

# The Relationship Between Managerial Humor and Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Proactive Work Behavior: An Application of Leader-Member Exchange Theory

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between humor and newcomer job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior through the application of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. This study worked off the previous research of Pundt and Herrmann (2014) where they suggested further research between humor and LMX in relation to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior. Participants filled out a survey if they were 18 years or older and had been at their current job for one year or less. The survey consisted of four scales measuring the humor of the participant's manager and the participant's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior, respectively. A Pearson correlation test was performed to see the relationship between positive and negative managerial humor on the aforementioned variables. Within the findings, positive humor had a moderate correlation to positively relating to job satisfaction. Negative humor had a low or slight correlation to negatively relating to job satisfaction. Finally, positive humor had a low or slight correlation to positively relating to organizational commitment. Overall, this study could aid managers with the socialization of their newcomers and development of LMX relationships.

**Keywords:** humor, leader-member exchange theory, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, proactive work behavior

## INTRODUCTION

The following study investigates the relationship between managerial humor and newcomer job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior through leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. Through an investigation of these variables, managers, businesses, and/or employers can examine their own socialization practices and see if managerial humor can be beneficial in improving the job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior of their newcomers. By looking at the variables through an LMX lens, managers can see how maintaining quality manager/subordinate relationships through the use of humor may be beneficial to their overall success as professionals, as well as the overall success of their organization.

Before one can understand or study the variables above, one must understand LMX theory. Thus, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory examines the relationship between the leader of an organization and their subordinates. The relationship between a leader and subordinate can hold great power in the success of an organization. Wang, Zhang, Ding, and Cheng (2018) stated in their study that "...when the superior-subordinate relationship is negative, this will increase the subordinates' anticipated anxiety about adverse events" (p. 658). When subordinates experience anxiety or feelings of uncertainty about their standing with their supervisor, their overall satisfaction can decrease (Lindsey Hall, Baker, Andrews, Hunt, & Rapp, 2016). There is quite a bit of research on leader-member exchange theory in relation to job satisfaction, but there has been little research about humor in leader-member exchange theory and its relationship to subordinate job satisfaction. Pundt and Herrman (2014) stated that although their study on the use of affiliative and aggressive humor by leaders in organizations focused on humor and organizational leadership, there should be a focus on humor used by leaders and its "...relationship to outcome variables such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, or proactive work behaviour" (p. 120).

In addition, research regarding the relationship of humor through leader-member exchange on newcomer job satisfaction has not been studied extensively. Pundt and Herrman (2014) suggested that future studies could be completed "...by studying the development of LMX in organizational newcomers" (p. 119). Knowing how

managerial humor can increase job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior in newcomers will help predict the socialization of newcomers. Previous research found that humor can have both a positive and negative relationship with subordinates in an organization. For example, Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, and Viswesvaran (2012) studied positive humor in organizations and found a "...positive sense of humor is associated with: good physical and mental health; buffers the negative effects of workplace stress on mental health; and promotes effective functioning at work" (p. 175). In terms of the negative relationship between humor and subordinates, Evans and Steptoe-Warren (2018) found that managers using negative humor saw "Their subordinates reported significantly poorer working environments compared with others sampled and perceived their managers to be significantly weaker leaders" (p. 451). Not only can the type of humor utilized by the manager impact the subordinate, but it can impact the managers or the perception of the managers as well.

The identity of a newcomer also plays a role in how they experience their manager's humor. If a newcomer's identity becomes the "butt" of a joke by their manager, they will experience an increase in stress and anxiety, amongst many other psychological factors. With an increase in stress and anxiety comes a decrease in overall job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior. When one's identity is used as a joke, especially in regard to aggressive humor, the consequences of that joke can take a negative toll on the newcomer and organization.

As a whole, the relationship between managerial humor and newcomer job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior are important to examine due to the weight they carry in the success of an organization. If a subordinate, especially a newcomer, is not satisfied with their job, their commitment to the organization and how much work they are willing to put into the job will most likely be significantly lower than those newcomers who are satisfied. To increase satisfaction and in turn, organizational commitment and proactive work behavior, managers could use humor. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between humor and newcomer job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior through the application of leader-member exchange theory.

Survey data will reveal new employees' perceptions of managerial humor, as well as these employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior. It is expected that negative types of managerial humor will have negative impacts on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior, whereas positive types of managerial humor will lead to more positive outcomes. In addition, this study applies leader-member exchange theory (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009), which predicts that the type of humor managers use will impact the quality of their relationships with their employees.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Leader-Member Exchange Theory*

As stated previously, leader-member exchange theory (LMX) examines the relationship between the leader of an organization and their subordinates. Within LMX, managers or leaders create unique relationships with subordinates (Lindsey Hall et al., 2016), but each relationship between managers and subordinates can be defined by its quality (Clemens et al., 2009). LMX theory states that a manager-subordinate relationship is either low or high quality (Wang et al., 2018). The exchanges between leaders and their subordinates in lower quality LMX relationships constitutes a more "contractual" (DeConinck, 2011, p. 23) relationship where subordinates work to uphold their end of their contract by completing work assigned and not working toward a relationship with their manager that would result in higher trust between the two of them. In comparison, a high quality LMX relationship leads to more personal exchanges and moments where the manager and subordinate have a shared trust for one another that benefits both parties. The manager benefits because they have a trustworthy subordinate and the subordinate benefits because they may see an increase in opportunities for professional development (DeConinck, 2011). In fact, the higher the quality of relationship between leader and subordinate, the higher the "...respect, trust, and obligation" (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 237) there will be within that relationship.

In addition to understanding, trust, and loyalty, Lindsey Hall et al. (2016), found in their study "...that as LMX increases, so do the relationships between organization identification and commitment" (p. 30). Also, Gerstner and Day (1997), concluded "LMX is consistently correlated with member job performance, satisfaction (overall and supervisory), commitment, role perceptions, and turnover intentions" (p. 836). In other words, as the LMX between managers and subordinates increases, the job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior increases or improves for the subordinate. The benefits of a high LMX relationship can include positive impacts on salary, promotion, benefits, friendship with coworkers, met goals, enjoyment, etc. (Spector, 1985). These benefits help determine the job satisfaction of a subordinate, which is defined as how satisfied or pleased an organizational

member is with their job, the work they are performing, or other factors related to the job (Volmer, Niessen, Spurk, Linz, & Abele, 2011). Thus, when a subordinate experiences a high quality LMX relationship, they will see the benefits of that relationship and experience higher job satisfaction.

Another aspect or benefit of a high quality LMX relationship is that the subordinate in the relationship will receive some type of favorable treatment from the manager (Volmer et al., 2011). According to DeConinck (2011), "When employees receive favorable treatment from their employer, they will feel obligated to reciprocate that treatment through increased effort [proactive work behavior] and commitment to the organization" (p. 23). Organizational commitment occurs when an employee displays a sense of loyalty with their organization. Employees with higher organizational commitment tend to share values with their organization as well as share their pride for working there with others (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Whereas proactive work behavior is behavior demonstrated by an organizational member that consists of "taking charge, voice, individual innovation, and problem prevention" (Parker & Collins, 2010, p. 636). High quality LMX relationships help an organizational member to not only attach themselves to their organizations but to also be comfortable sharing their ideas and making sure they are heard. This literature is important to the present study because LMX theory is the lens and foundation through which the researcher will examine and interpret the data. Through an understanding of LMX theory and its relationship to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior, managers can see how the quality of relationships with their subordinates correlate to the overall success of their workplaces.

### *Humor in the Workplace*

As noted with the literature above, with higher quality LMX relationships comes higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Lindsey Hall et al., 2016). Not every LMX relationship though is high quality. Managers also experience low quality LMX relationships where one way of improving those relationships is through humor. Pundt and Herrmann (2014) found that not all, but specific types of humor promoted high quality relationships between leaders and followers. Leist and Müller (2013) presented four types of humor that will be used in the present study – they are affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating.

Affiliative humor is "...used to enhance one's relationships with others in a way that is relatively benign and self-accepting" (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray & Weir, 2003, p. 52). An example of affiliative would include a manager telling a joke that subordinates would be able to connect to, like a personal anecdote or inside joke. The key for affiliative humor is to bring a sense of joy rather than negativity. Self-enhancing humor is used to help or promote oneself positively (Leist & Müller, 2013). Managers utilizing self-enhancing humor may tell jokes about themselves but ones that do not affect their own self-esteem, such as bumping into a wall and saying, "who put that wall there?" Leist and Müller (2013) defined aggressive humor as "...a hostile form of humor to enhance the self at the expense of others and included sarcastic or criticizing humor" (p. 552). Ultimately, aggressive humor consists of jokes that are meant to put others down, like making fun of a subordinate's work performance or overall appearance. Finally, self-defeating humor is used to make fun of oneself with the intention of pleasing others (Martin et al., 2003). Managers using self-defeating humor may joke about mistakes they have made to appeal to their subordinates but in an extreme manner. Self-defeating can also include a manager commenting on their own looks or weight. When these different humors enter the workplace, they can have a significant impact on whether the leader-member relationship is measured at a high or low quality. Evans and Steptoe-Warren (2018) found that without the influence of positive humor, aggressive humor could be detrimental to an organization and suggest managers utilize positive humor.

Humor not only impacts the quality of relationships but also the job satisfaction of subordinates or followers as well. Decker (1987) studied humor and its relation to job satisfaction and found that subordinate job satisfaction improved with an increase in the use of humor by the manager. Although Decker saw that managerial humor improved job satisfaction amongst subordinates, Evans and Steptoe-Warren (2018) studied how specific types of humor can correlate to job satisfaction differently. Specifically, they found that the use of aggressive humor lowered job satisfaction of subordinates.

Like job satisfaction, humor also influences the organizational commitment and proactive work behavior of subordinates in an organization. Romero and Arendt (2011) studied the use of subordinate humor and its relationship to organizational outcomes. They found that positive humor styles led to positive organizational commitment whereas aggressive humor led to negative organizational commitment of organizational members. Specifically, in connection with this study, the researchers stated, "Humor research in the field of management has the potential to produce some very interesting and useful findings" (Romero & Arendt, 2011, p. 658). With an increase in job satisfaction and organizational commitment from positive forms of humor, an organizational member would then demonstrate an increase in proactive work behavior. Thus, with a decrease in job satisfaction and

organizational commitment from negative forms of humor, an organizational member would then show a decrease in proactive work behavior. The present study will examine both positive and negative humor on the variables of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior in order to determine if there is a relationship between the type of humor used in an LMX relationship and the aforementioned variables.

### *Newcomers in Organizations*

Discussing LMX quality and humor thus far has focused on the general impact each one has on the variables of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior. One aspect of an organization where LMX relationship quality can be quite different is for newcomers. This is because newcomers "...are participating in two interrelated processes, socialization into the organization and development of an LMX relationship with a new supervisor" (Dienesch & Liden, 1986, p. 628). It is difficult for newcomers and managers to develop a high quality LMX in a short amount of time because of stress newcomers may be experiencing during their socialization process (Zheng, Wu, Eisenberger, Shore, Tetrick, & Buffardi, 2016). Managers utilizing humor in leader-member exchange with newcomers may lead to a higher quality relationship. Job satisfaction for newcomers is also different because they do not have any experience with the new organization. Because newcomers learn new facets of their organization every day, their job satisfaction does not actually increase with their socialization. These facets could actually be considered "undesirable" to the newcomer (Ok & Park, 2018). Thus, humor could be a great way for managers to prevent the decrease in job satisfaction from occurring.

Similar to job satisfaction, the organizational commitment of newcomers is more likely to be higher when they first begin a job and decreases the longer they work for an organization and become aware of the undesirable facets of their job (Ok & Park, 2018). To prevent this from happening, a manager can use humor to increase organizational commitment. Newcomers need to have some sort of attachment their job in order to be successful in the organization. When the quality of the LMX increases from the positive humor, so will the job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In a study that examined a temporary workplace setting between camp leaders and their subordinates, researchers found that there is a positive relationship between LMX and organizational commitment (Ioannidou, Karagiorgos, & Alexandris, 2016). Although the correlation was moderate, this study helps demonstrate that organizational commitment can develop and be positive within a short period of time. Managers can utilize humor to develop a positive organizational commitment amongst their newcomers who have not been there for a long time.

When newcomers have a sense of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, they will seek more responsibility (Zheng et al., 2016). Seeking more responsibility is a form of proactive work behavior (Parker & Collins, 2010; Zheng et al., 2016). A way in which newcomers can seek more responsibility is through information seeking. Zheng et al. (2016) wrote, "...information seeking provides an early way for organizational newcomers to convey their high job interest and motivation to supervisors..." (p. 846). Information seeking by newcomers occurs when newcomers feel comfortable and supported within their new workplaces (Zheng et al., 2016). Humor can be used by managers to create that environment where information seeking can easily occur for newcomers.

Overall, understanding how managerial humor can increase the job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior in newcomers in this study will help managers and organizations predict factors related to successful, or unsuccessful, socialization of newcomers.

### *Humor and Identity in the Workplace*

Studying the relationship between humor and newcomer job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior would be incomplete without also examining how the newcomers' identity plays a role in how they experience their manager's humor. In particular, someone's gender, sexual orientation, and/or race can influence not only what content a manager uses in their humor but also how a subordinate will react to that humor.

For example, in a study conducted by Willis (2012), he interviewed young LGBTQ+ workers in regard to their witnessing of homophobic behavior and jokes at their workplaces. He found by just hearing others make jokes or talk poorly about members of the LGBTQ+ community, those LGBTQ+ employees are less likely to identify as LGBTQ+. In particular, Willis (2012) stated:

The language and expressions exchanged in work relationships, as recalled by participants, position lesbian and gay identities and relationships as sources of moral degradation, ridicule and, in some instances, hate. To this end, participants' accounts highlight how discursive violence can operate in the workplace – informal speech practices through which homophobic beliefs and sentiments are conveyed, from conversations in the staffroom to joke-telling (p. 1603).

When subordinates are unable to express themselves openly or experience outright bias from their managers, they will experience an increase in stress and anxiety, amongst many other psychological factors. With an increase

in stress and anxiety comes a decrease in overall job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior. Thus, if managers use humor that degrades their subordinate's sexual orientation, they can expect not only to have unhappy subordinates but an unsuccessful organization as well.

In terms of race, humor can be used to offend others, but as stated by Romero and Cruthirds (2006), "Humor does not have to be intentionally negative or aggressive in order to offend" (p. 64). For example, managers could think they are telling a stereotypical, "funny" joke about a racial group that they think will get everyone laughing, but in reality, the manager is causing harm to their employees and organizations. Their subordinates do not have to necessarily identify with the race within the joke, but they could know or be close with someone who does. Racial humor can produce negative effects on the organization as well. According to Romero and Cruthirds (2006), "...ethnic humor in a mixed ethnicity group will likely alienate the audience, cause interpersonal conflict and inhibit organizational outcomes" (p. 64). Similar to the use of homophobic humor and exchanges above, racial humor will likely decrease the overall satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior of subordinates. In addition, newcomers within organizations where managers use such offensive humor can experience a delay in socialization and harbor overall negative feelings about themselves and the organization they work for.

## HYPOTHESES

As stated above, Pundt and Herrmann (2014) suggested there should be further research on the topic of humor in relation to leader-member exchange theory. In particular, they suggested further research should include how humor through LMX relates to the job satisfaction of newcomers. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Positive types of humor in leader-member exchange have a positive relationship to the job satisfaction of newcomers within an organization.

H2: Negative types of humor in leader-member exchange have a negative relationship to the job satisfaction of newcomers within an organization.

In addition, Pundt and Herrmann (2014) said that future research should include how humor through LMX relates to organizational commitment of newcomers. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Positive types of humor in leader-member exchange have a positive relationship to the organizational commitment of newcomers within an organization.

H4: Negative types of humor in leader-member exchange have a negative relationship to the organizational commitment of newcomers within an organization.

Finally, Pundt and Herrmann (2014) proposed that future research should examine how humor through LMX relates to proactive work behavior of newcomers. Thus, the following research questions are proposed:

H5: Positive types of humor in leader-member exchange have a positive relationship to the proactive work behavior of newcomers within an organization.

H6: Negative types of humor in leader-member exchange have a negative relationship to the proactive work behavior of newcomers within an organization.

## METHODS

This study approached the topic from a quantitative perspective through the use of variables and existing scales that correlated to statistical data. The goal of the study was to investigate the relationship between positive and negative managerial humor and the job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior of newcomers within their organizations. Thus, the variables presented in the study are as follows: positive humor, negative humor, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior. To collect the data, the researcher created an online survey based on four existing scales with demographic questions at the end of the survey. The Humor Styles Questionnaire (Martin et al., 2003) was shortened and modified to fit the humor style of the participant's manager. The Job Satisfaction Survey (Spector, 1985) and Proactive Work Behavior Survey (Parker and Collins, 2010) were shortened to 20-item scales. The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Steers, and Porter, 1979) was not modified at all.

### *Participants*

Participants (See Table 1) filled out a survey if they were 18 years or older and had been at their current job for one year or less. Of the 279 responses recorded, 156 responses were valid and analyzed. The responses not analyzed were incomplete or included participants who had been at their job for more than one year. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 71 (Range = 53). The most reported ages were 18 and 21 (n = 23) with 36 participants not reporting their age at all. The most reported gender identity was female at 83.97% (n = 131) while 15.38%

identified as male ( $n = 24$ ) and 0.6% identified as gender variant/non-conforming ( $n = 1$ ). 85.89% of respondents identified as straight ( $n = 134$ ) and the next highest reported was bisexual at 5.8% ( $n = 9$ ). The highest reported ethnicity was white/Caucasian at 95.5% ( $n = 149$ ) and the next highest was Asian/Pacific Islander at 3.2% ( $n = 5$ ).

**Table 1.** Participant Demographics

<b>Demographic</b>	<b># of Participants</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	131
Male	24
Transgender female	0
Transgender male	0
Gender Variant/Non-Conforming	1
Not Listed: _____	0
Prefer not to answer	0
<b>Sexual/Romantic Orientation</b>	
Asexual	6
Bisexual	9
Gay	0
Straight (heterosexual)	134
Lesbian	2
Pansexual	1
Queer	1
Questioning or unsure	4
Same-gender loving	1
Not Listed: _____	0
Prefer not to answer	1
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Asian/Pacific Islander	5
Black/African American	1
Hispanic or Latinx	3
Native American	2
White/Caucasian	149
Not Listed: _____	0
Prefer not to answer	1

### *Procedure*

The researcher created an online survey through Qualtrics that was first sent to a random sample of 1,000 student emails provided by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse (UW-L). In addition, the survey was distributed on Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Instagram through posts and private messages. A document recruiting UW-L students was also posted on a whiteboard within the Communication Studies computer lab where potential participants wrote their name and email. Finally, snowball sampling was used when people on the aforementioned social media sites shared the initial post, tagged others on the post, or told the researcher they would share the survey with friends. The first page of the survey included information regarding informed consent for the participants. By clicking “I consent, begin the study,” the participants gave their consent to use the data from their respective surveys. If the respondents clicked, “I do not consent, I do not wish to participate” they were directed to the end of the survey. The next question asked, “Have you been at your current organization for one year or less?” If participants responded ‘No,’ they were directed to the end of the survey. If participants responded ‘Yes,’ they were allowed to continue with the rest of the survey.

The first questions of the survey were in regard to the humor utilized by the participant’s manager or supervisor at their job. Participants responded to an adapted Humor Styles Questionnaire (Martin et al., 2003) answering each statement on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was adapted so that the questions were about the humor style of the manager not the participant. There was a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

The questions measured affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humor. For the purposes of the researcher's study, the questionnaire was split into positive humor (affiliative and self-enhancing humor) and negative humor (aggressive and self-defeating) types used by managers. The reliability coefficient for positive humor was .80 while negative humor was 0.78. Examples of questions included, "Your manager usually doesn't like to tell jokes or amuse people," "If someone makes a mistake, your manager will often tease them about it," and "It seems like your manager enjoys making people laugh."

The next set of questions were related to the job satisfaction of the participants at their current job. Participants responded to an adapted Job Satisfaction Survey (Spector, 1985), answering each statement on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The adaptation was taking a 36-item scale and shortening it to a 20-item scale. The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.89. Examples of questions included, "I sometimes feel my job is meaningless," "I like the things I do at work," and "There is too much bickering and fighting at work." Then, participants responded to a 15-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday et al., 1979) answering each statement on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.89. Examples of questions included, "This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance," "There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely," and "Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part."

The last set of questions before the demographic ones were in regard to the participant's proactive work behavior. Participants responded to an adapted Proactive Work Behavior Survey (Parker and Collins, 2010) answering each statement on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The researcher adapted the scale by shortening it from 35-items to 20. The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.86. Examples of questions included, "I have engaged in career path planning," "I generate creative ideas," and "I observe what performance behaviors my boss rewards and use this as feedback on my own performance." Finally, participants responded to an open-ended question asking their age followed by 'select all that apply' questions about their gender identity, sexual/romantic orientation, and ethnicity.

## RESULTS

Each of the hypotheses were analyzed through a Pearson correlation test in the software called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

### *Hypotheses 1 and 2*

H1 and H2 related to the type of humor utilized by the manager of the participants of the study and the relationship between managerial humor and the participant's job satisfaction at work. In particular, H1 stated that positive managerial humor would positively correlate to the job satisfaction of newcomers. Whereas H2 stated that negative managerial humor would negatively correlate to the job satisfaction of newcomers. Pearson correlation was used to test H1. There was a moderate positive correlation between positive humor and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.452, p < .01$ ). Pearson correlation was also used to test H2. There was a low or slight negative correlation between negative humor and job satisfaction ( $r = -0.267, p < .01$ ).

### *Hypotheses 3 and 4*

H3 and H4 were in regard to the type of humor utilized by the manager of the participants of the study and the relationship between managerial humor and the participant's organizational commitment. Specifically, H3 stated that positive humor would positively correlate to the organizational commitment of newcomers. Whereas H4 stated that negative managerial humor would negatively correlate to the organizational commitment of newcomers. Pearson correlation was used to test H3. There was a low or slight positive correlation between positive humor and organizational commitment ( $r = 0.336, p < .01$ ). Pearson correlation was also used to test H4. Since the Sig. (2-tailed) value, or " $p$ ," was greater than .01, the correlation between negative humor and organizational commitment is negligible. Thus, the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is not relevant.

### *Hypotheses 5 and 6*

H5 and H6 concerned the type of humor utilized by the manager of the participants of the study and the relationship between managerial humor and the participant's proactive work behavior. H5 stated that positive humor would positively correlate to the proactive work behavior of newcomers. H6 stated that negative managerial humor would negatively correlate to the proactive work behavior of newcomers. Pearson correlation was used to test H5. Since the Sig. (2-tailed) value, or " $p$ ," was greater than .01, the correlation between positive humor and proactive work behavior is negligible. Thus, the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is not relevant. Pearson

correlation was also used to test H6. Since the Sig. (2-tailed) value, or “*p*,” was greater than 0.01, the correlation between negative humor and proactive work behavior is negligible. Thus, the Pearson correlation coefficient (*r*) is also not relevant for H6.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between managerial humor and newcomer job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior. In particular, the goal of this study was to see if positive humor positively correlated to newcomer job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior and if negative humor negatively correlated to the aforementioned variables. The following section will interpret the results above as well as offer information regarding limitations and future research on the topic.

H1 stated that positive types of humor in leader-member exchange positively correlate to the job satisfaction of newcomers within an organization. This hypothesis was supported in that job satisfaction correlated moderately to positive humor. Overall, this result extends the research of Pundt and Herrmann (2014) as they stated a need for an expansion into the relationship of humor to job satisfaction. In addition, the result of this study is supported in that the job satisfaction of the newcomer would increase with positive managerial humor because as mentioned in the literature review, it is known that humor utilized by a manager increases job satisfaction of subordinates (Decker, 1987). For newcomers, job satisfaction tends to decrease the more socialized they are within the organization (Ok & Park, 2018). Managers who use positive humor early in the socialization of newcomers, similar to the managers of the participants in this study, can use positive humor to counteract the trend of decreasing job satisfaction. Also, Pundt and Herrmann (2014) found that humor promoted higher quality LMX relationships. With an increase in the quality of LMX between the manager and newcomer, the relationship can be more personal (DeConinck, 2011) because there are elements of “...respect, trust, and obligation” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 237). A more personal relationship can help in counteracting the trend of decreasing job satisfaction as well (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

In H2, the researcher hypothesized that negative types of humor in leader-member exchange negatively correlated to the job satisfaction of newcomers within an organization. The hypothesis was supported in that there was a low or slight negative correlation to negative humor on newcomer job satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the research of Evans and Steptoe-Warren (2018) because they found that the use of aggressive humor, especially without a positive humor influence, lowered job satisfaction among subordinates. As noted in the previous paragraph, newcomer job satisfaction decreases over time. The two components of negative humor are aggressive and self-defeating humor. According to Martin et al. (2003), aggressive humor “...was positively related to measures of hostility and aggression...” and self-defeating humor “...is positively related to Neuroticism.” Thus, if newcomers are welcomed by hostility, aggression, and neuroticism, it will be difficult to increase job satisfaction both early and later in their time with the organization. The quality of the LMX relationship between the manager and newcomer will be of lower quality if it is intertwined with feelings of hostility.

H3 stated that positive types of humor in leader-member exchange positively correlated to the organizational commitment of newcomers within an organization. The hypothesis was supported in that there was a low or slight positive correlation to organizational commitment by positive humor. The result extends the research of Romero and Ardent (2011) in that they suggested managerial humor had research potential. Within their study, they found that positive humor among subordinates led to positive organizational commitment. If managers use positive forms of humor, they can also see an increase in organizational commitment. Humor can also increase the quality of LMX (Pundt & Herrmann, 2014). In addition, it is known that higher quality LMX relationships are more personal (DeConinck, 2011). Thus, humor could lead to an increase in “...good communications channels [which] appears to be one of the most important elements needed for organizational commitment” (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 13). A reason for a low or slight correlation may be that there are quite a few factors that are associated with an increase or decrease in organizational commitment—not just humor. Some include ambiguity, stress, position tenure, job level, education, etc. (Mowday et al., 1979).

In H4, the researcher hypothesized that negative types of humor in leader-member exchange negatively correlated to the organizational commitment of newcomers within an organization. The hypothesis was not supported in that the correlation between negative humor and newcomer organizational commitment was negligible or not statistically significant. As stated in the previous paragraph, there are many factors that influence the organizational commitment of a newcomer (Mowday et al., 1979). Since the newcomer is being acquainted with the organization, humor may not be a factor that the participants in this study saw as vital to their socialization. The existing research from Romero and Ardent (2011) suggested further research in management humor in relation to organizational commitment, but this finding cannot extend their research.



H5 stated that positive types of humor in leader-member exchange positively correlated to the proactive work behavior of newcomers within an organization. The hypothesis was not supported as there was a negligible correlation between positive humor and positive proactive work behavior. The research of Pundt and Herrmann cannot be extended as the study was unable to find a correlation of positive humor on proactive work behavior. Smithikrai and Suwannadet (2018) found that organizational commitment of subordinates had an influence on the subordinate proactive work behavior. Since the correlation between positive humor and organizational commitment was low, it may not have had high enough influence on the proactive work behavior of the participants in the present study.

In H6, the researcher hypothesized that negative types of humor in leader-member exchange negatively correlated to the proactive work behavior of newcomers within an organization. The hypothesis was not supported by the results as there was a negligible correlation between negative humor and proactive work behavior. Similar to the previous paragraph, this result cannot extend the research of Pundt and Herrmann (2014). Since organizational commitment has an influence on proactive work behavior (Smithikrai & Suwannadet, 2018) and the organizational commitment with negative humor is negligible then it could cause proactive work behavior and negative humor to be negligible as well. Another explanation for the result in H5 and H6 is that 64.1% of the participants in the present study were between the ages of 18-22 and could have been working in temporary positions as college students. There may not be a need for these participants to be concerned with proactive work behaviors or motivated by any type of humor to engage or not to engage in the behaviors if they do not see a future with the organization.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

One of the limitations of this study is the population. Since the researcher sent the survey to 1,000 random emails from the same university, this could have impacted the following population percentages. In terms of the population, this study was limited in that 83.97% of participants identified as female. In addition, 85.89% of participants identified as straight. This skews the results in not including a balanced participant number of other identities. 95.5% of the respondents also identified as white. This too leaves out the input of other identities. The population size of only 156 participants most likely contributed to the skewed results above as well. The data from the study ultimately could not make a statistically significant argument if identity of the participants played a role in the humor they received from their manager and ultimately how it impacted their job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior.

For further research, there would be a benefit to also measure LMX in addition to the relationship between humor and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior. Since the study is based on the theory of leader-membership exchange it would be beneficial to see how the quality of LMX correlated to the three variables mentioned above. In addition, the age of the manager would also be advantageous based on the work of Martin et al. (2003). In their study, they found that "...younger participants had higher Aggressive humor scores than did older participants indicating that older adults are generally less likely to use humor to disparage, ridicule, or manipulate other than are adolescents" (p. 62). It would be interesting to see if the age of the manager has any correlation to the humor they use. Finally, this study could also be used by future qualitative studies to examine stories of humor utilized by managers. Qualitative studies could also interview both newcomers and organizational members who have been with the organization for a longer period of time to compare their perceptions of managerial humor and its relationship to their work life.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between humor and newcomer job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior through the application of leader-member exchange theory. This research found that there was a correlation between positive and negative humor and job satisfaction as well as a correlation between positive humor and organizational commitment. Whereas there was a negligible correlation between negative humor and organizational commitment and proactive work behavior in addition to positive humor and proactive work behavior. This study can demonstrate the influence that humor has and can have on the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of its newcomers. Due to the influence organizational commitment has on proactive work behavior and the small sample size, humor may not be enough to correlate positively or negatively to organizational commitment and proactive work behavior in a significant way. Overall, this study could aid managers with the socialization of their newcomers and development of LMX relationships.

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