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### Prior Discipline and Performance among Police Officers: Does Organizational Fairness Matter?

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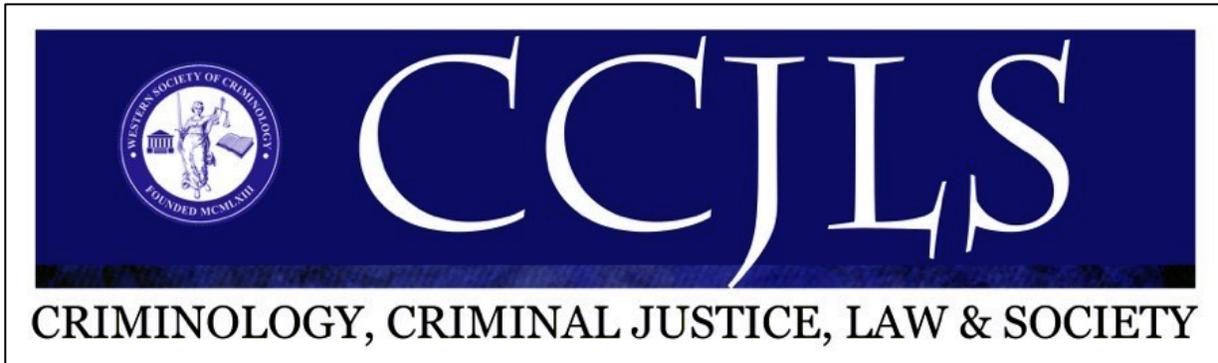
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## Prior Discipline and Performance among Police Officers: Does Organizational Fairness Matter?

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### ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Using a survey of police officers ( $n=1080$ ) in a southern state of the USA, this study examines how overall performance is influenced by organizational fairness and prior disciplinary actions. In particular, this study focuses on the relationship between organizational treatment and officers' self-acknowledged engagement in more innocuous forms of negative work-related behaviors, general task performance, and extra-role behaviors. Results suggest prior disciplinary actions and organizational treatment are related to officer performance. Our findings highlight fair treatment's relationship to enhanced prosocial activities and reduced negative work behaviors. Of importance to police administrators, police officers' fairness perceptions of the police organization appear to have a stronger influence on overall work performance among officers that have prior disciplinary actions, further underscoring the need for organizations to consider how officers are treated.

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Enhancing overall police performance remains a critical goal and objective for law enforcement leadership, political leaders, and denizens. For this reason, research that explores how an organizational work environment and organizational policies, such as disciplinary practices, shape police officer performance is necessary to enhance our understanding of the relationship between perceived organizational treatment and performance as this information is vital to developing sound organizational policies and practices (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015).

Due to the public outcry and demands for increased accountability of police officers, including biased policing and the use of excessive force, many departments have experienced increased public scrutiny and implemented stricter policies and disciplinary practices in an attempt to restore relationships between police and their communities (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015; Weitzer, 2015). Thus, increasing police accountability and professionalism should be a primary goal for any police administration. Therefore, the processes and practices to accomplish this goal should be implemented and enforced in a manner that is perceived by officers as fair; otherwise, implementing stricter policies and more punitive disciplinary practices can have adverse consequences (Reynolds et al., 2018; Reynolds & Helfers, 2018a; Shane, 2012). Previous researchers have postulated that perceived harsh, inconsistent, or biased disciplinary actions could lead to decreased performance and increased negative work-related behaviors (Harris & Worden, 2014; Reynolds & Hicks, 2015; Shane 2012). Conversely, procedurally just based policies, along with their implementation, can promote perceptions of organizational support and could ultimately enhance officer performance (Reynolds & Helfers, 2018a). Given recent increases in police scrutiny and anti-police sentiment stemming from a series of highly publicized police use of force incidents involving unarmed minorities across the United States beginning with the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, the need for officers to feel supported by their administration becomes paramount (Nix & Wolfe, 2016; W. M. Oliver, 2017).

While police researchers have made great strides in increasing our understanding of how fairness influences police behaviors and attitudes during the last decade (Carr & Maxwell, 2018; Donner et al., 2015), the relationships between disciplinary actions, organizational treatment, and overall performance have yet to be fully explored (Reynolds & Helfers, 2018a; Shane, 2012). In particular, researchers have yet to examine the relationship that how officers are treated within their organization is associated with

officers' prior exposure to the disciplinary process and their performance. Thus, this led the authors to the research question for this study: Does organizational fairness influence occupational police performance, invariant of officers' involvement in the disciplinary process?

While police leadership has limited influence over external stressors that influence officers' work-related behaviors, police leadership does have a profound influence over officers' work environment. Consistent with management and organizational industrial studies, this study examined performance as consisting of three related, but distinct dimensions: general task, negative work-related behaviors, and extra-role behaviors between officers as a function of being a party to the disciplinary process within the agency—regardless of the outcome. This study helps to fill this gap in the literature by further examining the extent that overall fairness and prior disciplinary actions are associated with overall performance.

## Literature Review

### Police and Overall Work Performance

The general occupational and management literature identifies three distinct concepts that describe an employee's overall performance: *task performance* (sometimes referred to as in-role behaviors), *extra-role* (sometimes expressed as organizational citizenship behaviors), and *negative work-related behaviors* (sometimes referred to as counterproductive work behaviors) in the general occupational and management literature (Colquitt et al., 2013). Task performance describes work-related tasks that employees are expected to perform that are consistent with their position in the organization, which are often the primary activities used to evaluate employees' work performance (Colquitt et al., 2013), whereas extra-role activities are often proactive or not explicitly required and expected, but otherwise benefit the organization (Colquitt et al., 2013). In essence, they are those things that exceed organizational expectations. Conversely, negative work-related activities are intentional acts that undermine the organizational goals or otherwise harm the organization (Colquitt et al., 2013; Masterson et al., 2000).

A review of the literature suggests that all three aspects of performance exist within most, if not all, organizations (Colquitt et al., 2013). However, the type of activities that employees engage in will vary based on their occupation and their role within the organization (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). In other

words, these behaviors are a direct function of the opportunities and skill sets of each employee. Thus, research on performance should consider an employee's occupation and role when examining workplace behaviors.

### ***Police Performance***

Police performance is a complicated and multi-faceted concept, and there is not universal agreement as to the role policing should serve (e.g., crime fighter or public servant); thus, what activities constitute quality or effective policing is debatable. For example, research on police subcultures support that these views differ not only between line-officers and organizational leadership (Reuss-Ianni, 1983), but line-officers themselves (Paoline, 2004). Of note, officers' work-related attitudes can have a significant influence on how they perceive citizens and how they approach their job and perform their duties (Paoline, 2004; Paoline & Terrill, 2013). Additionally, police officers have a substantial amount of discretion regarding how they perform their duties (Mastroski, 2004). Furthermore, most of officers' self-directed actions occur with limited to no direct supervision (M. K. Brown, 1988; Mastroski, 2004; Rowe, 2007). For example, an officer can decide which vehicle to stop, what moving or non-moving traffic infraction to enforce, and whether the violator receives a warning or a traffic citation.

For the purpose of this study, the authors examined all three aspects of employee performance from a police occupational framework in lieu of specific types of police activities (e.g., traffic stops). In particular, the authors examined patrol officer self-reported work-related activities. The primary reason is that patrol officers comprise the largest segment of employees in police departments (Reaves, 2011) and also have the most day-to-day contact with the community (M. K. Brown, 1988; Goldstein, 1960).

### ***Organizational Influences on Police Performance***

Officers' performance and role expectations are often guided by departmental policies, philosophies, and legal mandates (Phillips, 2016; Wilson, 1978), which are often shaped by departmental policies and enforced through instrumental means (i.e., performance evaluations and departmental disciplinary practices; Tyler et al., 2007). For this reason, there has been a renewed emphasis for departmental leadership to narrow organizational policies to enhance police performance, particularly by curbing police malfeasance in regard to officer discretion (President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, 2015). While research supports that situational and subject factors influence officers' discretionary activities (Buvik, 2016), research

continues to support that an officers' organizational environment influences their work-related behaviors (Bradford et al., 2014; Carr & Maxwell, 2018; Donner et al., 2015; Eitle et al., 2014; Hass et al., 2015).

Relevant to this study, Reynolds and colleagues (2018) conducted a qualitative study on how police officers react to perceived organizational mistreatment. During the interviews, police officers self-reported limiting their work output as a retaliatory response to the perceived organizational abuse or neglect, such as unfair disciplinary practices. Officers also described utilizing their discretionary powers when conducting proactive crime fighting activities by selecting pedestrian and traffic stops that minimized the likelihood of receiving a citizen complaint or potential adverse administrative sanctions (i.e., disciplinary actions), but still met their supervisor's work expectations. For instance, the authors reported that one officer described making traffic stops for vehicle infractions in lieu of speeding infractions, as speeding citations are more likely to anger the citizen and be contested, thus increasing the likelihood the person stopped may file a complaint against the officer. This suggests that the lack of support and perceived unfair treatment from administrators can lead to officers altering their performance or decreasing pro-active policing activities (W. M. Oliver, 2017; Shjarback et al., 2017), whereas other research suggests that positive treatment by management can help officers overcome workplace uncertainty (Wolfe et al., 2018). These findings are consistent with earlier police research that mentioned officers may alter their work behaviors to adjust to the uncertainty of the workplace and bureaucracy (M. K. Brown, 1988; Van Maanen, 1975). It is not surprising that scholars have suggested that organizational factors are often stronger predictors for stress than their actual working environment (Eitle et al., 2014; Shane, 2013) and that officers often adapt their behaviors due to these strains (Paoline & Terrill, 2013). This suggests that organizational influences can have a positive or negative influence on police officer work-related attitudes and behaviors, at least to some extent. Furthermore, research supports that organizational leadership may even help alleviate some external work strains, such as anti-police rhetoric and sentiment, by providing a buffer and a support system against public criticism when they promote organizational justice principles (Nix & Wolfe, 2016). Conversely, perceived organizational mistreatment and injustice has shown to be linked to misconduct and other analogous forms of negative-work behaviors (Kaariainen et al., 2008; Reynolds et al., 2018; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011).

### *Fairness and Work-Related Outcomes*

Research consistently shows that relationships exist between organizational justice and employee performance within the public and private workplace settings (Colquitt, 2008; Cropanzano et al., 2007). Meta-analyses find support for direct and indirect relationships between organizational justice and all three aspects of employee performance: task performance, extra-role behaviors, and negative work-related behaviors (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). Furthermore, organizational justice has consistently shown to be one of the strongest organizational predictors of work behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2013). In general, research finds evidence that organizational justice is related to augmented task performance and extra-role behaviors, while perceptions of unfairness or injustice are related to increased negative work-related behaviors (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013).

The steadily increasing amount of organizational justice research in policing is consistent with the findings in the general occupational literature (Donner et al., 2015). Hence, organizational justice provides a viable theoretical lens for examining overall performance and providing insight as to how perceived organizational treatment is linked to performance. Overall, prior studies support that perceived organizational fairness is associated with decreases in various types of police misconduct (Kaariainen et al., 2008; Reynolds et al., 2018; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011), increases in compliance, and rule-adherence (Hass et al., 2015; Tyler et al., 2007). Additionally, officers who perceive higher levels of organizational justice in their department have more favorable work-related attitudes, such as stronger organizational commitment, job satisfaction (Crow et al., 2012), and more favorable attitudes toward citizens (Carr & Maxwell, 2018; Myhill & Bradford, 2013; Wolfe & Nix, 2016).

### **The Current Study**

The purpose of this study is to further our understanding of disciplinary practices, police occupational performance, and officers' perception of organizational fairness. First, this study helps to fill a gap in the literature by exploring how prior involvement in the disciplinary process, regardless of outcome, may be linked to police performance because prior research has warned about the potential negative effects of perceived unjust disciplinary actions (Reynolds et al., 2018; Reynolds & Helfers, 2018a; Shane, 2012). Second, most policing scholars and practitioners would agree that organizational treatment has an influence on an officer's behavior

that can often supercede outside factors (e.g., anti-police sentiment and publicity). Hence, this research builds on the existing organizational justice research by assessing the relationship between perceived organizational fairness and performance. Third, while recent police performance studies have been approached from a macro perspective using aggregate departmental data, this study examined performance at an officer's level using self-reported data. In addition, this study measures overall police performance (i.e., task-performance, negative work-related behaviors, and extra-role behaviors) versus a specific behavior or dimension. The study concludes with a discussion of the practical implications of the findings, policy suggestions, and direction for future research.

This study uses a structural equation model (SEM) to examine the link between organizational fairness and police performance, with a focus on examining whether the effects differ based on prior experience with the disciplinary process. Based on a review of the relevant literature, the following hypotheses were postulated:

*H1: Fairness is significantly related to all three facets of performance (in-task, extra role, and negative work-related behaviors).*

*H2: The disciplinary process independently conditions the causal process between fairness and officer performance.*

## **Method**

Several methodological techniques have been used to gather data on police performance. These include self-reports, employee evaluations, peer observations, police personnel records, or other forms of secondary data. However, given the amount of discretion afforded to police officers who have limited direct supervision, it is often difficult to capture many aspects of police behavior. Thus, similar to this study, many researchers rely on self-reported measures when examining negative work-related behaviors and varying forms of difficult to capture types of police misconduct (Kaariainen et al., 2008; Reynolds et al., 2018; Helfers et al., 2019; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011).

### **Data**

Data for this study were collected from municipal police officers who were members of a state-wide police association in a southern state (USA). The association represents police personnel (e.g., current officers, retired officers, and police support staff) from campus, rural, state, suburban, and

urban jurisdictions throughout the state. The association’s president, with support from the executive committee, supported the research and encouraged members to participate. The survey contained a cover letter from the association president approving of the research and encouraging membership participation, along with a letter from the researchers explaining the purpose of the study and ensuring that officers’ responses would be voluntary and anonymous.<sup>1</sup> The survey was distributed via email to 5,921 members who met the research criteria (i.e., sworn police officers currently employed in rural, suburban, and urban police departments).<sup>2</sup> After the initial request, in an effort to garner more participation with the survey, a second email was sent to the association membership. A third email request was sought, but the association leadership denied the request claiming the need to protect their members’ interests. There were 1,861 officers who completed the survey that equated to a 31.4% response rate. The final sample used in this study consisted of 1,080 officers representing only line-level officers (i.e., police officers and sheriff’s deputies) with general arrest powers.<sup>3</sup> The descriptive statistics for the sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Sample (N = 1,080)**

Variable		
Race	White	89.99 %
	Black	4.36 %
	Asian/Pacific Islander	1.20 %
	Other	4.45 %
Hispanic	Yes	17.05 %
	No	82.95 %
Sex	Female	12.41 %
	Male	87.59 %
Current Assignment	Patrol	69.07 %
	Detective	17.22 %
	Special Assignment	13.43 %
	Other	0.28 %
Department Size	Very Small	21.08 %
	Small	20.06 %
	Medium	15.32 %
	Large	38.25 %
	Very Large	5.29 %
Direct Experience with Disciplinary Process	Yes	61.20 %
	No	38.80 %
Tenure (in Years)	Mean	13.28
	Standard Deviation	8.88
	Minimum	1.00
	Maximum	42.00

**Dependent Variables**

There were three dependent variables in the current study, general task performance, negative work-related, and extra-role behaviors. Each of these constructs was developed using a two-stage process. The first stage involved the use of primary axis factoring methods (i.e., EFA) to determine the initial factor structure. The second step subjected these factors to a confirmatory factor analytic approach, which provides an empirical assessment of how well the factors capture the underlying construct implied in the data (T. A. Brown, 2014). Further, the CFA allowed us to partial out the covariation between each of the dependent variables. There is an inverse relationship between officers who engage in negative work-related behaviors and their general task performance ( $\rho = -0.39$ ) and extra-role behaviors ( $\rho = -0.41$ ). Also, there is a strong relationship between officers’ general task performance and their proactive task performance ( $\rho = 0.71$ ). The full descriptive statistics and factor loadings are shown in Table 2.

**Negative Work Behaviors**

These indicators reflect a wide array of behaviors that represent activities that police officers should not engage in while on duty (i.e., unprofessional) or minor forms of misconduct that were consistent with prior occupational and management (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Bennett, 1995, 1997; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997) and police research (Kaariainen et al., 2008; Reynolds et al., 2018; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Specifically, we identified five different behaviors.<sup>4</sup> Officers were asked to indicate how often they engaged in these behaviors on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (most of the time). While each of the indicators represented a deleterious behavior, they range in severity from meeting up with coworkers instead of engaging in other work-related activity ( $M = 3.21, SD = 1.27$ ) to sleeping or taking naps during the officer’s shift ( $M = 1.46, SD = 0.98$ ). Each of the indicators was rather strongly related to the construct, and the scale showed an acceptable level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ).

**General Task Performance**

The second dependent variable represented respondents’ willingness to faithfully engage in those behaviors that were essential to their jobs. In other words, those types of behaviors that, if avoided, would put the officer in peril of being punished by supervisors and/or department leadership. This construct was measured using four indicators on the

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and CFA Estimates for Dependent and Independent Variables**

	M	SD	Range	CFA Estimate
<b>Endogenous Variables CFA<sup>1</sup></b>				
<i>Negative Work-Related Behaviors (<math>\alpha = 0.73</math>)</i>				
Meet up with coworkers instead of engaging in work-related activities.	3.21	1.27	1—6	0.42***
Do the bare minimum that is required.	1.94	1.26	1—6	0.60***
Sleep or take naps during your shift.	1.46	0.98	1—6	0.64***
Engage in non-job-related activities while on duty (e.g., reading, watching movies).	2.39	1.43	1—6	0.60***
Take longer on calls to avoid other work.	1.68	1.07	1—6	0.73***
<i>General Task (<math>\alpha = 0.82</math>)</i>				
Fulfill the responsibilities specified for someone in your position.	5.36	0.79	1—6	0.73***
Perform tasks usually expected by your work organization as part of your job.	5.28	0.83	1—6	0.71***
Complete your work in a timely, effective manner.	5.29	0.78	1—6	0.77***
Meet the performance expectations of your supervisor	5.21	0.88	1—6	0.71***
<i>Extra-Role Behaviors (<math>\alpha = 0.74</math>)</i>				
I stay busier than other officers I work with.	4.56	1.14	1—6	0.80***
I am more proactive in crime fighting than other officers I work with.	4.43	1.31	1—6	0.79***
I answer more dispatched calls than other officers I work with.	4.10	1.22	1—6	0.60***
I try to assist citizens more than other officer I work with.	4.24	1.19	1—6	0.43***
<b>Exogenous Variable CFA<sup>2</sup></b>				
<i>Perceptions of Fairness (<math>\alpha = 0.90</math>)</i>				
My performance evaluations have been fair.	4.19	1.36	1—6	0.77***
My disciplinary actions have been fair.	3.74	1.62	1—6	0.83***
Opportunities to advance my career have been fair.	3.65	1.53	1—6	0.75***
Overall, I have been treated fairly at this department.	4.00	1.56	1—6	0.86***
Officers' evaluations are fair at this department.	3.66	1.41	1—6	0.71***

Notes: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$

<sup>1</sup> =  $\chi^2 = 245.68$ ,  $df = 62$ ,  $p < .001$ ; SRMSR = 0.040; RMSEA = 0.052; CFI = 0.95

<sup>2</sup> =  $\chi^2 = 18.37$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .001$ ; SRMSR = 0.013; RMSEA = 0.051; CFI = 0.996

same six-point Likert scale as above. The general task fulfillment items ranged from fulfilling the responsibilities for someone in your [the officer's] position ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) to meeting the performance expectations of your [the officer's] supervisor ( $M = 5.21$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ). Officers typically indicated a strong degree of compliance with these expectations of their job, which is largely expected given para-militaristic nature of policing

organizations. The descriptive statistics and factor loadings are shown in Table 2. Overall, the scale showed an acceptable level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ).

#### *Extra-Role Behaviors*

The final dependent variable in the study represents the degree to which officers engage in proactive tasks on the job. Again, this was measured using the same six-point Likert scale used in the other

dependent variables. The four indicators that are used to assess officers proactive task performance range from officers indicating that they stay busier than other officers with whom they work ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) to frequently handling more dispatched calls than other officers with whom they work ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ). Again, the factor loadings suggest that each of these indicators is strongly related to the underlying construct, and the scale shows an acceptable level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ).

### Independent Variable

Over the last 30 years, research studies and meta-analyses supported that how an employee is treated influences both work-related attitudes and behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2001, 2005, 2013; Cohen-Charash, & Spector, 2001). Organizational justice focuses on employees' perception of fair treatment in their organization and their reactions to these perceptions (Colquitt et al., 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2007). Organizational justice is often discussed in terms of three interrelated but distinct dimensions of justice: (a) distributive, (b) procedural, and (c) interactional justice (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2005). Distributive justice refers to the fairness in terms of equitable outcomes. Procedural justice describes the processes used by the organization to derive the outcomes, whereas interactional justice is indicative of the manner that an employee is treated during the process. Yet, research does support a four-dimensional construct that sub-divides interactional justice with interpersonal justice denoting the extent that the employee is treated with respect and dignity, and informative justice represents whether the employee was provided adequate information about the processes and policies (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013).

While much of the police research in this realm has operationalized organizational justice using the three or four-dimensional approach to examine perceptions of fairness, this study uses a holistic measure of fairness because the purpose was not to assess the influence of distinct dimensions on performance, but fairness in terms of officers' generalized perception of their overall work environment (Reynolds & Helfers, 2018b). For similar reasons, this research also does not approach fairness through a process-based model of procedural justice (Tyler, 2004, 2006), which is often used to examine how principles of fair treatment influence perceptions of events, such as police and citizen interactions (Donner et al., 2015).

Previous research supports that when employees make judgment assessments about fairness in their organization, they often form an overall fairness perspective by taking into account their direct

and vicarious experiences (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). Thus, employees hold a holistic perception of their organization (i.e., a global attitude) in addition to being able to make separate judgments about an event (i.e., specific attitudes). A qualitative study by Reynolds and Hicks (2015) on perceptions of fairness in police organizations among officers provides support for the notion that officers distinguish between fairness in terms of singular events (i.e., specific attitudes about a specific experience or aspect) and fairness in the organization as a whole (i.e., global attitudes). Furthermore, these authors found that officers held distinct perceptions toward the organization and their supervisors.

Given this research focuses on the perception of overall fairness in the organization versus the influence of specific or interrelated facets (e.g., distributive, procedural, interactional, and informative justice), this study utilized a holistic concept of organizational justice (Reynolds & Helfers, 2018b). The primary independent variable in this study is a latent indicator depicting perceptions of fairness within the organization—across a few domains. Officers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with five statements using a six-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The domains on which fairness were assessed ranged from perceptions about the fairness of performance evaluations ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) to perceptions regarding the fairness of career advancement opportunities ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ). Interestingly, there is more dispersion in perceptions of fairness across these domains. Each of these indicators was strongly related to the underlying latent construct, and the scale showed a good degree of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

### Analytic Plan

The current study uses structural equation modeling (SEM) to estimate the relationships between the variables. There are three reasons that SEM is the most appropriate analytic technique to use in the current study. First, by using latent variables, SEM allows for researchers to partial out the measurement error associated with the use of survey data (T. A. Brown, 2014). Second, SEM is flexible enough to allow for the simultaneous estimation of direct effects on multiple endogenous (i.e., dependent) variables simultaneously, while partialing out the shared variance between the items (T. A. Brown, 2014). Finally, the use of SEM allows researchers to assess if the causal process works the same for multiple groups, by simultaneously estimating the causal sequence for multiple groups (Byrne, 2004). This last benefit of SEM has been infrequently used in criminology (c.f., Powers et al., 2017) but holds a great deal of promise

for determining if the causal sequence varies based on groups (Kline, 2005).

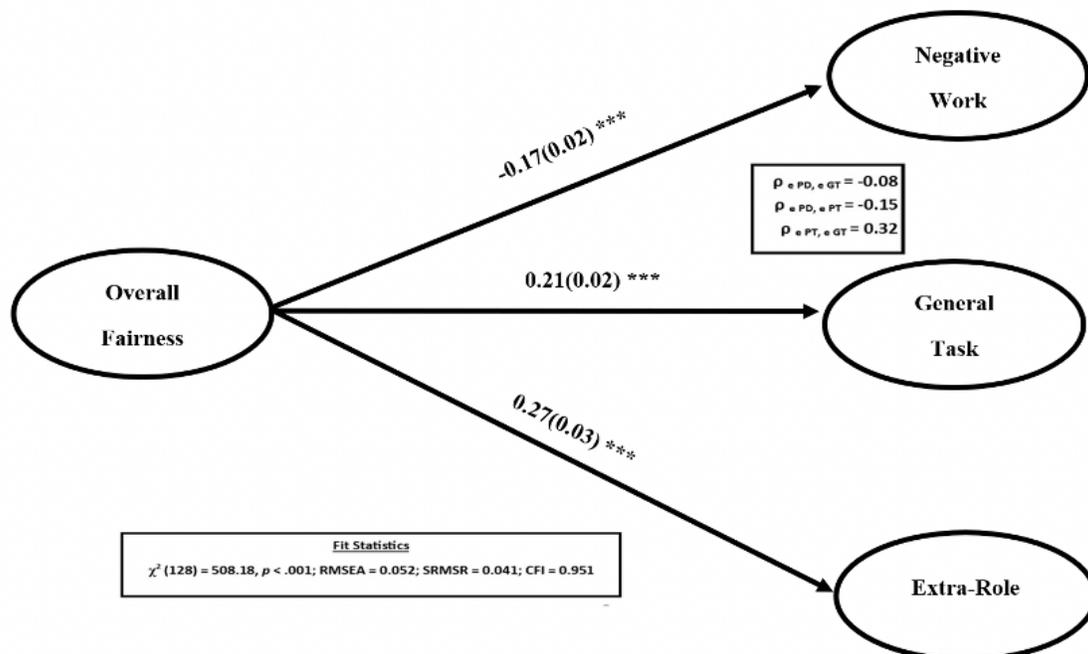
In this study, we are interested in determining if those officers who have been subjects of their department's internal disciplinary process ( $n = 661$ ), regardless of the outcome of the investigation, differ from those officers who have never been party to this type of investigation ( $n = 419$ ). We are trying to determine if experiencing the disciplinary process independently conditions the causal process between fairness and negative work behaviors, general task performance, and extra-role behaviors. Accomplishing this requires estimating a baseline model that represents the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. After all, if there is no significant relationship in the aggregate, it is unlikely that one will exist between the groups (Byrne, 2004). Determining the causal invariance (i.e., does being involved in the disciplinary process affect the causal relationships in the model) requires researchers to start with the assumption that the model is equivalent across groups and then slowly relaxing the equivalency assumption until the models are allowed to be completely independent. This process is accomplished in an iterative manner to identify the best fitting model, using the standard Hu and Bentler (1999) criterion. Ultimately, we present the results

from only two models here: the baseline model and the best fitting structurally invariant model.

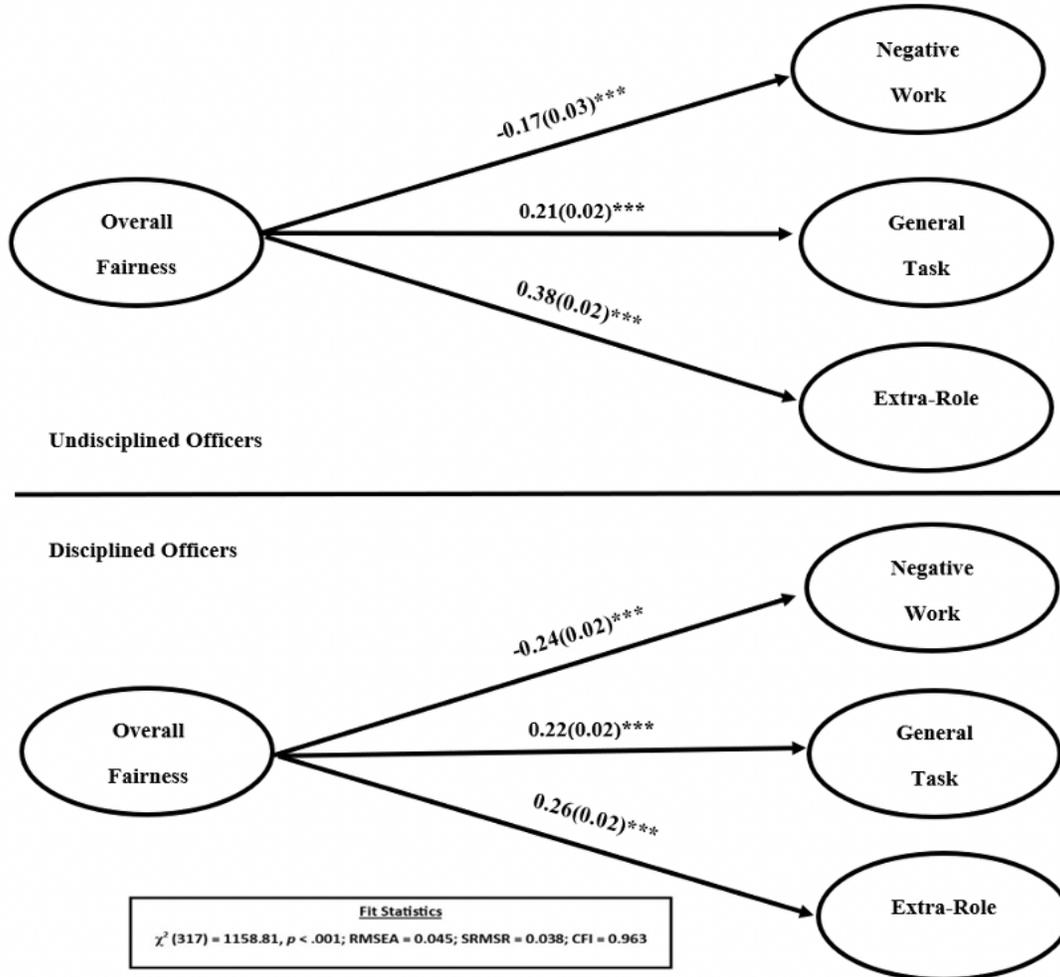
## Results

The results from the baseline model, which estimated the pooled effect between the independent and dependent variables, are presented in Figure 1. Overall, the model fit the data well ( $\chi^2_{(128)} = 508.18, p < .001$ ; RMSEA = 0.052; SRMSR = 0.041; CFI = 0.951). The results suggest that fairness has the strongest effect ( $b = 0.27, p < .001$ ) on extra-role behaviors, followed by general task performance ( $b = 0.21, p < .001$ ), and lastly, on negative work behaviors ( $b = -0.17, p < .001$ ). In other words, perceptions of fairness within the organization are related to the positive (i.e., general task performance and extra-role behaviors) activities of officers, as well as negative work behaviors of officers. This finding supports the first hypothesis. These results would seem to suggest that officers' job performance—across multiple domains—are in part influenced by perceptions of fairness. Next, we turn to the central question of this study, whether these effects differ based on prior experience with the disciplinary process. In order to determine if there was invariance across these groups, we started by assuming that there was no invariance—measurement or structural—between these groups.

**Figure 1. Estimating the Effects of Perceptions of Fairness on Police Negative-Work Related, General Task Performance, and Extra-Role Behaviors. ( $N=1,080$ )**



**Figure 2. Split Structural Model—Based on Experiences with Disciplinary Process—Estimating the Effects of Perceptions of Fairness on Negative Work-Related Behaviors, General Task Performance, and Extra-Role Behaviors. (N=1,080)**



We then began relaxing assumptions until we found the best fitting model. The fit statistics are presented in Table 2. The results indicate that the best fitting model comes from the assumption that there is complete structural variance between those officers who have been disciplined and those officers who have never participated in the process. The results from this model are presented in Figure 2.

After allowing for the causal sequence to completely differ between the groups, the model still fit the data well ( $\chi^2 (317) = 1158.81, p < .001; RMSEA = 0.045; SRMSR = 0.038; CFI = 0.963$ ). These results indicate that the causal sequence is independent for those who have experienced the disciplinary process

and those who have not, thus confirming the second hypothesis. While the results appear largely the same, there are differences in the magnitude of the effects between fairness and the dependent variables. Specifically, we found that the effect of fairness for officers who have experienced the disciplinary process on engaging in negative work-related behaviors ( $b = -0.24, p < .001$ ) are 41.18% stronger than for those officers who have never experienced the disciplinary process ( $b = -0.17, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, we found that for officers who have been through the disciplinary process ( $b = 0.26, p < .001$ ), fairness exerts a 31.58% weaker effect on extra-role behaviors compared to those who have never experienced the

disciplinary process ( $b = 0.38, p < .001$ ). Finally, we found that the results for general task performance are almost identical for those who have experienced the disciplinary process ( $b = 0.22, p < .001$ ) as compared to those who have not been through the disciplinary process ( $b = 0.21, p < .001$ ). Overall, the results would seem to suggest that fairness is fundamental for dictating how officers, regardless of experiencing the disciplinary process, engage in the discretionary parts of their job—both pro- and anti-social. However, exposure to the disciplinary process has little difference on the effect that fairness has on officers' general task performance.

## Discussion

This study extends our understanding of how officers' perceptions of overall fairness in police departments influence officer work related behaviors by examining all three dimensions of generalized officer performance (Donner et al., 2015; Rosenbaum & McCarty, 2017). Importantly, this study attempted to capture how officer perceptions of fairness influence minor forms of negative work-related behaviors that are often difficult to detect and which are generally outside the purview of supervision. These types of harmful acts are important to reiterate. Recall the dependent variable was measured using the following behaviors: meeting with co-workers instead of engaging in work-related duties, doing the bare minimum, sleeping on duty, engaging in non-duty related activities, and taking longer than necessary on calls for service. We also examined how perceptions of fairness influence general tasks that officers are *required* to perform to meet the goals of an organization and their engagement in other extra-role policing behaviors. This study is unique in that we examined the relationship between perceptions of fairness and each of these outcomes, not only the sample as a whole, but we also examined the differences in the process for officers who had been through their agency's disciplinary process.

We find, similar to prior research, that officer perceptions of organizational fairness influence their overall performance (Bradford et al., 2014; Hass et al., 2015; Kaariainen et al., 2008; Reynolds et al., 2018; Tyler et al., 2007; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). The findings are consistent with the societal expectations that citizens have with the police. Specifically, when officers feel as though they are treated fairly, they perform more general tasks, engage in more extra-role activities (i.e., proactive policing), and engage in fewer negative work-related behaviors. Furthermore, our findings advance the recommendation put forth by the President's Task Force Report on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing (2015)

emphasizing the importance of agency leadership embracing organizational justice principles. Additionally, the findings also align with motivational theory by linking organizational treatment to performance. As officers would be more likely to reach their maximum performance potential when the organization meets their personal and physiological needs (Armeli et al., 1998; Blau, 1967; Cropanzano et al., 2007; Colquitt et al., 2013; Herzberg et al., 1959; Mazlow, 1943; McClelland, 1961). Thus, how officers perceive their treatment is critical for supervisors and administrators if they want to improve their relationships with subordinates and enhance their overall work performance. Research finds, in accordance with the authors' anecdotal experiences, that police organizations have traditionally used a "heavy-handed"/authoritative management style (Sarver & Miller, 2014; Wuestewald & Steinheider, 2012) to the detriment of enhancing interpersonal relationships. This creates a separation between line officers and supervisory officers (Caldero & Crank, 2011; Reuss-Ianni, 1983) that may contribute toward harmful behaviors among line officers. Therefore, recognition of the benefits of organizational justice practices is important for today's police leadership. This study provides further evidence to suggest that being fair to all officers, disciplined and non-disciplined alike, is important as it can achieve the results police supervisors desire of their personnel (Reynolds & Helters, 2018a). However, the advice is especially important for officers who traverse the organization's disciplinary process, regardless of reason or outcome. This is a key finding because it emphasizes that if administrators do not treat officers in an organizationally just manner, the administration can hinder officer performance that is counter indicative to the primary reason for the disciplinary process, which should be to promote and shape positive work behaviors. The purpose of supervision is not just to have oversight of an officer's behavior but, more importantly, to provide guidance and encouragement to maximize the efficacy of both the officer and the organization. The ultimate goal should be to ensure that the employee feels they are a valued member of the team (Carr & Maxwell, 2018; Hass et al., 2015; Myhill & Bradford, 2013; Nix & Wolfe, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2018; Wolfe et al., 2018).

Overall, when officers perceive fair treatment, they are more likely to adhere to the expectations of the organization in regard to engaging in lower levels of negative work-related behaviors, along with performing at higher levels of general task and extra-role behaviors. Regardless of whether an officer is disciplined, officers' general task performance is not affected. This may suggest that officers acknowledge that there are certain tasks every

officer must perform (Paoline & Terrill, 2013). Since employees (officers) aspire toward acceptance of supervisors, employees are knowledgeable about what is expected of them and will strive to meet their general obligations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Tyler & Blader, 2003; Tyler et al., 2007). After all, employees must be aware that to maintain employment, certain performance conditions must be met.

The results of this study provide value to police administrators because perceptions of fairness matters among officers, regardless if they have experienced the disciplinary process. For instance, fairness is much stronger for those who have experienced the disciplinary process in regard to their decision to engage in negative work-related behaviors. Officers who have been subject to the process must not be ostracized (as often occurred in an agency in which one of the authors was employed—supervisors referred to officers in the process as “their turn in the barrel”) because it may result in officers engaging in higher levels or more instances of deviance. The purpose of discipline should be to correct behavior and not be exclusively punitive in nature (Harris et al., 2015; Harris & Worden, 2014; Shane, 2012). Our results would suggest that fairness occupies an integral role in shaping officers’ perceptions of the disciplinary experience (Reynolds & Hicks, 2015).

Additionally, when officers perceive their treatment as fair, they report lower frequency of engaging in negative work-related behaviors compared to officers who have not received discipline. This finding may suggest that there is a reciprocal effect concerning discipline and performance. When disciplined officers perceive fair treatment, they are less willing to engage in minor forms of negative work-related behaviors and may develop loyalty to the organization and their supervisors. Conversely, when officers feel mistreatment by being singled out or giving excess or wanton punitive sanctions, they may retaliate and alter their work behaviors in the form of not engaging in proactive policing activities. Officers are selected for employment because they have high character traits, and the expectation is that their emotional intelligence will be above the norm so that they can overcome adversity (P. Oliver, 2014). However, officers have the same needs as any other person, and they must be treated with dignity and respect by their supervisors to alleviate negative feelings toward the organization. Supervisors should be particularly attuned to those officers who have been subjected to the disciplinary process because they may be more likely to engage in deviant behavior and be less proactive with job tasks if they perceive the disciplinary process as unjust.

Police officers are human, and mistakes are likely an inevitable part of the job, especially when working in quickly evolving situations with less than complete information. The findings of this study highlight that even when officers have been disciplined, how they are treated during the process is important. They may still not be pleased with the fact they were disciplined, but they will be less likely to take it out on the organization, and the officer will be less likely to engage in negative work behaviors. Further, the officer will be more likely to engage in proactive activities/extra-role behaviors that benefit their department and community. This research supports organizational justice principles as the foundation for ensuring that officer performance aligns with organizational and community expectations (Donner et al., 2015; Nix & Wolfe, 2016), especially as it pertains to disciplined officers. As police supervisory practitioners are aware, there can be differences between disciplined and undisciplined officers, but fair treatment toward all personnel is essential to ensure that officers are performing in accordance with agency and community expectations. Therefore, organizational justice principles should be a central focus for police leadership to enhance the legitimacy of the police (President’s Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, 2015).

### Limitations

This study is not unlike others because there are limitations that must be recognized. First, the study used a cross-sectional design with a non-probability sample of current police officers who were members of a state-wide police officer association. Thus, the results are unable to draw causal reference, but they do highlight the importance of fair treatment regardless if an officer had been subjected to the disciplinary process. However, the sample was able to capture a large number of police officers who work in various sized and types of police agencies throughout the state. Moreover, the sample was representative of the demographics of the officers who work in the state.<sup>5</sup> Second, the survey did not inquire into when the last disciplinary action occurred, nor did it identify the magnitude of the infraction that contributed to the discipline. Third, the response rate (31%) was lower than desired, which may be indicative that selection bias may be present. However, the response rate was consistent with online survey research (Dillman et al., 2014; Tourangeau et al., 2013). Furthermore, the issue of selection bias may not be a significant concern as research has suggested that response rates are not a good indicator for critiquing non-response bias because even when bias is present in survey research, the relationships between variables tend to be small (as

cited in Nix & Pickett, 2017, p. 31). Lastly, there was not a sufficient number of cases to allow us to examine if there was a difference between officers in the various assignments. This is an area for further research to determine if patrol officer perceptions are different from officers in other police assignments (e.g., investigations, special assignments, and administrative assignments).

### Conclusion

This study reemphasized that the police performance concept is complex with many nuances. Even though police performance has recently been discussed in a post-Ferguson context that focuses on the external environment of the police and reactions to intense negative media coverage of tragic police-citizen encounters, this study examined the role that organizational treatment of officers has on their self-acknowledged engagement in general task, innocuous forms of negative work-related, and extra-role behaviors. This study provides practitioners and scholars insight into the importance of fair treatment as it illustrated that disciplined officers who perceive that they are treated fairly behave in a compliant manner toward organizational efficacy by engaging in extra-role behaviors and less negative work behaviors. Therefore, embracement of organizational justice principles by police supervisors throughout an organization can better ensure that officers' behavior will comport to organizational expectations (Kaariainen et al., 2008; Reynolds et al., 2018; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011; Wolfe et al., 2018). This study suggests that future research may want to examine how specific organizational policies and practices influence perceptions of organizational justice, for example the use of disciplinary matrices. Furthermore, future research should also consider examining if officer assignment matters in regard to their performance after being disciplined. Lastly, future research should continue to examine how organizational justice promotes organizational support within a social exchange theoretical framework and how it influences other work-related behaviors and attitudes.

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#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Prior to the survey being distributed to the state-police association, the protocol and the survey instrument were approved by the Institutional Review Board of one of the authors.
- <sup>2</sup> The association also had members who were retired officers, EMS, officers affiliated with campus and the state police, and police support personnel, but those were excluded from receiving the survey.
- <sup>3</sup> Officers who identified themselves as supervisory or command level officers were excluded from analysis.
- <sup>4</sup> Items used to create the measure of negative-work behaviors were based on examples provided by officers previously interviewed (see Reynolds & Hicks, 2015).
- <sup>5</sup> The state licensing agency reported similar demographics of sworn police officers in the state as represented by the study's sample.