Humor with a Shade of Blue:
Examining Humorous Exchanges during Police-Community Interactions

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DISSERTATION
Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology, Law, and Justice
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016

Chicago, Illinois

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Paul Schewe, Dr. Bill McCarty, Dr. Heather Risser, and Commander Bruce Lipman (Ret.). Through each step of the process, each of these members provided feedback, food for thought, and overall support. This dissertation would not be possible without their contributions.

I would like to thank Dennis P. Rosenbaum, my chair, advisor, and mentor. His relentless efforts to advance my education has been nothing short of absolute. His real-life embodiment of both procedural justice and humor characteristics will influence me for a lifetime.

I would like to thank my family and friends who have been a great source of inspiration throughout my life. Thank you to Grandma, all my aunts and uncles, my siblings and cousins, and all of my friends who motivated me to answer the question of, “So, when are you going to be done?” Thanks also to Dan Lawrence, Paola Baldo, Gina Enciso, Justin Escamilla, and all the graduate students at UIC for making me smile when it all seemed too much. Thanks to all the faculty at UIC for guiding me through my studies, especially Jon Maskaly for his statistical insights.

A very special thanks to Tufano’s, Red Bull, Taco Bell, The Simpsons, The Grateful Dead, and Pall Mall’s for giving me many moments of sanity during the completion of my academic endeavors.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Mary Christoff. From the moment we met, you have pushed me to be a better person. None of this would be possible without you. I love you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Present Analysis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. PROCEDURAL JUSTICE</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Satisfaction with Police Encounters</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Outcomes of Legitimacy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. HUMOR</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Definitions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Humor Theory</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Individual Theories</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Social Theories</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Types of Humor</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Humor and Procedural Justice</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 The Dual Function of Trust in Humor and Police Interactions</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. HYPOTHESES</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. METHODS</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Data Source</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Missing Data</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Measures</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 Demographics</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2 Incident Characteristics</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3 Community Characteristics</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4 Humor</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.5 Satisfaction</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.6 Procedural Justice</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Weighting of Agencies</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Analysis Methods</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. ANALYSIS</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Demographic Characteristics</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Incident Characteristics</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Community Characteristics</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Factors Related to Display of Sense of Humor</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Discussion and Implications for Part I: Antecedents of Humor</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Effect of Humor on Satisfaction and Procedural Justice</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Discussion and Implications for Part II: The Consequences of Humor</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CITED LITERATURE</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. COMMUNITY MEMBER DEMOGRAPHICS</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. OFFICER DEMOGRAPHICS</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. INCIDENT CHARACTERISTICS</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. PRINCIPLE COMPONENTS ANALYSIS: CONCENTRATED DISADVANTAGE</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. AGREE/DISAGREE: OFFICER DISPLAYED A SENSE OF HUMOR</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. SATISFIED/DISSATISFIED: TREATED BY THE OFFICER</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. FACTOR LOADINGS/CORRELATION: PROCEDURAL JUSTICE ELEMENTS</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. RACE/ETHNICITY ANALYSIS</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. GENDER ANALYSIS</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. AGE ANALYSIS</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI. DEMOGRAPHIC REGRESSION</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII. INCIDENT ANALYSIS</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII. CONCENTRATED DISADVANTAGE ANALYSIS</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV. REGRESSION: ANTECEDENTS TO HUMOR</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XV. MODEL 1: INDIRECT EFFECTS</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVI. MODEL 2: INDIRECT EFFECTS</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Proposed direct and mediated relationship</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Direct and mediated relationship</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Direct and mediated relationship with controls</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY

A study of the antecedents for a police officer displaying a sense of humor was carried out as well as the effects of humor on elements of procedural justice and satisfaction. Surveys from 11,138 community members with recent police interaction in 51 communities were collected and analyzed. Information on demographic, incident, and community characteristics were utilized for the first part of the analysis (antecedents of officer humor). Community member perceptions of procedural justice elements and their overall satisfaction with the officer encounter were utilized for the second part of the analysis (effects of officer humor).

Overall, demographics such as officer age, community member age, and community race were found to be significantly related to whether an officer displayed a sense of humor. Incident characteristics (such as who initiated the interaction and the type of crime involved) were also related to officer displays of humor, as well as community characteristics. When examining the effects of officer humor, there was a direct relationship with the community member’s overall satisfaction with the encounter. Officer humor’s effect on satisfaction was also mediated by elements of procedural justice (trustworthy, empathy, competence, and respectful), with empathy having the most salient relationship with humor.
I. INTRODUCTION

The glass from the window is still on the ground when the police arrive. The community member seems shaky but knows that the danger is gone. As the officer takes notes, the community member relays how the TV stolen from his living room was a gift from his wife for his birthday last year. Looking up at the community member with a smile, the officer says, “You know, you can always use this as an excuse to get a new one this year.” The community member chuckles at the thought of it. After the officer leaves, the community member re-plays the conversation in his mind. Thankful for the pleasant interaction, he is more at ease. While this may have been a stressful day, he is satisfied that the police have done their job.

The above scenario illustrates the subtle power of humor to influence the flow and demeanor of communicative interactions. What may start as a stressful situation can be transformed into a pleasant or at least tolerable experience by the mere introduction of a humorous quip by one of the interaction participants. A substantial body of research has been dedicated to studying this very phenomenon and has provided considerable insight into the elements and process involved in humor communication. Inspired by this literature, the present research seeks to expand humor communication effects to the relatively unexplored area of police-community interactions.

While there has been a solid focus on other communication elements within police-community interactions, researchers have largely neglected the specific element of humor. Many authors have provided anecdotal or qualitative analyses to describe humor’s presence in police work (Pogrebin and Poole, 1988; Gilmartin, 2002), however a thorough examination of the relevant literature has yet to reveal any quantitative work containing humor as a predictive variable. Instead, humor is often depicted as one of many nearly indistinguishable elements in a person’s overall communication style. This research takes the step to analyze humor as a distinct
feature of a person’s communication ability and examine the positive outcomes associated with it.

1.1 Present Analysis

The present analysis attempts to take humor and articulate its relevance in the interaction between police and members of the community. There are two large dynamics at play within this research: police interactions with the public and the use of humor. The larger context for this work on police/community interactions involves the concept of procedural justice (Thibaut and Walker, 1975; Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 2003). In essence, this concept focuses on the processes involved in the interaction and how they influence perceptions of the relationship. By downplaying the outcome of the interaction, procedural justice emphasizes proper communication and listening skills in the context of fairness. Procedural justice has been established as an important behavioral characteristic of criminal justice authorities that influences public satisfaction with, and perceived legitimacy of, such authorities. Recently, this work has been translated into training programs for police departments in the United States, Australia, and the UK. The present study attempts to further the concept of procedural justice and detail one specific aspect – humor.

Humor is often thought of as a natural human element, whether in the context of specific utilization or in a broader appreciative perspective. The question of why humor is such a large part of the human experience has evolved through the years to include individual and societal functional explanations. Broadly, philosophers and researchers have argued that humor serves a number of functions, including expressions of superiority, coping, and incongruity (for individual contexts) as well as bonding, persuasion, and safety-valve (for social contexts) (Lynch, 2002; Chapman and Foot, 1976). These separate functions are often described in a vacuum, however, without taking into account factors which may moderate the likelihood of humor being used as
well as the effects humor may have. This research attempts to identify such antecedents and effects of humor.

The present research examined three types of factors which may influence the amount of humor used in police-community interactions. These factors are individual characteristics, contextual characteristics, and community characteristics. All three factors are proposed as possible determinants of an officer’s decision to use humor during interactions with the public, though the degree to which each factor plays a role has not been established in prior research. A brief overview of the theoretical and empirical importance of these characteristics is provided below.

Individual characteristics refer to the demographic features of the participants of the interaction, both the officer and the community member. These characteristics include race/ethnicity, age, and gender. While previous literature has addressed the influence of an individual's demographics on the content of police/community interaction, it has not explored the relationship between demographics and humor usage in such interactions. Individual characteristics have some influence on a person’s use of humor; for instance, males use more humor than females while younger individuals use more humor than older individuals, and racial/ethnic groups have been shown to use different types of humor (Robinson and Smith-Lovin, 2001; Svebak, et al, 2004; Romero and Cruthirds, 2006).

Shared demographics have been shown in other contexts to influence both the quantity and quality of humor use (Pogrebin and Poole, 1988; Ziv, 1984; Roth and Vivona, 2010). Interaction participants who are of the same gender, race, or age are more likely to use humor with each other as a way to express shared values and viewpoints (Terry, 1997). To address this in the present research, a matching scale was calculated for shared demographics between the police officer and community member. By creating a matching scale on race/ethnicity, gender,
and age, the present research is able to examine whether shared characteristics really do matter when predicting the presence of humor. One question is whether brief, one-time interactions between a police officer and a community member with shared characteristics are sufficiently powerful to alter the tone of traditionally serious interactions.

The second level of characteristics deals with the specific context of the police-community interaction. These characteristics include whether the interaction was initiated by the community member (e.g. a call for assistance or to report a crime) or was police-initiated (e.g. a traffic stop). Officer displays of humor may be received differently by the community member in these distinct situations. These incident-level variables have long been identified as being integral to the level of satisfaction community members feel during the interaction (Skogan, 2006; Decker, 1981), though their direct relationship to humor has yet to be explored. For example, when a community member is involved in a traffic stop, they are less likely to be satisfied with the interaction, though past literature is silent as to whether this also means the interaction is more likely void of a humorous exchange. Context may be important. Hence, the current research will examine whether the type of interaction (police-initiated or community-initiated contact) as well as the type of crime incident if community-initiated (personal or property crime) influences the prevalence of humor during the encounter.

This research also examines community characteristics in relationship to the use of humor. The concept of “concentrated disadvantage” in urban neighborhoods (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1997) provides a unique perspective on police-community interactions that takes us beyond individual or incident-level characteristics to the boarder social context of the encounters. Given that policing styles have been shown to vary by neighborhood (Terrill & Reisig, 2003), with lower income, high crime communities the recipient of more aggressive styles of policing, perhaps the role of humor is reduced as a function of these structural characteristics.
This was tested in the present research by viewing differences in the rate of humor use in neighborhoods defined by different levels of concentrated disadvantage.

The present research also examines the consequences of humor, specifically how it affects perceptions of procedural justice and the community member’s overall satisfaction with their police contact. Therefore, the antecedent conditions that contribute to the expression of humor as well as the consequences of humor for evaluations of the police are analyzed.

This research provides insight into the utility of police humor during interactions with the public as well as factors which may moderate the effects of humor. We begin by exploring the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of both procedural justice and humor. The ensuing section then examines the background rationale for each influencing construct described above and articulates a series of hypotheses that are tested herein. The background literature and statement of hypotheses are followed by a description of the data collection and analysis methods. The results are then described, with the precedents to officer humor being examined first and then the consequences of humor. The final section of the dissertation provides an overview of the findings, a discussion of the potential importance of this work for theory, policy and practice, an acknowledgement of the study’s limitations, and some thoughts about future directions for research on police humor.
II. PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The present research is grounded in a simple proposition – positive interactions with law enforcement will result in positive benefits for society. The notion that processes are more important than outcomes during interactions is at the core of a large body of research on “procedural justice”, which serves as a building block for the present study. The concept of procedural justice in law enforcement interactions has been largely influenced by Tom Tyler’s work in showing how the “procedures used by legal authorities to make decisions influence reactions to those decisions” (Tyler, 1988). Consequently, the reactions to the decision processes go a long way in determining the extent to which community members will perceive law enforcement as legitimate authorities of the state, thus influencing how they will behave when interacting with law enforcement as well as their behavior when no law enforcement is around (Tyler, 2003).

Arguing for a group-value model (Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1989), Tyler contends that relationships with authorities are long-term contracts which individuals place stock in. People desire to be socially bonded with authority figures. Tyler’s early conceptualization posited that interactions with these authorities need three tenets in order to be viewed as satisfying: “neutrality of the decision making process, trust in the third party, and evidence about social standing” (Tyler, 1989). Procedural justice theory has since been expanded (see below).

The framework for the current research views procedural justice from two directions. First, we must determine what procedures are relevant when judging whether an interaction is perceived as just or not. The relative importance of factors that contribute to procedurally just interactions must also be determined. Second, the consequences of (un)just interactions should be examined. These consequences can include overall satisfaction with the process, evaluations
of police legitimacy, as well as other outcomes. By addressing these two courses of influence, we may then discuss their implications for future law enforcement interactions.

The idea that the relationship between the police and the community is largely based on the evaluation of police services has been around for a while. Scaglion and Condon (1980) showed that perceptions of police were not so much a result of race/ethnicity, age, or income as they were a result of the community members’ evaluations of police services. Examining the idea of procedural justice during its infancy stages, Tyler and Folger (1980), attempted to identify how these police services were evaluated and found that two constructs explained a significant portion of the variance in how subjects rated police on performance: whether the police (1) solved the problem and (2) behaved fairly in the specific interaction.

Once it was established that procedures in general mattered, research turned to the identification of what specific procedures mattered. This provided a bevy of studies influenced by past findings in the field of psychology. Tyler (1988) argued that it was not a “simple, unidimensional approach” to assessment of fairness and identified seven aspects of determining fairness. Five of the seven related to the actions of the authority; their motivation, honesty, ethicality, bias, and decision quality. The other two dealt with the opportunities of the community member, namely the opportunities for representation and error correction (the ability to correct an officer’s error or ‘complain[]’ about unfair treatment) (Tyler, 1988). During his analysis of these constructs he found most of them had a significant relationship with whether community members judged the procedures and authorities as being fair.

From there, many researchers have created constructs that were attempts to define what was meant by a procedurally just interaction. Mazzerole, et al (2012) performed a meta-analysis of these studies and provided a list of varying operational definitions used to measure police/community procedural justice. Listed within the varying studies are constructs dealing with
the perceptions of police in general, giving a voice to the community member, levels of received
respect, approachability of the police, indices of compliance, as well as self-reported measures
of criminality, among others. Overall, the manner of measuring procedural justice has evolved to
the point where Rosenbaum et al (2015) used over 40 variables to measure constructs related to
procedural justice. Clearly our understanding of what makes a procedurally just interaction is
becoming more apparent, although debate remains about the definition and validation of these
constructs (Gau, 2011).

2.2 Satisfaction with Police Encounters

When measuring procedural justice, prior research has most commonly used “satisfaction”
as the outcome variable. Satisfaction provides a summative assessment of a specific encounter
from the community member’s perspective, as well as an overall indicator of police performance
from multiple encounters. As an example, picture a fast food organization. One negative service
evaluation informs the public that one person received bad service; multiple negative service
evaluations inform the public that the restaurant gives bad service. This begs the question, what
variables contribute most significantly to the satisfaction of community members during police
interactions?

Perhaps the most frequently studied predictors of satisfaction with police contacts are the
demographics of the community member. Results from these analyses, however, are
inconsistent. Many studies have identified demographic variables as significantly related to
satisfaction (Brandl and Horvath, 1991; Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Engel, 2005; Gau and Brunson,
2010), though our understanding of these relationships remains limited. For instance, minorities
are less likely to be satisfied with their police interactions (Gallagher, et al, 2001; Reisig and Parks,
2000; Sampson and Bartusch, 1998). However, there is conflicting research as to whether the
community member’s race/ethnicity has a direct effect on satisfaction or whether instead, it has a part in how police treat them, thus contributing to lower satisfaction. Skogan (2005), for example, argues that demographic variables, such as age, race/ethnicity, and language could explain the degree to which the police interact with community members in a procedurally just or unjust way. While still finding that satisfaction was affected by the process, Skogan argued that the above demographic factors influenced how police treated the community members. Schuck and Rosenbaum (2005) found some support for racial and ethnic populations having different levels of satisfaction with their police interactions, though their analysis suggested that this is perhaps because minorities experienced a wider variety of interactions with police than Caucasians. The general consensus in the literature appears to be that when measuring demographics and satisfaction, a moderating variable is more likely the cause for differences in satisfaction, but that demographic variables may help us to understand differences in the moderating variable.

Apart from demographic explanations of satisfaction, research has suggested two factors are largely responsible for a community member’s satisfaction with the outcome: the fairness of the procedures and the trust of the officer’s motives (Tyler, 2003; Tyler and Huo, 2002; Tyler, 1988). For items which affect procedural fairness and trust of the officer, Tyler (2003) argues that it is the quality of decision making and quality of treatment which have the most impact. Furthermore, between decision making and treatment, quality of treatment has the larger effect on the community member’s perception of both procedural fairness and trust in the officer’s motives.

Other studies have tested different models. Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch (2001), for instance, labeled their constructs as professional conduct (containing such items as professional conduct, quality of service, and honesty), friendliness (containing such items as concern, politeness, and helpfulness), and crime control/prevention (containing such items as investigative skill, and ability to fight/prevent crime). They found that the professional conduct factor was
related to higher satisfaction and considered more important by community members. These two models are in essence measuring very similar items and finding similar results as previous literature – the treatment of the community member in a professional manner holds more influence over satisfaction than actual investigative functions.

Other studies have found that the relative influence of procedures and performance on satisfaction may be dictated by the interaction type. Murphy (2009) found that for community-initiated contacts, the performance of the police was the biggest determinate of satisfaction. However, for police-initiated contacts, procedural justice elements better predicted satisfaction. This set of findings can be explained using expectancy disconfirmation theory (Reisig and Chandek, 2001). When community members initiate the contact, they may expect certain actions from the police and when these expectations are not met, the community member’s satisfaction is likely to be reduced. A broader discussion of expectancy disconfirmation is provided later in the section dealing with humor.

Similar findings are also found in areas outside of the United States. Hinds (2009) found that the largest contributors to community member satisfaction in Australia were police performance, elements of procedural justice, and perceptions of police legitimacy. However, different from previous literature, police performance was the largest contributor to satisfaction. While this finding suggests that there may be differences in the public’s relationship with the police in other countries, it also reminds us that procedural justice and legitimacy are fairly universal concepts, at least in relation to the authority of law enforcement. However, the differences between Australia and the United States are small compared with other countries and government types. Research in this field has not been conducted in areas with more oppressive law enforcement types.
2.3 Outcomes of Legitimacy

If the police have the legal authority to enforce the law and demand compliance with their requests, do they really need to spend time being concerned with community perceptions of them? In reality, the ability of police to leave community members satisfied has a wide range of pro-social benefits. The most beneficial result is that the public will view the police as a legitimate authority (Tyler, 2003; Mazerolle, et al, 2012a; Dai, et al, 2011).

For the purposes of this paper, police legitimacy may be defined as the condition whereas an individual believes that legal authorities are entitled to be obeyed (Tyler, 2003). Rather than a fear of the repercussions for disobeying (Tyler, 1994), legitimacy takes a social bond perspective, arguing that community members who view the police as legitimate will be more likely to accept police’s directions and decisions (Gau and Brunson, 2010). Therefore, individuals who obey the law do not do so because of compulsory force, but rather because they accept the notion that there must be authority and that the police are a valid form of it. Conversely, individuals who do not view the police as legitimate will not accept them as a valid form of authority.

A potential consequence of a legitimate police force is the willingness of the population to “cooperate with the police in fighting crime” (Tyler and Fagan, 2008). If community members feel socially bonded with law enforcement, they will feel a mutual obligation to help control crime. However, measuring this has been somewhat problematic. Tyler and Fagan (2008) created a composite score for cooperation, though only three of six variables dealt with proactive combating of crime. The other three variables dealt with reactive behaviors or vague descriptions of volunteering.

The extant research suggests that it is difficult to identify a linear path between satisfaction and cooperation. Mazerolle, et al (2012), in their meta-analysis, found that cooperation was “only indirectly related [to satisfaction] through legitimacy”. Thus, there is incomplete support for the
idea that procedural justice can uniquely affect cooperation. While cooperation, in the sense of the community being bonded with the police, does not appear to be a direct consequence of procedural justice, other research suggests community-member compliance with police directives is perhaps a more direct outcome.

Because coercive tactics are not universally effective at gaining compliance, McCluskey (2003) argues that procedural fairness may assist in compliance where coerciveness fails. In addition to this, procedural tactics may alleviate the need for coerciveness altogether. These findings are important in that, as seen with Tyler (2003), there is a social agreement on legitimate police actions. McCluskey uses the example of asking for identification, finding that most (approximately 93%) complied with this request, determining it to be a legitimate request. Similarly, actions which are judged to be procedurally fair tend to increase legitimacy, and therefore should also increase the number of requests that are perceived as legitimate. However, as with cooperation, a linear relationship has not been established and effects are only present when moderated by legitimacy.

The research on procedural justice have revealed what influences community member satisfaction and what the consequences of satisfaction are. However, the research on procedural justice has not adequately addressed the unique influence of humor. The available literature has either largely ignored humor or has integrated it within other factors. Rarely, if at all, has humor been studied as the prime construct in the procedural justice realm. There are positive and negative aspects to humor which should be studied in the context of criminal justice. The function of humor is where this research now turns.
III. HUMOR

The current research seeks to connect the elements of procedural justice with humor communication. Looking at the literature on humor will help to make this connection. Interactions containing levity have long been studied to determine individual as well as social effects. The application of such findings to the interactions between police and the community is the missing link. This section provides an overview of key humor research to observe how levity and jocular behavior may be applied to the criminal justice field. Naturally, this must begin by defining humor before applying it to various interaction settings.

3.1 Definitions

The question of why people use humor and why people laugh are two completely separate questions. In essence, the second question (why people laugh) is somewhat straightforward – people laugh because they find a statement to contain the criteria for making something humorous. A calculation within themselves is performed to determine if what they are perceiving is “funny”. Quantitatively, Chapman and Foot (1976) put it best: “Humor = Salience (State + Trait) x Incongruity + Resolution”. The present research does not determine whether a person laughed or felt something was humorous. Instead, this research only has the ability to measure the purposeful display of humor – a terminology which infers an active attempt at humor rather than humor occurring without effort. Thus, for the purposes of this research, we may define a sense of humor as an overt display of humor by a police officer as perceived by the member of the community with whom the officer is interacting. All other definitions of humor, though perhaps appropriate in other research settings, would not apply here.
3.2 **Humor Theory**

There are two general directions that humor theory research normally takes – individual level humor and societal level humor (Lynch, 2002). Individual level theories of humor focus on the reasons a person uses humor, while societal level humor looks at the social benefits of humor. For the first section, the individual level theories of humor are detailed. The second section explores how the individual theories relate to societal level theories of humor.

3.2.1 **Individual Theories**

Humor research has traditionally broken down individual level humor into three categories: Superiority, Relief/Coping, and Incongruity (Lynch, 2002; Chapman and Foot, 1976; Graham, et al, 1992; Wilkins and Eisenbraun, 2009). After a review of the literature to date, there does not appear to be a comprehensive theory of individual level humor. These three general theories must be examined separately to see how well they can explain an individual's use of wit and where they are lacking.

Superiority humor is that which “elevates a person above the target of [the] humor” (Graham, et al, 1992). According to this model, humor is a way for an individual to create the sense, either in themselves or in the target, that there is a distinction wherein one person is greater and the other is lesser. This may often be accomplished by negative humor rather than positive. For example, Fleet (1890) cites a religious example wherein Elijah informs the prophets of Baal that, when their God was not responding to their invocations, they should “cry louder, for perhaps the god slept or was taking a walk”. In this example, clearly Elijah was using humor to establish that his God was true and that they were worshiping a false deity, thus confirming his religion’s superiority over theirs.
Superiority humor essentially comes from the idea that when there are challenges to our ideas and positions, we may conquer those opponents by belittling them. As Burma (1946) states:

“In any conflict, it is most gratifying to cause one’s adversary to appear ludicrous in his own eyes. Where this is not possible, very considerable satisfaction can be secured by making your opponent appear ludicrous in your eyes”

In Burma’s view, satisfaction appears to be the desired outcome of superiority humor. We see this theme consistently through all humor theories. However, for the immediate time, superiority theory shows that if we cannot conquer a challenge to our position through other means, we may at least succeed in the practice of ridiculing it. By reducing the power of our problems, we are able to assert some degree of superiority over them. Our satisfaction is increased by defeating challenges to our positions through humor.

A second theory for explaining humor is Relief/Coping. This theory states that individuals use humor in an attempt to “ease the tension in uncomfortable situations…and express hostility in a socially acceptable manner” (Overholser, 1992). Relief theory essentially states that when confronted with a threat, we use humor in an effort to relieve the pressure we feel from that threat (Freud, 1905). One can see how this differs from superiority theories in that superiority attempts to conquer the threat, while relief theories conceive of humor as a mechanism for coping with the threat. Thus, the individual may not be able to defeat the threat; however its power is reduced to a level that we can then deal with it.

A good example of relief and coping humor would be gallows humor. This type of humor is often morbid but is required in the most stressful of situations – death. Gallows humor is essentially making fun of death, an inevitable, inescapable, and wholly indiscriminate aspect of life. However, when we are able to laugh at death, to make fun of its dominance over us, we are able to relieve some of the gravity with which it bears over us (Thorson and Powell, 1993). While
this is obviously an extreme form of coping, gallows humor nonetheless shows how humor can be used to cope in the face of tense situations.

Relief/coping theories of humor explain how individuals attempt to regain satisfaction through humor. Fear and stress reduce how satisfied we are in our lives – in order to regain that satisfaction, we must negate the cause of the stress. Therefore, with humor, we are able to reclaim what was taken from us and return to a psychologically stable position. This can be seen with college students and the often multiple responsibilities they have to balance. Booth-Butterfield, et al (2007) examined students who worked while in college and found that individuals who were able to cope with humor had a higher level of job satisfaction. While there was not a direct relationship between humor and satisfaction, humor’s effect on satisfaction was mediated by coping.

The final individual theory of humor looks at the joy we get from identifying incongruity within a situation. The use of incongruity humor is based on our “desire for consistency within internal frames and external environment” (Lynch, 2002). While incongruity may also explain why we laugh at something, the focus here is on why someone would create a joke with incongruous subject matter. Incongruous humor points out what is inconsistent with a situation in an attempt to bring it to light so that it may be corrected. Incongruity humor therefore has a remedial function in that, even without suggesting how an incongruous situation may be fixed, it highlights the problem so that others may see it.

Incongruity humor is essentially the Schrodinger’s Cat of the humor world – things are and they are not at the same time. Martin (2010) raises this contention by retelling a joke in which a bank robber is found not guilty at trial and proceeds to ask the question “Can I keep the money?” Martin speaks of the two incompatible thoughts that come from this joke – that the robber is both guilty and not guilty at the same time. The question that comes from incongruity is why we would
point out the inconsistencies found in our world. The answer may come back to the first two theories already discussed. We may be attempting to establish our superiority by being one who can recognize the inconsistent elements. By having an inside understanding that two things are incongruous, we may tell the joke to measure ourselves against others: “Are other people as smart as me that they also get the joke?” On the other hand, to point out inconsistencies might be a coping mechanism, since the inconsistency may be seen as a challenge to our understanding of the world. The ability to put something in a humorous light will therefore negate the challenge. The inconsistencies may not be solved, but their power will be reduced.

One point of interest with incongruity theory is that it is a constant in all humor. Refer back to the equation set out in Chapman and Foot (1976) and see that all humors’ effectiveness is partially moderated by levels of incongruity. There would be nothing humorous about the statement “Two men walk into a saloon and the third one ducks”. Instead we use the phrase “Two men walk into a bar and the third one ducks”. This now becomes humorous since the incongruity of the word “bar” having the potential to mean a place to drink as well as a metal pipe creates an inconsistency in our mind that we are able to laugh at when we realize the dual meaning. All humor therefore requires an element of incongruity if it is to be deemed effective.

The satisfaction gained from incongruity humor can be looked from a cognitive perspective. Rothbart (in Chapman and Foot, 1976) argues that solving the incongruity results in laughter, while not being able to solve the incongruity does not. This can be explained more simply as those who “get the joke” will laugh while those who do not “get the joke” will not laugh – the incongruity remains unsolved for them. For example, the joke “How many surrealists does it take to screw in a light bulb? Banana!” is not funny for individuals who are unfamiliar with surrealism’s penchant for non sequitur. They do not get the joke. However, a person with some understanding of surrealism will be able to decipher the incongruity of the set up and punchline,
thereby solving the inconsistency resulting in laughter. The satisfaction is found in the completion of the cognitive exercise.

3.2.2 Social Theories

In addition to individual theories of humor, there has been considerable research into how humor is used in a social setting. Research reporting on social bonding/distinction (Pogrebin and Poole, 1988), social persuasion (Markiewicz, 1974; Hobbs, 2007), and safety-valve (Rhodes, 2001) aspects of humor have expanded individual theories to observe how they affect not only the participants of the humor, but society as a whole. While these three social theories are not comprehensive, they are social theories which should have the most relevance to our discussion of police and humor in later sections of this paper.

The ability of humor to bond individuals together is found through a shared, positive experience (Pogrebin and Poole, 1988). This is accomplished by creating solidarity within two or more individuals through the reduction of social distance between them (Roth and Vivona, 2010). For instance, college students may recognize the distinction between themselves and the professor, placing the professor on a pedestal of sorts. Should the professor begin the first class of the semester with a joke, indicating that they are a regular person, the distance between student and professor is reduced, perhaps making the professor appear more accessible and helpful.

Bonding may be achieved through all three theories of individual level humor. With the superiority theory, the joke teller may be establishing group superiority over another group. Weaver (2010) ponders whether racial/ethnic humor is one way of distinguishing one group from “the others”. The “others” are in a lower class than the joke teller (and his/her group), but the question becomes how do we know which group we fall into? This is where humor assists – anybody who might identify with the butt of the joke falls into the out-group, while if you are still
standing, you are part of the in-group. Humor then acts as a way to clearing up ambiguity as to who is in and who is out.

Bonding is also achieved with coping theories of humor. Coping requires “continuous appraisals and reappraisals of the shifting person-environment relationship” (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Often help is required to be able to identify what must be reappraised and psychologists often fill this role. However the patient must be able to trust the therapist in order to trust their opinions. Gelkopf (2009) identifies humor as one way of doing this, stating that humor may “deepen the therapeutic alliance” and “improve the patient’s trust in the therapist and therapeutic process”. By simply laughing with the patient, the therapist can reduce the distance between the two resulting in potentially faster healing time.

Incongruity may also result in bonding experiences. As with the evaluation of the individual level reasons for incongruous humor, on the social level, incongruity may be used in humor either as a superiority bonding experience or a coping bonding experience. As stated before, humor may be used as a way of establishing the “others” in order to determine superiority. By identifying incongruity within an outside group, the joke teller is effectively pointing out that group’s flaws, thereby implying that those flaws do not permeate the inside group. With regards to coping humor, incongruity allows a person to identify the absurdity of their beliefs, thus allowing them to “reappraise” them. If the occurrence which we are coping with cannot be seen as something which needs to be bypassed, then we have no need to cope with them. Incongruity humor thus helps bond individuals by facilitating the process between two individuals of exploiting the inconsistency between healthy and unhealthy thought processes.

A second social theory of humor is that of persuasion (Hobbs, 2007; Holmes and Marra, 2006; Markiewicz, 1974; O’Quinn and Aronoff, 1981). This social theory of humor is built on the stipulation that individuals who use humor have leadership characteristics within them. What
logically follows is that those who exhibit leadership characteristics are the same people that can persuade people to have trust in the direction they are leading (Hughes, 2008). Holmes and Marra (2006) study this from an organizational standpoint and find that humor is one way to get subordinates to “accept decisions with which they may not fully concur”. This does not mean that managers should be continually using jokes and treating the office as a place to goof off. Instead, a well-placed joke within the context of office work has the ability to persuade employees to work more efficiently for a manager they are fond of and trust.

This has been studied in the legal context with attorneys and how the jury views humorous statements coming from legal counsel. Hobbs (2007) contends that humor’s persuasive power comes from an “enhanced rapport by creating a shared negative judgment of the object of the speaker’s contempt”. Malphurs (2011) examined humor use by attorneys in Supreme Court hearings, arguing that while humor provided a way to ease the tenseness of a historically serious institution, the affect humor had on the outcome of cases was impossible to determine. Perhaps humor has a larger persuasive effect on socially inferior recipients as opposed to those who are socially superior. For instance, Pogrebin and Poole (1988) found that most forms of humor were not effective nor appreciated when communicated from a subordinate to a superior.

Related to individual level theories of humor, persuasion is an obvious byproduct of superiority. Individuals who use humor in order to establish their superiority are attempting to display that they possess leadership skills and thus their directives should be followed. This may only apply though if the humor is appreciated. Any attempt at humor that is not appreciated may go to contradict the intentions of the joke teller to establish their superiority. A failed joke may be viewed as annoying; definitely not a trait of superior individual.

With regards to coping humor, persuasion may also be a byproduct. Since coping humor can “express hostility in a socially acceptable manner” (Overholser, 1992), the recipient of the
hostility may be more likely to accept the criticism and resolve to change their behavior based on the humorous exchange. For example, if a superior was to belittle a subordinate, the subordinate may react with defiance – the subordinate may even do their job with less efficiency. However, a well veiled criticism of the employee (in essence the manager coping with an inept worker) may allow the employee to hear the critical undertone, not be offended because of the humorous overtone, and improve their performance based on the delivery of the message.

As with the discussion of bonding, incongruity humor results in persuasion through both superiority and coping. With superiority, the ability to make other groups look absurd (Burma, 1946) may persuade members of society that the in-group is correct and therefore should be followed. This is very similar to the connection between bonding and incongruity; however this is not surprising since when people are bonded, they are more likely to have an influential and persuasive relationship with each other. The same can be said for coping humor using incongruity. By noting the incongruity in a person’s thought process a therapist can bond with their patient, thus persuading them to take a different course of action.

A final social theory of humor is very similar to the individual level theory of coping humor. However, instead of an individual using humor to cope with specific occurrences in their life, this social theory deals with humor as a way of releasing societal stress. This theory has been referred to as a safety-valve view of humor (Freud, 1905; Rhodes, 2001; Lynch, 2002). Mechanically, a safety valve releases pressure when it becomes too high. In reference to humor, safety valve theory argues that humor allows for a release of tension in people. Rhodes (2001) gave the example of Carnival, wherein commoners were allowed to mock those in authority as a way of relieving the tension of being under their rule. This way, the commoners were less likely to revolt and the status quo was maintained.
The modern day form of this is generally considered to be television (Rhodes, 2001). Television allows for an airing of social grievances which we may then share a societal laugh at, thus deferring societal aggression. The Simpsons is a prime example of this notion, as the show paints a stereotypically comprehensive picture of society – neighborly interaction, corrupt government, inept police, dysfunctional nuclear families (as well as non-traditional families), occupational hazards, etc. By being able to laugh at nosy neighbors such as Flanders, this model implies that we are able to resist violence against our real life nosy neighbors. Saturday Night Live also fills this role. By being a variety sketch show, SNL is able to pick and choose aspects of society to satirize. In this same vein are The Daily Show and The Colbert Report. These two are unique in their ability to provide news while mocking it at the same time. Society is less likely to be outraged by a corrupt government if the same people who are telling us about the corruption are also disparaging it through mockery.

Safety-valve theory appears to deal more with societal coping than societal superiority; however there are some tentative connections. The use of safety-valve humor may create a sense of subjective superiority. While those who are in power will always have an objective dominance, by being able to mock them, commoners are able to insinuate they perhaps are more intelligent and would do a better job should they obtain power. This sense of superiority is brief in length though, lasting only as long as the sense of joy. After the laughter is over, the realization of subjection returns; the commoner is back to being under the rule of those in power. However, the brief moment of subjective superiority is enough to keep the commoner under social control.

Coping is more appropriately related to safety-valve humor as it is essentially a social coping mechanism. Returning to Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) definition that coping requires appraisal and reappraisal of a situation, safety-valve humor facilitates this by appraising those in power and finding fault. After the humorous relief, society is able to then reappraise the powerful, leading to a suppression of revolutionary desires. Therefore, the faults of those in power are
reappraised as “no big deal” since we have been able to laugh at them. The satisfaction of the commoners being controlled is regained then through the social airing of grievances.

As with all other theories we have covered, incongruity humor is a vehicle for obtaining the theoretical outcome of safety-valve humor. By identifying the disparity between how those in power should act and the manner in which they do act, the ability of commoners to laugh at those in power is made possible. This results in a sense of superiority in the commoner – if they can see that something doesn't make sense, their outlook is obviously superior. Incongruity also facilitates coping by allowing the commoners to reappraise a situation as incongruent.

3.3 Types of Humor

With an understanding of all the different individual and social theories of humor, our focus now shifts to the different types of humor. These different types may be used to accomplish any of the above theorized goals of humor; however their success may be mediated by the situation and relationship involved. For example, let's take two different instances of humor use: two long-term friends and two strangers. The two long-term friends may be able to insult each other and through their friendship, the insult may solidify their already strong bond. However, with the two strangers, an insult may offend one of the participants and a negative relationship will result. This will be discussed in more depth as we look at all the different types of humor. This example provides a framework for assessing different forms of humor.

There are two general overarching categories of humor: positive humor and negative humor (Kirsch and Kuiper, 2003). This does not necessarily refer to the tone of the humor. As in the example above, a sarcastic or derogatory joke does not necessarily mean that the humor is negative. Instead, negative humor is that which creates a negative relationship. This may include sarcasm and derogation; however it cannot be defined by it. Positive humor, on the other hand,
is humor which creates a positive relationship between the joke teller and the joke listener. Even with the special cases where negative humor has positive effects (and vice versa), individuals consistently using negative humor will, on the whole, have negative relationships. While we may have sarcastic and derogatory humorous interactions with close friends, should those types of interactions permeate the majority of our relationships, there will most likely be overall negative effects.

Efforts to identify characteristics of positive and negative humor have proven fruitful. Kirsch and Kuiper (2003) performed a factor analysis on characteristics of humor and found fairly reliable constructs with acceptable discriminate validity. For their positive humor characteristics, statements such as “I display a quick wit and a ready repartee”, “I maintain group morale through humor”, and “I use good-natured jests to put others at ease” hang together in a single factor. For negative humor, statements such as “I am sarcastic” and “I needle others, intending it to be just kidding” produced a separate factor. Perhaps the specific verbiage can explain the difference in factor loadings. For instance, “good-natured jests” is similar to but connotatively different from “I needle others”. These small distinctions can help determine whether humor will be taken graciously or offensively (Johnson, 1990).

The differences between positive and negative humor were also empirically studied by Cann, et al (2011) who found that the recipient of the humor was a large determinate in whether the humor would be judged as positive and negative. Cann, et al found that receivers of humor “do not readily consider aggressive humor to be indicative of a humorous orientation”. The recipient of humor therefore makes a distinction between positive and negative humor and assesses the humorous intent of the actor based on that distinction. This dichotomous criterion for the judgment of humor is understood in elementary terms by nearly all people – just because you think something’s funny doesn’t mean I do too.
We may recognize the overarching categories of positive and negative humor by studying more specific styles of humor. The literature generally recognizes four specific types of humor: Affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating (Cann, et al, 2011; Veselka, et al, 2010; Kuiper and Leite, 2010; Vernon, et al 2008). Affiliative humor (that which shines a positive light on others) and self-enhancing humor (that which shines a positive light on the joke teller) are generally looked at as being positive humor. Aggressive humor (that which is demeaning to others) and self-defeating humor (that which is demeaning to the joke teller) are generally looked at as being negative humor. These four styles result from the invaluable work of Martin, et al (2003) in developing the Humor Styles Questionnaire. This questionnaire looks at different styles of using humor and through principle components analysis and confirmatory factor analysis, the authors were able to determine these four scales which have since been validated in other studies.

The four types of humor styles fit into the overall theories of humor that we have already discussed. As stated before, the theories do not discriminate between positive and negative humor, or between the above individual styles. Coping humor may incorporate self-enhancement humor as well as self-defeating humor. The same may be said about superiority humor – it may incorporate affiliative as well as aggressive humor. The social theories may contain any of these humor styles as well. Essentially, there are many theoretical goals of humor and many evidence-based paths to reach them.

Theoretical challenges to the dual explanations of humor still remain though. While some have argued that most humor is good-natured and negative humor is an anomaly, others maintain that there is some element of aggression in all humor, though it may be miniscule (Martin, 2010). For example, any self-enhancing humor that someone uses inherently implies that “I am better than the rest.” Similarly, any affiliative humor used inherently implies that someone else is better than the rest. In either case, the humor which we consider as positive has an aggressive tone.
towards “the rest”. This is a contested issue, though, and has been described as “stretched thin” for examples that many people would consider purely innocent and positive humor (Martin, 2010).

3.4 Humor and Procedural Justice

With an understanding of both procedural justice and humor, we are able to analyze how one influences the other. The effectiveness of humor in garnering legitimacy may be tied in with the theory of expectancy disconfirmation. Simply stated, this theory suggests that a person’s perceptions on the quality of an interaction are based on the congruity of how they expected the interaction to happen (Reisig and Chandek, 2001). Therefore, if an individual believes an encounter will be negative and it is positive instead, they will be more satisfied than individuals whose expectations were met. Conversely, if a person believes an encounter will be positive and it is negative, they will be less satisfied than a person whose expectations were met.

Literature on procedural justice has shown this to have merit. Rosenbaum, et al (2005) found that for police-initiated experiences (e.g. traffic stops), negative encounters did not change community members’ perceptions of the police. Since the community members expected this to be a negative interaction, the actual interaction merely confirmed their beliefs. However, in contacts initiated by the community member (e.g. crime reports), a negative interaction did have an effect on how community members viewed the police since they expect these type of interactions to be more positive.

Expectancy disconfirmation may be broken down into three different categories: positive disconfirmation, zero disconfirmation, and negative disconfirmation (Chandek and Porter, 1998; Reisig and Chandek, 2001). When a community member expects the interaction with police to be positive and their expectations are not met, they will experience negative disconfirmation. However, in the case of traffic stops where the community member expects a negative interaction,
if they are treated in a procedurally just manner, leading to a positive interaction, they will experience positive disconfirmation, ultimately resulting in higher satisfaction. Rosenbaum, et al (2005) reported findings which would indicate that humor would only affect levels of satisfaction when community members are expecting negative encounters. However, other research has shown that expectancy disconfirmation will have similar effects on the community member’s level of satisfaction for both positive and negative encounter types (Reisig and Chandek, 2001).

Even in the tensest of situations, the ability of the police to surprise a community member by acting outside of their expectations can have very positive effects. With regards to humor, Coates (1972) provided anecdotal evidence of expectancy disconfirmation (though not labeled as such) when describing police officers encountering protestors in cases of civil unrest. Citing one specific story, an officer informed the protestors that should they not “move on”, they should be “prepared to get your bathrobes and towels ready. We are going to have to stage some unusual aquatics”. Many protestors left and a large confrontation was avoided. The unexpected behavior of the part of the police in the anecdotes of Coates relieved tension in the crowds and led to less confrontation, thus reducing animosity.

Therefore, the incongruity of an officer using humor is most effective when, in community members’ perceptions of the police, they are not a joking group of actors. This actually may cause the humor to result in greater joy within the community member and potentially increased their perceptions of other procedural justice elements. Incongruity theories of humor state that we find things funny when we recognize that they are “inconsistent with the expected rational nature of the perceived environment” (Lynch, 2002). With regards to police officers, the public may expect an officer to be very serious, very professional. A humorous demeanor may be so incongruous with their expectations that positive disconfirmation occurs, resulting in shared mirth and a positive evaluation of the interaction, despite the community member’s initial misgivings. This also may
have tertiary effects too, as the community member may be likely to relay the occurrences to a friend or family member, thus allowing that person to reevaluate their perceptions of the police.

The flip side to this is the possibility that police may use negative humor, and thus cause a large amount of anger resulting from negative disconfirmation. Taking the stereotype that police are supposed to be serious and professional, an attempt at humor that fails may cause the community member to believe that the officer does not take the situation seriously and is not professional in carrying out his/her duties. This will most likely create a negative effect on the community member’s evaluation of other procedural justice elements and their overall satisfaction with the encounter. The situation may still be humorous when the community member re-tells the story, but only with the officer being put-down for being unprofessional, rather than the officer being held-up as with a successful attempt with humor.

Humor also has the potential for increasing overall satisfaction with interactions through shared experience. Given the importance of friendliness factors (Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch, 2001) and given the cohesive nature of humor, interactions containing levity may cause the community member to believe they were able to contribute to the interaction through a shared laugh. This is related to the construct of voice discussed by Hillier (1998) since it contains elements of inclusiveness and equality. However, this should only apply for interactions wherein the community member is allowed to participate in the humorous exchange. One-sided humor displays, where the officer is only allowed to joke, may have a negative effect whereby the community member would feel even more dominated when not allowed to contribute to the humorous exchange.

Humor can be related to social cohesion when the humor is directed to outside parties (Kirsch and Kuiper, 2003). This is related to the cohesive effect that humor has; generally speaking, those who share in a joke reduce the social distance between themselves and others
or further solidify their existing relationship (Graham, 1992). By the building of rapport, the sense of commitment each party has to the other is increased (Gremler and Gwinner, 2008). For example, in a retail setting which contains typically single interaction relationships, Gremler and Gwinner (2008) found that humor, as part of a larger construct of connecting behavior, was the most frequently mentioned tactic utilized by retail employees. They found that while these behaviors did not lengthen the time of the interaction, they helped the employees “put the customer at ease”, thus leading to higher satisfaction in the interaction.

This satisfaction with a humorous exchange has also been widely studied in medical interactions (Francis, et al, 1999; Sala, et al, 2002; Chapman and Foot, 1996), consistently finding that mirth between doctors (or nurses) and patients leads to higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of apprehension. As with police, the power inequities within the relationship of patient and doctor may be viewed as overbearing to those with less power. Doctors who used humor did so in an attempt to reduce the power differences (Francis, et al, 1999). The effect on satisfaction, however, is strongest when both parties laugh at the humor. For example, Sala, et al (2002) found that in low satisfaction visits containing humor, only the doctor laughed at the humor, while in high satisfaction visits, there is more likely to be laughter from both parties. This has implications for the appropriateness of humor during police/community interactions. The officer must be sensitive when employing humor or risk further damaging the relationship with the community member.

For aggressive situations, humor has a dual function of either escalating or neutralizing conflict. Norrick and Spitz (2006) found that, among other functions, humor has the potential for defusing aggression, “especially when they [the humor user] enjoy higher status (have more power) in the interaction”. Obviously this would apply to law enforcement since during police-community encounters, they occupy that higher status. However, attention to the type of humor used is required, as down-putting humor or sarcastic humor may escalate the situation. For
example, a person suffering a mental crisis might not appreciate a sarcastic attitude from an officer and the situation may escalate as a result of this. Instead, self-deprecating humor may better help in alleviating the aggressive setting since, as the one with power, the officer may essentially level the playing field by insinuating that his power is limited.

Without attention to the sensitive nature of humor use, officers may come off as acting in a procedurally unjust fashion, potentially creating a physically dangerous situations for themselves. Berkowitz (1970) found hostile humor, when identified by the receiver of the joke, enhanced the aggressive disposition of the receiver. Meyer (2000) saw the dividing function of humor as potentially aggressive as well. Not only may divisive humor reduce the community member’s perceptions of procedural justice, it may lead to more coercive actions by a police officer (i.e. arrest) by causing a more aggressive response by the community member. This may lead to far lower perceived levels of procedural and distributive fairness since through the use of negative humor, the community member may develop a sense of “he started it”.

In light of our understanding that negative humor may lead to reduced perceptions of procedural justice elements and reduced satisfaction, officers must display a certain level of emotional intelligence to know when humor will lead to increased or decreased perceptions of procedural justice elements and ultimately their satisfaction with the interaction. Yip and Martin (2006) examined how humor relates to emotional intelligence and found that individuals who incorporated negative humor may be less empathetic and can escalate volatile situations rather than diminish the tension associated with them. Interestingly, positive humor traits were found to be unrelated to the ability to empathize or manage conflicts, suggesting that these abilities may be “related more to a lack of negative styles of humor than to the presence of positive styles”. Still, those with positive styles of humor are better at conversing with strangers and “initiating friendships”. Coupled with the natural occupational task of police in engaging in conversation
with relative strangers, this ability could go a long way in putting the community member at ease in a shorter period of time.

While the above literature speaks to how humor can increase a community member’s satisfaction with an interaction between him/herself and a police officer, we have yet to address how humor can increase perceptions of *legitimacy*. If we are to define legitimacy as the community members’ perceived “obligation to obey the law and to defer to the decisions made by legal authorities” (Tyler and Fagan, 2008), we must determine how this can be accomplished through humor. Perhaps the second part of this definition is where humor is most likely to have an effect, i.e., the ability of humor to persuade people to defer to, and respect, the officer’s decisions. The ability of humor to insinuate and solidify leadership abilities has been widely studied (Holmes and Marra, 2006; O’Quin and Aronoff, 1981; Rizzo, et al, 2009; Markiewicz, 1974). The function of humor to validate these leadership abilities therefore has great implications for the purposeful inclusion of humor in police legitimacy studies.

Humor has the capacity to influence individuals’ decisions and persuade them to take particular actions. This obviously has great utility in the day to day operations of law enforcement. O’Quin and Aronoff (1981) examined the presence of humor in laboratory financial negotiations and found when humor was coupled with an offer, greater concessions were made by the study participants. Dunbar, et al (2012) extends this concept by recognizing the cohesive nature of humor and suggests that positive feelings toward a communication partner may reduce the desire to be argumentative. This may relate to cooperation and compliance outcomes in the case of an officer giving instructions for community members to disperse from an area or settle down during domestic disturbance call. The use of humor stimulates a personal relationship rather than perpetuating the “us v. them” mentality which plagues many police/community interactions.
Should we also define legitimacy as the condition in which community members become partners in fighting crime or “coproducers” of public safety with the police (Rosenbaum et al., 1998; Tyler and Fagan, 2008), humor as a rapport building tool may help to alleviate the lack of proactive information sharing, also referred to as the “no-snitch culture,” which permeates urban neighborhoods. By creating bonds with the community through shared mirth, law enforcement may be able to gain the trust of the community members that their actions and motives are legitimate and therefore should be supported (Tyler, 2003). This concept of trust is extremely important and will be covered in more depth later.

Humor may also help individuals to identify with a law enforcement agent, thus deferring to the legitimacy of the officer. Lynch (2002), though studying humor in an organizational setting, put forth a model of humor which shows a relationship between identification and control. Identification humor is that which allows someone to “identify with the organization…and to show they are production-oriented to the organization’s goals.” This then allows them to identify with the organizations “structures and culture”, thereby allowing that organization to exert control. If the purpose of procedural justice is to get the community member to view law enforcement as a legitimate entity in our culture, humor may facilitate this by helping them identify with that entity.

The ability of humor to socially bond may have the same effect on police officers as it does on community members. Mastrofski (1981) commented on how officers categorize individuals. While such ability may allow officers to make quick judgments on how they approach a situation, these labels and categorizations also seek to separate the community members from the officer socially. Since humor can create social bonds between interaction participants, it may help to reduce the power of the stereotypes by allowing the officer to find common ground with the community member. Again though, social bonds would only be formed if the community member is allowed to also join in the mirth. The community member must be able to have a voice in formulating the perceptions about him or her.
3.5 The Dual Function of Trust in Humor and Police Interactions

The concept of trust is related to the use and appreciation of humor as well as how one views interactions with an authority figure. However, trust must be defined in order to view how it plays into the realm of police contact and humor. A cursory search for such a definition within the academic field reveals a plethora of possibilities, though each definition is molded to the focal point of the research. For our purposes though, trust may be defined as “the extent to which one party is willing to depend on somebody, or something, in a given situation with a feeling of relative security, even though negative consequences are possible” (McKnight and Chervany, 1996, found in Josang and Presti, 2004). This definition of trust, when used in the contexts of procedurally just police interactions, is applicable considering the need for the community to trust the officer during encounters, despite the very real possibility of “negative consequences”.

Of specific mention in this definition is the idea that the person depends on the other with “a feeling of relative security”. Indeed, when using humor and with police interactions, security is key as both of these activities require the revelation of private information. Police interactions are an “intrusion” into a person’s private life, albeit one that we accept if we view the police as a legitimate entity (Gau and Brunson, 2010). Thus we reveal characteristics about ourselves that we would not reveal to any other persons or organizations (identifying information, access to our homes, etc.). In a similar vein, humor also reveals private information not readily accessible through other forms of communication. Humor is a tool for coping (Freud, 1905) – however the mere use of it may broadcast that we are experiencing something which requires coping. Humor allows us to reveal undesirable traits in an acceptable fashion – the so-called “only joking” defense (Johnson, 1990; Crawford, 2000).

In his discussion of procedural justice, Tyler (2004) recognizes trust as a “key issue” in police-community interactions, one that is linked to society’s desire to view law enforcement as a
“benevolent and caring” entity. Should an individual believe that law enforcement is acting out of genuine concern (thus trusting their intentions are noble), they will view the interaction as being positive. Conversely, if that same individual believes the police are an arm of oppression, or generally lack good judgment when enforcing the law, then any interaction will be viewed with an eye of doubt, and satisfaction will be substantially lower. With a humorous interaction, the community member may judge the officer as “more caring”, thereby evaluating the interaction as more just, ultimately leading to satisfaction. Other research has found direct and indirect relationships of similar veins between trust and satisfaction with police (Tyler, 1989; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Tyler, 2003), though no research has definitively displayed unidirectional relationship. The relationship is most probably mutualistic, with trust effecting satisfaction and vice versa.

Therefore, both police contacts and humor use/appreciation require the presence of a minimal level of trust. However, the element of trust is not established in a single interaction. Trust is forged through consistent positive encounters – a luxury rarely afforded to police. Therefore, other characteristics of the encounter should inform the officer regarding the degree of trust that can be assumed.
IV. HYPOTHESES

The present research studies humor during police-community member interactions to explore both the antecedents and consequences of officers displaying a sense of humor\(^1\). As noted above, these research questions are embedded in, and bring together, the relatively independent literatures on procedural justice and humor. Specifically, this research explores: (1) the demographic, incident and community characteristics associated with displays of humor, (2) their relative importance of these factors when examined together, and (3) humor’s relationship with elements of procedural justice and the community member’s overall satisfaction with the interaction. Relevant research questions and hypotheses are addressed in this order.

Research Question 1: Do shared demographic characteristics of officers and community members create a sufficiently bonded structure to influence the likelihood of an officer displaying a sense of humor during an interaction?

- H1: Officers will be more likely to display a sense of humor during interactions involving community members of the same race/ethnicity as the officer than during interactions involving officers and community members from different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

- H2: Officers will be more likely to display a sense of humor during interactions involving community members of the same gender as the officer than during interactions involving officers and community members of different genders.

- H3: Officers will be more likely to display a sense of humor during interactions involving community members of the same age group as the officer than during interactions involving officers and community members of different age groups.

Past research has pointed to the notion of shared cultural and personal experiences as being a major factor in the presence of humor (Pogrebin and Poole, 1988; Ziv, 1984; Roth and Vivona, 2010). As humor is an indicator of trust and bonds between two individuals (Ziv, 1984), the assumption here is that a certain level of comfort must be present for a humorous interaction.

\(^{1}\) The variable used in this analysis is worded as “the officer displayed a sense of humor”. For purposes of brevity and simplicity, this variable is sometimes referred as officer displays of humor, humor use, or other variations. The reader should assume throughout the course of this research that all references to an officer’s humor is a perceptual rating by the community member.
to occur. Demographic characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, and age are visible indicators of similarity between two individuals, no matter how superficial. Thus, when the demographic characteristics of the officer and community member match, greater perceived similarity is assumed, thereby leading to a greater display of an officer’s sense of humor. While not a part of the hypotheses, this research also examines individual demographic characteristics to determine their potential influence on an officer displaying a sense of humor.

Research Question 2: Do incident characteristics influence the likelihood that officers will display a sense of humor during interactions?

- H4: Officers will be more likely to display a sense of humor when the encounter is initiated by the community members than when the encounter is initiated by the police officer

- H5: Officers will be more likely to display a sense of humor when the encounter is the result of property crime than when the encounter is the result of personal crime

In a situation where a community member calls the police, there is often less stress associated with it than with police-initiated contacts (the exception might be the reporting of domestic violence, sexual assault, or other violent victimization). During contacts initiated by the community member, where they are often a victim of crime, an officer may recognize the stress experienced by the community member and attempt to neutralize it by displaying a sense of humor. Conversely, in a police-initiated contact, where the community member is often suspected of wrongdoing, the stress is caused by the police and the officer may more likely take an authoritative role than a sympathetic role. The concept of situational appropriateness discussed earlier is therefore a main part of this hypothesis.

The same degree of appropriateness should also apply to whether a crime reported by a community member is classified as a property crime or a personal crime. When an individual experiences a property crime, the victim, on average, is less likely to experience as much physical or emotional distress as when he/she is victimized by a personal/violent crime. The assumption
is that a sense of humor would be interpreted as less professional under more stressful circumstances, and therefore, would adversely affect satisfaction with the officers. Officers should be aware that violent crime is a more impactful issue than property crime, and therefore will be less likely to display their sense of humor in these instances.

Research Question 3: Do community characteristics influence the likelihood that officers will display a sense of humor during interactions?

- H6: Officers will be more likely to display a sense of humor during interactions occurring in communities characterized by lower levels of concentrated disadvantage than during interactions occurring in communities defined by higher levels of concentrated disadvantage.

While there does not appear to be any research examining the proclivity of police to use humor as a result of community characteristics, the tone of interactions within high disadvantage communities contrasts with that displayed in low disadvantage areas (Terrill & Reisig, 2003). Compstat and Zero-tolerance policing are popular policing strategies in disadvantaged communities, and as such, police officers in these areas are more concerned with the suppression of crime via stop-and-frisk, citations and arrest strategies (since Compstat counts and rewards such behaviors) rather than positive interaction strategies (cf. President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Also, these same communities experience high levels of public violence, street-level disorder, drug abuse, mental illness, and homelessness, thus bringing the police into contact with persons on the street who can create communication challenges. Hence, given the extra stress on officers and the organizational pressures to reduce these problems and produce “numbers”, one would expect a more authoritarian tone with interactions in these areas as opposed to any level of lightheartedness that might involve positive humor.

Research Question 4: What is the relative importance of individual, incident, and community characteristics on the likelihood of an officer displaying a sense of humor?

- H7: The likelihood of an officer displaying a sense of humor will be most influenced by incident level characteristics relative to other characteristics.
The concept of appropriateness in humor can be used to support the hypothesis that the officer will be most likely to use incident-level cues to determine when to display a sense humor as opposed to all other characteristics. For instance, a white, male officer may encounter a situation wherein a white male community member has been the victim of an armed robbery. Although there are shared individual characteristics, the incident characteristics would likely supersede the individual similarities, and the officer would recognize that it is inappropriate to display humor because of the seriousness of the incident, regardless of any perceived similarity. Conversely, a white, male officer would be more likely to display their sense of humor with a minority female if the incident characteristics were such that humor would be appropriate.

Community characteristics might be expected to have the smallest effect due to the lack of personal and sympathetic contexts. Seeing as humor is an interpersonal exchange, shared demographic qualities and experiential factors will more likely affect whether humor is displayed than the overall community characteristics. Conversely, the argument could be made that collective, social, and cultural influences of the community may have a greater effect on an officer’s display of humor than the demographic or incident characteristics. Therefore, while H7 predicts what will be the strongest predictor of humor, the weakest predictor is unknown.

Research Question 5: What is the relationship between a displayed sense of humor and perceptions of procedural justice within the encounter and how does this relate to the community member’s level of satisfaction with the encounter?

- H8: An officer displaying a sense of humor within an encounter will increase perceptions of procedural justice elements within the encounter.

- H9: Increased perceptions of procedural justice elements will increase the community member’s level of satisfaction with the encounter.

- H10: Procedural justice will mediate the effects of humor on the community member’s level of satisfaction with the encounter.

- H11: The presence of humor within an encounter will have a positive effect on satisfaction after controlling for procedural justice elements.
The presence of humor within an interaction has most commonly been included as a part of other elements of procedural justice, though humor’s direct effect on procedural justice has been overlooked. As humor holds the power to directly alter the tone of an interaction (Norrick and Spitz, 2008), it may also alter the perception of the other interaction participant, thereby increasing the perception of procedural justice elements. Humor may increase perceptions of an officer’s empathy, trustworthiness, respectfulness, and competence. A positive reception of an officer’s humor may create positive feelings within the community member, thus increasing the perception of these procedural justice elements. Since the majority of procedural justice research has focused on satisfaction being a prime outcome value, increases in procedural justice fueled by displaying a sense of humor would be expected to ultimately result in higher levels of satisfaction with the police/community member interaction.
V. METHODS

5.1 Data Source

This dissertation utilizes data collected as part of the National Police Research Platform's (NPRP) Police-Community Interaction (PCI) Survey (See Rosenbaum et al., in press). I assisted in the development of the PCI survey, as well as data collection, data management and technical reports. Participating communities were recruited as part of a national random sample of police agencies to examine organizational and community level characteristics and sentiments. While 100 agencies participated in some aspect of the Platform, a total of 51 participated in the PCI survey of their interactions with the police.²

Recruitment of participants was achieved through letters distributed by participating agencies (see Appendix A). Information about community members who had police contact from traffic stops, traffic accidents, and crime incidents was compiled by each participating agency for recruitment. In most cases, no more than 2 weeks after the incident was recorded in the police records management system, community members were sent survey recruitment letters from each agency’s chief or sheriff. The community members were encouraged to participate in the survey, but were assured that the survey was not administered by the police department and that individual results would not be given to the agencies. The community member was provided a unique, 8 digit PIN to remove all identifying information from their responses and prevent multiple responses per incident. These PINs were generated using an agency code as the first 3 numbers, with the last 5 numbers being assigned sequentially based on when the interaction took place.

² Agencies that did not participate in the community survey did so for a variety of reasons, including cost, lack of records management, and concern about how the results might be interpreted. Although 58 agencies participated in PCIS, only 51 were used for this analysis. The other 7 were excluded because they were not a part of the random sample, though were allowed to participate due to their involvement with previous phases of the NPRP.
Agencies were instructed to remove any community member from the mailing list who was under the age of 18, or were involved in crime incidents that contained sensitive case characteristics (sexual assault, homicide, child abuse, etc.). Once the agency was successful at generating a list of relevant incidents with names, addresses, and demographic information, a mail merge was employed using a template provided by the NPRP.

At regular intervals, the police agencies would send their de-identified mailing database to the researchers describing the demographic and incident characteristics for cases where a recruitment letter had been mailed to the community member. The mailing database provided by the police agencies allowed the researchers to monitor the progress of each agency, calculate response rates, and determine the reliability of survey responses on questions pertaining to demographic and incident characteristics. The mailing database provided by the police agencies also allowed for the calculation of the rate of returned letters.

Upon receipt of the mailing database, this file was merged with the survey response database. These responses were collected through an online/telephone survey site (Plum). The use of Plum allows for respondents to complete the survey either online (web survey) or by telephone (interactive voice survey). The interactive voice survey allowed persons without access to the internet to participate in the study. Completed survey responses were stored on the Plum website and were available to download at any point. Upon downloading the survey responses, the merged datasets were saved on a password protected external hard drive and stored in a locked filing cabinet stored within a locked office with a unique key for that office. All procedures to protect the responses of community members as well as any identifying information regarding agencies were performed in strict accordance with IRB protocols.
5.2 **Missing Data**

After merging the survey datasets with the mailing datasets, the final dataset was checked for missing and incompatible data. While taking the survey, respondents were given the option of refusing to answer a question. Respondents were asked to provide their demographic information, similar to the information provided in the agency dataset. For respondent demographics, race/ethnicity was missing 7.5% of the time, age was missing 6.3% of the time, and gender was missing 5.5% of the time. In addition, variables directly related to the present research were sometimes missing as well. In terms of officer demographics (as reported by the community member), race/ethnicity was missing 5.6% of the time, age was missing 8.6% of the time, and gender was missing 0.7% of the time. For incident level responses concerning crime reports, type of crime was missing 20.9% of the time. The respondent could also refuse to provide answers to perceptual variables, such as whether humor was used and the level of satisfaction experienced during the interaction. In the survey dataset 14.4% did not answer the question regarding the presence of humor and 0.8% did not answer the question regarding their satisfaction with the encounter.

There were also rare cases wherein the community member reported information about the incident that conflicted with the mailing dataset. For instance, the mailing dataset provided by the police may have indicated that the incident was a traffic stop, yet on the survey, the respondent indicated their interaction related to a crime report. This occurred in 6.3% of cases. This may have occurred because the community member had multiple interactions with the police during a small window of time and took the survey thinking about another interaction that was not the reason for their receiving a letter. Demographic inconsistencies between the survey and mailing datasets also occurred, with an inconsistent reporting of race/ethnicity happening 10.2% of the time and gender 3.4% of the time. Differences for age between the two datasets were not able to be calculated due to fact that some agencies provided year of birth and others provided
age in years. Therefore, to calculate the accuracy of the police dataset, whether the individual’s birthday had past or not would need to be known. The rate of inconsistency is assumed to be generally similar to other variables.

In the occurrence that the mailing dataset from police records and the survey respondent dataset did not match on demographic or incident level reports, the decision was made that the community members’ response would ultimately supersede the mailing dataset. The rationale for this decision was that the study focuses on the community member’s perception of the encounter, and therefore, their reporting of the variables in question would be most appropriate to include. Thus, when the community member responded to a question, their response would take priority. For variables where the community member did not respond (community member demographics, incident characteristics), if the information was present in the police records, that information would be used. For instance, if a community member did not want to report their race/ethnicity, the race/ethnicity indicated in the police dataset would be substituted in the analysis.

5.3 Measures

The measures used in the dissertation are described here, based on a sample size of 11,138 total respondents across 51 jurisdictions (mean of 218.39 respondents per agency). These jurisdictions comprised a random sample of police agencies throughout the United States. A total of 244,317 mailings regarding officer stops and crime reports were sent out, resulting in a response rate of 4.6%. The final sample is sufficiently large to avoid any major statistical problems and provide adequate statistical power to detect real differences. Also, being a randomly selected sample of police jurisdictions in the United States, the sample provides greater generalizability than the typical single-city approach to survey research. Community member and officer demographics, as well as missing information for each, are provided in Table 1 and Table 2 below.
This section then describes incident characteristics, followed by a description of neighborhood characteristics. Finally, predictor and outcome variables are described.

5.3.1 Demographics

For the community member’s gender, respondents were asked “What is your gender?” (1=Male, 2=Female). As seen in Table I, the sample (N=10,987) was fairly evenly split with males representing a slight majority (52.8%). This is not surprising considering the disproportionate amount of police contacts experienced by males (Leiber, et al, 1998) contrasted with their generally lower response rate (Sax, et al, 2003).

For the community member’s race/ethnicity, respondents were asked “What race do you consider yourself to be?” Respondents were provided with 7 options (1=White, 2=Black or African American, 3= Hispanic or Latino/Latina, 4=Asian, 5=Native American, 6=Some other racial or ethnic group, 7=Mixed race). Due to the relatively low percentage of respondents who were Asian, Native American, some other racial or ethnic group, or of mixed race, racial/ethnic categories were collapsed into 4 groupings (White, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/Latina, and a more general “Other” category). By doing this, a small percentage of respondents were placed into the Other category (6.4%) and therefore 93.6% maintained their identified racial category. The sample (N=10,809) contained a strong majority of Caucasians; however there is substantial representation from minority groups and a relatively equal dispersion between the minority groups.

For the community member’s age, an open-ended response question asked respondents “Please enter your age”. Ages were then collapsed into three categories in order to create the matching variable with officer age (described below). These categories are “Under 30 years old”, “Thirty to forty years old”, and “Over 40 years old”. Over half the sample (N=10,953) were
community members over the age of 40, with community members under the age of 30 having a smaller proportion of responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N (percent)</th>
<th>Percent Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5882 (52.8%)</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5105 (45.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>8079 (74.4%)</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1372 (12.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>648 (5.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>709 (6.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>1716 (15.4%)</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 40</td>
<td>1814 (18.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40</td>
<td>7423 (66.6%)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For officer demographics, questions regarding the breakdown of characteristics mirrored those of the community member demographics (see Table II). However, in the agency mailing data, no officer demographics were included. Thus, when an officer demographic question was not answered by a community member, no data could be substituted for the missing values. In these incidents, the community member could not be included in the specific matching variable. For instance, if a community member indicated the officer’s gender and age, but did not answer the question regarding the officer’s race/ethnicity, they were excluded from the "Match on Race" variable, but not the other two.
Officer gender was determined by the question “Was the officer you interacted with most a male or female?” and was again coded as 1=Male, 2=Female in the survey. Officers in the sample (N=11,048) were overwhelmingly male, constituting 87.7% of the interactions. The percentage of male officers in the sample is very reflective of the 88.1% of sworn police officers nationwide (Department of Justice, 2013).

For officer race/ethnicity, community members were asked “To the best of your knowledge, what was this officer’s race or ethnicity?” and were given the same 7 options as with their own race/ethnicity (1=White, 2=Black or African American, 3= Hispanic or Latino/Latina, 4=Asian, 5=Native American, 6=Some other racial or ethnic group, 7=Mixed race). Since agencies were not required to indicate officer’s race/ethnicity in their mailing datasets, the accuracy of the community member’s subjective attribution of race/ethnicity was difficult to determine. However, the probability is that a majority of the community members would be able to determine race/ethnicity accurately. As with the community member demographics, there was a low percentage of respondents who indicated the officer was Asian, Native American, some other racial or ethnic group, or of mixed race/ethnicity, and therefore officer race/ethnicity were collapsed into the same 4 groupings (White, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/Latina, and a more general “Other” category). The sample (N=10,537) had a large percentage of White officers (79.6%) while officers placed in the “Other” category only made up 1.7% of the sample. The number of white officers in the sample is slightly higher than the national average of 75% (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012).

Finally, for officer age, respondents were asked “What was the age of the officer you interacted with the most?” and were given three options (1=Under 30 years old, 2= Thirty to forty years old, 3=Over 40 years old). In the sample (N=10,243), most officers were estimated to be between 30 and 40 years of age (55.4%) with the other two age categories being fairly evenly
split around 20%. National estimates of officer age broken down into the above categories could not be found, so the representativeness of these figures is unknown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE II – Officer Demographic Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Under 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 to 40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From these community member and officer demographics, the matching variables were created. For demographic matching, respondent demographics were compared with officer demographics in each individual encounter. When the demographics matched, a score of 1 was assigned to a calculated variable MatchedGender (or MatchedRace or MatchedAge). Interactions involving individuals who are not matched on a specific demographic were assigned a value of 0. Furthermore, an ordinal variable was created to measure the number of matching characteristics between the officer and community member. This way, we are able see whether more matches on demographic variables has a stronger association with a display of humor than a single match.
The results (N=11,016) indicate a good percentage of interactions had a match on one or more demographics. This occurred 87.4% of the time after removing the cases which had missing data for all three demographic categories. For gender, a match was found in 54.5% of the sample (N=10,966), with most of the matches coming from male community member/male officer matches. This is due to the high number of male officers in the sample. For matches on age groupings, a match was found in 25.2% of the sample (N=10,067), with matches more often coming from older officers/older community members. Finally, for race/ethnicity (N=10,334), 63.6% of the community members were racially matched with the officer, with a large percentage of these being Caucasian community members and Caucasian officers. Since the race/ethnicity variable had an “other category”, whether there was a matched race if both officer and community member were “other” was impossible to determine. Therefore, the percentage of 63.6 represents situations where the officer and citizen both were Caucasian, Black, or Hispanic.

When looking at multiple matches (N=10,135), only cases which had values for all three demographic categories were included. For instance, if race and gender were present for both officer and citizen, but age was missing for one of two, the case was excluded from the analysis. This only occurred in 9% of the cases. For the number of matched characteristics, 35.1% matched only on a single characteristic, while 35.2% matched on two characteristics. Only 9.3% of interactions had a match on all three characteristics, with 11.5% not having any matches at all. This resulted in a mean of 1.47 matched characteristics for the data set.

5.3.2 Incident Characteristics

For incident level characteristics (see Table III), respondents were asked “How did your face to face contact with a police officer occur?” Respondents were provided with 5 options (1=It was a traffic stop, 2=It was a traffic crash, 3=It was a crime report, 4=I was stopped while walking,
riding a bike, or waiting in a public area, 5=I called the police and an officer took my report over the telephone”). Option 5 was provided as some agencies informed us that some interactions with a police officer took place via telephone. For the purposes of this research though, only traffic stops and crime reports will be analyzed (Individuals who were stopped while walking, riding a bike, or waiting in a public area were merged together with traffic stops, as these types of interactions fell into the category of police-initiated interactions). Only these interaction types will be analyzed because they best represent citizen-initiated and police-initiated encounters. Traffic crashes carry element of both citizen and police initiation, and telephone reports are qualitatively different from face-to-face interactions. Thus, both are excluded from this analysis.

When looking at all of the survey respondents (N=11,138), 48.0% took the survey as the result of a traffic stop, 1.9% took the survey as the result of a street stop (walking, riding a bike, or waiting in a public area), and 50.1% took the survey as the result of a crime report. As this question about incident type was a prime focus of the Platform research, a response was required. Therefore, no missing data were associated with this question.

The police mailing dataset provided the various crime incidents which could have led to a community member to initiating a police interaction. These crime incidents were collapsed into two categories: Personal Crime and Property Crime. For these two options (N=3,765), there was a large majority of property crimes (71.6%) though this is hardly surprising considering the proportion of property to person crimes in the general population (U.S. Department of Justice, 2013). In addition to this, the police agencies were requested not to mail surveys to individuals who were victims of certain types of crime (sexual assault, domestic violence, etc.).
TABLE III – Incident Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident Initiated</th>
<th>N (percent)</th>
<th>Percent Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police Initiated</td>
<td>5558 (49.9%)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Member Initiated</td>
<td>5580 (50.1%)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Member Initiated – Property Crime</td>
<td>3406 (71.6%)</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Member Initiated – Personal Crime</td>
<td>359 (7.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.3 Community characteristics

The calculation of a community disadvantage scale for this study was derived from the original concept of disadvantage put forth by Sampson and Bartusch (1998). Items in their scale include measures of poverty, public assistance, unemployment, female-headed households with children, individuals under the age of 18, and the proportion of Blacks in the community. This scale has been validated in multiple studies, though at times different variations have been used. Most variations remove the proportion of Blacks in the community from the scale, due to its relative lower factor loading as well as the perception that percentage Black (and more generally minority percentage) comprises its own construct. Other researchers have adjusted the scale in different ways. Reisig and Parks (2000) used percent poor, percent labor force unemployed, percent female-headed families, and percent black; Brenner, et al (2013) used poverty, female single headed households, unemployment, and household education; Lei, et al, (2014) used per-capita income, unemployment, poverty, female-headed households, and public assistance. As can be
seen, researchers’ conception of disadvantage varies with their research interests and personal preference.

For this research, four of the six original items will be retained, with percent Black and percent under 18 being removed from the construct. Percent Black was removed in part because of the lower factor loading as shown in Table IV, though the primary reason is that race/ethnicity is treated as a separate construct in the analysis plan, specifically as a matching variable to assess how similarity of officer and community member characteristics affects an officer’s display of sense of humor. Percent under 18 was removed because it constituted its own factor when performing the Principal Component Analysis. Looking at the previous literature cited above, removing this variable from Concentrated Disadvantage does not appear to be a unique decision. Therefore, only poverty, public assistance, unemployment, and female-headed households with children are included in the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE IV – Principle Components Analysis: Concentrated Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Public Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Female Headed Household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Under 18 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factor scores were calculated from a Principal Components Analysis for each variable to determine their overall contributions to the scale, and each item was weighted in relation to their factor scores. After weighting, z-scores were calculated for each variable, which were then combined in order to create a mean concentrated disadvantage score. A concentrated disadvantage score was calculated for each agency and therefore no agency was excluded as the result of this variable.

5.3.4 Humor

To determine the presence of a humorous interaction, respondents (N=9,532) were asked how much they agreed with the statement that the officer “Displayed a sense of humor” (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly agree). As seen in Table V, the items displayed good variance, with 22.4% strongly disagreeing with the statement, 26.0% disagreeing, 28.0% agreeing, and 23.6% strongly agreeing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Displayed a Sense of Humor”</th>
<th>N (percent)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>2236 (23.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2652 (28.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2461 (26.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>2127 (22.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.5 Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the encounter was captured by asking respondents, “Taking the whole experience into account, how satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the officer in this case?” Respondents (N=11,051) were provided four options (1=Very dissatisfied, 2=Dissatisfied, 3=Satisfied, 4=Very satisfied).

As seen in Table VI, respondents on average were fairly satisfied with their encounter, with 54.4% indicating they were Very Satisfied, 19.9% indicating they were Satisfied, 10.2% indicating they were Dissatisfied, and 15.5% indicating they were Very Dissatisfied. The amount of responses for Very Satisfied caused some initial concern regarding variance and skewness, though descriptive statistics of the variable revealed acceptable variance and only moderate skewness (1.25 and -.930, respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“How satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the officer in this case”</th>
<th>N (percent)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“How satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the officer in this case”</td>
<td>11058</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
<td>6017 (54.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>2204 (19.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>1125 (10.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Dissatisfied</td>
<td>1711 (15.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.6 Procedural Justice

The NPRP’s PCI measured a host of procedural justice variables. To determine what scales were present in the data, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to validate the primary theory-based dimensions of procedural justice (Rosenbaum et al., in preparation). Four of these factors specifically relevant to the interaction characteristics are included in this dissertation and are reported in Table VII.

The first factor dealing with procedural justice is Trustworthy. Given the significant relationship between humor and trust (Ziv, 1984), this factor is crucial to the present research. The Trustworthy scales measures the degree to which the community member believes the officer could be trusted in their actions and motives. Specific items include During the encounter, the officer…“seemed trustworthy” and “Took the matter seriously”. Higher scores in the scale indicate higher perceptions of trustworthiness. The two items in the scale had a correlation coefficient of .919, with the overall scale having an alpha coefficient of .813.

The next factor is Empathy, which is a measurement of how well the officer listened, as well as showed concern and comforted the community member. This scale was included in the analysis due to the potential for humor to create solidarity during stressful times. This scale’s items were During the encounter, the officer “Listened to what I had to say”, “Seemed concerned about my feelings”, “Seemed to believe what I was saying” and “Comforted and reassured me”. Higher scores in the scale indicate higher perceptions of empathy. All items in this scale had factor loadings over .9, while the overall scale had an alpha coefficient of .943.
## TABLE VII – Factor Loadings/Correlation: Procedural Justice Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale (Item)</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to what I had to say</td>
<td></td>
<td>.936</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seemed concerned about my feeling</td>
<td></td>
<td>.944</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seemed to believe what I was saying</td>
<td></td>
<td>.918</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comforted and reassured me</td>
<td></td>
<td>.900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treated me with dignity and respect</td>
<td></td>
<td>.938</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treated me politely</td>
<td></td>
<td>.935</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talked down to me (Reverse Coded)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.820</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.669***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seemed trustworthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took the matter seriously</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.785***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeared to know what he or she was doing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answered my questions well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third procedural justice factor in the present research is Competence, or the community member's perception that the officer was knowledgeable in the profession. As humor is often seen as an indicator of intelligence (Greengross and Miller, 2011; Bressler and Balshine, 2006), a police officer may increase the perception that he or she “has everything under control” by displaying a sense of humor. The Competence scale included the items During the encounter, the officer “Appeared to know what he or she was doing” and “Answered my questions well”. Higher scores in the scale indicate higher perceptions of officer competence. The two items in the scale had a correlation coefficient of .948, with an overall scale alpha of .883.

The final scale included in this analysis is Respectful. This scale measures the level of dignity and respect the community member feels the officer gave. Humor has in the past been shown to increase feelings of respect towards the humor user (Decker, 1987), though it is less clear as to whether this is the result of an individual actively using humor or simply displaying a sense of it. The Respectful scale includes three items, inquiring into whether, during the encounter, the officer “Treated me with dignity and respect”, “Treated me politely”, and “Talked down to me”. “Talked down to me” was reverse coded so that higher scores in the scale were indicative of higher perceptions of officer respect. The scale had an overall alpha of .877, and all items had factor loadings above .820.

5.4 Weighting of Agencies

The data being used for this research came from both Sheriff and municipal police agencies that serve a wide variety of populations. Some agencies were larger and therefore yielded a larger number of survey responses. For instance, one single agency accounted for approximately 20% of the entire sample, while other agencies contributed less than 1% of the total sample. Therefore, the decision was made to weight each agency so that analyses would
reflect agencies as equal contributors, rather than the sample being heavily defined by a few large agencies. As there were 51 agencies, the weighting process took an equal contributing percentage of 1.9608 (100/51) and divided this by the actual contributing percentage of each agency. The resulting weighted percentage was assigned for each agency and all analyses were performed with this weighting scale turned on. This was necessary to ensure equal influence of each agency on the results, regardless of population size.

5.5 Analysis Methods

To test the above hypotheses, multiple tests were employed. For demographic characteristics, the matching variable was analyzed, as well as the individual race, gender, and age of the officer and community member. T-tests were utilized for the three matching variables as well as race (dichotomized into White/Non-White) and gender of the officer/community member. An ANOVA was utilized for the age variables as these had three levels. For the incident characteristics, t-tests were utilized as these were dichotomous variables. Since community characteristics are at the agency level and officer displays of humor is at the individual level, the data were aggregated in order to observe community characteristics relationship to officers’ displays of humor. This was accomplished using a simple regression. Finally, to determine the relative importance of the three characteristic types (demographic, incident, and community), they were subjected to a linear regression with humor as the dependent variable.

Once the relationships between the above variables and humor were established, the consequences of humor were explored. This was accomplished with a Structural Equation Model (SEM), detailing the path between humor, procedural justice elements, and the community member’s level of satisfaction with the encounter. SEM allows for observation of the path of
effects between different variables, i.e. the influence an independent variable has on a dependent while also accounting for other latent and observed constructs.

Past research has shown procedural justice to have an effect on a person’s level of satisfaction with a police encounter. This analysis expands on past research to determine whether sense of humor works directly on satisfaction, works indirectly through procedural justice, or both. SEM allows for different pathways by which sense of humor may influence overall satisfaction with the encounter to be tested. Therefore, the path analysis examined in this section begins with a displayed sense of humor as the starting point and moves through four elements of procedural justice (empathy, trustworthy, competence, and respectful) to satisfaction with the interaction.
VI. ANALYSIS

6.1 Demographic Characteristics

The results of the hypothesis testing for demographic variables are shown in Table VIII. The first demographic examined was race/ethnicity. H1 stated that an officer would be more likely to display a sense of humor during interactions with community members of a shared race/ethnicity compared with community members of a different race/ethnicity. The results of an Independent Samples T-Test indicate a significant mean different between levels of humor for matched groups (x=2.60) and non-matched groups (x=2.38), t(8811) = 9.02, p<.001.

Based on the large number of White officers and community members in the sample, there was concern that the relationship between race/ethnicity and display of humor might be merely a product of White interactions. This concern was supported by the evidence. Of the entire sample, 64.5% of the cases were matched pairings of White officers and White community members. Approximately 29.4% of the sample was not matched at all, leaving only 6.1% of the sample as a Non-White match. The 6.1% of the sample that was Non-White match does not indicate that the officer and community member were of the same race/ethnicity – simply that they both were “Non-White”.

Looking solely at officer race/ethnicity, the results indicate that White and Non-White officers displayed a sense of humor at similar rates, t(9040)=.120, p=.905. However, the race/ethnicity of the community member did lead to different rates of humor. All officers (regardless of race/ethnicity) displayed a sense of humor with White community members significantly more than Non-White community members, t(9210)=10.942, p<.001.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Match Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Match</td>
<td>2975</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>8811</td>
<td>-9.02</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match</td>
<td>5838</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Officer Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7543</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>9040</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>1499</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Com. Mem. Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6809</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>9210</td>
<td>10.942</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>2404</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Com. Mem. White</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off. White</td>
<td>5576</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>6483</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td>.620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off. Non-White</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Com. Mem. Non-White</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off. White</td>
<td>1759</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>2327</td>
<td>2.799</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off. Non-White</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results also indicate that White and Non-White officers did not differ in their display of humor with White community members, t(6483)=.496, p=.620. However, with Non-White community members, the race/ethnicity of the officer mattered to some degree. Non-White officers were more likely to display a sense of humor with Non-White community members than were White officers, t(2327)=2.799, p<.01. Therefore, while racial-matching was significantly related to displaying a sense of humor, this effect was largely influenced by the majority of White officers and White community members. Nevertheless, non-white matching does seem to increase the display of humor, though again, this does not indicate that the officer and community member were actually matched on race/ethnicity.

The second hypothesis (H2) stated that officers would be more likely to display a sense of humor during interactions involving community members of the same gender than with community members of a different gender. This hypothesis was not supported by the evidence (see Table IX) as there was no significant difference in displays of humor between these two groups, t(8858)=.442, p=.659.

The matched-gender variable did not suffer the same proportionality problems that matched-race did. While there were certainly more male than female officers (88.4% of officers were male), the distribution of community members was fairly even, with males having minimally more responses (53.5% compared with 46.5%). The distribution within the officer gender categories was also fairly even. For example, male officers were paired with male community members 55.0% of the time and with female community members 45.0% of the time. Conversely, female officers were paired with female community members 57.1% of the time and with male community members 42.9% of the time.

Since there was no significant relationship between matched gender and officer humor, the data were analyzed for potential gender differences within officers as well as within community
members. The results show that the gender of the community member made little difference in whether the officer displayed a sense of humor, t(9090)=.227, p=.821. However, there were differences between male and female officers in their displays of humor. Female officers were more likely to display a sense of humor overall compared with male officers, t(9415)=3.183, p=.001. Therefore, with both race/ethnicity and gender, matching demographics did not appear to influence whether an officer displayed a sense of humor; instead, individual groups within race/ethnicity (White community members) and gender (female officers) are associated with higher displays of officer humor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Match Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Match</td>
<td>4190</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>9296</td>
<td>.443</td>
<td>.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match</td>
<td>5108</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8356</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>9415</td>
<td>-3.183</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1060</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Mem. Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5027</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>9090</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2404</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third hypothesis (H3) stated that officers will be more likely to display a sense of humor during interactions involving community members of the same age group than with community
members who are not in their same age group. The results were contrary to the hypothesis (see Table X). That is to say, officers were significantly less likely to display a sense of humor when interacting with someone from their own age group (M=2.45) than when interacting with someone from a different age group (M=2.56), t(8707)=4.138, p<.001.

This finding, like the other demographic categories, shows the limits of the matching hypotheses in that individual demographics play a larger role than simple matching. However, unlike the other demographic categories, there were significant differences in both officers and community members (as opposed to only one). A One-Way ANOVA was conducted to observe differences between officer age groups and their displays of humor. There was a significant effect of officer age on their display of humor, F(2, 8845)=32.8, p<.001. Post hoc comparisons using a Tukey HSD indicated that younger officers were more likely to display a sense of humor than older officers. Officers under the age of 30 (M=2.67, SD=1.073) were significantly more likely to display a sense of humor than 30 to 40-year-old officers (M=2.52, SD=1.07), p<.001. Officers under 30 were also more likely to display a sense of humor than officers over the age of 40 (M=2.38, SD=1.114), p<.001. Furthermore, officers who are 30 to 40 years old were significantly more likely to display a sense of humor than officers over the age of 40, p<.001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE X – Age Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community member age also made a significant difference, with officers much more likely to display a sense of humor to older community members. For community members over 40, officers displayed a sense of humor at a much higher rate (M=2.69, SD=1.038) than community members under 30 (M=2.11, SD=1.08), p<.001. Officers also displayed humor at a higher rate with community members over 40 compared with community members between the ages of 30 and 40 (M=2.29, SD=1.103), p<.001. Community members between 30 and 40 had a significantly higher display of humor by officers than community members under the age of 30, p<.001.

When considering these results, we again see how matching on age was not related to higher displays of humor – instead displays of humor fluctuated based on individual characteristics. Officers will more likely display a sense of humor at a younger age and with community members who are over the age of 40. Of the sample, 60.3% of the officers were under 40 and 67.8% of the sample were community members over 40. Therefore, the negative relationship found with the matching variable is not actually a function of matching. Rather, it is likely a consequence of the sample being made up predominately by younger officers and older community members.

The results indicate that, contrary to hypotheses 1-3, matched pairs of demographics are not sufficient for predicting whether an officer will display a sense of humor. Rather, individual demographics appear to explain the presence of humor better. To further understand the role of individual demographics, a decision was made to assess the relative contribution of individual demographics on an officer’s display of humor. Linear regression analysis was employed with Displayed a Sense of Humor as the dependent variable, and Officer Gender, Officer Age, Community Member Race, and Community Member Age as known contributing variables. The first run of this model included all other individual demographic variables that were not shown to significantly contribute to an officer displaying a sense of humor (Community Member Gender
and Officer Race). By including these first, the difference in variance contribution when adding the other variables can be observed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.521</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Mem. Gender</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>-.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer Race (W/NW)</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer Gender</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.032**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer Age</td>
<td>-.128</td>
<td>-.075***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Mem. Race (W/NW)</td>
<td>-.218</td>
<td>-.088***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Mem. Age</td>
<td>.289</td>
<td>.201***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table XI, the first model was insignificant with Community Member Gender and Officer Race being unrelated to Humor (p=.903). When adding the four criteria variables that were believed to significantly contribute to the model, the overall model became significant (p<.001). All four predictors added in the second model were significant with three of the four having a p value less than .001. When reviewing the relative contribution of each predictor, the age of the community member made the largest contribution, with a standardized Beta of .201.
The overall model explained only 6.1% of the variance in an officer’s display of humor, indicating that other factors were at play here. To examine what these other factors may be, analytic attention was turned to incident characteristics.

6.2 Incident Characteristics

There were several incident characteristics which might lead an officer to display a sense of humor. These include whether the interaction was officer-initiated or community member-initiated, as well as whether the community-initiated interaction was a personal or property crime. The hypotheses were as such:

When reviewing who initiated the interaction, the results provide support for the hypothesis H4. Officers were more likely to display a sense of humor during community member-initiated interactions (x=2.88) than with officer-initiated interactions (x=2.19), t(9440)=-33.105 p<.001. The number of community member-initiated interactions and officer-initiated interactions was an approximate even split. Therefore, there was no concern for the oversampling problem that was experienced with the demographic characteristics.

As shown in Table XII, the results of the analysis of examining differences between property crime and personal crime supported hypothesis H5. Officers displayed more humor when the encounter was a property crime (mean=2.88) than when it was a personal crime (mean=2.60), t(468)=5.06, p<.001.

Although property crime made up 88.8% of incidents where community members initiated the interaction, there was no concern about the oversampling problem reported for the demographic characteristics. The reason was that the analysis did not need to combine factors from the officer and the community member. Therefore, the results were not influenced by
variations within the offense type. Thus, we can be confident that the observed relationships between humor and incident characteristics were not masking other contributing factors.

TABLE XII – Incident Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police-Initiated</td>
<td>4824</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>9440</td>
<td>-.33.10</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com.-Initiated</td>
<td>4652</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type Crime Report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td>3254</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, to determine the relative contribution of the incident characteristics, all three were included in an ANOVA to examine their effects on an officer’s display of humor. To do this, the variables were recoded, since personal and property crimes were housed within the Initiation variable (under community-member initiated). Therefore, a new variable was created with the following three values: (1) officer-initiated, (2) community member-initiated property crime, and (3) community member-initiated personal crime.

The ANOVA results show a significant effect of incident characteristics on officers’ display of humor, F(2, 8321)=468.623, p<.001. Drilling down further, using a Tukey Post Hoc test, the three incident characteristic types created three unique subsets which were significantly different from each other (p<.001). Of the three, community member-initiated property crime was
associated with the highest presence officer humor, whereas police-initiated interactions had the lowest presence.

### 6.3 Community Characteristics

Finally, this research examined the potential for community characteristics to influence an officer’s display of humor. To do this, a concentrated disadvantage score was calculated and applied to each agency as described earlier in the Methods section. The data were then aggregated to the agency level for the analysis.

**TABLE XIII – Concentrated Disadvantage Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.533</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentrated Disadvantage</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001, **p<.01

The hypothesis related to community characteristics (H6) states that officers would be more likely to display a sense of humor during interactions in communities with lower levels of concentrated disadvantage than in communities with higher levels. This concept was examined using a regression, where concentrated disadvantage was treated as a continuous variable
ranging from -1.13 to 2.34. As shown in Table XIII, the regression results indicated that community characteristics were unrelated to an officer displaying a sense of humor (p=.848).

6.4 Factors Related to Display of Sense of Humor

To learn more about the independent and combined effects of demographic, incident, and community characteristics, they were subjected to a regression analysis. For incident characteristics, two dummy codes were created for the linear regression to be possible. The first dummy variable measured community-initiated personal crimes compared with police-initiated contacts. The second dummy variable measured community-initiated property crimes compared with police-initiated contacts. By including these contributing factors into a single model, we can observe the significance of these variables when controlling for the others as well as measure the percent of variance attributed to these variables.

The original matching hypotheses variables were also included in the regression. When controlling for certain demographics, there is the possibility that matched pairings might have some meaningful relationship with an officer’s display of sense of humor. The question became whether to include the three separate match variables (Match Race, Match Gender, Match Age) or whether to include an overall matching variable. The decision was made to include the variables “Matched on Any Demographic” and “Number of Matches”. The prime reason for this was if the separate match variables were placed in the regression, the contribution of “Number of Matches” would not be possible since a collinearity statistic of less than .001 would automatically exclude the variable. This is because the variance in “Number of Matches” would be shared completely with the individual match variables in the model. Therefore, the more informative analysis would be whether a general matching significantly relates to an officer’s display of sense of humor and whether this relationship was enhanced by the number of matches.
When entering all the demographic, incident, and community characteristics into a singular mode (see Table XIV), the overall model was significant (p<.001). The model possessed an Adjusted R Square of .153, indicating that 15.3% of the variance in an officer’s display of sense of humor can be attributed to demographic, incident, and community characteristics. Of the 11 variables that were entered into the final model, seven were significant at the .05 level or less: Officer Age (younger officers displayed more humor), Community Member Age (older community members reported higher displays of humor from officers), Community Member Race (Whites reported higher displays of humor from officers), Matched on Any Demographic (at least one demographic match reported higher displays of humor from officers than no match at all), Community-initiated Person Crimes (more humor displays than police-initiated), Community-initiated Property Crimes (more humor displays than police-initiated) and Concentrated Disadvantage (communities with higher levels of concentrated disadvantage experienced less displays of humor than communities with lower levels of disadvantage).

When looking at differences between matching demographics, incident characteristics, and community characteristics, the largest contributor was Community-initiated Property Crime. This lent support to H7, stating that incident characteristics would have the greatest influence on an officer’s display of humor. Since the different scales were employed for the various variables, the standardized Beta was examined to observe the strength of the contribution. The property crime dummy code had a Beta of .330, while the personal crime Beta was .102. These two Betas were larger than nearly all of the demographic or community characteristics, with the exception of Community member age (β=.163). Whether the community member and officer were matched on any demographic was significant but had a weak relationship (β=.038) but the number of demographic matches was not significant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>SE</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.873</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer Race (W/NW)</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer Gender</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer Age</td>
<td>-.125</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>-.073***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Mem. Race (W/NW)</td>
<td>-.140</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>-.057***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Mem. Gender</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>-.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. Mem. Age</td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.163***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Demographic Match</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.051***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Demographic Matches</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>-.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Crime (Dummy)</td>
<td>.692</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.307***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Crime (Dummy)</td>
<td>.472</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.088***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentrated Disadvantage</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>-.040***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.153</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td></td>
<td>123.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001, **p<.01
6.5 Discussion and Implications for Part I: Antecedents of Humor

Part I of this research set out to examine what variables might explain an officer’s display of humor during a police interaction as perceived by the community member. Based on prior research and theorizing, these variables were placed into three categories: demographic matching, incident characteristics, and community characteristics. While these categories were the focal point for hypothesis testing, univariate demographic factors appeared to be equally important. For instance, the age of both the community member and the officer were related to whether an officer displayed a sense of humor, with older community members and younger officers being associated with higher levels of humor. Similarly, a community member’s race/ethnicity also influenced whether an officer displayed a sense of humor (Whites reported receiving higher displays of officer humor), regardless of the community characteristics in which the interaction takes place.

While officers being matched to community members on any single demographic proved to be related to higher levels of officer humor, the number of matches does not appear to have any relationship. Incident characteristics were also important for influencing officers’ displays of humor, with community-initiated property crimes relating to the highest probability of an officer displaying of sense of humor. Finally, community characteristics were also predictive, with higher concentrated disadvantaged communities yielding lower displays of humor by officers. All of these confirm the type of relationship predicted by the hypotheses.

These findings are important for the research community as they seem to provide insight into the antecedents of officer’s displaying a sense of humor. Although police humor during encounters with the public has been largely ignored by researchers, the preceding analyses could provide a springboard for future inquiries. As a starting point, this research gives the academic community a window for understanding when and with whom officers are displaying a sense of
humor and, as importantly, when and with whom they are not displaying a sense of humor in more than 50 American cities.

These findings may have implications for officer self-awareness as well as training. Officers may be wholly unaware that they display a sense of humor differently with different populations or in different incident types. One way for officers to recognize their disparate treatment might be video-taped scenarios. Officers would then be able observe their interactions and identify the presence and degree of humor based on the characteristics of the community member. By doing this in a scenario setting, officers can identify differences and seek to modify their behavior in their real-world interactions.

For community member demographics, one might ask why officers display higher levels of humor with older individuals and Caucasians. There are a number of theoretical explanations as to why a community member's race/ethnicity might influence an officer's display of humor. Perhaps the agency's style of policing influences officers' willingness to display humor. For example, Wilson (1968) found that agencies can be categorized as conforming more to the watchman, legalistic, or service style of policing. Similarly, today there is considerable dialogue about the “warrior” style versus the “guardian” style of policing that dominates different police cultures (President’s Task Force, 2015). Legalistic, enforcement, and warrior styles seem less compatible with expressions of humor than service-oriented, guardian styles. Future research could explore whether these differences in organizational culture affect officers’ freedom to use humor.

Aside from organizational approaches to policing, there is the possibility that historical and implicit bias factor into the differences in humorous displays. Implicit bias permeates all of society, including the criminal justice system, and may “influence how [someone] might react when dealing with unfamiliar people or situations” (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). The
individuals with whom police officers interact with on a daily basis are largely unknown to them and therefore the officers might incorporate their implicit biases when engaging in such interactions. Thus, with Caucasian and older community members, officers may perhaps be less fearful and may feel more at ease, thus opening the door to a humorous exchange. This may be due to the officer implicitly believing that Caucasians and older community members are less “criminal”.

An alternate way of looking at this is rather than an increase in displays of humor when dealing with Caucasian or older community members, perhaps there is a decrease in humor when dealing with minority or younger community members. In this respect, officers may feel they have to be more authoritarian or parental with younger community members, which may result in a more stern approach that does not allow for displays of humor.

This type of authoritarian demeanor may also explain the disparity of humor displays between higher and lower levels of concentrated disadvantage. In areas perceived by officers to be ridden with violent crime and disorder, a crime control function of law enforcement may reign supreme (Mastrofski, et al, 2002). The belief that “upward deviance is more serious than downward deviance” (Black, 1976) may preclude officers from displaying a sense of humor during interactions in neighborhoods with higher levels of concentrated disadvantage. Oftentimes, officers feel the need to come across as tough and physical to be respected and safe. The concept of “seriousness” may further explain differences in incident types, where a police-initiated interaction frequently involves some type of law enforcement sanction against law violators. Conversely, a community-initiated interaction may conjure up images of community service in the officer’s mind and therefore require a less serious tone than that of law enforcement.

This information may be helpful for officers to recognize the different ways they present themselves to different communities and individual members of the community. If officers can
recognize how they treat community members, whether consciously or subconsciously, they might be able to make a better effort to display a sense of humor, regardless of community or individual characteristics. Officers may also be able to recognize the need to deliver more consistent services regardless of individual or community characteristics.

Although humor may be a desirable component of successful interpersonal communication, it is not a requirement of police work. What is required by the constitution is that police treat people in a fair and impartial manner regardless of their personal characteristics. The question remains whether humor is one mechanism to generate feelings of equity and fairness among the consumer population and improve their overall satisfaction with police services. Thus, to explore the benefits to the community, the analysis now turns towards the effects of humor on satisfaction and perceptions of procedural justice.

6.6 Effect of Humor on Satisfaction and Procedural Justice

As discussed in previous sections, procedural justice (PJ) is a key determinant of community satisfaction with police encounters. PJ elements (such as the officer being empathic, trustworthy, competent, and respectful) have been shown to increase perceptions of police legitimacy (Tyler, 2003), the community’s willingness to cooperate with police (Tyler & Fagan, 2008), and compliance with police directions (McCluskey, 2003). Humor can be an important mechanic for stimulating perceptions of procedural justice. Exactly how humor stimulates such perception is the focus of this research. The theoretical model displayed in Figure 1 was developed to test of the procedural justice pathways that humor might take towards increasing community satisfaction with police encounters.
In order to observe how humor can influence a community member’s perception of satisfaction and procedural justice, this research used a Structural Equation Model (SEM), with satisfaction as the dependent variable and elements of procedural justice as mediating variables. SEM allows for the observation of “directional and non-directional linear relationships among a set of measured variables and latent variables” (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). The use of SEM has been expanded in the recent past (Tremblay and Gardner, 1996) and is appropriate in this research as it allows for the observation of paths between humor and the procedural justice elements.

Figure 1 – Proposed Direct and Mediated Relationship
The results are presented as a two-step process: first, the model was run using humor, the procedural justice elements, and satisfaction as the only variables; next, the model was run controlling for the variables that were previously found to be significantly related to the officer displaying a sense of humor. These variables were gleaned from the regression results discussed earlier.

In the first step of the SEM, the variable humor was entered first to observe the direct effect on satisfaction regardless of other variables. An officer’s display of humor was positively related to satisfaction ($p<.001$) and had an R-Squared value of .4361, indicating that the officer’s humor could account for 43.61% of the variance in satisfaction. The procedural justice elements were then added to the model in order for the hypotheses under RQ5 to be addressed. These hypotheses were as follows:

- **H8**: An officer displaying a sense of humor within an encounter will increase perceptions of procedural justice elements within the encounter.

- **H9**: Increased perceptions of procedural justice elements will increase the community member’s level of satisfaction with the encounter.

- **H10**: Procedural justice will mediate the effects of humor on the community member’s level of satisfaction with the encounter.

- **H11**: The presence of humor within an encounter will have a positive effect on satisfaction after controlling for procedural justice elements

As illustrated in Figure 2, the overall model was significant ($p<.001$) with all contributing variables found to be positively related to satisfaction. The four procedural justice variables were all significant at the .001 level, while humor was significant at the .01 level ($p=.004$). This indicates that when controlling for procedural justice elements, humor still retained its significant relationship with satisfaction, thus confirming H11. However, the contribution of humor was dramatically reduced when controlling for the procedural justice elements, as the coefficient value
for display of humor dropped from .70 to .03 as it related to satisfaction. The model had a Coefficient of Determination (CD) value of .562, indicating that the variables could account for 56.2% of the variance in the overall model.

There was also an effect of humor on the procedural justice elements, confirming H8. The presence of officer humor was associated with increases in all four of the PJ elements (p<.001). Of the four PJ elements, humor had the largest effect on perceptions of officer empathy (x=.70). The other three PJ elements had coefficients hovering just above .52. Therefore, while all PJ elements were significantly increased by the presence of humor, the effect was most salient with empathy.

Figure 2 – Direct and Mediated Relationship
When testing H9, the coefficients for the procedural justice elements were substantially higher than display of humor in relationship to satisfaction. Respectful (x=.37) and Empathic (x=.38) showed a larger relationship with satisfaction, followed by Competent (x=.18) and Trustworthy (x=.19). From these results, Empathic appears to be related more to satisfaction than the other three procedural justice elements and the officer’s display of humor. However, these values only indicate the direct effects on satisfaction and does not look at the indirect effects of humor.

Given the focus of this dissertation on humor, the analysis looked at such indirect effects of humor on overall customer satisfaction, mediated by procedural justice elements (H10). In other words, does humor work through procedural justice to influence satisfaction? The process for examining the indirect effects of humor was to examine the combined slope of display of humor’s relationship to each procedural justice element and divide that by the combined standard error of each combination. The formula for this process (Sobel, 1982) is as follows:

\[
Z = \frac{(b_{V1} \times b_{V2})}{(Se_{V1} \times Se_{V2})}
\]

In an effort to compensate for the nested nature of the data, whereby individual officers responses are nested within (not entirely independent of) the larger group of officers employed by the same agency, cluster adjusted standard errors were used. While cluster adjusted standard errors do not control for agency level variation, it solves the problem of violating the assumption of non-correlated error terms that underlies the linear statistical model employed here.

As shown in Table XV, the indirect effects of an officer’s display of sense of humor are significant through each of the procedural justice elements (p<.001 for all PJ elements), thus confirming H10. Of these, the largest effect was displaying a sense of humor through Empathy,
with an indirect coefficient of .27. Displaying a sense of humor through Respectful was the next highest coefficient (x=.20). While Competent and Trustworthy were significant, their relationship was weaker (both with coefficients of .10). Working through all four of the PJ elements, the officer’s display of humor was associated with higher levels of satisfaction experienced by the community member.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter Estimate</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humor → Trustworthy</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>326.67</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor → Empathy</td>
<td>.269</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor → Competence</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor → Respectful</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>653.67</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next step of the SEM was to include the variables previously related to displays of sense of humor as control variables. This way, we can examine the unique effects of humor on the procedural justice elements and satisfaction while holding constant the elements we know have some influence on displays of humor. These variables include the officer’s age, the community member’s age, the community member’s race/ethnicity, whether the community member and officer were matched on any demographic, the two dummy codes for incident characteristics, and the concentrated disadvantage of the community.
As illustrated in Figure 3, the overall model was found to be statistically significant ($p<.001$) with the four procedural justice scales and the humor variable remaining significant. The humor variable was significant at the .05 level ($p=.035$) with the procedural justice variables having a $p$ value of less than .001. While the significance level for displaying a sense of humor was reduced in this model, the coefficient remained essentially the same ($x=.03$).

The coefficients for the procedural justice elements also remained essentially the same, with Competence ($x=.18$) and Trustworthy ($x=.18$) still having a weaker relationship with satisfaction than Respectful ($x=.35$) and Empathic ($x=.41$). When the officer is judged to be empathic, this actually increased the slope when including the control variables on the front end and remains the largest effect on community member’s level of satisfaction with the encounter.
The overall model had a Coefficient of Determination (CD) value of .144, indicating that the model could account for 14.4% of the variance in the overall model.

The decrease in CD between the first and second model can be explained by the addition of the control variables. By adding these variables, there is more variance in the model that requires explanation. However, by adding these variables, the model is more accurately reflective of humor’s influence on procedural justice and satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter Estimate</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>z</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humor \rightarrow Trustworthy</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.0006</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor \rightarrow Empathy</td>
<td>.297</td>
<td>.0006</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor \rightarrow Competence</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.0006</td>
<td>171.67</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor \rightarrow Respectful</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>.0005</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The indirect effects of the officer displaying a sense of humor were also examined for this model and are reported in Table XVI. All indirect effects were significant at the .001 level, with Empathic again having the largest indirect effect for displays of sense of humor (x=.30). Respectful (x=.20) again contained the second highest indirect effect and both Trustworthy and Competent had a coefficient of approximately .10. Overall, even while controlling for items we know to affect an officer’s display of humor, the results show a significant direct and indirect
positive relationship between humor and a community member’s satisfaction with the police interaction.

6.7 Discussion and Implications for Part II: The Consequences of Humor

When looking at the results of the Structural Equation Models, a clear picture can be seen indicating that an officer’s display of humor holds a unique, significant relationship to the community member’s overall satisfaction with the interaction. While controlling for procedural justice elements, the greater the display of humor on the part of the officers, the higher the level of satisfaction expressed by the community members with the encounter. The officer’s display of humor is also indirectly positively related to the community member’s satisfaction with the interaction through each of the four procedural justice elements. Furthermore, controlling for characteristics found to be related to the display sense of humor in previous analyses did not erase these relationships.

The construct of Empathy warrants its own conversation here, as it had the greatest relationship with satisfaction out of the four PJ elements. Relevant to this research, Empathy also had the strongest mediation effect on humor’s relationship to satisfaction. Empathy is our ability to identify the emotional state of another and put ourselves in that person’s shoes, so to speak. While a positive virtue in general, empathy has a specific role in enhancing a community member’s perception of effectiveness and trust in the police (Posick, Rocque, & Rafter, 2012). How then does an officer’s display of sense of humor enhance the community member’s perception of empathy? Perhaps by displaying a sense of humor the officer is communicating to the community member that he/she is a person rather than a cop. Humor is also a vehicle for connecting with another person at an intimate level and communicating shared values. When officers can show the community member that they perhaps have more in common than the
community member might perceive, this could strengthen the positive tone of the interaction and lead to better interactions. The more recent attempts to understand police legitimacy have moved beyond fairness to focus on shared values between the police and the community (Jackson et al., 2014). Humor may be a tool for enhanced a sense of shared values.

Trustworthy and Competent were less affected by an officer’s display of humor and this may have something to do with the way these constructs were measured and whether the use of humor has a boomerang effect. The scale for Trustworthy included the item “Took the matter seriously”. By displaying a sense of humor, the community member might believe the officer is not “taking the matter seriously”, thus reducing humor’s effect on satisfaction. The scale for Competent included the items “Appeared to know what he or she was doing” and “Answered my questions well”. By displaying a sense of humor, the community member might believe they are not receiving straightforward answers, perhaps indicating that the officer did not know what they were doing. This might also explain the differences in this scale’s relationship to satisfaction. Nevertheless, humor seems to affect views of the officers’ trustworthiness and competence in a positive direction overall.

Indeed, one thing that should be highlighted in this part of the research is that no matter when, and with whom the officer displays a sense of humor, there is a positive effect for the community member’s level of satisfaction. Even after controlling for officer and community demographics, incident characteristics, and community characteristics, the results still indicate a positive effect of humor. Therefore, while officers should incorporate elements of appropriateness when making decisions about when to use humor, the positive effects of humor are fairly robust. Thus, officers are more likely to experience positive results by using humor than refraining from using humor at all times.
The findings from this research may have implications for police training. Many agencies may feel that cultivating a humorous exchange is not something worthwhile for training, and instead continue to focus on tactical and legal issues. However, based on the findings here, agencies that incorporate humor into their training curricula around interpersonal communication may discover significant benefits. Officers must first be reminded that their natural disposition to using humor can be a positive addition to an interaction and that they should not shy away from using it. Officers should also receive training on appropriate use of humor. The current state of research has not advanced to a point where the conditions of appropriateness can be fully defined, but certainly, the humor literature and common sense inform us about certain conditions where it might be inappropriate (e.g. loss of a loved one).

A further question regarding training is whether an officer can be trained to “be funny”. Humor is a developed trait, one that is saturated with issues of timing, tone, delivery, and originality. Training officers to display humor will have varying effects on different officers – some will succeed and some will do very poorly. Caution should be taken when attempting to train an officer to use humor. This is not to say that some degree of humor might not be trainable. Providing officers with a humorous statement that has worked for other officers in traffic stops might be beneficial and something that most officers could learn to adopt. However, training would need to address the same issues of timing, tone, and delivery. For the moment, training should be focused on informing officers that it is ok to use humor and issues of appropriateness.
VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While all efforts to maintain strict, rigorous standards of data collection and analysis have been put forth, there are shortcomings which should be acknowledged. This research is an initial step in a new area of study regarding the use of humor in police work. This study explores the precedents and effects of an officer’s display of humor during encounters with community members in 51 America cities that vary in size and region of the country. Future research might benefit from the findings of this research, but there are several limitations to this study that should be noted.

One limitation to this research is the survey response rate. Hovering between 4 and 5 percent, there is concern that the response rate may limit the generalizability of the findings. A cursory check of the mailing data found that response rates for the various demographic categories were not proportionate to the mailing set. For example, Whites were over-represented in the responses. Therefore, the ability of this research to apply the findings to the population as a whole is limited despite the large sample size and random selection of agencies.

Another factor that restricts generalizability is the absence of street encounters between the police and community members (typically youth) that do not result in a police report. If a pedestrian stop or casual interaction does not result in a police report, it would not be included in the police mailing database of community members who are invited to complete the survey. Thus, some of the more problematic interactions between the police and youth on the streets will not be represented here.

Individual variables within the analysis may affect the reliability of the analysis. The survey question used to measure officer’s humor asks the community member to indicate their agreement with the following statement: “The officer displayed a sense of humor”. The use of a
single item to measure any construct is generally less reliable than using multiple survey questions. More importantly, in the case of humor, there are issues of construct validity that limit our ability to understand or interpret the findings. The single item used here contains some level of ambiguity that could be resolved in future research by adding other questions related to the humor. Questions indicating whether the officer initiated the humor or whether he/she was simply showing appreciation for the community member’s humor would help resolve the question of who began the humorous exchange.

Past research has demonstrated that the tone of the humor, either positive or negative, can play an important role in guiding a humorous interaction (Cann, et al, 2011; Kirsch and Kuiper, 2003; Decker, 1987). Therefore, any community member who perceives that the officer is using negative or derogatory humor may report that humor was present, though would not be afforded the opportunity to expand on the type of humor used (positive or negative). On the other hand, some research suggests that negative humor is “not funny” due to its generally aggressive nature, and thus loses its label as “humor” (De Koning and Weiss, 2002). In this instance, the community member would likely report the officer did not use humor since he or she did not find it funny. Therefore, this limitation may have had minimal impact on the results of this study.

Satisfaction was also measured using a single survey item. While public satisfaction with police contacts has been used repeatedly in past research (Decker, 1981; Skogan, 2005; Rosenbaum, et al, 2015), the meaning of satisfaction is uncertain. The item on the survey was worded as follows: “Taking the whole experience into account, how satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the officer in this case?” The item focuses on the treatment by the officer and does not address other aspects of the encounter, such as satisfaction with the outcome. Future research should measure other aspects of satisfaction in addition to treatment to gain a more comprehensive understanding of police/community interactions.
A more in-depth examination of displays of humor in different settings would help us to understand how humor might be utilized to produce positive results during these interactions.

The present research examined police-initiated interactions, community-initiated personal crimes, and community-initiated property crime interactions. However, these categories are still somewhat general and undefined. For example, in the community-initiated personal crimes, domestic violence and sexual assault were not included in this dataset for reasons of appropriateness. We might reasonably assume that displays of humor would have different effects in these cases. The results might also be affected by the type humor displayed by the officer during such delicate instances of victimization. For example, bonding humor might work with the victim of a sensitive crime, though teasing could easily backfire. Future research might also find that humor has differential effects for certain property crimes. For example, humor may have a different impact on victims of property crimes that exceed $500 when compared to victims of property crimes under $500.

Organizational factors might also explain differences in displays of humor and represent a potential fertile area for future research. These factors may include policing styles (Wilson, 1981) as well as other organizational factors. For instance, the levels of organizational justice and agency culture have been measured in previous research (McCarty & Skogan, 2012; Paoline & Terrill, 2005; Rosenbaum, et al 2015). Understanding how these factors influence an officer’s display of humor, regardless of demographic, incident, or community contexts, will provide a more complete picture of the forces that shape officers’ humor in different environments.

An officer’s personality may also affect his/her display of humor. Some people have a better sense of humor than others, and this might be considered as a new selection criterion during the testing and screening process for police recruits. However, personality measures, especially those pertaining to humor, are prone to a high degree of response bias (Koehler & Ruch, 2009; Leacock, 1961; Allport, 1961; Martin & Lefcourt, 1984). Therefore, caution should
be taken when attempting to measure an officer’s sense of humor. Assuming valid personality measures, humor use by “funny” and “unfunny” people could be used to predict differences in the quality of police-community interactions.

Finally, future research might examine why or how humor increases the perception of empathy, a strong predictor of public satisfaction with the police in prior research (Posick, Rocque, & Rafter, 2012) and in the present study. For example, by displaying a sense of humor, are officers being perceived as more human and approachable rather than more mechanistic and authoritarian? By displaying a sense of humor, are officers able to break down the “us vs. them” mentality by showing community members that the officers are “regular people?” How exactly are humor and empathy linked? Perhaps through the display of humor, the officer somehow indicates to the community member that he/she is more understanding, can relate to the community member’s experience, and has some compassion for the community member’s plight.

Arguably, the results of this study provide a new framework for evaluating police/community interactions. Officers’ stand to gain when displaying a sense of humor during their encounters with community members. An officer’s sense of humor can positively influence a community member’s perception of the officer’s competence, respectfulness, trustworthiness, and most of all empathy. The enhancement of these procedural justice qualities in turn increases the community member’s satisfaction with the interaction, and as shown in prior research, has many other positive consequences, including increased cooperation with the police and enhanced police legitimacy (Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Fagan, 2008; Rosenbaum et al., 2015). The specific mechanisms by which these humor-related processes operate have yet to be fully understood or documented. Hopefully, this dissertation has opened the door to a new line of research on the use of humor by police officers that will someday help to improve police-community relations and public safety.
CITED LITERATURE


Coates, Joseph F. (1972). "Wit and Humor: A Neglected Aid in Crowd and Mob Control". 
*Crime and Delinquency*. Vol. 18, pg. 184-191


APPENDIX A
Community Member Invitation Letter

«CIT_FIRST» «CIT_LAST»
«STNUM» «STDIR» «STREET» «APT»
«CITY» «STATE» «ZIP»

Dear resident:

Our records show that you had contact with a [Police/Sheriff Agency] [police officer/deputy sheriff], in the context of a reported crime incident, traffic stop, or traffic crash. Records show that the contact occurred on or around <INT_DATE>.

Because the [City/County] [Police Department/Sheriff's Office] is fully committed to professional service, we have started a new method for you to give feedback about our performance during this encounter. We have asked university researchers to run an independent survey. This will help us improve our services. The survey is short, confidential, and voluntary. It will ask how you were treated and your level of satisfaction with our services. You may take the survey in English or Spanish.

Please take a few moments to complete this survey by telephone or web:

➢ By calling 1-XXX-XXX-XXXX (in both English and Español)

OR by going to the web address below:

➢ For English & en Español:  http://XXXXXX

OR by scanning the QR code with your smart phone or tablet device:

You will be asked to enter a PIN number in order to fill out the survey. Your PIN number is <PIN>. The purpose of the PIN number is to make sure that only one survey is completed for each contact. Numbers are not connected in any way to your contact or any police records.

For more information about this letter and survey, please call the number or go to the website.

Para obtener más información acerca de esta carta y la encuesta, por favor llame al número anterior o visite el sitio de internet.

I want to point out that this survey of [police/deputy sheriff] services is managed by researchers outside of the [police/sheriff's] department and that your answers are confidential. The [City/County] [Police/Sheriff] will not know if you did the survey or how you answered the survey questions. We will only see summary results (where all surveys are combined) and those results will be very useful to us.

Thank you for giving us feedback so we can continue to improve our services to [CITY/COUNTY] citizens.

Sincerely,

[Chief/Sheriff Name], [Title]
VITA

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“Measuring Police-Youth Encounters: Using Social Media Analysis, Electronic Surveys, and Other Methods for Capturing and Evaluating Experiences”. Thematic Panel Presentation. ASC, 2013 (Atlanta, GA)
“Center for Homicide and Sexual Assault Investigations”. Thematic Panel Presentation. ASC, 2014 (San Francisco, CA)