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# Communicative Reconstruction of Resilience Labor: Identity/Identification in Disaster-Relief Workers

Vinita Agarwal & Patrice M. Buzzanell

*Drawing from the structural theory of identification [Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998] and resilience theory [Buzzanell, 2010], our inquiry provides insight into the sustainability of disaster-relief worker involvement and the discursive processes whereby workers overcome emotional and physical challenges to create resilience labor. Analyzing 23 semi-structured interviews with disaster-relief workers of a non-profit organization, we define resilience labor as the dual-layered process of reintegrating transformative identities and identifications to sustain and construct ongoing organizational involvement and resilience. The identification frames align with familial, ideological, and destruction-renewal network ties that empower individuals to construct their identities in transformative ways. The frames can guide non-profit managers and volunteers working in extreme contexts characterized by societal conflicts or disruption to sustain themselves as they construct resilience labor.*

**Keywords:** Identification; Resilience; Resilience Labor; Identity; Disaster-Relief Workers; Frames; Disaster Relief; Non-profit Organizations

Through disaster-relief workers' efforts, communities and individuals start processes of post-disaster recovery after loss of friends and family, possessions, and infrastructure. During Hurricane Sandy, for example, more than 30,000 volunteers and 200 non-profit and community service organizations partnered to assist in rebuilding devastated communities (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2013). When disaster strikes, disaster-relief workers help individuals and communities recreate familiar routines, rebuild infrastructures and community networks, and counter feelings of isolation through emotional assistance (Federal

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Emergency Management Association, 2005; Perry, 2007). Such labor is both material and discursive; it is essential to individuals' and communities' reconstructions of everyday life. We examine the communicative construction of identity and identification frames and resilience processes to understand how disaster-relief workers accomplish processes of reintegration during everyday and atypical disruptions (Buzzanell, 2010).

Disaster-relief workers experience multiple challenges in their work. These challenges consist of assisting others and themselves in constructing resilience, defined in our study as an ability to re-envision productive and self-defining outcomes through adversity. Disaster-relief workers address challenges of social inequality, resource allocation, and interorganizational competition. Disaster-relief work also exposes workers to separation from families, personal risk, and the emotional labor of comforting, hoping, and witnessing loss (Military OneSource, 2014; Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2014). Creating resilient relationships and communities are everyday processes that sustain families, organizations, and nations (Canary, 2008; Richardson, 2003; Segrin, 2006), yet there is little research informing practitioners in their efforts to create resilience in those who witness death, destruction, and devastation (Bills et al., 2008).

We argue that such research can provide insight into sustainability of worker involvement and the discursive processes whereby workers overcome emotional and physical challenges through resilience labor. Drawing from the structurational theory of identification (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998) and resilience theory (Buzzanell, 2010), our inquiry provides insight into how disaster-relief worker identities and identifications (a) support and constrain worker involvement, and (b) create a form of productive participation we term resilience labor, defined in our study as a dual-layered process of (re)integrating transformative identities and identifications to sustain and construct ongoing organizational involvement and resilience. Pragmatically, by understanding how identity/identification processes shape and are shaped by the context of organizational sites (Kuhn, 2006), our study guides disaster-relief managers and emergency organizations by demonstrating how (a) identity/identification processes can influence work outcomes and help organizations sustain worker involvement (Ashcraft, 2007), (b) resilience can support disaster-relief workers experiencing burnout and identify transformative ways of addressing challenges in disaster-relief work, and (c) resilience labor in disaster-relief workers can help address resilience-based processes in other forms of work, particularly those associated with recovery, assistance, and renewal after crises (e.g. military deployment and return; Villagran, Canzona, & Ledford, 2013; Wilson, Wilkum, Chernichky, MacDermid Wadsworth, & Bro-niarczyk, 2011).

## Literature Review

We first overview scholarship on volunteering with a focus on identity/identification processes in disaster-relief volunteering. We then link resilience with disaster-relief

work to construct a framework for locating identity/identification processes in resilience labor.

### *Volunteering*

Most literature on volunteering centers on individual motivations to volunteer, examining individual variables such as self-efficacy or altruism (Mowen & Sujan, 2005); situational variables such as time and money (Lenkowsky, 2004); or societal variables such as social networks, religion, and family (Eckstein, 2001; Wilson, 2000). Although we use the term non-profit workers, members, and volunteers interchangeably, we understand volunteers as those whose primary motivation for work is driven by altruistic and other-directed non-economic considerations. Because non-profit worker motivation is sustained more by discursive constitution of self-worth than economic rewards (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; McAllum, 2014; Rodell, 2013), examining how discursive negotiation of identity/identification guides volunteer involvement with non-profit organizations can provide important insights for researchers and practitioners. Eschenfelder (2012) notes how the emotional labor performed by non-profit workers for clients is equally a source of identification with work and a motivator to give more of themselves to their work. Ganesh and McAllum (2012) highlight volunteer identity investments in organizational contexts to recognize the importance of emotional labor.

Although research on volunteering has examined how individuals integrate cultural norms (Kuhn et al., 2008), identity (McAllum, 2014), autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2012), and life narratives (Lair, Shenoy, McClellan, & McGuire, 2008) to organize meaning through work (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008), the discursive processes underlying how individuals engage in identity construction are not clearly understood in specific contexts such as disaster-relief labor. Pragmatically, understanding the complex ways in which empowering identity/identification discourses can sustain involvement and resilience is essential for protecting the physical and psychological health of those who labor in disaster-relief contexts. Understanding these identity/identification processes can help scholars and practitioners sustain worker involvement not simply in disaster-relief, but also in everyday struggles. Our findings can help organizational identity scholars address capacity-building through resilience labor—for the individual disaster-relief volunteer, non-profit managers, emergency management organizations, and affected communities.

### *Volunteer Identity/Identifications*

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) states that one's identity, or a sense of self, is an evolving part of self-concept. Organizational membership is a key aspect of members' identity, one through which members share in the organization's value and decision premises (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987; Scott, 2007). The sense of connection referenced by identification with collectivities typically coincides with complex choices that individuals make about whether their identities are enhanced through

connection with particular others (Williams & Connaughton, 2012). According to structuration theory, organizational activities shape identities and their corresponding identifications (Scott et al., 1998). In other words, norms governing activities (e.g. providing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)) structure specific forms of member identities (e.g. as emergency assistance professionals) and their corresponding identifications (e.g. disaster-relief work). The theory sees identity as a structure of rules and resources that both enable and constrain agency to produce and reproduce behaviors in specific situations.

In managing identity/identification frames, individuals do the work of discursively aligning their values with those invoked by the materiality of the work site (Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Burke, 1969/1970; Silva & Sias, 2010). Different work activities and contexts evoke different forms of identities and identifications such that multiple and conflicting identification frames can coexist with particular identifications gaining salience at specific times (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Russo, 1998; Scott & Stephens, 2009). Researchers have called for further examination of the relations between activity, identifications, and higher order nested identities in volunteer work (Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). Frames can be defined as an underlying principle that enables members to selectively utilize aspects of their perceived realities in ways that communicate connections to or distance from competing value premises (Fairhurst, 2011; Meisenbach, 2008). Identification frames involve an ongoing management of discourses through individual talk and stories, media, family, and organizational or societal discourse surrounding issue trajectories and organizational crises. By describing events and actions in ways that cultivate feelings of connection or alienation, our study attends to how identity/identification frames shape and are shaped by activities to sustain disaster-relief worker involvement and resilience through creating resilience labor.

### *Resilience*

Resilience has been examined as collaborative and individual efforts. Resilience in organizational settings has been considered across multiple domains as a form of creative adaptation to disruptions and losses that, when supported by situational factors, can stimulate empowering logics (Buzzanell, Shenoy, Lucas, & Remke, 2009). At an individual level, resilience alludes to individuals' abilities to achieve productive outcomes and change during or resulting from adverse circumstances (Buzzanell, 2010). We adopt a communicative perspective, understanding resilience as an individual process that is intersubjectively constructed through co-crafting productive narratives, identities, emotions, and networks that enable reintegration and/or transformation after change.

Human resilience has been investigated from many disciplinary perspectives. Some talk about individual factors such as realism, value systems, or an open mind as necessary conditions for invoking resilience (Bonnano, 2004; Coutu, 2002). Others study storytelling in families and high-risk occupations (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013), or organizational recovery during disasters (Chewning, Lai, & Doerfel, 2013). Inter-

intrapersonal researchers examine resilience and environmental factors such as family support and individuals' spiritual future orientations to boost resilience qualities (Foran, Adler, McGurk, & Bliese, 2012; Lee, Sudom, & Zamorski, 2013). Buzzanell and colleagues argue that individuals maintain resilience intersubjectively through continuous reintegration of self and others in ways that involve both accepting reality pragmatically and making creative adjustments to adapt to, and potentially change, circumstances.

Ultimately, disasters can be seen as opportunities for social transformation, bridging societal inequities and modifying individual capacity (Baker, 2009). Disaster-relief work can be a site for workers to address their own vulnerabilities as well as a priori societal inequities to craft visions of post-disaster "normalcy" for themselves and others. By examining how communities and disaster-relief workers can be reintegrated in self-sustaining ways through disaster-relief work we shift attention away from the dependencies associated with the practices of receiving or providing assistance and direct attention toward how resilience processes are sustained by resilience labor. Our study examines the following research questions:

RQ1: Do identity/identification frames in the work of disaster-relief enable sustained disaster-relief worker involvement? If so, how?

RQ2: Do identity/identification frames enable disaster-relief workers to overcome emotional and physical challenges to create resilience labor? If so, how?

## Method

### *Participants and Context*

The Helping Hand (pseudonym) is an emergency aid organization premised on the ethos of humanitarian care to victims of natural disasters and emergencies. Its main operations include community services, support for military members and families, and international relief and development programs. The local chapter is a small unit comprising 4½ full-time staff and approximately 141 volunteers. Volunteers are involved in training (e.g. CPR and first-aid), community outreach, fund-raising, and office management. Core volunteers are part of disaster action teams, whose responsibility is caring for victims of local emergencies (e.g. fires, floods, nor'easters, and hurricanes). On average these teams respond to 8–10 emergencies per month. Many volunteers are also available to deploy to large-scale or national emergencies in other parts of the country. During Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the chapter sent 300 volunteers to New Orleans, the most per capita of any chapter in the country (personal email correspondence, Executive Director, The Helping Hand, March 21, 2012).

Interview participants included 4 full-time and 1 half-time staff member and 18 volunteers from the not-for-profit's chapter who self-selected themselves into this study by responding to the first author's emails or requests made during a monthly meeting ( $N = 23$ , males = 11, females = 12). Because two of the four staff members were

volunteers when they started, we use the term “disaster-relief workers,” “members,” and “volunteers” interchangeably to describe our participants. Demographic data collected through an online survey indicated that participants averaged 51–61 years of age (on a response set using decades ranging from 20 to 70 years and older), were primarily unpaid volunteers, Caucasian, had master’s degrees, and had been with the chapter for 2–5 years.

### *Procedures*

Upon obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and the support of non-profit board members, the first author conducted individual semi-structured interviews over a two-month period. After reading a copy of the informed consent form that assured participants of confidentiality, participants engaged in semi-structured interviews ranging from 10 to 50<sup>1</sup> minutes in duration (average = 25.5 minutes) and starting with domain-specific questions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001) that explored their identity as disaster-relief workers, their motivation in working with disaster-relief, and what they perceived to be their bases of identity/identification. Because of its semi-structured format, the first author was able to probe into participants’ experiences with different frames to shed light on communicative interactions, expressions of identity/identification, and meanings of disaster. Identity/identification was operationalized through questions such as how participants felt about the non-profit organization, members, and disasters. Questions also addressed relationships, trust, volunteering and non-profit work, as well as how disaster-relief work resonated with workers (e.g. involvement), and challenges.

After interviews were conducted, a professional transcriptionist and the first author transcribed the audio recordings. The first author and an assistant verified the accuracy of the transcription against these recordings. After inserting pseudonyms reflecting gender but masking identifying details (e.g. position), transcriptions resulted in 181 pages of single-spaced text. Two of the 23 interviews were analyzed by the first author and an assistant working separately by looking for sensitizing concepts (such as “belonging” for identification) from key literatures (Charmaz, 2001). Through line-by-line discussions, they placed these concepts into broader semantic categories. The first author then proceeded with further coding, synthesizing the categories into stable interpretive frames that incorporated significant issues and examples (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). If additional categories emerged that did not fit into existing categories, a note was made in the margins with examples. If additional categories emerged more than three times, and were phrased in language indicating high emotional intensity, the categories were included in the analysis. Identity/identification frames were identified through repetition of particular concepts in groupings (e.g. family) that recurred throughout participant responses to domain-related questions. Finally, the first author obtained member validation by presenting the identity/identification frames at a monthly membership meeting (May 9, 2012) with approximately 15 volunteers in attendance. Participants provided feedback in ways that assisted with validation.

The second author examined the data and corresponding frames from the initial analysis and identified the concept of “resilience labor” that resonated through the interviews. The interview data were further examined for participants’ descriptions of identity/identification and ways in which these constituted resilience labor. To understand resilience, we looked for adaptability and transformation of individuals and communities, rebuilding over time, and for potential negative cases. After individually conducting these processes, we shared, discussed, and finalized our findings.

## Results

Our study examined whether and how identity/identification frames in the work of disaster-relief (a) sustain member involvement (RQ1) and (b) enable members to overcome emotional and physical challenges to create resilience labor (RQ2). Findings suggest that disaster-relief worker involvement and resilience were sustained through three identity/identification network frames to create resilience labor: (a) familial network ties describing relationships among members, their own family, and the community, (b) ideological network ties describing the ethos of humanitarian, secular, and egalitarian principles; and (c) destruction-renewal network ties describing reflection on the cyclical, intense, yet temporary nature of disaster-relief work (Table 1). Understanding networks as forms of interconnectedness, of identifiable communication patterns (Monge & Contractor, 2003), pragmatically, these network frames can be employed by disaster-relief managers and agencies to sustain worker involvement and resilience to create resilience labor.

### *Familial Network Identity/Identification Frame*

First, family network ties sustained disaster-relief worker involvement and resilience to create resilience labor through members’ self- and other-directed work of building

**Table 1.** Disaster-relief frames, identity/identification targets, and resilience labor.

Disaster-relief frames	Identity anchors	Identification targets	Resilience labor
Family networks	Being family Becoming family	Members Own family Community	Creating open, trusting, and caring networks
Ideological networks	Humanitarian, Egalitarian Secular	Organization, Disaster-relief work	Embodying a humanitarian, secular, and egalitarian work ethic
Destruction-renewal networks	Savior Universal	Cyclical, intense, temporary	Finding spirituality through call to extreme work contexts, self- and other-directed labor, bounded spatiotemporal episodic work

ties with each other, their family, and the community over time. Members described looking out for each other as family in ways that reduced stress (Table 1). Rob, a Helping Hand staff member, said: "If I did not have the co-workers I have here, uh stress would have gone over many times, we understand each other, we work together ... we're family. That is the one thing that kept me here." Rob described how his own identity as "being family" helped him sustain involvement as staff, such that "even before I was employed here, as a volunteer, I felt like family." In family communication research, the notion of family is defined by participants themselves without any preconceived definitions of family as a normative legal or biological unit (Galvin, 2006).

Jill's work gave her a sense of control by backgrounding her negative feelings associated with losing her job when she was the financial support for her husband and daughters and foregrounding productive action (Buzzanell, 2010):

You trained, you had a purpose, you had a class to go to ... it put my mind off of my down stuff and lifted me into something that had purpose ... With being laid off so quickly, it was at the holidays, there was no control ... with The Helping Hand I knew exactly what to expect ... and it literally kept me from being enormously depressed. It gave me a hope that I'm able to help someone ... that they can possibly help me as well, then I knew that there was hope out there for both of us.

Jill described how her present identification with "family" networks sustained involvement through her future orientation: "When I retire I'm going to have this basis to work with ... It's like a family over there, you know, everybody knows everybody." Enabling those who have lost everything and are "shaking with fear," sustained her as she worked to create resilience in others because it "literally fills an emptiness. I get a chance to see, the biggest thing for me is seeing that smile."

Jill's work sustained her own family, too, as her young daughters and husband also learned to come through adversity together and create resilience. Jill recounted the times when she came home in the early morning hours after a house fire and her daughter would say,

I'm making you a cup of coffee ... and she's asking me "is everybody okay, how are things doing?" ... And then the other one ... she will come and hug me and she goes "you smell like smoke. Do you want me to start the shower?"

In fact, her husband also would wait until she got home, even if it was at 2.30 a.m., "he was still up. So it's just you know it's just seeing the family pulling together but not just for me, but for those I serve." Jill anchored her identity in her own family and in The Helping Hand members as her future family. Through her work, she sought to overcome adversity and regain control through productive action—that is, resilience—for and with her family, and for herself.

Even as Jill regained control in her own life, she was sustained by empowering others: "And then you show up and ... you give them a purpose ... and then all

over suddenly the shaking stops and they are calmer ... That's big for me." Jill described how she had been vulnerable through her job loss and how working with The Helping Hand empowered her: "I can control what I do by ... by going out and helping someone. I can control my life, by getting a really getting a really, really bad [thing] to becoming a good thing ... it's not going to define who I am." Jill's resilience labor invokes Buzzanell's (2010) and Lucas and Buzzanell's (2012) dual-layer resilience processes as volunteers construct resilience for others who have experienced trauma and for themselves as they, too, experience the loss through their labor.

Kathy described how she felt good knowing that "I've supported, not just myself ... but the other disaster volunteers," as well as those in the community affected by disaster ("over December they got new Christmas toys for kids who had been in a fire and lost everything"). Moreover, she knew that she could count on her volunteer family network: "I was also, my son was in the military and we had a family death ... The Helping Hand ... was able to reach them, get my son home for the funeral." Although the family image runs through organizational communication literature in myriad ways (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987), the discursive identity construction of being family sustained involvement by supporting one another, being part of a collective, a family, through tough times. An older worker, Judy, who started volunteering when her husband passed away, described how her non-profit "family" held her together when she was in the ICU: "I have a chronic health condition, bronchitis. I was rushed to the hospital and I almost didn't make it ... They couldn't have been any closer than my family. They were all worried about me ... it's very, very close."

In "becoming family" the disaster-relief workers sustain identification with other members such that a key factor in their resilience labor was their strong emotional bonds with each other or, in network parlance, their strong linkages in the networks that are essential to growth and transformation: "We have a lady out right now and I'm keeping in touch with her: it's what can I do for you? This is the way that everybody is here" (Judy); or, "I've taken people that have been in an accident ... they'd do the same thing for me so we all just, we're here for each other. So it's more than just friends. It's friends, family, we have a connection with each other" (Judy); "We're not only helping in the community but we really look out for one another here" (Molly), or, "the people here make me feel like I'm contributing in a positive way ... that's really, that's all I need, you know, to make me feel worthy of myself" (Pat).

Helping others who face an extreme form of loss challenges workers to envision strength in transformative ways: "When you see people at their most vulnerable time you see sides that you hope other people don't ever have to experience ... It just opens up another world." The intense reflection on loss and renewal as workers help individuals and communities rebuild over time—helped anchor the disaster-relief workers' resilience labor in familial network ties. As Justin said: "when it comes time for need, the bell rings ... we are there ... Family, literally family." By gaining control discursively, anchoring their identities in familial network ties, and

identification with fellow members as family, the workers sustained involvement and resilience in self and others to create resilience labor.

#### *Ideological Network Identity/Identification Frame*

Second, ideological network ties sustained disaster-relief worker involvement and resilience to create resilience labor through aligning materialities and humanitarian, secular, and egalitarian ideologies, thus elevating their work beyond immediate circumstances (Table 1). We understand ideological beliefs as an enduring commitment toward a set of values. Matt, a long-term staff member, started out as a high school volunteer during Hurricane Gloria when he was 15 years old. Matt described how the organizational ideology of egalitarianism was key to his continued involvement:

[The Helping Hand] doesn't look at race, religion, creed ... you're not trying to recruit somebody to your religion, it's just that it is totally, we'll help the enemy, we'll help the good, the powerful, who ever, as long as it's a human being.

By framing the organization as a site for identity creation through work (Deetz, 1992; Mumby, 2013), the ideological network frame enabled volunteers to elevate individual and work values beyond immediate circumstances to create resilience labor. Because The Helping Hand was respected internationally for its humanitarian ideology, affiliation with the ideological network ties provided a powerful basis for identification. Pat, an older, licensed psychotherapist who had just moved here following her divorce, described how her affiliation with The Helping Hand brought recognition and respect to others and herself: "they are well respected in the community and when I wear my little red badge and a medal you know, I am proud, yeah." In affiliating herself with the organizational ideological identity, Pat expressed the emotional ("proud") and material ("badge ... medal") connections that sustained her involvement, while her work helped her be resilient by (re)creating her identity as a valuable resource in her new community: "there was a guy ... whose house burned down ... and he had nothing. So, I brought him some groceries and some jackets and stuff like that."

For Evan, a newer volunteer, affiliation with ideological network ties enabled access to disaster sites and ability to live out his core beliefs and values:

[The Helping Hand] facilitate(s) the ability to get into national disaster and even international disaster relief work ... I don't feel the need to get into another big organization just to accomplish that goal because I feel like I'm getting that here.

Evan described how he was drawn to addressing inequalities, how he was "discovering the true value of money and the true value of love. I mean, in this point of my life, you know, [Evan's prior organization] doesn't mean a heck of a lot to me." Through The Helping Hand, Evan went to Haiti to help with earthquake victims "and when I got back I started getting some serious feelings of compunction, guilt, and the anxiety for guilt. Just having to do with meeting the imbalance of equality in the world and

I'm a pretty lucky person." For Evan, disaster-relief work at The Helping Hand had fundamentally (re)defined his identity. Later, he paid his airfare for multiple trips:

I mean I spent thousands to do that. It wiped out my life savings, not that I had all that much but it wiped out my savings. It took me until almost December to get back on my feet [financially].

Yet as soon as he was done with six trips to Haiti, Evan started gathering friends to help out in the Gulf. Evan had been a party and event organizer in a beach city. He described how, after his return from Haiti, going back to his previous work was impossible: "There are just hundreds of drunk college kids and all these people ... having a good time and I just looked at it and I couldn't, it just didn't seem fair, it didn't seem right and I walked away from it." Evan's internal struggles were highlighted in his disaster-relief work: "Anybody who died their paperwork came across my desk and I had to get transporters to actually move the body, move it to the morgue, register and supervise these stuff." Evan's account reveals his struggle to manage his own psychological vulnerability to disaster-relief work: "None of that was really anything I had ever done before ... and I consider myself a mentally strong person so while I was there ... I got through it okay."

Although Evan was strong for others, he was working to be resilient: "I was strong for everybody I needed to be strong but coming back is hard and it's a mess ... that was ten times more difficult than being there ... having to re-immerse myself in the day-to-day operations of life." The work of addressing vulnerabilities challenged Evan to be resilient "every single day and I've been back ... is a struggle" to find meaningfulness in his prior work: "I have a really difficult time dealing with other people who don't seem to realize how lucky they are. I keep it in perspective because before I volunteer(ed) in Haiti I was the same way." Evan's alignment of ideologies, his past and present through his work with The Helping Hand provided an identity/identification frame to be resilient and to create resilience labor. The gratitude of those less fortunate made Evan's involvement sustainable, such that "for every bad memory I have and for every difficult aspect of this, you know, there is a smiling face at the back of my mind." His gratitude is reflected in his work on his personal struggles and on behalf of disaster victims through The Helping Hand.

The Helping Hand symbolized affiliation with a shared ideological network ("It's rewarding when you meet someone that maybe doesn't speak your language but they're wearing that same emblem and you know they have the same principles"; Molly, a long-time volunteer) and work ethic ("If you know you have a staff that is dedicated ... you feel good about the job that we are supposed to do is getting done"; Chris, a staff member) that provided members with a basis for sustained involvement ("So as long [I] have the feeling that The Helping Hand is benefiting society, I'm right there with them"; Pat). The ideological network frame sustained involvement even when members questioned the day-to-day workings of and perceived contradictions within the organization. In managing his frustrations with the national organization's perceived bureaucracy and the chapter workers who "are extremely skilled,

knowledgeable people, dedicated people," Paul asked, "What is the level of dedication? How many times, how much pounding on the head and kicking on the rear can people put up with before they say enough?" Paul, who was previously a non-medical psychiatrist for over 40 years, felt that although the chapter workers like him embodied specific values, dealing with policies coming from "national" was frustrating. Similarly, Molly said

something came out just last week, about changing all of the training programs and I am really having a lot of trouble with that because the gentleman that's making these changes has worked at national since July of this year, has never taken a CPR class, has no medical background, and has proposed all of these changes.

Although Molly felt she could have walked away, she continued, because she "realized that the local group here makes such a positive impact that I had to keep doing what I was doing ... I felt like if I backed off that then all the other programs would suffer." Thus the ideological network frame sustained involvement and resilience to create resilience labor through worker alignment of ideological (humanitarian, secular, and egalitarian) values with personal values; aligning material practices and markers (helping all, logo, and badge) to reintegrate and elevate their individual challenges and goals within an ideological frame.

#### *Destruction–Renewal Network Identity/Identification Frame*

Third, disaster-relief worker involvement and resilience were sustained through referencing destruction–renewal network ties through cyclical disaster-relief processes and bounded spatiotemporal connections organized to fill specific needs, then reconstituted with others to create resilience labor during present disaster-relief work and in preparation for future relief-work episodes. The intensity of this frame was reflected in participant descriptors of disaster-relief work as "mind-blowing" (Sue), "pulling together often in very difficult circumstances" (Ryan), "help[ing] people who were in dire need that were ... really temporary situations" (Joan), "empowering others to help themselves" (Paul), and for the "emptiness" (Jill) they felt in themselves before connection with The Helping Hand (*Table 1*). Yet, this intensity was unique because the nature of their involvement in extreme disaster situations was temporary. Having provided assistance, Lisa felt good "that I have done my job and they are calm ... and I always give them my number ... they are just looking for like a lifeline. Yeah, yeah I like that." In Port-au-Prince, Evan recounted rebuilding a temporary hospital during his first deployment: "they rebuilt a facility that was a temporary rehabilitation hospital, and then they also built a trauma field hospital ... it was a tent sitting that was literally this hospital and functioning for probably about six months."

The temporary, episodic quality of the work kept calling Evan back: "I went down there for a week, I came back, three weeks later I went down for another week, I came back. Four weeks later I went down for another and I came back" to fulfill disaster-relief goals: "It was really difficult. I worked seven consecutive 18-hour days each

week I was down there so I mean in three weeks doing 350 hours is a lot." Perhaps connecting with self/other-directed vulnerabilities invited workers to be mindful of their own resilience, to consider life and death in ways that created enduring forms of sustenance: "There would be a lot of situations where we would need something in order to save somebody's life and most of the time we couldn't get it and that was hard" or days when "there would be patients in there and you talk to somebody and you are saying goodbye to them at night, you would wake up in the morning and they would be dead, they would be deceased" (Evan).

The destruction–renewal frame evokes the entire disaster preparedness, response, and recovery cycle from the initial call to action witnessing death and destruction in the field, through their labor of rebuilding and renewal, and finally, to processing the meaningfulness of their involvement, and preparing to answer the call again. Volunteers identified with the grand call of disasters: "I got involved [right] after Hurricane Katrina ... from watching the hurricane approach ... I just right away had this feeling like I have to get there ... It seems that when there are national disasters is when I am able to do that to go" (Sue); "I was called for Katrina ... then I started volunteering for the disaster action team" (Jill); and "I heard an ad on the radio shortly after Katrina hit and ... I kind of obsess about big events like this; 911, Katrina, Tsunami" (Bill). Referencing how the micro-discourses of vulnerability and macro-discourses of destruction and rebuilding sustained member involvement, Matt said: "It's purely an adrenaline kind of thing ... you come into work and the next thing you know there's a disaster and you're leaving the office and you've got to go to deploy in two weeks." His partner shared his passion: "They're adrenaline junkies, I'm one, too ... getting an ambulance call as sick as that may sound, you know when that pager would go off when you're responding to [an] accident, your adrenaline kicks in [it's] a very pleasant feeling" (Molly); and others: "The thrill of the incident like you know with the firefighters like the alarm goes off and the adrenaline rush ... you have the thrill of going out there" (Rob).

The management of emotions and work has been examined in many ways, including how we invoke emotions in ways that produce or prevent certain feelings (Hochschild, 1983). In the field, disaster-relief workers evoke the spirituality of resilience labor through opening themselves to the emotional intensity of their labor, or "the management of emotion as a job requirement" (Shuler & Sypher, 2000, p. 51) in ways that connected individuals to their work. Molly, a long-time volunteer (now staff), said: "When I get a phone call and someone says you know you trained me in CPR 6 or 8 months ago and I saved a life today that makes it all worthwhile"; or in explaining the occupational experiences that brought him to working with disaster-relief: "The theme runs through wanting to teach, help, inspire, others ... at The Helping Hand, you're working with people often who are hurting, and grieving" (Dave). Participants referenced how disaster-relief work invokes emotional poignancy: "People that work with maybe Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts they're not working necessarily with people in crisis ... they're not connecting with people when they're at their absolute worst" (Molly); or, as Sue, a school teacher, recounted her own vulnerability working with Katrina's victims and evoking resilience in transformative ways: "Not

knowing what to expect, not knowing what was coming next ... So you have to definitely draw on something, for me it was God." Perhaps the spiritual was embedded in cyclical destruction–renewal episodes, the total immersion in extreme job contexts.

In processing their experience, the destruction–renewal frame was central to worker involvement and resilience to create resilience labor: "It actually fulfills an emptiness. We go through life a lot, just not knowing why we are feeling empty" (Jill), or: "Sometimes I don't even totally understand it but you know you feel good. When you go to sleep at night you can say, OK, I helped somebody." Judy elaborated:

I've been out when Alzheimer's patients have wandered off ... they knew the person there was no way they could be alive, I just happened to look up and I saw a 4-wheeler flying down the road ... and we just stood there and waited for a minute and well this young man came in and he kept screaming he's alive, he's alive ... it's like, ah, everybody looks up and says, thank you! To the Lord. Because it's just the feeling I cannot put into words.

Perhaps being vulnerable to the "intensity" (Judy) or "devastation" (Lisa) of the participants in disaster-relief work is essential to creating resilience labor. Evan worked to help a woman with two small children, one of whom could not walk since birth, who lost her husband, and was injured herself: "So all three of them, her and her two birth-defected children were admitted to the hospital." After they recovered, she lost her house, so when she was released, she was told, "'here you go, you have nothing.' ... And she was like 'well I don't have anything all I have are these two kids, one of them can't walk.'" For Evan, the work of "helping that woman; she'll never be able to repay anybody ... I mean, it's all about just trying to [undo] that feeling of guilt." Evan's perception of guilt is set in the context of recognizing his privileged position as a consequence of the circumstances in which he was born. For Evan, an opening up of his identity as privileged sustained involvement in his work on behalf of others by enabling him to go beyond it to help others even as he expanded his awareness of his own identity. The destruction–renewal network frame references participants' identification with the complete disaster-relief cycle from the call to action to the process of internal reflection as the workers engage in the resilience labor.

In discussing compassion in the workplace, Miller, Considine, and Garner (2007) note that individuals in service organizations requiring a high degree of authentic emotional labor are drawn to the work of making themselves emotionally vulnerable, of providing emotional support to others, and ultimately, managing the fallout (guilt, burnout, and emotional exhaustion) in their own lives. Matt's comment illustrates how this form of compassion and emotional labor can be a powerful form of identification for workers and the attraction of instant gratification: "You can see them being helped instantly and it provides a very quick kind of that you've seen the good and the positive that you do in the community." The destruction–renewal network theme referenced the reflection on the identification with temporary but immediate gratification: "You're providing assistance to folks who are at the bottom of the pit ... Everything has been taken away, it's gone ... You're able to offer a cup of cool water to a person who's in dire thirst" (Dave). Providing a helping hand ("a cup of cool

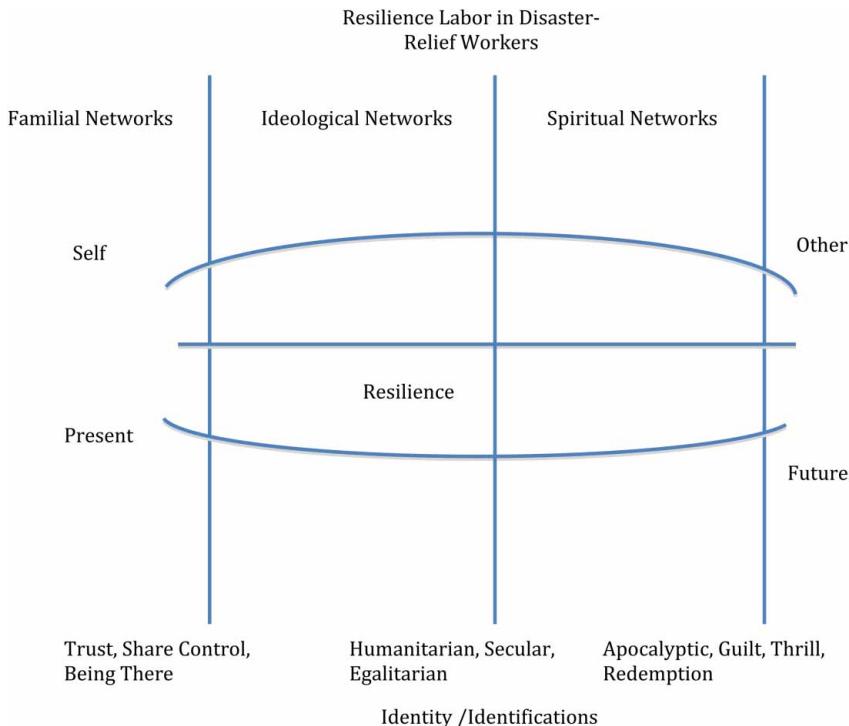
water") creates a form of resilience labor through simultaneous identification with both destruction and renewal through one's labor: "That would be very fulfilling to me that they are going to eat, sleep and have clothing I would be part of their care for a few days" (Ana). Others contrasted their disaster-relief work with other volunteer activities work, saying that the latter would be "very depressing ... where you are working with people who are long term in ... situations be it homeless ... Here there is a more immediate reward type" (Joan) or, "because once I got there and I saw the people, I saw the reason why they were there ... I would feel very bad pouring something that was just down the drain ... not making an impact" (Paul). The destruction–renewal cycle evoked the intense process of calling to and enabling life, witnessing death, and feeling the immediate gratitude of those saved and wholeness in one's self.

Disaster-relief workers saw those affected as nodes of a temporary embodied communication network as they experienced disasters first- and secondhand (i.e. the workers are present on site, but also experience the disaster through its connections to others, and thus to themselves) in each destruction–renewal cycle: "To sit down with a person and offer them some short term help and to see them get a smile on their face ... That's my pay check" (Simon). In the destruction–renewal network frame, participants referenced a cyclical, intense, temporary identification with destruction and renewal to sustain involvement and resilience. The spiritual lay in the symbolic value of their resilience labor to triumph of over evil (destruction, "crisis" [Carla]).

## Discussion

Resilience is an ongoing process fraught with multiple tensions. Our study finds disaster-relief worker involvement and resilience is sustained through three identity/identification network frames: familial network ties (i.e. identification with one's family, fellow members, and community); ideological network ties (i.e. identification with humanitarian, egalitarian, and secular values); and spiritual network ties (i.e. identification with the cyclical, intense, yet episodic nature of disaster-relief work to create resilience labor). We define resilience labor as the dual-layered process of reintegrating transformative identities to sustain and construct organizational involvement and resilience (Figure 1). We find that resilience labor is sustained through the dual-layer processes of creating resilience in others and themselves through connections to identity/identification networks. These networks fulfill real needs and encourage workers' identities and connections as family, as humanitarian, and as people poised to respond with lifesaving efforts for themselves and those whom they serve. As disaster-relief workers craft their identities, the identification networks provided support necessary for constructing resilience in self and others through resilience labor.

The identity/identification relationship sustains work involvement through network identification connections—familial, ideological, and spiritual—that empower individuals to construct their identities in transformative ways. Our findings suggest that the ongoing and cyclical nature of resilience labor connects functional (i.e. external and



**Figure 1.** Dual-layer resilience labor processes in disaster-relief workers.

task context), relational (i.e. emotional, opening oneself to vulnerability, and loss), and internal (i.e. achieving meaningfulness and connections with community and higher beings), through the networks of identity/identifications. Our examination of individuals who choose to volunteer in extreme contexts characterized by societal conflicts, disruption, or instability allows us to reveal the unique identity/identifications motivations driving and sustaining such work involvement.

In the familial network frame, participants' identity/identifications with family encompass bonds that surfaced in affective ("felt like family"), cognitive ("we understand each other"), and behavioral ways ("we work together"). Furthermore, participants used "family" as both, a descriptor ("we're family") and a metaphor ("I felt like family"). Resilience labor draws upon Buzzanell's (2010) resilience processes and reflects the dual nature of disaster-relief workers' self- and other-directed labor—constituting resilience for the people affected by disasters and for themselves through identification with the context of disaster and loss. In dual-layer resilience processes, people anchor their identities in family patterns and important roles that they fulfill (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012). Our study finds a key factor in volunteers' resilience labor to be strong linkages with familial, ideological, and destruction-renewal network identification ties that draw their transformative potential from individuals' intense connectedness with external and internal vulnerabilities. Perhaps the key to

sustained resilience labor is the dual (self- and other-directed) work and identification networks constructed for the present and available in the future ([Figure 1](#)).

In our study, individuals sought the call of disasters to engage the transformative and creative potential of resilience labor. In some ways the workers' incorporate seemingly contradictory ways of doing work through the development of alternative logics (Buzzanell, [2010](#)) in collaboration with others in their networks by reframing the context. Spirituality with a future orientation has been an important source of resilience in soldiers returning from combat deployment (Villagran et al., [2013](#)), and among others in difficult circumstances. In our study, individuals who choose to work in contexts of extreme forms of societal disruption create dual-layered resilience labor. This labor is sustained by transformative, self-reflexive networks of identity/identification that combine intense self- and other-directed work with the labor of renewal.

### *Pragmatic Implications*

Pragmatically, our findings can assist disaster-relief workers in their work of creating resilient communities in emergency, disaster, or war-torn contexts and sustain involvement in important ways. First, cultivating and supporting disaster-relief worker identity as family whereby members look out for each other and for the disaster-torn communities can be empowering for workers and can sustain involvement in their work. Promoting an organizational familial network affiliation also could assist disaster-relief workers in mitigating stress in their own lives by providing a sense of control through fulfilling tasks, creating trusting bonds, and fostering support for each other. To sustain disaster-relief worker resilience, non-profit managers and disaster-relief agencies can employ dual-layer resilience processes that enable disaster-relief workers to draw upon the strength of multiple family network ties (with other members, community, and their own families) as they labor to rebuild disaster-affected communities.

Second, non-profit managers should integrate the ideological values driving the disaster-relief mission into community work and their own lives to create resilience labor. Promoting connections between individually and organizationally held ideologies can integrate the emotional value of disaster-relief workers' individual labor (feeling proud and respected) with the material markers of organizational identity (logo, emblem, and badges) and sustain volunteer involvement while building a resilient member identity anchored in core beliefs (Buzzanell, [2010](#)). Relatedly, when disaster-relief non-profit organizational identification is threatened by reputational crises (e.g. allegations of deviating from mission), non-profit managers can focus on rebuilding bonds between organizational and member ideological commitments so individual member identity is not threatened by such acts.

Third, non-profit managers should be mindful of members' emotional labor in providing support to others and foster resilience labor by aligning disaster-relief work with spiritual narratives. These supports and connections build on identity/identification frames associated with extreme personal and community vulnerabilities

(death, disease, and job loss) and their resilience labor. By addressing the intense, cyclical nature of disaster-relief episodes and by reinforcing workers' feelings of fulfillment that come from witnessing the immediate impact of their work in communities, non-profit managers can sustain worker involvement.

## Conclusion

Our findings illuminate how the self-reflexive identity/identification networks form a basis for sustaining involvement and resilience among individuals who choose to work in extreme sites to create resilience labor. Theoretically, the identity/identification networks sustaining individuals' resilience labor enable us to collapse participants' experiences and our analyses together in meaningful units. However, the different discursive threads—disaster-relief workers' identification with familial, ideological, and spiritual networks and their transformative potential through dual-layered resilience labor processes—deserve greater attention in everyday contexts. Future researchers can explore the link between resilience labor and transformative identity/identification networks in a range of extreme societal contexts (natural disasters, military deployments, societal conflicts, or man-made emergencies) over time and space to better understand how worker identities and identifications develop and shift. Pragmatically, by understanding how identity and identification networks enable positive transformation and capacity-building in individuals working in extreme work sites, organizations can help workers and communities reach their full potential through resilience labor.

## Notes

1. Interviews ranged from short to moderate duration and were defined by an individual's ability to participate. One participant had an interview time of 10 minutes and 28 seconds in part because she was new to the USA. She explained she was working with the non-profit mainly to give back (as was the custom in her country) but did not elaborate much during the probing questions. One participant, a male volunteer in his 20s who had given up his regular job to engage in disaster-relief volunteering, had an interview time of 50 minutes and 2 seconds.

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