specifically, it has been used in over 90% of studies on burnout (Shirom & Melamed, 2006). However, several researchers have pointed out a few of its shortcomings. First, the questions on the scale are phrased in the same direction, but the scales of exhaustion and depersonalization are

worded negatively, whereas the personal accomplishment scale is worded positively. Research suggests that this unidirectional wording within each dimension may have caused the factor analysis of the items to cluster the items in a way that may have been inaccurate and that if they were all worded the same way, the factor analysis would have resulted differently (Bouman, te Brake, & Hoogstraten 2002; Demerouti & Nachreiner 1996; Lee & Ashforth 1990).

Second, the three-factor structure has been shown to vary across occupations, nationalities, and versions of the MBI (Lee & Ashforth, 1990; Nye, Witt, & Schroeder, 1992; Schaufeli, Bakker, Hoogduin, Schaap, & Kladler, 2001; Schutte, Toppinen, Kalimo, & Schaufeli, 2000; Taris, Schreurs, & Schaufeli, 1999). Some researchers (e.g. Kalliath, 2000) have suggested that a two-factor model consisting of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization would be a more appropriate model for burnout, as personal accomplishment is more related to other organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Some research even suggests that personal accomplishment could be better conceptualized as an antecedent or consequence of burnout (Taris, Le Blanc, Schaufeli, & Scherurs, 2005).

Finally, the emotional exhaustion dimension of the MBI only focuses on affective expressions of exhaustion. This makes sense at first because the dimension is measuring *emotional* exhaustion, but many researchers (e.g., Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981; Shinn, 1982) have suggested that this dimension should measure other aspects of exhaustion, such as cognitive and physical exhaustion, as different people experience exhaustion in different ways.

Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, and Kantas (2002), created the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) in an effort to address the challenges presented by the MBI. While it is based on a model similar to the MBI, it features questions that measure the dimensions in both positive and negative directions, only two dimensions (exhaustion and disengagement, which is similar to depersonalization), and questions that assess emotional, cognitive, and physical components of exhaustion. This inventory is not restricted to human service professions and can be applied to any occupational group (Demerouti, et al., 2002).

This study used the dimensions of the OLBI to define burnout: exhaustion and disengagement. They are defined slightly differently than the dimensions in the MBI. Exhaustion is defined as a consequence of intense physical, affective, and cognitive strain, while disengagement is defined as distancing oneself from work in general and endorsing negative attitudes towards work (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008).

**The relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors.** Research on burnout has linked burnout to various outcomes, ranging from decreased job performance (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004), increased health problems (Chen, 2012), and an increased likelihood of depressive symptoms (Upadyaya, Vartiainen, & Salmela-Aro, 2016). Burnout has also been shown to be related to withdrawal behaviors. Past research that has examined the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors bundled the burnout dimensions together and studied the relationship of overall burnout with individual withdrawal behaviors. For example, Lazaro, Shinn, and Robinson (1984) found that burnout was strongly and positively related to turnover intentions, and

Weisberg (1994) found that burnout had a significant impact on a teacher's intention to leave his or her job.

More recent research has examined the relationship between each component of burnout and individual withdrawal behaviors. For example, Schouteten (2016) focused specifically on the withdrawal behavior of absenteeism and studied how burnout was related to that behavior for university employees in the Netherlands. As described before, absenteeism is typically measured in terms of frequency and duration (Leonard & Dolan, 1990). Burnout, measured using the Utrecht Burnout Scale (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000), was shown to have a positive relationship with absenteeism; more specifically, employees who reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion were absent for longer periods of time and more frequently. This finding is consistent with Deery, Iverson, and Walsh's (2002) findings on call center employees. They found that the greater a call center employees' emotional exhaustion, the more frequently they were absent from work. Ybema, Smulders, and Bongers's (2010) also found that higher levels of burnout were likely to lead to greater absenteeism in the future.

Lambert, Hogan, and Altheimer (2010) examined the relationship between burnout and absenteeism and turnover intentions among correctional staff at a maximum security private prison in the Midwest. Using the MBI, they found that the different dimensions of burnout were related to different outcomes. More specifically, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were both found to have significant positive associations with absenteeism and turnover intentions, suggesting that those who felt exhausted and indifferent towards their work wanted to avoid going to work, whether the avoidance was

temporary (being absent) or permanent (thinking about leaving the organization). Lack of personal accomplishment was not linked to absenteeism or turnover intentions.

Using a sample of college students and the MBI, Moneta (2011) investigated the links between burnout and intention to leave their study program (the student equivalent to turnover intention at an organization). Results showed depersonalization and lack of personal achievement were related to intentions to leave, while emotional exhaustion was not (Moneta, 2011). According to Moneta, the lack of a significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and the intention to leave a study program among students was probably because they expected emotional exhaustion to be a part of the hardships of college and thus tolerated it more. Additionally, a lack of personal achievement might indicate to students that they needed to rethink their chosen path, so leaving their program of study made sense, especially since they paid to be in university.

In sum, these studies indicate that burnout and its dimensions are, in general, positively related to withdrawal behaviors. The following sections discuss factors that have a moderating role on the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors.

### **Moderators of the Relationship Between Burnout and Withdrawal Behaviors**

Because burnout has been shown to lead to withdrawal behaviors, researchers have attempted to identify moderators that might influence how much employees engage in withdrawal behaviors once they experience burnout. Many of these moderators are situational, meaning they occur in the employee's environment. For example, Green, Miller, and Aarons (2011) examined the moderating effect of transformational leadership on the relationship between emotional exhaustion (measured using a sub-scale of the

MBI) and turnover intentions among mental health providers. Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which the leader is admired and respected, promotes a common vision and provides meaning to the work of staff, supports innovation, and takes into account the specific needs of individual employees (Bass 1990).

Green et al. (2011) believed that the reason transformational leadership would have a moderating effect on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions was because transformational leaders are so inspiring and respected that employees would be willing to work through their feelings of emotional exhaustion in order to continue working with their leaders. The researchers' hypothesis was supported: they found that transformational leadership moderated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions such that "higher transformational leadership reduce[d] the strength of the positive association" (p. 377) between emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. Emotionally exhausted employees with a transformational leader were less likely to intend to quit when compared to emotionally exhausted employees who did not have a transformational leader. This suggests that having a transformational leader can buffer or reduce the negative effects of an employee's emotional exhaustion on their turnover intentions.

Trussell (2015) examined the moderating effect of reciprocal organizational trust on burnout and turnover intentions. Trussell used Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) definition of trust: "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (p. 5). In the

context of organizations, Trusell split the concept of organizational trust in two: the level of trust between individuals and the organization (how much the employees trusted the organization) and the levels of perceived trust received from the organization (how much employees believed their organization trusted them). Trusell used the OLBI when measuring burnout. Results supported his hypothesis and showed that both an individual's trust in their organization and an individual's perceived organizational trust moderated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. The effect was such that those who had higher levels of individual or perceived organizational trust had fewer turnover intentions when experiencing emotional exhaustion than those who had lower levels of individual or perceived organizational trust.

The literature described above discussed situational characteristics that could serve as moderators of the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors, but there has also been research on how personal characteristics could serve as moderators of these relationships. For example, du Plooy and Roodt (2013) reasoned that those who are married would avoid thinking about leaving their organization when they experienced burnout because of the obligation they may feel to provide for their partner. Their hypothesis was supported when they found that marital status acted as a moderator in the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions such that among employees who experienced burnout, those who were married were less likely to think about leaving their organization than those who were not married. Another commonly studied individual characteristic that could serve as a moderator to burnout is personality.

**Personality.** Different personality traits can make a person more or less likely to engage in different behaviors – someone who is shy is less likely to enjoy presenting to a large audience, simply based on a basic understanding of the personality trait of shyness. Because of how influential personality traits are on behaviors, there has been a great deal of research on how personality traits influence workplace behaviors (e.g., Bowling, Burns, Stewart, & Gruys, 2011; Queiros et al., 2016).

One of the most widely used personality models is the Five-Factor model (Goldberg, 1990), also known as the Big Five. The five traits in this model are agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, openness to experience, and neuroticism. Agreeableness is defined as how cooperative, caring, trusting, and sympathetic towards others a person is (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Conscientiousness is defined as how achievement oriented, dependable, organized, and responsible a person is (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Extraversion is defined as cheerfulness and sociability. Openness to experience (often shortened to “openness”) is defined as curiosity and imagination. Neuroticism (also called the reverse of emotional stability) is defined as how prone to anxiousness, sadness, and insecurity a person is (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This paper focused on the traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness because they have been found to moderate relationships similar to the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors.

**Personality as a moderator.** Unfortunately, the literature examining the moderating effect of personality on the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors is essentially nonexistent. Researchers have examined either the relationship between a personality trait and a burnout dimension or a personality trait and a withdrawal behavior.



Because of this limitation, I will discuss research that examined personality as a moderator of relationships where burnout has been replaced by another antecedent or withdrawal behaviors have been replaced by a different outcome.

Schuamberg and Flynn (2017) conducted a study to examine the moderating effect of agreeableness on the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism. They hypothesized that those who are highly agreeable are motivated by fulfilling the expectations of others as opposed to fulfilling their own immediate interests, thus they would be absent less often even when they are not satisfied with their jobs. Their hypothesis was supported. The personality trait of agreeableness moderated the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism: even when experiencing low levels of job satisfaction, those who were highly agreeable engaged in less absenteeism than those who were less agreeable.

Recently, Eissa (2020) conducted research investigating the moderating effect of conscientiousness on the relationship between burnout and employee expediency. Employee expediency is defined as the use of unethical practices to expedite work for self-serving purposes. These practices typically come back to hurt the company when the system can no longer bear the weight of these cut corners – for example, when it was discovered that General Motors was skipping safety procedures in order to save time and increase profits. In her research, Eissa described how experiencing burnout increased the likelihood of an employee engaging in expediency for the sake of completing their task with the least effort needed. She hypothesized that conscientiousness might play a role in reducing chances of engaging in expediency such that the positive relationship between

burnout and employee expediency would be weaker for those high in conscientiousness than for those low in conscientiousness because those who are high in conscientiousness prefer completing tasks according to the rules, even when they experience burnout. Her research showed support for her hypothesis.

Agarwal and Gupta (2018) conducted a study that investigated the moderating effect of conscientiousness on the relationship between work engagement (a positive work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption) and turnover intentions. They reasoned that because highly conscientiousness individuals invest themselves cognitively and emotionally in their work, feelings of engagement would be more important to them compared to those who are less conscientious. Their findings showed that conscientiousness did indeed moderate the relationship between work engagement and turnover intentions. When both highly conscientious people and less conscientious people experienced the same amount of work engagement, the highly conscientious individuals were significantly less likely to think about leaving their company than those who were less conscientious.

### **Goal of the Present Study**

Withdrawal behaviors like lateness, absenteeism, and turnover are costly to organizations, leading many researchers to search for possible antecedents to withdrawal behaviors. Among the researched antecedents is burnout, a syndrome which has been shown to increase the likelihood of engaging in withdrawal behaviors. Researchers have recently examined situational factors that may play a role in moderating the relationship

between burnout and withdrawal behaviors, however, there is a lack of research that examines the moderating role of personal characteristics on these relationships.

Personal characteristics can cause different people to react in different ways to the same situation – in this case, two people experiencing the same degree of burnout, but having different personality traits, are likely to react differently from each other.

Conscientious and agreeableness are two traits that have been shown to moderate the effect of relationships similar to the one between burnout and withdrawal behaviors.

The goal of the present study was to examine the moderating role of agreeableness and conscientiousness on the relationship between burnout and lateness, absenteeism, and turnover intentions.

Highly agreeable people enjoy getting along with others, maintaining harmony, overlooking others' shortcomings, and focusing on positivity (Leary & Hoyle, 2009).

These traits may make agreeable people less likely to engage in absenteeism or lateness, as these behaviors could disrupt the harmony of the workspace. Additionally, because of their ability to overlook shortcomings and focus on positivity, agreeable people may be less likely to engage in turnover intentions when they experience burnout, instead reasoning that things will get better. Thus, the following set of hypotheses were put forth for testing in this study:

*Hypothesis 1a:* The relationship between burnout and absenteeism will be moderated by agreeableness such that when experiencing burnout, highly agreeable employees will engage in less absenteeism than less agreeable employees.

*Hypothesis 1b:* The relationship between burnout and lateness will be moderated by agreeableness such that when experiencing burnout, highly agreeable employees will engage in less lateness than less agreeable employees.

*Hypothesis 1c:* The relationship between burnout and turnover intentions will be moderated by agreeableness such that when experiencing burnout, highly agreeable employees will have less turnover intentions than less agreeable employees.

Highly conscientious people have high levels of discipline, prefer to follow rules, and cope with stressful situations by problem-solving and accepting responsibility of their actions (Leary & Hoyle, 2009; O'Brien & DeLongis, 1996). Because of these traits, they may avoid engaging in behaviors that goes against the rules, such as tardiness and absenteeism, regardless of how much burnout they feel. Additionally, they may think that feelings of burnout are an obstacle to overcome rather than something that can be avoided by leaving their organization. Thus, the second set of hypotheses were put forth for testing in this study:

*Hypothesis 2a:* The relationship between burnout and absenteeism will be moderated by conscientiousness such that when experiencing burnout, highly conscientious employees will engage in less absenteeism than less conscientious employees.

*Hypothesis 2b:* The relationship between burnout and lateness will be moderated by conscientiousness such that when experiencing burnout, highly conscientious employees will engage in less lateness than less conscientious employees.

*Hypothesis 2c:* The relationship between burnout and turnover intentions will be moderated by conscientiousness such that when experiencing burnout, highly

conscientious employees will have less turnover intentions than less conscientious employees.

If these hypotheses are supported, there will be a better understanding of how personal characteristics can moderate the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors. With this greater understanding, organizations will also gain a greater understanding of their employees. Conscientiousness and agreeableness are personality traits that many companies like to hire for because of the positive outcomes related to them, such as job performance (Bradley, Baur, Banford, & Postlethwaite, 2013; Salgado, 1997). If it is supported that conscientious and agreeable employees are more resistant to withdrawal behaviors when experiencing burnout, then these findings could provide more support for hiring such employees or creating programs to help develop conscientiousness in employees.

## Method

### Participants

Over 500 people from my personal and professional networks were invited to participate in the study. Among those, 239 individuals responded, resulting in a response rate of 47.8%. To participate in the study, participants had to be at least 18 years old, working at least part time, and at their company for at least 6 months. They also could not be self-employed. Those who did not meet this criteria were removed from further analysis, leaving a final sample of 159 participants.

The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1. The majority of the sample was female ( $n = 112$ , 70.4%) (two participants did not respond), and the most common age ranges were 25 to 34 years old ( $n = 44$ , 27.7%) and 45 to 54 years old ( $n = 44$ , 27.7%). There was nearly even split between respondents who worked 40 hours or more a week ( $n = 77$ , 48.4%) and those who worked 31 to 40 hours ( $n = 73$ , 45.9%), showing that the majority of the participants worked more than 31 hours per week. Participants worked in a variety of industries, including education ( $n = 50$ , 31.4%), “Other” ( $n = 45$ , 28.3%), healthcare ( $n = 21$ , 13.2%), and engineering ( $n = 17$ , 10.7%). In terms of tenure, most participants had been working at their company for 1 to 3 years ( $n = 57$ , 35.8%), followed by more than 9 years ( $n = 31$ , 19.5%), and 3 to 5 years ( $n = 26$ , 16.4%).

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

	Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	44	27.7%
	Female	112	70.4%
Age	18 - 24 years	20	12.6%
	25 - 34 years	44	27.7%
	35 - 44 years	21	13.2%
	45 - 54 years	44	27.7%
	55 years or older	30	18.8%
Hours Worked per Week	20 - 30 hours	9	5.7%
	31 - 40 hours	73	45.9%
	More than 40 hours	77	48.4%
Industry	Computer Science	14	8.8%
	Education	50	31.4%
	Engineering	17	10.7%
	Finance/Insurance	5	3.1%
	Healthcare/Pharmaceuticals	21	13.2%
	Manufacturing	2	1.3%
	Sales/Retail	3	1.9%
	Other	45	28.3%
Tenure	6 months - 1 year	24	15.1%
	1 - 3 years	57	35.8%
	3 - 5 years	26	16.4%
	5 - 7 years	14	8.8%
	7 - 9 years	7	4.4%
	More than 9 years	31	19.5%
COVID-19 Influences	Reduced Hours	14	8.8%
	Working From Home	118	74.2%
	Essential Worker	30	18.9%
	Worry about losing job	45	28.3%
	Other	33	20.8%

*Note:* The COVID-19 question allowed respondents to choose multiple options, thus the percentages add up to more than 100. *N* = 159

Data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus participants were given an option to identify ways that the pandemic affected their work. The majority of participants reported that they have had to work from home ( $n = 118, 74.2\%$ ), some reported that they were worried about losing their jobs ( $n = 45, 28.3\%$ ), and some reported that their work had been changed in other ways (e.g., an increased workload, mental strain, or forced pay cuts) ( $n = 33, 20.8\%$ ).

### **Measures**

**Burnout.** Burnout is defined as feeling exhausted because of and disengaged from work. Exhaustion is defined as a consequence of intense physical, affective, and cognitive strain, while disengagement is defined as distancing oneself from work in general and endorsing negative attitudes towards work (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008). Burnout was measured using the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), created by Demerouti and Bakker (2008). The OLBI has sixteen items, eight to measure disengagement and eight to measure exhaustion. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items included “I find my work to be a positive challenge” (reverse coded) and “After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.” The responses for each all items were averaged to create a composite score for this general burnout. Higher scores indicated that a person felt more burnout. Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .86, indicating high reliability.

**Withdrawal behaviors.** Withdrawal behaviors were measured in terms of lateness, absenteeism, and turnover intention. Lateness is when an employee fails to arrive to work on time. Absenteeism occurs when individuals miss an extended, unexcused period of



time from their work. Turnover intentions are defined as the cognitive process of thinking of quitting, planning on leaving a job, and the desire to leave the job (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979).

Lateness and absenteeism are typically calculated using company records. Without access to such records, I created two questions each for lateness and absenteeism. Lateness and absenteeism were measured on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*0 days*) to 6 (*9 or more days*). The lateness items were “In the past 6 months, how many times were you late to work?” and “In the past 6 months, how many times did you leave work early?” The absenteeism items were “In the past 6 months, how many full days of work did you miss for any reason?” and “In the past 6 months, how many partial days of work did you miss for any reason?” The scores of the two lateness questions were averaged to create a general lateness score, and then same was done with the absenteeism questions. The Pearson correlation for the lateness items was  $r = .40$  ( $p < .01$ ), while the Pearson correlation for the absenteeism items was  $r = .39$  ( $p < .01$ ). These statistics indicate a somewhat weak relationship between the two questions in each set of items.

The two turnover intention items were adapted from Raver and Nishii (2010), and were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*More than once a week*). The two items were “How often do you think about quitting your job for reasons such as more money, more prestige in another organization, problems with your current leadership, better working conditions elsewhere, etc.?” and “How often do you search for other job opportunities for reasons such as those listed in the previous question?” The scores of the two turnover intention items were averaged to create a general turnover

intention score. The Pearson correlation between these two items was  $r = .68$  ( $p < .01$ ), indicating that there is a strong relationship between the two items.

**Personality.** Personality was measured in terms of conscientiousness and agreeableness. Conscientiousness is defined as how achievement oriented, dependable, organized, and responsible a person is, while agreeableness is defined as how cooperative, caring, trusting, and sympathetic towards others a person is (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Conscientiousness and agreeableness were measured from the Mini-IPIP, a scale created by Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, and Lucas (2006). The Mini-IPIP has 20 items – four items to measure each of the Big Five personality traits – but only the items for conscientiousness and agreeableness were used.

The items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items included “I like order” and “I make a mess of things” (reverse coded) for conscientiousness and “I sympathize with other’s feelings” and “I am not really interested in others” (reverse coded) for agreeableness. The responses for each personality trait were combined and averaged to create a composite score for this variable where a higher score indicated a higher score of conscientiousness or agreeableness. Cronbach’s alpha for the set of agreeableness items was .76, indicating good reliability, while Cronbach’s alpha for the set of conscientiousness items was .65, indicating relatively low reliability.

**Demographic information.** Participants responded to questions regarding their demographic information. The questions were age, hours worked per week, tenure, whether or not they were self-employed, the industry of employment, and gender.

Because data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was also one question that asked how the pandemic has affected their work.

### **Procedure**

Employees from various industries and backgrounds in my professional and personal network were invited to participate in the online survey through social media platforms (i.e., Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn). Some participants were also directly recruited via email and the survey link was posted to my workplace's online "bulletin board" where any employee could post about events. Eight individuals then shared the survey with their own network.

Data were collected through an online Qualtrics survey. The survey invitation contained a short message that explained the general purpose of the study, participation criteria, and a link to the survey. Those who clicked the link to the survey were taken to the consent form, which stated the purpose of the study, who to contact in case of questions, risks and benefits associated with the study, and anonymity of their responses.

Participants clicked "I agree to participate, take me to the survey" to indicate their willingness to continue with the survey, or clicked "I do not agree to participate" to indicate that they no longer wanted to participate. All participants could stop the survey at any time, and could skip questions that they did not want to answer. If a participant answered a demographic question in a way that disqualified them from the survey (e.g. answering that age was under 18), they were taken to the end of the survey and no more responses were collected from them. Once the survey was completed, all participants were thanked. All responses were logged in Qualtrics. Once the data were collected, they

were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 25) program using Pearson correlations and hierarchical multiple regression analyses.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations for the measured variables. On average, participants reported somewhat low levels of burnout ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = .58$ ), suggesting that they did not seem to be disengaged from or exhausted by their work. They reported relatively low engagement in withdrawal behaviors. That is, participants were late to work one to two times in the last six months ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) and absent from work one to two times in the last six months ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ), and they thought about quitting their job about once a month ( $M = 2.06$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). The standard deviations of all three withdrawal behaviors were somewhat large, indicating individuals differed in their withdrawal behaviors. Finally, participants reported high levels of agreeableness ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) and conscientiousness ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = .72$ ), indicating that they felt that they were very friendly and positive and relatively disciplined and rule-following. Overall, participants in the sample experienced low levels of burnout, did not engage in withdrawal behaviors often, and considered themselves highly agreeable and relatively conscientiousness.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics, Pearson Correlations, and Cronbach's Alpha Among the Measured Variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Burnout	2.75	.58	(.86)					
2. Lateness	2.47	1.44	.18 *	(.40)				
3. Absenteeism	2.79	1.31	.07	.37 ***	(.39)			
4. Turnover Intentions	2.06	1.12	.44 ***	-.01	-.01	(.68)		
5. Agreeableness	4.11	.64	-.12	.01	.08	.03	(.76)	
6. Conscientiousness	3.71	.72	-.28 ***	-.34 ***	-.27 ***	-.08	-.04	(.65)

*Note:* Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha/Pearson correlations) are in parentheses along the diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 159$

## Pearson Correlations

The results of the Person correlations are presented in Table 2 and show the extent to which the measured variables were related to one another. Burnout had a significant, weak positive relationship with lateness  $r(157) = .18, p < .001$ , such that the more individuals experienced burnout, the more often they were late to work. Burnout also had a significant, moderate relationship with turnover intentions,  $r(157) = .44, p < .05$ , suggesting that the more individuals experienced burnout, the more often they thought about quitting their job. Burnout did not have a significant relationship with absenteeism,  $r(157) = .07, p > .05$ .

Among the outcome variables, only lateness had a significant, moderate positive relationship with absenteeism,  $r(157) = .37, p < .001$ , such that the more often individuals were late to work, the more likely they were to be absent from work or vice versa. Turnover intentions were not significantly related to lateness,  $r(157) = -.01, p > .05$ , nor absenteeism,  $r(157) = .07, p > .05$ .

Conscientiousness had a significant negative relationship with burnout,  $r(157) = -.28, p < .001$ , lateness,  $r(157) = -.34, p < .001$ , and absenteeism,  $r(157) = -.27, p < .001$ , suggesting that the more conscientious individuals were, the less likely they were to experience burnout, and be late to and absent from work. Conscientiousness did not have a significant relationship with turnover intentions ( $r = -.08, p > .05$ ). Agreeableness was not related to any of the measured variables (burnout,  $r = -.12, p > .05$ ; lateness,  $r = .01, p > .05$ ; absenteeism,  $r = .08, p > .05$ ; turnover intentions,  $r = .03, p > .05$ ).

## Tests of Hypotheses

A hierarchical multiple regression (MRC) analysis was conducted to test each Hypothesis (1a through 2c) in two steps. In the first step of each analysis, burnout and a particular personality trait (agreeableness or conscientious) were entered as predictor variables to evaluate their direct effects on a particular withdrawal behavior. In the second step, the cross-product of burnout and the personality trait was entered to test the moderating effect of the personality trait on the relationship between burnout and the particular withdrawal behavior.

**Lateness.** Hypothesis 1a stated that agreeableness would have a moderating effect on the relationship between burnout and lateness, such that those who are more agreeable would be late to work less often than those who are less agreeable, even when experiencing the same amount of burnout. Hypothesis 2a stated that conscientiousness would have a moderating effect on burnout and lateness, such that those who are more conscientious would be late to work less often than those who are less conscientious, even when experiencing the same level of burnout.

The upper portion of Table 3 shows results pertaining to Hypothesis 1a. The first step of the analysis showed that burnout and agreeableness accounted for 3% of the variance in lateness,  $R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(2, 156) = 2.64$ ,  $p > .05$ , meaning that they did not significantly contribute to the prediction of lateness behaviors. When evaluating direct effects, only burnout had a significant and unique contribution to lateness, such that those who experienced more burnout were late to work more often ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = 2.30$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Results of the second step of this analysis showed that the incremental effect of the



interaction between burnout and agreeableness was not significant,  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 155) = .00$ ,  $p > .05$ . The interaction effect did not account for a significant amount of variance in lateness above and beyond the direct effects of burnout and agreeableness. These results did not show support for Hypothesis 1a.

Table 3

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Lateness*

Predictor		$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$r$	$\beta$
Step 1:	Burnout	.03	.03	.18 *	.18 *
	Agreeableness			.01	.03
Step 2:	Burnout x Agreeableness	.03	.00		.19
Step 1:	Burnout	.12 ***	.12 ***	.18 *	.09
	Conscientiousness			-.34 ***	-.31 ***
Step 2:	Burnout x Conscientiousness	.13	.01		.41

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 159$

The lower portion of Table 3 shows results pertaining to Hypothesis 2a. The first step of the analysis showed that burnout and conscientiousness accounted for 12% of the variance in lateness,  $R^2 = .12$ ,  $F(2, 156) = 10.75$ ,  $p < .001$ , meaning that they significantly contributed to the prediction of lateness behaviors. When evaluating direct effects, only conscientiousness had a significant and unique relationship with lateness, such that the more conscientious individuals were, the less often they were late to work ( $\beta = -.31$ ,  $t = -3.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This result is different from the first analysis, as burnout did

not have a significant unique contribution to lateness ( $\beta = .09, t = 1.19, p > .05$ ). This may be because being late to work is more closely related to conscientiousness ( $r = -.34, p < .001$ ) compared to burnout ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ), thus conscientiousness accounted for a greater portion of the variance. This result suggests that burnout is not a unique predictor of lateness as the significance of its beta changes depending on what other predictor is entered with it; agreeableness increases the significance of burnout's beta, while conscientiousness reduces it. Results of the second step of this analysis showed that the incremental effect of the interaction between burnout and conscientiousness was not significant,  $\Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(1, 155) = .74, p > .05$ . The interaction effect did not account for a significant amount of variance in lateness above and beyond the direct effects of burnout and conscientiousness. These results did not show support for Hypothesis 2a.

There were no moderating effects of personality on the relationship between burnout and lateness in either of the hierarchical MRCs. These results indicated that the relationship between burnout and lateness did not differ as a function of personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness.

**Absenteeism.** Hypothesis 1b stated that agreeableness would have a moderating effect on the relationship between burnout and lateness, such that those who are more agreeable would be absent from work less often than those who are less agreeable, even when experiencing the same amount of burnout. Hypothesis 2b stated that conscientiousness would have a moderating effect on burnout and lateness, such that those who are more conscientious would be absent from work less often than those who are less conscientious, even when experiencing the same level of burnout.

The upper portion of Table 4 shows results pertaining to Hypothesis 1b. The first step of the analysis showed that burnout and agreeableness accounted for 1% of the variance in absenteeism,  $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(2, 156) = .99$ ,  $p > .05$ , meaning that they did not significantly contribute to the prediction of absenteeism. When evaluating direct effects, neither burnout ( $\beta = .08$ ,  $t = .98$ ,  $p < .05$ ) nor agreeableness ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $t = 1.12$ ,  $p > .05$ ) had significant and unique contributions to absenteeism, perhaps because neither burnout nor agreeableness had a strong relationship with absenteeism ( $r = .07$ ,  $p > .05$  and  $r = .08$ ,  $p > .05$  respectively). The absence of these relationships mean that these variables were not significant predictors of absenteeism. Results of the second step of this analysis showed that the incremental effect of the interaction between burnout and agreeableness was not significant  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 155) = .00$ ,  $p > .05$ . The interaction effect did not account for a significant amount of variance in absenteeism above and beyond burnout and agreeableness. These results did not show support for Hypothesis 1b.

The lower portion of Table 4 shows results pertaining to Hypothesis 2b. The first step of the analysis showed that burnout and conscientiousness accounted for 8% of the variance in absenteeism,  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $F(2, 156) = 6.33$ ,  $p < .01$ , meaning that they significantly contributed to the prediction of absenteeism. When evaluating direct effects, only conscientiousness had a significant unique relationship with lateness, such that the more conscientious individuals were, the less often they were absent from work ( $\beta = -.28$ ,  $t = -3.44$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Similar to the findings regarding lateness (H2a), this may be because conscientiousness has a greater relationship to absenteeism ( $r = -.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than burnout does ( $r = .07$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Results of the second step of this analysis showed that the

incremental effect of the interaction between burnout and conscientiousness was not significant,  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 155) = .04$ ,  $p > .05$ . The interaction effect did not account for a significant amount of variance in absenteeism above and beyond the direct effects of burnout and conscientiousness. These results did not show support for Hypothesis 2b.

Table 4

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Absenteeism*

Predictor		$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$r$	$\beta$
Step 1:	Burnout	.01	.01	.07	.08
	Agreeableness			.08	.09
Step 2:	Burnout x Agreeableness	.01	.00		-.02
Step 1:	Burnout	.08 **	.08 **	.07	-.01
	Conscientiousness			-.27 ***	-.28 **
Step 2:	Burnout x Conscientiousness	.08	.00		.10

*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 159$

There were no moderating effects of personality traits on the relationship between burnout and absenteeism in either of the hierarchical MRCs. These results indicated that the relationship between burnout and absenteeism did not differ as a function of personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness.

**Turnover intentions.** Hypothesis 1c stated that agreeableness would have a moderating effect on the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions, such that those who are more agreeable would think about quitting their jobs less often than those

who are less agreeable, even when experiencing the same amount of burnout. Hypothesis 2b stated that conscientiousness would have a moderating effect on burnout and turnover intentions, such that those who are more conscientious would think about quitting their jobs less often than those who are less conscientious, even when experiencing the same level of burnout.

Table 5

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Turnover Intentions*

Predictor		$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$r$	$\beta$
Step 1:	Burnout	.20 ***	.20 ***	.44 ***	.45 ***
	Agreeableness			.03	.08
Step 2:	Burnout x Agreeableness	.22	.01		.92
Step 1:	Burnout	.20 ***	.20 ***	.44 ***	.46 ***
	Conscientiousness			-.08	.05
Step 2:	Burnout x Conscientiousness	.20	.00		-.24

*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 159$

The upper portion of Table 5 shows results pertaining to Hypothesis 1c. The first step of the analysis showed that burnout and agreeableness accounted for 20% of the variance in turnover intentions,  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $F(2, 156) = 19.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , meaning that they significantly contributed to the prediction of turnover intentions. This is unlike the results regarding lateness (H1a) and absenteeism (H1b), where agreeableness and burnout did not account for any significant contributions in the first step. This may be because

burnout was more closely related to turnover intentions ( $r = .44, p < .001$ ) than lateness ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ) or absenteeism ( $r = .07, p > .05$ ), thus accounting for a greater amount of the variance. When evaluating direct effects, only burnout had a significant and unique contribution to turnover intentions, such that those who experienced more burnout were more likely to engage in turnover intentions ( $\beta = .45, t = 6.28, p < .001$ ). This finding is similar to that of lateness (H1a), where burnout had a significant and unique contribution, but different from that of absenteeism (H1b), where it did not.

Results of the second step of this analysis showed that the incremental effect of the interaction between burnout and agreeableness was not significant  $\Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(1, 155) = 2.73, p > .05$ . The interaction effect did not account for a significant amount of variance in turnover intentions above and beyond the direct effects of burnout and agreeableness. These results did not show support for Hypothesis 1c.

The lower portion of Table 5 shows results pertaining to Hypothesis 2c. The first step of the analysis showed that burnout and conscientiousness accounted for 20% of the variance in turnover intentions,  $\Delta R^2 = .20, \Delta F(2, 156) = 19.19, p < .001$ , meaning that they significantly contributed to the prediction of turnover intentions. When evaluating direct effects, only burnout had a significant and unique contribution to turnover intentions, such that those who experienced more burnout were more likely to think about quitting their job ( $\beta = .46, t = 6.09, p < .001$ ). This may be because turnover intentions were more closely related to burnout ( $r = .44, p < .001$ ) compared to conscientiousness ( $r = -.08, p > .05$ ), thus making burnout have a greater contribution to predicting turnover intentions. The results of H1c and H2c as a pair are different from the rest of the

hypotheses as the results for both H1c and H2c show that burnout is a significant and unique predictor for turnover intentions. These findings suggest that burnout is a unique predictor of turnover intentions as the significance of its beta did not change as a function of the personality trait entered with it.

Results of the second step of this analysis showed that the incremental effect of the interaction of burnout and conscientiousness was not significant  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 155) = .21$ ,  $p > .05$ . The interaction effect did not account for a significant amount of variance above and beyond the direct effects of burnout and conscientiousness. These results did not show support for Hypothesis 2c.

There were no moderating effects of personality on the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions in either of the hierarchical MRCs. These results indicated that the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions did not differ as a function of personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness. Overall, results showed that the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors of lateness, absenteeism, and turnover intentions did not change as a function of agreeableness and conscientiousness.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of the present study was to test the moderating role of agreeableness and conscientiousness on the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors, namely lateness, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. Previous research has established that experiencing burnout increases the likelihood of engaging in withdrawal behaviors (e.g. Lazaro, Shinn, & Robinson, 1984; Weisberg, 1994), and that the personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness have moderating effects on similar relationships (e.g. Eissa, 2020). However, there has not yet been research on the influence of these personality traits on the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors. This study attempted to fill this gap in the literature.

### **Summary of Findings**

Hypotheses 1a through 1c stated that agreeableness would moderate the relationship between burnout and lateness (H1a), absenteeism (H1b), and turnover intentions (H1c), such that the relationship between burnout and each of these withdrawal behaviors would be weaker for people who were more agreeable than people who were less agreeable. None of these hypotheses were supported as the results of an interaction between burnout and agreeableness were not significant.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b were stated based on the belief that agreeable people would avoid being late to and absent from work because these behaviors cause disruptions and inconvenience others. Agreeable people like to maintain harmony and are considerate of others, thus being disruptive and inconveniencing others goes against their nature. However, the findings of this study suggest that if agreeable people are suffering from



burnout, they may not consider that being late to or absent from work are significant disruptions to others. For H1c, turnover intentions, it was posited that agreeable people would keep a positive outlook and prefer to think about their current job improving rather than think about looking for a new job. The lack of support for this hypothesis suggests a positive outlook may not be enough to buffer the negative effects (disengagement and exhaustion) of burnout on turnover intentions.

It may also be that agreeable people's need for harmony and positivity is a need that is more apparent in social interactions. As about 70% of the sample was working from home, social interactions during data collection might have been limited to video calls, phone calls and/or emails. Working from home might have meant that agreeable individuals did not see how their behaviors, such as being late or absent, caused disruptions, or, even if they saw it, they did not have to confront the disruption face-to-face. Perhaps in a normal business setting where people work in the office, the personality trait of agreeableness might have more of a role in moderating the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors than in a remote work setting.

Hypotheses 2a through 2c stated that conscientiousness would moderate the relationship between burnout and lateness (H2a), absenteeism (H2b), and turnover intentions (H2c), such that the relationship between burnout and each of these withdrawal behaviors would be weaker for people who were more conscientious than those who were less conscientious. None of these hypotheses were supported as the results of an interaction between burnout and conscientiousness were not significant.

People who are conscientious have a high degree of self-discipline, follow rules diligently, and are hard-working. These traits appear to play a role in a conscientious person's values and sense of self, whereas the characteristics of agreeable people appear to play a greater role in social behavior. This difference may be why conscientiousness did not have a moderating effect, but did contribute to predicting lateness and absenteeism. The results regarding lateness are a specific example of this. Lateness was the only outcome variable that was both negatively related to conscientiousness and positively related to burnout, making the burnout-conscientiousness-lateness relationship the most likely to have a moderating effect. The lack of such an effect means that those who are conscientious are not any more or less likely to be late even when they are experiencing burnout. The effect of conscientiousness may have been so significant on its own that it overrode the effects of burnout. However, this interpretation is speculative.

Another potential reason for the lack of the moderating effect of both agreeableness and conscientiousness on the relationship between burnout and these withdrawal behaviors is due to the time of the study. Data were collected during the middle of COVID-19, where about 70% of participants were required to work from home and more than 25% of participants reported that they were worried about losing their jobs. The anxiety or uncertainty caused by COVID-19 may have influenced the degree to which employees felt burnout, and how often they engaged in withdrawal behaviors, regardless of their personality. Individuals may have not thought about quitting their jobs because of the high rates of layoffs and furloughs the country experienced during this time (Guina,

2020). This anxiety about losing their jobs may have led to employees not being absent from work, as absences may have led their employers to lay them off.

Additionally, many places that employees would typically go to on a day off, such as parks, beaches, and shopping malls, were closed during quarantine; individuals may have decided that work, regardless of how exhausting or disengaging, was preferable to being bored at home, and thus avoided taking leave from work. These situational influences of job instability and quarantine may have overwritten the potential influence of personality on the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors.

COVID-19 could have also influenced the low level of burnout found in the sample. It could have been that employees actually had lower levels of burnout while they worked from home because they had a greater sense of control over their time (i.e. a lack of commute, being able to make meals during the work day); research suggests that those who feel a greater sense of control over their jobs are less likely to experience burnout (Hätinen, Kinnunen, Pekkonen, & Kalimo 2007).

This study had a few key findings that are unrelated to the hypotheses. First, it was found that burnout positively predicted turnover intentions and lateness, but did not predict absenteeism. This may be in part because of the anxieties around job stability – even if employees felt burnout, they may have been too worried about losing their jobs to take unjustified days off.

Second, it was found that conscientiousness negatively predicted lateness and absenteeism, but not turnover intentions. This may be because those who are conscientious are disciplined and follow rules, and thus would not be late to or absent

from work because it goes against their own values and the values set by their workplace. However, thinking about quitting one's job can be a personal and private thought process that employees engage in when they are feeling unfulfilled in their work. It may be that turnover intentions do not go against any rules that conscientious people set for themselves. In fact, it may be that because conscientious people know the value of hard work and discipline, they have no issue thinking about quitting their jobs if their personal and/or professional needs are not being met.

The third key finding is that conscientiousness was shown to be a better predictor than agreeableness. Conscientiousness had significant, moderate negative relationships with burnout, lateness, and absenteeism, while agreeableness was unrelated to all other variables. Perhaps being disciplined and organized has a greater influence on burnout and withdrawal behaviors when compared to being considerate and positive.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Results of the present study did not show support for the hypotheses that conscientiousness or agreeableness moderate the relationship between burnout and each of the withdrawal behaviors. Literature on the topic of burnout and withdrawal behaviors had not yet examined the moderating role of personality on the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors. Thus, the present study was conducted in an effort to fill that gap.

Although there has been research that examined moderated relationships similar to that between burnout, personality, and withdrawal behaviors, many of the moderators that have been examined were situational, occurring in the environment of the employee, such

as the style of leadership used or the perceptions of trust at an organization (Green et al., 2011; Trussell, 2015). The present study took a different approach and examined whether or not personal characteristics, namely personality traits, would have a moderating effect on the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors.

In more recent research, personality has been shown to influence relationships similar to that of burnout and withdrawal behaviors. For example, Schaumberg and Flynn (2017) showed that agreeableness moderated the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism. Even when experiencing low levels of job satisfaction, those who were highly agreeable were absent less often than those who were less agreeable because they did not want to fail to meet the expectations of others. It would follow logically to say that someone who is experiencing burnout, that is, feeling disengaged from and exhausted by their work, would have low job satisfaction. Because of how these two constructs are related to one another, it would stand to reason that the relationship between burnout and absenteeism could be also moderated in this way. A key difference between these predictors, however, is that job satisfaction is a positive attitude, while burnout is a negative one. Perhaps the moderating role of personality (in this case, agreeableness) is different depending on whether the valence of the predictor variable is positive, like job satisfaction, or negative, like burnout. Another difference in variables is that job satisfaction is an attitude while burnout is a psychological and physical state – perhaps personality has a greater moderating influence on a job attitude as a predictor compared to a state of being as a predictor.

Also similar to this study, Eissa (2020) found that conscientiousness weakened the relationship between burnout and employee expediency, which is the use of unethical practices to expedite work for self-serving purposes. Conscientious, rule-following employees were less likely to engage in this behavior because it went against their preference for and dedication to correct procedures. Employee expediency is similar to withdrawal behaviors in that it is an action taken by the employee that can harm the organization, thus the present study looked to examine whether similar results would be found in regards to lateness, absenteeism, and turnover intentions.

The lack of consistent results may be because Eissa (2020) had supervisors score their employees on how frequently they engaged in expediency. However, in the present study, participants self-reported their withdrawal behaviors. A supervisor report on such behaviors may have been more accurate than self-reports. Another difference is that employees engage in employee expediency in an effort to finish their work sooner or meet deadlines (Eissa, 2020), not in an effort to avoid their work or workplace, which may be their intent when they are late to work, absent from work, or thinking about quitting their job. Perhaps the difference in intention may influence how personality comes into play in decision-making.

In another study similar to this study, Agarwal and Gupta (2017) found that conscientiousness moderated the relationship between work engagement and turnover intentions, such as those who were conscientious were less likely to think about quitting their job when they were engaged in their work when compared to those who were less conscientious. According to Agarwal and Gupta (2017), this is because highly

conscientiousness individuals invest themselves cognitively and emotionally in their work, and thus feelings of engagement are more important to them compared to those who are less conscientious.

The present study's finding that conscientiousness did not moderate the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions is somewhat inconsistent with Agarwal and Gupta's (2017) findings, considering that disengagement, the opposite of work engagement, is a dimension of burnout. It may be that conscientious people highly value work engagement, but do not necessarily see it as a requirement for staying at a job. That is, work engagement may increase a conscientious individual's commitment to their workplace and reduce their turnover intentions, but a lack of engagement is not necessarily a reason for them to decrease their commitment to the organization or influence their turnover intentions.

The hypotheses of this study were not supported, however, there were other findings that were consistent with previous research. For example, previous studies found that burnout increased the likelihood of absenteeism and turnover intentions (e.g. Deery, Iverson, & Walshe, 2002; Schouten, 2017; Weisberg, 1994). Consistent with those studies, the present study also found that burnout was positively related to absenteeism and turnover intentions, indicating that the more burnout employees experience, the more often they are absent and think about quitting.

Other studies (e.g. Mustafa, Santos, & Chern, 2014) found that conscientiousness was negatively related to burnout, lateness, and absenteeism. The results of this study also found that conscientiousness was negatively related to burnout, lateness, and

absenteeism, such that the more conscientious an individual, the less often they experience burnout, are late to work, and absent from work.

Bowling and Eschleman (2010) found that agreeableness was negatively related to counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), which include lateness and absenteeism. The findings of this study that agreeableness had no relationship to the three withdrawal behaviors are somewhat inconsistent with their findings. This may be because while CWBs include lateness and absenteeism, they also include other behaviors that may be more closely related to agreeableness individually (i.e., workplace bullying), thus leading to a negative relationship between agreeableness and CWBs as a whole.

Finally, Koslowsky et al. (1997) conducted a meta-analysis that found lateness and absenteeism were behaviors that were related to each other. Consistent with Koslowski et al., the present study also found that lateness and absenteeism were positively related, indicating that the more often individuals are late to work, the more often they are to be absent.

### **Practical Implications**

Although the results of this study did not support the hypotheses that personality traits (i.e., agreeableness and conscientiousness) moderate the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors, present findings still have some practical implications. Conscientiousness and agreeableness are personality traits that many companies hire for because of the positive outcomes related to them, such as job performance, time management, leadership abilities, and absenteeism (Bradley et al., 2013; Leary & Hoyle, 2009; Salgado, 1997). Results of the present study showed that conscientiousness was



negatively related to burnout, lateness, and absenteeism. Thus, more conscientious individuals were, the less likely they were to experience burnout, and be late and absent from work. These results support the decision of many organizations that hire candidates who are highly conscientious.

It may also be beneficial for organizations to create programs that help employees develop conscientious traits. In a longitudinal study, Hudson and Fraley (2016) found that people who were able to change their conscientious personality traits in ways that aligned with their goals experienced increases in well-being over time. The study did not create a program to facilitate the personality changes, but had participants work towards the changes themselves. However, these findings could be used to support “conscientiousness development” programs at organizations, such as providing incentives for meeting specific goals or creating a cohort that supports each other in conscientious behaviors such as keeping work orderly, meeting deadlines, and completing work thoroughly.

The findings of this study also showed that burnout was positively related to turnover intentions. To reduce turnover intentions that develop because of burnout, it may benefit organizations to invest in employee well-being initiatives that address both burnout and the underlying cultural issues that lead to burnout. These initiatives could improve “workaholic” culture in organizations and help struggling employees reduce their feelings of burnout in a variety of ways, such as reinvigorating their passion for their work or helping them find ways to combat exhaustion that their work may bring them.

Bui et al. (2020) developed and tested the effectiveness of a wellness initiative among surgical trainees in New York in an effort to reduce burnout and depression rates among trainees. They implemented their wellness initiative in two parts. They first created three programs, each centered around facilitated discussion (guided reflection on stressors experienced by trainees), mindfulness training (mindful attention and meditation to increase capacity for workplace stress), or narrative medicine (an exploration of art to strengthen clinical experience through self-reflection and empathy). Second, the researchers requested that each department nominate a wellness champion, who received formal training on the wellness programs listed above and served as a liaison between trainees and the wellness programs that they chose. Bui et al. found that surgical trainees who reported having wellness resources and a wellness champion who supported their efforts in wellness were less likely to experience burnout than their counterparts who did not have such resources.

An organizational intervention that is aimed to reduce burnout might also likely reduce employees developing turnover intentions, given the positive relationship between burnout and turnover intentions. Thus, the findings of Bui et al. may be a good model for creating a wellness initiative to reduce burnout and hence turnover intentions. Based on Bui et al.'s findings, it appears that the key to a good wellness initiative may be programs that address specific employee stressors and individuals who support the initiative and drive results. Each organization is likely to have different stressors that affect its employees, but perhaps a stressor that could be found in any industry is mental exhaustion from a large workload and/or too few resources to complete the work

(American Institute of Stress, 2001). An organization could implement a program that uses mindfulness training, which has been shown to increase the ability to handle workplace stress (Bui et al., 2020), thus reducing the feelings of exhaustion from a large workload. Organizations would also need wellness champions to support employees using these programs and get buy-in from managers so that participating in these programs is not looked down upon. The wellness champion was important as the existence of the role was a representation of the organization's dedication to reducing burnout. This would help in addressing cultural issues around burnout at an organization.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

One strength of this study is that it attempted to fill the gap in the literature in withdrawal behaviors. To the best of my knowledge, the present study was the first one to examine if personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness mitigate the negative impact of burnout on withdrawal behaviors. Although results of the present study did not show support for the hypotheses, future research should still examine these personality traits as moderators of the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors.

Another strength of this study is that participants in the present study came from the wide variety of industries. This means that the results may be generalizable across various industries, rather than just one particular industry.

There are several limitations of this study which should be addressed. First, 70% of the respondents were female. This lack of representation in the sample makes generalizing across gender difficult. Thus, it is not known whether these findings also apply to other genders. Past findings about gender have been mixed; some found that

women experienced less burnout (Woodside et al., 2008), while another study found no difference between men and women on burnout (Lemaku, Purdy, Rafferty, & Rudisill, 1988). If future researchers conduct a similar study, it would behoove them to ensure that they have a representative sample.

Second, lateness and absenteeism were measured through self-report rather than collected from company records. The survey questions asked participants about these behaviors within the past six months. It is possible that participants might have forgotten exactly how many times they were late to or absent from work, or they may have responded in a socially desirable manner and consequently provided inaccurate responses. Additionally, exempt/salaried employees often do not have fixed start and end times, which could have complicated their assessment of lateness. Choosing to collect these responses as a self-report measure may have also led to the low reliability (i.e., correlation) between the two items that measured each variable. I would encourage future researchers to conduct a similar study at an organization where he or she could access company records, which would be more reliable than a self-report. If future researchers also consider withdrawal behaviors in the last year or two, they may find a greater number of instances of these behaviors.

A third weakness is that data collection occurred during COVID-19, and a large majority of survey respondents indicated that they worked remotely. Working from home could make it more difficult to conceptualize being late to work, and employees may have chosen to avoid being absent because they were already home and many areas that they could spend their time or need to go (e.g., malls, beaches, parks, banks, child

care/day care centers) were closed. A little over one-fourth of the respondents indicated that they were worried about losing their jobs, which may have led to fewer withdrawal behaviors in the sample overall. These might have contributed to the lack of a relationship between burnout and lateness and absenteeism. Perhaps a future study should conduct a similar study during a time where businesses operate normally.

One final weakness of this study is the nature of the design is cross-sectional, that is, the data for this study were collected at a single point in time. Cross-sectional studies are useful in analyzing the prevalence of a given variable, such as burnout, but cannot be used to make a causal statement about the findings of this study. Therefore, we cannot state that burnout caused people to be late to or absent from work. A longitudinal study that surveys the same group of people about their feelings of burnout and their engagement in withdrawal behaviors multiple times over a given time period to make a causal statement about burnout and withdrawal behaviors. Perhaps future researchers could identify groups of new employees at organizations and survey them multiple times over the course of a year or two. The length of the study would give the researchers a better understanding of how burnout could drive employees to withdrawal behaviors, and would also give researchers the chance to observe actual turnover rather than just turnover intentions. The addition of turnover as a variable could be key in identifying a ‘breaking-point’ for employees that organizations should avoid.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine if agreeableness and conscientiousness would have a moderating role on the relationship between burnout and lateness,

absenteeism, and turnover intentions. Although results of this study did not provide a concrete answer to the moderating role of agreeableness and conscientious, more research is still needed to examine personality traits as the moderators of the relationship between burnout and withdrawal behaviors. Consistent with past research, the present study also found that conscientiousness was negatively related to burnout, lateness, and absenteeism. Conscientiousness seems to be a personality trait that promotes resistance against workplace stressors and withdrawal behaviors, making it a valuable trait for employees to possess.

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## **Appendix**

### **Demographic Items**

What is your age?  
How long have you worked in your current position?  
How many hours do you typically work per week?  
Are you self-employed?  
Which of the following best describes the industry in which you work?  
What gender do you identify as?

### **Scale Items**

#### **Withdrawal Behavior Items**

In the past 6 months, how many days were you late to work?  
In the past 6 months, how many days did you leave work early?  
In the past 6 months, how many full days of work did you miss for any reason (i.e. being sick, vacation, or doctor's appointments)?  
In the past 6 months, how many partial days of work did you miss for any reason (i.e. being sick, vacation, or doctor's appointments)?  
How often do you think about quitting your job for reasons such as more money, more prestige in another organization, problems with your current leadership, better working conditions elsewhere, etc.?  
How often do you search for other job opportunities for reasons such as those listed in the question above?

#### **Personality Items**

##### **Conscientiousness**

I often forget to put things back in their proper place.\*  
I like order.  
I make a mess of things.\*  
I get chores done right away.

##### **Agreeableness**

I sympathize with other's feelings.  
I am not really interested in others.\*  
I feel others' emotions.  
I am not really interested in other people's problems.\*

#### **Oldenburg Burnout Inventory Items**

I always find new and interesting aspects in my work.  
There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work.\*  
It happens more and more often that I talk about my work in a negative way.\*  
After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.\*  
I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well.  
Lately, I tend to think less at work and do my job almost mechanically.\*

I find my work to be a positive challenge.  
During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.\*  
Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of work.\*  
After working, I have enough energy for my leisure activities.  
Sometimes I feel sickened by my work tasks.\*  
After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.\*  
This is the only type of work that I can imagine myself doing.  
Usually, I can manage the amount of my work well.  
I feel more and more engaged in my work.  
When I work, I usually feel energized.

**COVID-19 Item**

Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected how you work? You can pick all that apply.

\* Indicates an item that was reverse-coded