# Police Managers' Self-Control and Support for Organizational Justice[*]

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Scott E. Wolfe

Justin Nix

Bradley A. Campbell

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**Abstract**

Recent policing research has identified a positive relationship between line-level officers' perceptions of organizational justice and their adherence to agency goals and job satisfaction. However, we have little understanding of the factors that are related to police managers' support for organizational justice when interacting with employees. We collected survey data from a sample of U.S. command-level officers (N = 211) who attended a training program in a southern state to address this gap in the literature. The anonymous survey was administered in-person to participating command-level police officers prior to their training program. Our multivariate regression analysis revealed that police managers who reported higher levels of self-control were more supportive of organizational justice ($b$ = .26, $p$ < .00). Additionally, police managers who reported higher quality relationships with their colleagues expressed greater support for organizational justice ($b$ = .02, $p$ = .02). Respondents' self-legitimacy was not significantly associated with their support for organizational justice. This study contributes to the organizational justice literature by presenting the first analysis that links police commanders' self-control to support for organizational justice within their management practices. The findings help pinpoint the types of individuals who may be best equipped to be fair police managers.

*Keywords:* organizational justice, self-control, police, supervisors, fairness, management

*Public significance statement:* Police managers with higher levels of self-control were more supportive of organizational justice. This study's findings provide insight regarding the individual characteristics most amenable to supporting organizational justice. Support for such management practices is important because organizational justice has been shown elicit officer behaviors that improve community relations and safety.

# Police Managers' Self-Control and Support for Organizational Justice

Police departments are complex organizations and managing them is a difficult task, especially in the post-Ferguson era of U.S. policing. Political pressure, employee satisfaction, and public scrutiny are daily challenges faced by contemporary police managers (Crank & Langworthy, 1992; Wolfe & Nix, 2016a). A string of high profile, police-involved killings of African Americans over the past few years is a good example of this reality. Reports of such incidents have been quickly and widely disseminated to the public through social media platforms (Gross & Mann, 2017). Media coverage of this type has helped galvanize public protests and calls for police reform. Recent research on this issue has revealed that police officers and supervisors alike have been negatively impacted by the continuous criticism of their profession—officers report being less motivated, viewing the job as more dangerous, and believing the public has become more antagonistic, and they appear to be more likely to de-police (Nix & Pickett, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017; Wolfe & Nix, 2016b). In many ways, such problems are contributing to a paradigm shift among U.S. law enforcement, from a disorder-oriented style of the past, to a more community trust-based policing strategy today (see Kelling & Moore, 1988; Reisig, 2010 for a discussion of similar changes throughout history). Undoubtedly, such issues present unique challenges to police managers.

How can police command staff best manage their officers in the face of so many competing interests, critiques, and changes? Research on organizational justice demonstrates that employees who believe they have been treated fairly by their supervisors are more likely to engage in a wide variety of beneficial work-related outcomes and organizational citizenship behaviors (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). Organizational justice has received considerable attention from police researchers over the past few years. For example, officers who feel they have

been treated fairly by supervisors are more likely to express commitment to agency goals and less likely to engage in misconduct (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe, 2014a; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Furthermore, organizational justice helps protect officers from the uncertainty and anxiety surrounding recent negative publicity (Nix & Wolfe, 2016).

Given the importance of organizational justice, a critical question arises: what factors are related to police managers' support for using fairness in their managerial practices? We have virtually no empirical evidence regarding this issue to date. Recent management research, however, provides insight by revealing that supervisors' self-control may be a key correlate of their support for organizational justice (Matta et al., 2017; see also, Mayer et al., 2007). Supporting the use of organizational justice when dealing with subordinates requires listening skills, empathy, patience, and respect for others—traits not commonly possessed by people with weak self-control (Baumeister et al., 1994; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Given that this area of inquiry is only beginning to take shape in the broader management literature, we do not know whether a similar mechanism operates in organizational contexts outside of typical business settings. Accordingly, we aim to build off this work by focusing attention on whether police supervisors' self-control is related to their support for organizational justice.

The present study advances the police literature by exploring whether police managers' self-control is associated with their support for organizational justice. In doing so, it is important to recognize that the police literature provides clues regarding other factors that may be related to managers' support for organizationally-fair treatment. Studies have shown that line-level officers' attitudes and behaviors are influenced by their self-legitimacy and the relationships they have with colleagues (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Paoline, 2001). We will discuss why such factors may impact supervisors' support for organizational justice and account for them in our analysis to help

provide an unbiased estimate of the self-control relationship. Our goal is to provide a richer understanding of whether an important personality characteristic shapes the extent to which command-level police supervisors support treating their officers fairly. We hope to contribute to the broader business management literature by providing evidence from a police-management context and by accounting for factors specifically relevant to police work. From a practical standpoint, our overarching goal is to improve our understanding of the types of individuals primed to be good police managers.

## Organizational Justice

Organizational justice theory holds a prominent place in the social psychological study of authority-subordinate relations. The framework is based on the integration of several justice perspectives including equity theory (Adams, 1965), procedural fairness (Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975), and interactional justice (Bies & Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1993). Although each framework addresses a different aspect of peoples' evaluations of authority figures, organizational justice theory considers each to be part of an overall fairness evaluation (Colquitt, 2001; Lind, 2001). In this way, organizational justice is typically viewed as being comprised of three components: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990; Lind, 2001). Within job settings, employees are more likely to have favorable evaluations of their supervisors if they feel that outcomes such as salary increases or assignment allocations are distributed fairly—with equity—across the organization (i.e., distributive justice). Regardless of outcome distribution, employees also value whether supervisors make unbiased decisions, clearly explain the reasons behind actions, and allow them a voice in the decision-making process—referred to as procedural justice. Finally, employees believe their supervisors are fair if they feel they have been treated with respect and honesty (i.e., interactional justice).

Organizational justice communicates to employees that they are valued members of their organization and they will not be exploited (Lind, 2001; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Lind & Tyler, 1992). Employees who feel managers have treated them fairly tend to be more productive than their counterparts, report greater job satisfaction and less intention to seek another job, have greater trust in the organization, and have a stronger commitment to organizational goals (DeConinck, 2010; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). Organizational justice also protects against counterproductive work behaviors such as stealing from work (Bechtoldt et al., 2007; Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001; Lim, 2002).

## Organizational Justice in Police Agencies

Police agencies are similar to other organizational settings in some ways. The success of the business—in terms of public safety and the administration of justice—is partially dependent on the quality of employee-supervisor relations. Organizational justice research carried out in police departments has supported this argument over the past several years. Ben Bradford and colleagues (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Bradford et al., 2014; Myhill & Bradford, 2013) have led such efforts in Europe. They have found that police officers who experienced fair supervisor treatment were more committed to their agency's goals, more likely to identify with their agency, and reported less cynical views about their occupation and citizens. Research in the United States has provided similar findings. Officers who are treated fairly report greater job satisfaction (Cronin, McDevitt, & Cordner, 2017), more trust in their agency (Wolfe & Nix, 2017), greater organizational commitment (Rosenbaum & McCarty, 2017), less distress, and a less cynical outlook toward civilians (Trinkner, Tyler, & Goff, 2016). Indeed, Donner and colleagues' (2015) systematic review concluded that police supervisor fairness was positively associated with employee job satisfaction, agency trust, and organizational commitment. Organizational justice also seems to

help prevent officers from getting into trouble. Officers who believe they are treated fairly are more likely to comply with departmental rules (Bradford et al., 2014; Haas et al., 2015; Tyler, Callahan, & Frost, 2007) and less likely to engage in misconduct (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011).

What is more, recent evidence suggests that fair supervisor treatment is associated with greater endorsement of democratic policing. Research shows that police officers who felt their supervisors treated them fairly were more likely to support using procedural fairness when interacting with citizens (Tankebe, 2014b; Trinkner et al., 2016). Recently, Van Craen and Skogan (2017b) demonstrated that supervisor fairness was associated with their subordinates having greater trust and moral alignment with citizens, which in turn fostered support for use of force restraint among these officers (see also, Van Craen, 2016; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017a).

Organizational justice produces beneficial outcomes within police agencies and helps cultivate positive attitudes among officers that likely translate into more favorable citizen interactions. It is clear, then, that organizational justice is a crucial element of effective police management. Yet, managers may have different opinions concerning the extent to which they support using fairness. This raises a key question: what factors are associated with police managers' support for organizational justice? Police managers' levels of self-control likely provide valuable insight regarding this question.

## Self-Control and Organizational Justice

Most organizational behavior research focuses on the outcomes of organizational justice, rather than its antecedents (Brockner et al., 2015). Some studies have examined the role of organizational structure and employees' individual characteristics as predictors of supervisors' use of organizational justice (Schminke, Ambrose, & Cropanzano, 2000; Scott, Colquitt, & Zapata-Phelan, 2007; Zapata, Olsen, & Martins, 2013). Only recently, however, has research begun

exploring whether supervisors' characteristics help explain whether they act fairly when dealing with employees. Mayer and colleagues (2007) showed that three of the Big Five dimensions of personality—agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism—were correlated with fair supervisor behaviors in the expected directions. Yet, in discussing these results, Matta et al. (2017, p. 763) noted, "The effect sizes uncovered in that study tended to be quite small, suggesting more value in pursuing narrow traits that are uniquely relevant to supervisor justice."

This led Matta and colleagues (2017) to argue that supervisor self-control is a specific personality trait that may predict justice rule adherence—i.e., managing with fairness and in a manner consistent with employees' normative expectations. According to Matta et al. (2017, p. 754), "individuals low in self-control lack the ability to follow normative rules and to refrain from indulging in negative, impulsive action tendencies, such as angry outbursts, hurtful remarks, and aggressive behaviors." Criminologists and social psychologists conceptualize self-control in a similar way: "people who lack self-control will tend to be impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk-taking, short-sighted, and nonverbal, and they will tend therefore to engage in criminal and analogous acts" (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, pp. 90-91; see also, Baumeister et al., 1994; Tangney et al., 2004). Matta et al. used an experience-sampling study of working adults recruited from a large Midwestern university. The study involved participants completing daily diary surveys about interactions with their supervisors, and the supervisors completing a survey meant to capture their level of self-control. The results demonstrated that employees perceived less organizational justice from supervisors with weaker self-control.

Related organizational behavior research also lends support to this theoretical connection. Scott and associates (2014) showed that negative emotions experienced by managers were associated with less frequent use of organizational justice. Although this study did not directly

measure self-control, it suggests that the inability to exercise control over emotions decreases managers' ability to supervise fairly. Whiteside and Barclay (2014) conducted an experiment that involved participants playing the role of a manager tasked with telling an employee that he was going to be laid off. Compared to their counterparts in the control group, participants who were randomly assigned to engage in a self-control depletion task were significantly less likely to use interpersonal fairness while communicating the layoff message.

Whether self-control is associated with police managers' views of organizational justice has yet to be subjected to empirical scrutiny. However, the relationship between self-control and certain behaviors has been examined by policing scholars. Police officers with lower self-control are more likely to be involved in on-duty traffic collisions (Rojek et al., 2017) and engage in misconduct (Donner & Jennings, 2014). Lawrence and associates (2017) recently demonstrated that officers with higher levels of empathy and lower levels of neuroticism (both closely related to self-control) received higher scores from citizens regarding their use of procedural fairness.

Accordingly, there is good reason to expect self-control to be associated with managers' support for organizational justice. Managing fairly requires a supervisor take time to listen to employees' concerns and allow them an opportunity to express their opinions. This requires patience, a trait people with low self-control typically do not possess. Relatedly, organizational justice requires empathy, which is a key characteristic of people with high self-control. It is not enough simply to listen to one's employees. A fair manager must honestly care about his or her employees' concerns, and make efforts to address legitimate problems. Fairness of this type does not necessitate supervisors agreeing with their subordinates all of the time. Rather, they must ensure empathy by trying to see the world through their employees' eyes. Indeed, this requires self-control. Organizational justice also necessitates adequate verbal skills, which is not something

people with low self-control exhibit. Fairness requires interacting with subordinates in a calm, clear, and respectful manner. Such interaction skills require higher self-control because they take more time than issuing threats (e.g., to demote or suspend an officer) or yelling and cursing at an employee. Together, each of these examples underscores one of the ultimate goals of using organizational justice—forward thinking. As discussed above, fair supervisor treatment translates into a wide variety of beneficial employee behaviors. To achieve such results, supervisors must care about producing good employees and maintaining stable, positive relationships with them. As Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argued, and research supports, people with weak self-control are poor creators of quality, long-lasting relationships. Interacting with subordinates in a fair manner suggests a supervisor is considerate of employee concerns and long-term agency outcomes, something that requires self-control.

**Self-Control as a Predictor of Support for Organizational Justice**

The handful of studies capable of speaking to the relationship between supervisor self-control and organizational justice typically focus on actual behavior. Given this connection, we also expect supervisors' self-control to be related to their attitudes regarding organizational justice. Research has not yet examined the connection between police managers' self-control and their support for *or* use of organizational justice. Thus, a reasonable starting point is to examine the predictors of police managers' support for organizational justice. Fortunately, there is reason to believe that police supervisors who express support for organizational justice will be the same individuals likely to use it.

The theories of reasoned action and planned behavior suggest that when taken into consideration with factors such as perceived behavioral control (i.e., the ability to perform a behavior based on beliefs about factors that may impede or facilitate the behavior), attitudes about

a *specific behavior* impact behavioral intentions which, in turn, influence actual behaviors (Ajzen, 1985; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Montano & Kasprzyk, 2015). Within the organizational behavior literature, Scott, Colquitt, and Paddock (2009) provided an important contribution related to this issue. They argued that when managers have a greater ability to use discretion, their attitudes (termed "managerial motives") and emotions are more likely to result in organizationally-fair treatment of subordinates. High discretion situations are characterized by "few or ambiguous cues" about how people should "think, feel, or act" (Brockner et al., 2015, p. 106; see also, Mischel, 1977). In contrast, low discretion situations have clear rules guiding decision making. This allows supervisor attitudes to have a greater impact on their actual behavior when they are in high discretion managerial environments, such as those commonly seen in police agencies (Scott et al., 2014).

Although no research has examined this topic in a police-management context, studies concerning line-level officers' support for procedural justice speak to the issue. For example, Skogan and colleagues (2015) demonstrated that line-level officers exposed to a procedural justice training program were more likely to endorse the use of procedural justice during citizen interactions. In a separate study, Bond et al. (2015) found that police recruits who were more supportive of procedural justice reported higher intentions to be procedurally just during citizen-interactions. Finally, Wheller and colleagues (2013) showed that officers who completed procedural justice training had more supportive attitudes of the concept and were more likely to treat people with fairness during role-playing exercises. Given this research, along with research demonstrating the value line-level officers place on being treated fairly by their supervisors, studying the antecedents of police managers' support for organizational justice is a worthy endeavor.

**Other Factors Related to Support for Organizational Justice**

A final question worth consideration is whether there are other factors that may be associated with police managers' support for organizational justice—particularly factors that have been studied by policing scholars but have received less attention in the broader organizational justice literature. Indeed, two such factors emerge from the policing literature. The evidence compiled to date, although limited, suggests that power-holders' sense of self-legitimacy – that is, their "recognition of, or confidence in, their own individual entitlement to power" (Tankebe, 2014a, p. 3) – is a key antecedent of their commitment to being fair with those over whom they exercise authority. Recent work has revealed that police officers' sense of self-legitimacy is related to numerous beneficial work-related outcomes, including support for the use of procedural fairness during citizen interactions (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; see Meško et al., 2017 for an example within a prison setting). In a management context, then, self-legitimacy may be an important correlate of police commanders' support for organizational justice. Individuals who are more confident in their authority may be more likely to support treating subordinates in a respectful, fair manner, compared to those with less confidence who may be inclined to rely on aggressive, terse managerial techniques aimed at establishing power and control over their subordinates (Blader & Chen, 2012; see also Tankebe & Meško, 2015).

The relationship a supervisor has with others in his/her agency is another important variable to consider. Consistent with interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), the broader business management literature has shown that coworker support (or conversely, antagonism) is a key predictor of role perceptions and work attitudes (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Likewise, in the context of policing, a large body of work has investigated police culture – recognizing that as in any other profession, peer workgroups influence officers' attitudes (Paoline, 2001; Terrill, Paoline,

& Manning, 2003; Waddington, 1999). For example, McCluskey, Terrill, and Paoline (2005) found that officers working in peer groups that valued aggressive patrol were more likely to base their decisions to use coercion on extralegal reasons such as the gender, class, or demeanor of a suspect (see also, Ingram et al., 2013). A more recent study explicitly concerned with police managers found that those who reported greater attachment to their peers were less likely to maintain attitudes attributable to the "Ferguson Effect" (Nix & Wolfe, 2017a). It seems likely that there is also a peer effect with respect to police managers' support for organizational justice.

Social psychological research also anticipates such a relationship. Blader and Chen (2012, p. 995), for example, demonstrated that individuals who cared more about how much their colleagues respected and trusted them were more likely "to be concerned about the impressions they cultivate with social targets, to consider these parties' perspectives, and to act in ways that will be regarded as respectable and commendable." Given that employees expect fair treatment during supervisor interactions (see Scott et al., 2009), managers maintain quality relationships with people in their organization by interacting with others in a fair manner (Blader & Chen, 2012). In this way, we expect police commanders who believe they have quality relationships with their colleagues to be more likely to support organizational justice.

## The Current Focus

The present study examined whether command-level police managers' self-control was associated with their support for organizational justice. As we see it, exploring this issue within a police-management context was particularly important because there are clear differences between managing police departments and other organizations. Police agencies operate in paramilitary-type environments characterized by giving and following orders, and situations that sometimes have life-or-death consequences. As such, listening to employees' concerns and ensuring respectful

treatment may be less of a concern among some police managers compared to the type of supervisors often studied in the business literature. Based on available evidence, however, we hypothesized that supervisors with stronger self-control would be more supportive of organizational justice.

## Method

### Sample and Procedure

We analyzed survey data collected from a sample of command-level police managers who attended a continuing education course offered by a southern state's criminal justice training academy. The training program focused on contemporary police management issues and legal updates and is offered annually to chiefs, sheriffs, directors, and their immediate lower ranking command-level supervisors (e.g., assistant and deputy chiefs or sheriffs). Although this is a convenience sample of command-level police officers who attended the annual training course, we believe it is a useful starting point for our research question. One of the current study's authors was invited to lecture at the training program offered in October 2016. Prior to lecturing, the researcher administered hard copies of the survey to all 258 training attendees. Potential respondents were informed about the voluntary nature of participating in the survey and that the questionnaire would remain anonymous. No incentives were offered for participation. The University of Louisville's institutional review board provided approval for the study. We achieved an 88% response rate with 227 completed surveys (well above the typical response rate for a police sample; see Nix, Pickett, Baek, & Alpert, In Press). After removing 10 respondents who indicated being the only sworn officer at their agency and losing another six to listwise deletion for missing data, the analyses below were based on the responses of 211 commanders. The average respondent

was 49 years old (SD = 8.29, range 27 – 77) and had approximately 24.5 years of experience as a police officer (SD = 7.95, range 5 – 56). And, as expected, most respondents were male (98%).

**Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument assessed respondents' views on several contemporary issues in law enforcement (e.g., experiences with body-worn camera policies and training). We dedicated several sections of the survey to questions used for the current study. Guided by prior research on the specific topics, we presented respondents with items aimed at capturing support for organizational justice, level of self-control, self-legitimacy, relationships with colleagues, and demographic characteristics. Next, we discuss each of these variables in detail.

**Dependent variable.** Our dependent variable—*support for organizational justice*—was operationalized as a scale consisting of six items. For example, respondents were asked how important is it that "I consider my employees' viewpoints," "I clearly explain the reasons for my decisions," and "I treat employees with respect." Table 1 lists all items for each of the scales used in the analysis. Each item was measured on the same five-point Likert scale (1 = not important at all, 2 = not important, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, 5 = extremely important). To the best of our knowledge, a validated scale that captures police managers' support for organizational justice is not available in the literature. Accordingly, we developed the items to tap into key aspects of organizational justice—voice, respect, and transparency (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). These items are consistent with validated scales that have been used to assess employees' perceptions of organizational justice in prior research (Colquitt et al., 2015; Matta et al., 2017). Principal-axis factor analysis (PAF) showed the items loaded on a single factor (factor loadings > .56). The items also had adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .79$). Accordingly, we averaged the

responses to these items to generate a mean index with higher scores reflecting greater support for organizational justice. Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for each of our variables.

[Table 1 about here]

**Predictor variables.** Our key predictor variable was *self-control* which was captured by asking respondents how strongly they agreed (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) with a series of eight survey items that tapped into the primary domains of low self-control—impulsivity, risk-taking orientation, short-sightedness, nonverbal, and insensitivity (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Grasmick et al., 1993; Tangney et al., 2004). Example self-control items included "I am good at resisting temptation" and "I do certain things that are bad for me, if they are fun" (reverse coded; see Table 1 for a complete list). These items come from Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone's (2004) Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS). We did not include several items from their scale because in pilot studies we conducted on different projects we learned that police officers often view psychological-based survey questions with skepticism. For example, officers routinely voiced concern with including items such as "I am lazy" and "I wish I had more self-discipline" on survey instruments (both items are contained on the BSCS). The eight items we measured exhibited strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .72$) and coalesced onto a single factor (factor loadings > .40). Responses to the items were used to construct a mean index where higher values indicate stronger self-control.

We also controlled for two other potentially important predictors of police managers' support for organizational justice as discussed earlier. First, we used a nine-item *self-legitimacy* scale that was measured with items such as "I am confident I have enough authority to do my job well" and "I believe people should always do what I tell them as long as my orders are lawful" (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The items demonstrated

acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$) and loaded on a single factor (factor loadings > .43). As such, we averaged the responses to the items to create a mean index whereby higher scores indicate a greater sense of self-legitimacy.

Second, we used a five-item scale to operationalize *relationships with colleagues* that contained survey questions such as "I have a good working relationship with my officers in my police station" and "I feel that my officers trust me" (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The items had an acceptable level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$) and loaded on one factor (factor loadings > .50). We averaged the items to generate a mean index with higher scores representing higher quality relationships with colleagues.

**Statistical controls.** We also accounted for several respondent demographic characteristics. Police managers' *years in law enforcement* was measured continuously and education was captured with a dummy variable (1 = *bachelor's degree*, 0 = less than a bachelor's degree). We controlled for the size of each respondent's agency with a categorical variable—*number sworn* (1 = 2 to 10, 2 = 10 to 24, 3 = 25 to 49, 4 = 50 to 99, and 5 = 100 or more). We did not control for officer gender or race because 98% of the sample was male and 96% was white.

## Results

### Analytic Strategy

Our analysis consisted of two steps. We first examined the correlations to determine whether significant bivariate relationships existed between our predictor and dependent variables. Next, we estimated an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equation to determine whether police managers' self-control was associated with their support for organizational justice, independent of self-legitimacy, relationships with colleagues, and the demographic controls. Preliminary analyses suggested that collinearity was not a problem in the model. All variance inflation factors fell well

below 4.0 and bivariate correlations well below |.70|, which are two commonly used thresholds to identify problematic collinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). However, there was evidence of heteroskedastic error terms, so we estimated the OLS model with robust standard errors (Hayes & Cai, 2007).

**Bivariate Correlations**

Table 2 presents the bivariate correlations between each of the variables included in our analysis. Respondents' self-control was significantly and positively associated with support for organizational justice ($r = .38$, $p < .00$). Police supervisors with higher levels of self-control were more supportive of organizational justice. Additionally, as expected, self-legitimacy ($r = .30$, $p < .00$) and relationships with colleagues ($r = .32$, $p < .00$) were both significantly and positively correlated with support for organizational justice. What is more, self-legitimacy ($r = .23$, $p < .00$) and relationships with colleagues ($r = .22$, $p < .00$) were positively associated with respondents' self-control. These connections (1) suggest that respondents' self-legitimacy and relationships with colleagues are important correlates of their support for organizational justice and (2) underscore the possibility that they may confound the connection between self-control and the dependent variable. Accordingly, we now turn to the next portion of the analysis to determine whether the associations hold in a multivariate context.

[Table 2 about here]

**Multivariate Results**

Table 3 provides the results of an OLS equation that accounted for about 24% of the variation in police managers' support for organizational justice. Consistent with expectations, respondents' self-control was significantly associated with support for organizational justice ($b = .26$, $p < .00$). Within our sample, police managers were more supportive of organizational justice in their

management practices if they had greater self-control. In fact, the standardized partial regression coefficient (β) revealed that this relationship was fairly strong—every one-unit increase in self-control corresponded with a .33 standard deviation increase in the support for organizational justice scale. The only other variable that reached statistical significance in the model was relationships with colleagues ($b$ = .02, $p$ = .02). Respondents with higher quality relationships with colleagues in their agency expressed greater support for organizational justice. Self-legitimacy did not have a statistically significant relationship with support for organizational justice. We now turn to a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

[Table 3 about here]

## Discussion

Policing in the United States has been met with an immense amount of public scrutiny and mistrust in recent years (Weitzer, 2015). In fact, public confidence in the police reached a twenty-two-year low in 2015 (Jones, 2015). Concurrently, several cities across the United States experienced increases in violent crime – which some have argued is the result of a legitimacy crisis characterized by reluctance on the part of officers to police proactively (Mac Donald, 2016; Rosenfeld, 2016; Shjarback et al., 2017). Furthermore, "ambush-style" killings of police officers have spiked recently, hitting a ten-year high in 2016 (Ingraham, 2016). Although these remain incredibly rare events (Maguire, Nix, & Campbell, 2017), the spike is nevertheless notable, and undoubtedly has been perceived as troublesome by police officers (see e.g., Nix, Wolfe, & Campbell, In Press). It should come as no surprise, then, that a recent study by the Pew Research Center (2017) found that 9 out of 10 officers have become more concerned about their safety, and 3 out of 4 officers believe interactions between police and black citizens have become tenser. Furthermore, 1 in 5 officers reported feeling both angry and frustrated "often or nearly always."

In light of these issues and police departments being under the microscope in the new era of social media, police officers holding managerial positions have a particularly challenging job. Fortunately, there is a growing body of evidence that line-level officers value organizational justice when following supervisors' orders (Donner et al., 2015). Yet, we have practically no understanding of the factors that are associated with support for organizational justice among management-level officers. Within this study we demonstrated that self-control was a significant predictor of the extent to which police mangers supported using fairness with subordinates. With this key finding in mind, several theoretical and practical implications warrant further discussion.

The fact that self-control was associated with command-level officers' support for organizational justice suggests not all leaders may not be equally primed to use fairness while dealing with their subordinates. As discussed above, we have reason to believe that management officers' support for organizational justice may be an important predictor of whether they actually treat subordinates in a fair manner. If so, this finding points us in a direction of better understanding the manner in which organizational justice may be related to positive and negative work-related outcomes. Exercising self-control can be taxing on one's cognitive and emotional energy – particularly under stressful conditions (Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010; Uziel & Baumeister, 2012) or when juggling many different tasks in the face of time constraints (Kahneman, 2011). As such, some police managers may be better equipped than others to use fairness with their subordinates, particularly during times of uncertainty or following critical incidents such as a controversial shooting. In this way, a manager's capacity to exercise self-control and treat employees fairly may change throughout the day. Glucose levels and whether a manager has used self-control earlier in the day (Gailliot et al., 2007; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), for example, may ultimately impact how much importance they place on treating employees

fairly, or whether they are actually able to behave in an organizationally just manner (Pratt, 2016). Future research in this area will need to explore these issues further.

At the outset, we identified two other factors as possible correlates of police managers' support for organizational justice—self-legitimacy and relationships with colleagues. Our intent with exploring these factors was two-fold. First, it allowed us to seek a better understanding of support for organizational justice, which is a topic that has received no research attention to date in the police literature. Second, it allowed us a better opportunity to explore the relationship between self-control and managers' support for organizational justice after accounting for factors that have been shown to be relevant to the police. Counter to expectations, our data did not provide evidence for a statistically significant relationship between police commanders' levels of self-legitimacy and support for organizational justice. Despite prior research revealing a connection between line-level officers' confidence in their authority and support for fair law enforcement practices (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe, 2014a), such a connection did not manifest within our sample of police commanders. Further research is needed to see if this finding is replicated within different police manager samples and, if so, why self-legitimacy is unrelated to perceptions about fair management practices. Many of our self-legitimacy items pertained to police authority in a general sense; however, it may be necessary to develop survey items that tap specifically into police managers' views of the authority they wield in their organization. As important, a reviewer of this paper noted that managers' self-legitimacy might mediate the link between self-control and support for organizational justice. We conducted supplemental analyses (available upon request) to test this possibility and did not find mediation of this type, but it certainly represents an opportunity for further exploration using different data sources.

Our findings showed that police commanders who have quality relationships with their colleagues were significantly more likely to support organizational justice. This result adds to the growing body of empirical evidence demonstrating that officers' perceptions of their relationships with colleagues play an important role in predicting beneficial work-related outcomes (Nix & Wolfe, 2017a, b; Tankebe, 2014a). Bottoms and Tankebe's (2012) dialogic model of legitimacy may help broaden our understanding of this relationship. They argued that authority figures such as the police establish legitimacy in the eyes of the public by first making a claim to legitimate authority, observing how their audience (e.g., citizens) responds to the claim (i.e., audience legitimacy), and then adjusting their behavior according to the demands of the audience. A similar process likely occurs *within* a police agency. Police managers must establish a claim to rightful authority over their subordinate officers. In order to get employees to perform their duties, follow orders, and behave in a manner that benefits the agency and community, managers must ensure trust and legitimacy in the eyes of their officers (Trinkner et al., 2016; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017a). Research supports this argument in the broader business management literature. Supervisors who wish to maintain quality relationships with their subordinates marked by respect and trust are more likely to engage in organizational justice (Blader & Chen, 2012). Accordingly, our study not only contributes to the police literature, but also advances the broader business management literature by revealing that quality relationships with colleagues impact managers' orientations toward fairness in a police management context. What is interesting to note, however, is that despite this finding our analysis revealed that police managers' self-control had a 40% larger standardized effect on support for organizational justice than did relationships with colleagues. In other words, one's peer relations are important but self-control is a better predictor of support for organizationally just management practices.

This study also has practical implications. We asked a straightforward research question: is self-control associated with police leaders' support for managerial practices, which we know are critically important in the eyes of their subordinates? Our results suggest that self-control is, indeed, a predictor of support for justice rule adherence. That is, managers with a greater ability to regulate their emotions, decisions, and behaviors are more likely to support adhering to the justice norms expected by their subordinates (Matta et al., 2017). With this knowledge, police agencies and other power holders like mayors, city managers, or city councils can perhaps better identify officers who are equipped to support exercising fairness as a leader and promote them to key positions (e.g., chiefs, sergeants) in the organization. One problem, however, is that most police agencies in the United States are characterized by a hierarchical, paramilitary structure (Bittner, 1973; Reiss, 1992). Such structure carries with it a clear chain of command, expectance of deference decorum, and military-like leadership behaviors. For example, it is expected that subordinates follow supervisors' orders without hesitation. While necessary in many respects, given the seriousness of many aspects of police work, this runs antithetical to many of the managerial techniques which we know employees value (e.g., explaining the reasoning behind orders).

To be clear, we make no claim that exercising fairness is a silver bullet, or even that it will be easy to utilize in the context of police organizations (Lind, 2001). Indeed, it may be downright difficult under some circumstances. We need additional research that can shed more light on these matters. For starters, qualitative research concerning what managers *think* about using organizational justice could be especially fruitful. Might they see it as disadvantageous in certain scenarios? Perhaps certain aspects of organizational justice (e.g., treating subordinates with respect) are easier to exercise regularly than others (e.g., allowing subordinates a voice in decision-

making processes). It may also be the case that certain components of self-control are more/less closely associated with support for or use of certain components of organizational justice. Research that can address such questions will require larger samples and more survey items, but could prove valuable both in theoretical and practical terms.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

While our work provides insight into the relationship between self-control and police managers' orientations toward organizational justice, it is not without limitations. First, we did not measure *actual* use of organizational justice. Future research should attempt to replicate, in the context of a police organization or with lower ranking police supervisors, what Matta et al. (2017) did in their study. Their daily diary survey research design allowed them to assess day-to-day employee experiences with organizational justice from their supervisors. They found that supervisors with higher self-control were more consistent in their fair treatment—"supervisors who have self-discipline, who think before they act, and who are skilled at concentrating tend to demonstrate less variability in justice" (Matta et al., 2017, p. 763). Research that builds off our efforts should attempt to determine if, and under what circumstances, low or depleted self-control contributes to greater justice variability (i.e., inconsistent fair treatment). It is also possible that managers with lower self-control are poorly positioned to treat subordinates with organizational justice. Such managers may report that they support organizational justice on a survey but, in reality, they are too self-centered, shortsighted, and egotistical to appreciate how their behavior is actually interpreted by employees or fail to realize that their behavior does not match their own attitudes about fair treatment. Muir's (1979) police officer typology may help in this regard as well. His professional or reciprocator officer (or for present purposes, manager) may be most likely to use organizational justice, whereas his enforcer may be least likely. Perhaps self-control predicts

Muir's officer types, which is information that could be used to help identify officers early in their careers with the most potential to be fair managers. We hope our findings motivate other researchers to shed light on some of these issues.

Second, although our respondents were employed by many different agencies, these departments were all in the same southern U.S. state. Our sample was comprised almost entirely of white males. These issues limit the generalizability of our results. Studies carried out in other regions of the United States and abroad, and/or with more diverse samples, would be a welcomed addition to the literature. Relatedly, our survey was cross-sectional and restricted our ability to consider some of the aforementioned nuances of self-control, such as depletion throughout a shift. Examining whether self-control depletion impacts police managers' attitudes toward or use of organizational justice would be a worthwhile endeavor for future research. Finally, we encourage future researchers to measure other factors that may play a role in police managers' support for or use of organizational justice. For example, police commanders must manage in organizational environments with competing interests and influences. City councils, mayors, and citizen review councils have power over police chiefs, sheriffs, and their immediate command staff. Police managers' support for or use of organizational justice may be partially shaped by whether such entities treat these officers with fairness, or allow for less role discretion which could inhibit their ability to be fair in some instances (Scott et al., 2014).

**Conclusion**

We conclude by emphasizing that we have only just begun to understand what predicts support for fair management practices. Here, we have provided a useful start by demonstrating that the same personality characteristic that has been connected to fair management in other settings also applies in the context of the police organization. Police managers who possess higher self-control

are more supportive of leading in a way that is likely to elicit desirable attitudes (e.g., satisfaction, trust, and commitment) and behaviors from their subordinates (e.g., procedural fairness on the street and constraint in the decision to use coercive force). These are the individuals whom we need leading our police agencies. Ultimately, appointing such individuals to leadership positions could help further professionalize U.S. policing, improve morale during a period in which morale has taken a hit, and translate into more favorable community relations – because police officers who feel they have been treated fairly are more likely to mimic such behavior on the street (Trinkner et al., 2016; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017a).

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Table 1

*List of Survey Items*

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**Support for Organizational Justice**

*How important is it that…*

(1 = not important at all, 2 = not important, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, 5 = extremely important)

1. I consider my employees' viewpoints.
2. I treat employees with kindness and consideration.
3. I clearly explain the reasons for my decisions.
4. I clearly explain the reasons my agency makes policy changes.
5. I treat employees with respect.
6. I make decisions that have the agency's best interest in mind.

**Self-Control**

*Please mark your level of agreement with each of the following statements…*

(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

1. I am good at resisting temptation.
2. I have a hard time breaking bad habits.*
3. I say inappropriate things.*
4. I do certain things that are bad for me, if they are fun.*
5. I refuse things that are bad for me.
6. Pleasure and fun sometimes keep me from getting work done.*
7. I am able to work effectively toward long-term goals.
8. I often act without thinking through all the alternatives.*

*Item was reverse coded.

Table 1 Continued.

*List of Survey Items*

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**Self-Legitimacy**

*Please mark your level of agreement with each of the following statements…*

(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

1. I feel that I represent the values of the public in my local community.
2. The powers I have as a police officer are morally right.
3. I am sure I can give a good reason to members of the public as to why my authority as an officer is morally proper.
4. I believe my role as an officer is necessary to prevent crime.
5. As a law enforcement officer, I believe I occupy a position of special importance in society.
6. I have confidence in the authority vested in me as a law enforcement officer.
7. I believe people should always do what I tell them as long as my orders are lawful.
8. I am confident I have enough authority to do my job well.
9. I believe law enforcement is capable of providing security for all citizens in my community.

**Relationships with Colleagues**

*Please mark your level of agreement with each of the following statements…*

(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

1. I have a good working relationship with my officers in my police station.
2. I feel that my officers trust me.
3. I feel supported by my officers.
4. My officers treat me with respect.
5. My views about what is right and wrong in police work are similar to the views of my officers.

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Table 2

*Bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics*

| Variable | Y1 | X1 | X2 | X3 | X4 | X5 | X6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dependent variable** | | | | | | | |
| Y1 Support for organizational justice | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| **Predictor variable** | | | | | | | |
| X1 Self-control | .38 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| **Controls** | | | | | | | |
| X2 Self-legitimacy [a] | .30 | .23 | 1.00 | | | | |
| X3 Relationships with colleagues [a] | .32 | .22 | .47 | 1.00 | | | |
| X4 Years in law enforcement | .09 | .03 | .05 | .07 | 1.00 | | |
| X5 Bachelor's degree | .04 | -.04 | .02 | .07 | .14 | 1.00 | |
| X6 Number sworn | .07 | .04 | .02 [b] | -.04 | .20 | .36 | 1.00 |
| Mean | 4.40 | 3.77 | 18.62 | 18.21 | 24.50 | .47 | 2.49 |
| SD | .39 | .49 | 3.70 | 3.84 | 8.01 | .50 | 1.28 |
| Minimum | 3.33 | 2.63 | 1.78 | 1.44 | 5.00 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Maximum | 5.00 | 5.00 | 25.00 | 25.00 | 56.00 | 1.00 | 5.00 |

Note: [a] The variable is squared to induce normality. [b] Multiplied by 10. "SD" = standard deviation.

Table 3

*The relationship between self-control and support for organizational justice (N = 211)*

| Variable | Support for organizational justice | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* | SE | β | (95% CI) | *p* |
| Self-control | .26 | .05 | .33 | (.16, .36) | >.00 |
| Self-legitimacy | .01 | .01 | .13 | (-.03[a], .03) | .11 |
| Relationships with colleagues | .02 | .01 | .20 | (.03[a], .04) | .02 |
| Years in law enforcement | .02[a] | .03[a] | .05 | (-.04[a], .01) | .44 |
| Bachelor's degree | .02 | .05 | .02 | (-.08, .11) | .73 |
| Number sworn | .02 | .02 | .06 | (-.02, .06) | .31 |
| Intercept | 2.69 | .19 | --- | (2.31, 3.06) | >.00 |
| *F*-test | | | 14.98 | | |
| $R^2$ | | | | | |

Notes: Entries are unstandardized coefficients (*b*), robust standard errors (SE), standardized coefficients (β), 95% confidence intervals, and *p*-values. [a] Coefficient multiplied by 10.