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**Enhancing Police Engagement: An Examination of the Links Between Fair Treatment and  
Job Engagement in a Canadian Police Organization**

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**Abstract**

This study examined the relationships between organizational justice and job engagement, and whether these relationships were stronger for civilian staff versus police officers.

Using survey data from a Canadian police organization, the results suggested that when police personnel perceived they were treated fairly, they were more likely to have a sense of psychological safety, which, in turn, enhanced their identification with their organization and increased their engagement with work. Findings further demonstrated that distributive justice (i.e., equitable outcomes) was more important to police officers than civilian staff, particularly, in relation to enhancing their attachment with the organization. In other words, as perceptions of distributive justice increased so did organizational identification; however, this effect was strongest for police officers. In general, organizational justice has positive implications for police organizations, namely in encouraging police personnel to engage their full selves at work.

**Keywords:** job engagement; organizational justice; organizational identification; psychological safety

## Introduction

Policing in Canada and other parts of the world is arguably much more than complex than it has ever been. Rapid advances in technology have created new threats and criminal opportunities (Karn, 2013). At the same time, the police are often faced with growing public demands for non-traditional policing services along with increased scrutiny; much of which has been driven by allegations of misuse of force and the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Similarly, the #MeToo movement has amplified internal issues of harassment and sexual misconduct (Broderick, 2016; RCMP, 2016; Schmunk, 2019). Thus, a key consideration for police organizations is to devise new ways of working while continuing to maintain legitimacy. Equally, police leaders must also look to effectively engage police personnel such that their behaviors are aligned with desired organizational values.

Determining how best to influence engagement—whereby police personnel invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies to meet the expectations of their job (Macey & Schneider, 2008)—has been largely unexplored in the policing literature. A study by Bradford et al. (2014) provided evidence that police officer motivations are associated with perceptions of fairness, and that organizational identification mediated much of the effect of organizational justice on officer motivation. Further, officers who felt more emotionally attached and loyal to the police service were more likely to indicate they were ready to take on discretionary activities, and were more confident and empowered to use their own initiative. While this research has contributed to the understanding of the broader effects of justice within policing, the links to job engagement, and the underlying conditions that account for these associations have not received much attention.

Research outside of policing has demonstrated that fair processes and outcomes are central to increasing job engagement (Colquitt et al., 2005; Haynie et al., 2016), and that identification with the organization mediated this relationship (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Given the nature of the policing environment, it is likely that the justice-job engagement relationship may also be partially explained by psychological safety—the sense of feeling “safe at work in order to grow, learn, contribute, and perform effectively in a rapidly changing world” (Edmondson & Lei, 2004, p. 23). For one, the enhanced public scrutiny of the policing, including the persistent threat of the ‘viral video’ that immediately disseminates recorded interactions with police, have increased police officer concerns for making mistakes and being punished for their actions (Workman-Stark, 2017). Further, the paramilitary nature of police organizations can pose significant risks for speaking up about tough issues or challenges. As noted by Kahn (1990), these workplace factors can make individuals feel psychologically safe (or unsafe), which influences their feelings of organizational identification and their willingness to invest in their work and (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth et al., 2008; Stets & Burke, 2005).

The current study proposes that psychological safety and organizational identification are not competing mechanisms, but rather they occur in a sequential manner in the justice-job engagement relationship. In other words, when police personnel perceive that their organization is fair, they are more likely to have a sense of psychological safety, which increases their identification with the organization, and in turn, enhances job engagement. Because of the difference in social status between police officers and civilian staff, it is also proposed that the justice-job engagement is contingent upon one’s status with the organization. The theoretical model is depicted in Figure 1. This paper begins with a review of the relevant literature, followed by a reporting of the methods and results, and concluding with a discussion of how the study

findings contribute to research and practice.

INSERT FIGURE ONE NEAR HERE

## **Theoretical Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **Justice and Job Engagement**

The concept of job engagement was initially developed to counter traditional motivational theories, which suggested that employees were motivated to work (or not) based on the provision of external rewards and intrinsic factors (Kahn & Fellows, 2013). Kahn (1990) proposed that employees are much more complicated than this and make conscious choices about how much of themselves they bring to work. Whereas engaged employees are cognitively vigilant, emotionally connected, and physically involved in their jobs (Kahn, 1990), disengaged employees “withhold their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies, and this is reflected in task activity that is, at best, robotic, passive, and detached” (Rich et al., 2010, p. 619).

To demonstrate what job engagement looks like, Kahn and Fellows (2013) share the narrative of a police detective investigating a robbery. As described by the authors, the detective “worked hard on the case. He followed leads, interviewed witnesses, researched files, and made calls. He followed the evidence to where it led and kept trying to move the case ahead” (p. 108). However, Kahn (1990, 1992) suggests that engagement is more than the amount of vigor an officer puts into his or her work. It is also about speaking up rather than remaining silent (e.g., calling out harmful workplace behaviors or instance of abuse of force), and being present (i.e., attentive, connected, integrated, and absorbed). In sum, the phenomenon of engagement can be observed when individuals are focused on their tasks, care about completing them effectively, share ideas confidently, and leverage their own expertise and experience to perform tasks to the best of their ability, thereby producing positive benefits for organizations (Kahn, 2010).

Prior research has shown that job engagement leads to greater work effort (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter., 2011), organizational citizenship behavior (Organ et al., 2006), and increased job satisfaction (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Studies have also shown that engaged employees are more committed, motivated, and empowered (Christian et al., 2011; Rich et al., 2010), are less absent from work, and less likely to leave the organization (Schaufeli, 2012). Specific to policing, the limited studies have identified a positive link between job engagement with increased commitment and efficacy (Richardson et al., 2006). Similarly, Brunetto and colleagues found that work engagement was predicted by well-being and job satisfaction, which in turn, predicted police officer commitment and turnover intentions (Brunetto et al., 2012).

Various researchers have suggested that the effectiveness of employee control mechanisms (i.e., engagement) are dependent on policies and procedures that are perceived as well intentioned and beneficial (Haynie et al., 2016). One means to accomplish this is through the implementation of fair practices and outcomes (Colquitt et al., 2005). When organizational members perceive decision-making processes and outcomes to be fair, they are more likely to want to be involved in work processes (Colquitt et al., 2013), to exert work effort that benefits both themselves and their organization (Lawler, 2001), and to establish closer ties to an organization that promotes fairness (Tyler & Blader, 2003).

Organizational justice refers to employee assessments about the fairness of treatment by organizational authorities (Roberson & Colquitt, 2005; Whitman et al., 2012), which are largely based on a set of rules to evaluate fair treatment, and the extent to which those rules are satisfied or violated determines perceptions of justice or injustice (Mayer et al., 2007). For instance, organizational policies and procedures are believed to be fair if they are applied consistently over time without bias (Leventhal, 1980; van den Bos et al., 1996), if they are applied accurately (De

Cremer, 2004), if they are correctable, and if they are consistent with ethical norms (Leventhal, 1980). Organizational justice is typically recognized as comprising three main elements: distributive, procedural justice, and interactional justice (Skarlicki & Folger, 1999; Whitman et al., 2012); however, Tyler and Blader (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tyler & Blader, 2003) note there is little conceptual difference between perceptions of fair process and decision-making and good interpersonal treatment and communication. As such, their research presents procedural justice as a combination of both procedural justice and interactional justice. This paper follows the same approach developed by Tyler and Blader and distinguishes between just two elements of organizational justice (i.e., distributive and procedural justice).

Although no studies have specifically examined the links between organizational justice and job engagement in policing, recent research has established that fair treatment produces positive outcomes for police organizations (Tyler et al., 2007). For instance, studies have highlighted the importance of fairness in creating supportive organizational climates (Bradford et al., 2014; Myhill & Bradford, 2013; Tyler et al., 2007; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011), changing external officer behavior (Gau & Gaines, 2011; Skogan et al., 2014), increasing police officer support for the use of procedural fairness (Wolfe & Nix, 2017; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011), increasing compliance with agency rules (Rosenbaum & McCarty, 2017), and positively influencing organizational commitment (Crow et al., 2012; Lambert et al., 2007; Rosenbaum & McCarty, 2017), and organizational identification (Bradford et al., 2014).

### **The Mediating Effects of Psychological Safety and Organizational Identification**

Psychological safety was initially introduced by Schein and Bennis (1965) as a cognitive state that reduces perceived threats, removes barriers to change, and supports a context in which failures are tolerated without retaliation, renunciation, or guilt (p. 45). Kahn (1990) later defined

psychological safety as “feeling able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (p. 708). More recently, Edmondson (1999) suggested that psychological safety is a shared belief that a team or work group is safe for interpersonal risk taking. Despite the limited empirical research within policing, the distinctive nature of the working environment presents a compelling argument of the need for psychological safety. For instance, the authority to use force means that the police are often in the precarious position of having their actions judged by others as justified (or not) after the fact. Added to this reality, is a ‘punishment-centered’ internal bureaucracy that is likely to be more focused on discipline than recognizing good work (Waddington, 1999). For police officers, such an environment can pose a potentially irresolvable dilemma of feeling both powerful—as every action could possibly have lethal consequences—, and powerless because “they are constantly scrutinized, supervised, and reined-in by their department’ (Kirschman, 1998, p.128). Thus, officers may adopt a ‘lay low’ approach rather than be subjected to sanctions for mistakes. Charman’s (2017) recent research into police socialization and culture suggests that learning from mistakes is an important aspect of learning ‘to be a cop’; thereby, providing additional support for the importance of enhancing psychological safety in the police working environment.

Throughout the execution of their duties, officers are also exposed to horrific crime scenes and other traumatic events that have implications for their mental health. However, demonstrations of emotions (other than anger) or asking for help have often been viewed as signs of weakness (Workman-Stark, 2017). Encouragingly, the increased focus on mental health has recently positioned psychological safety as an important workplace condition for encouraging police personnel (i.e., both officers and civilian staff) to speak up and ask for help. Psychological safety is also an important precondition for officers and civilian staff to admit mistakes and to

bring forth tough issues, such as allegations of misconduct. However, to do so, individuals must feel safe enough to be open with their colleagues and those within the management hierarchy without fear of being rejected, humiliated or experiencing any other negative consequences (Kahn, 1990; Carmelli & Gittel, 2009). Hence, a psychologically safe environment is generally dependent on the extent to which organizational members seek feedback, ask questions, ask for help, propose a new idea, or openly discuss mistakes (Edmondson, 1999; Nembard & Edmondson, 2011).

Kahn and Fellows (2013) suggest that a key condition for employee engagement is meaningfulness at work, which can be found, in part, in appealing work identities. This concept of work-related identification is grounded in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which stipulates that people have a fundamental motivation to create and maintain positive views of themselves (e.g., self-concept and self-esteem, See Aberson et al., 2000). Because of this motivation, people tend to identify more strongly with social groups, including organizations, that helps them to create and sustain positive self-views (Dutton et al., 1994; Tyler & Blader, 2000). In effect, identities that matter most to people are those that align with how they think about themselves and want to be thought of by others (Dutton et al., 1994). For example, police officers are likely to draw meaning from their identities as defenders of the weak or upholders of the law. They may also generate meaning from their identities as members of an esteemed police organization that is aligned with their personal values.

When people identify highly with their organization they are more likely to experience the organization's successes and failures as their own. As a result, they may take greater pride in their work (Roussin & Webber, 2012), and show stronger commitment to and support for the organization (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Mael & Ashforth, 1992), such as through job involvement and

extra-role behaviors (Riketta, 2005). Strong identification also encourages individuals to behave in accordance with organizational values (De Cremer et al., 2006; Van Dick et al., 2007), to collaborate more with each other, and to expand their efforts on behalf of their organization (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). Further, Myhill and Bradford (2013) suggest that identification with a service-oriented police organization, that is procedurally fair, may also be a positive force for change.

Previous empirical studies have identified a positive association between employee identification and enhanced job engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). They have also found that organizational identification mediates the relationships between organizational justice and various outcomes, including organizational citizenship behaviors (Demir, 2015), extra-role behaviors (Bradford et al., 2014), and interpersonal helping behaviors (Singh & Winkel, 2011). Through a study involving a police service in the UK, Bradford et al. (2014) found that officers who were more emotionally attached and loyal to the service were more likely to indicate that they were ready to take on discretionary activities, felt more confident and empowered to use their own initiative, and were more aligned with the philosophy of community policing. The study also found that organizational identification partially mediated the effect of organizational justice.

Beyond policing, research has shown that fair and respectful treatment is a basis for psychologically safe interactions (Edmondson et al., 2001; Kahn, 1990; Nishii & Mayer, 2009), and that employees are more likely to become engaged with their work when they understand the risks involved and feel psychologically secure (Kahn, 1990). Further, psychological safety has been found to mediate the relationship between organizational justice and job engagement (Lyu, 2016), and to facilitate organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth et al.,

2008; Stets & Burke, 2005). Based on the review of the literature, it should follow that when police personnel (i.e., both officers and civilian staff) perceive their organization to be fair, they should have a greater sense of psychological safety. In turn, a sense of safety should lead to increased identification with the organization, which encourages greater engagement with their work. In the current study, psychological safety is expected to mediate most of the association between organizational justice and organizational identification; however, building on prior research, it should be expected that when police personnel perceive that their organization promotes fair policies and procedures, they should, to a lesser extent, identify more with their organization.

*Hypotheses 1:* (a) distributive and (b) procedural justice will be positively associated with psychological safety.

*Hypotheses 2:* (a) distributive and (b) procedural justice will be positively associated with organizational identification.

To test the sequential mediation of the justice-engagement relationship, it is proposed that:

*Hypothesis 3:* The relationship between distributive justice and job engagement will be sequentially mediated, first through psychological safety, and then through organizational identification.

*Hypothesis 4:* The relationship between procedural justice and job engagement will be sequentially mediated, first through psychological safety, and then through organizational identification.

### **The Moderating Effect of Employee Status**

Status is defined as the relative social position, prestige, or esteem of an individual or group compared to others (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). In the workplace, status is often considered a salient feature as it conveys a variety of positional advantages (Bunderson, 2003; Piazza & Castellucci, 2014). For example, high-status people typically receive more challenging assignments, promotion opportunities, increased pay, and power (Berger et al., 1972). They are also usually listened to and followed by others. As a result, their socioemotional needs are more likely to be fulfilled than employees of lower status (Bunderson, 2003). Therefore, the degree to which high-status employees' needs are satisfied may not be as significant as for low-status employees.

In addition to gender, age, and race, which contain a prescribed social value that places these personal characteristics at the lower end of a social hierarchy, organizational rank (Levine & Moreland, 1990) and occupational role (Côté, 2011) are generally considered to reflect higher social status within organizations. Within policing, higher ranking officers hold more status than lower ranking officers (Reuss-Ianni, 1993) due to the paramilitary, hierarchical structure. Status differences can also be found between two distinct occupational identities or roles: civilian staff and police officers. Since 2003, the number of civilian police staff in Canada has grown twice as quickly as that of police officers (42% versus 21%); accounting for approximately 30 percent of all police personnel as of May 2017 (Conor, 2018). Civilians have become employed in emerging areas of police work, or in areas where they were formerly excluded, such as community liaison, specialized support for criminal investigations, investigation of economic and computer crimes, and intelligence collection and analysis (Council of Canadian Academics, 2014). Despite the increase of civilian personnel, studies continue to suggest that civilian staff

have difficulty integrating into the policing environment (Bentley, 2013; Loveday, 2007). For instance, research conducted on behalf of Public Safety Canada indicated that civilian integration challenges stem from commonly reported themes, such as poor acceptance of civilians carrying out functions typically performed by sworn police officers, issues of police culture and socialization, and police associations opposed to the hiring of civilians (Kiedrowski et al., 2015). Accordingly, it should be expected that civilian staff are less likely to have their socioemotional needs fulfilled than police officers. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 5:* The direct and indirect relationships between procedural justice and job engagement will be moderated by employee status, such that these relationships will be stronger for low-status (i.e., civilian) employees.

*Hypothesis 6:* The direct and indirect relationships between distributive justice and job engagement will be moderated by employee status, such that these relationships will be stronger for low-status (i.e., civilian) employees.

### **Methodology**

This study utilized secondary survey data that was collected on behalf of a large police organization (i.e., approximately 1,000 police and civilian staff) serving both rural and smaller urban centers in Central Canada. For the current study, items were included for organizational justice, psychological safety, organizational identification, and job engagement, along with the outcome variables of job satisfaction and turnover intentions. The study also incorporated demographic data pertaining to age, gender, level, race, tenure, and occupational role (i.e., police officer versus civilian staff). Finally, self-reporting survey data were deemed to be appropriate for this study as they capture individual perceptions, judgments, or feelings about various workplace factors.

## Participants and Procedures

Data were collected from two different sites within the police organization. Site 1 represented corporate support functions (e.g., Staffing, Recruitment, Training, Criminal Records), and was dominated by civilian personnel and women, with some police officers working in the recruitment and training functions. Site 2 represented traditional police operations (e.g., patrol, general investigations), and was dominated by police officers and men, with civilian staff engaged in front counter operations or supporting criminal investigations. For the original survey, the survey link was distributed via email to personnel at each site by their respective commanders, who encouraged, but did not require participation. Participants were also assured anonymity in their responses and were not provided with any incentive to participate.

Following the exclusion of nine participants who did not fully complete the survey, the final sample for Site 1 ( $n = 104$ ) consisted of 66% women, 82% civilian staff, 94% whites, and 89% nonsupervisory personnel. In contrast to Site 1, the final sample for Site 2 ( $n = 62$ ) was represented by 79% men, 98% police officers, 92% whites, and 79% nonsupervisory personnel. As the aim of the current study was to test the organizational justice-job engagement relationships within policing more generally, and whether these relationships were influenced by social status (i.e., being a police officer versus a civilian staff member), the data for both sites were combined. The combined response rate was approximately 65 percent ( $N = 166$ ). The combined sample was reflective of 51% men, 93% Whites, 52% civilian staff, and 85% in a nonsupervisory role. In addition, most respondents were between 35 and 44 years of age (36%) and 45 and 54 years of age (33%), and had between 10 and 14 (30%), and 15 to 19 years of service (22%). The sample was also reflective of the total population for both sites but not for the organization overall, as women and civilian staff were overrepresented in the sample.

## Measures

Scale items were selected based on clarity and performance in previous empirical studies and reviewed with members of the organization for additional content validity. Except where indicated, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with each item on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

*Organizational Justice:* Distributive justice (four items) and procedural justice (six items) were measured using Colquitt's (2001) organizational justice scale. Sample items for distributive justice included: "I am recognized fairly for the work that I do."; and "I think I am poorly recognized for the work that I do" (reverse coded). Sample items for procedural justice include: "My supervisor makes consistent decisions"; "My supervisor gives me the chance to voice my opinion about decisions that affect me"; and "My supervisor gives me an opportunity to appeal decisions I do not agree with".

*Psychological Safety:* Four items from Edmondson's (1999) psychological safety scale were used in the current study. Sample items: "People are able to bring up problems and tough issues without fear of repercussions", and "It is difficult to ask others for help" (reverse coded).

*Organizational Identification:* Five items were adapted from Mael and Ashforth (1992) to assess member perceptions of identifying with the organization. Items include: "I find that my values and the XXX<sup>1</sup> values are similar"; "I would describe the XXX as a large family in which most members feel a sense of belonging"; and "there is a common sense of purpose in the XXX".

*Job Engagement (DV):* This scale was measured using six of the 18 items from Rich et al.'s (2010) scale. Previous research has used a shortened form of this scale (e.g. Haynie et al.,

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<sup>1</sup> "XXX" refers to the organization, which is not publicly identified.

2019; Haynie et al., 2016), providing support for the use of a reduced number of items to assess job engagement. Job engagement is meant to measure the physical, cognitive, and emotional energies invested in work; therefore, the six items chosen consisted of the highest loading items from each of the three sub-dimensions. Sample items: “I am excited about my job”; “I feel energetic in my job”; and “am absorbed by my job”.

*Job Satisfaction (DV)*: Three items, adapted from Munsch et al. (2018), assessed job satisfaction; including: “All in all, how satisfied are you with your current job?”; “Knowing what you know now, how likely would you do this same job?”; and “How likely are you to recommend this job to someone else?”. The first item was rated on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 7 (very satisfied), and the second and third items were rated on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely).

*Turnover intentions (DV)*: This scale used items from Munsch et al. (2018), which included: “Taking everything into consideration, how likely is it that you will make a genuine effort to find a new job with another Service/employer within the next year?”; “How likely is that you will work for the XXX until you retire?” (reverse coded); and Taking everything into consideration, over the last year, how often did you seriously consider quitting your current job?”. Response choices ranged from 1 to 7.

*Employee Status (moderator)*: For this study, employee role was adopted as an objective measure of employee status, and the data were dichotomized into 0 (civilian = low status) and 1 (police officer = high status).

*Demographic Variables of Interest*: To ensure that any observed relationships were not the result of demographic differences, dichotomous variables were used to control for *gender* (0 = female, 1 = male), and *race* (0 = nonwhite, 1 = white). Organizational level was also

controlled for with a categorical variable; *level*, 1 (individual contributor; i.e. nonsupervisor), 2 (manager), and 3 (senior manager).

### **Analyses and Results**

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are shown in Table 1. As Table 1 reveals, distributive justice was highly correlated with psychological safety, organizational identification, and lower turnover intentions, and more moderately correlated with job engagement. In contrast, procedural justice was highly correlated with psychological safety and job satisfaction, and moderately correlated with organizational identification, job engagement, and lower turnover intentions. Job engagement was highly correlated with job satisfaction and moderately correlated with lower turnover intentions. Finally, employee status (i.e., role) was significantly associated with organizational identification only.

INSERT TABLE 1 NEAR HERE

Prior to testing the study hypotheses, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to evaluate model fit. As recommended by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998), model fit was assessed using model chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA). Values close to .95 for the CFI and TLI, and close to .06 for the RMSEA indicate good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The analyses indicated that the seven-factor measurement model had adequate fit,  $\chi^2(400) = 581$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .96, TLI = .95, and RMSEA = .05. In addition, all items loaded significantly on their respective factors and exceeded the recommended cut-off criteria ( $\geq .30$ ). Further, the seven-factor model fit significantly better than an alternative six-factor model in which the items representing procedural and distributive justice were forced to load onto a single organizational justice factor,  $\chi^2(399) = 649.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .94, TLI = .93, and RMSEA = .06. These results

confirmed the seven-factor structure of the model. Finally, each of the study scales exceeded conventional thresholds (.70), indicating that they were reliable (Hinkin, 1998). Cronbach alphas were as follows: Distributive Justice (.92), Procedural Justice (.94), Psychological Safety (.74), Organizational Identification (.88), and Job Engagement (.86), Job Satisfaction (.89), and Turnover Intentions (.82).

The hypotheses were tested using PROCESS (Hayes, 2018), controlling for gender, organizational level, and race in all analyses. PROCESS is a computational ‘add-on’ tool for SPSS that facilitates more effective analyses of mediation and moderation. Because PROCESS relies on bootstrapped estimates, which has been shown to be superior to the conventional causal steps method (e.g., Baron & Kenny, 1986) in terms of statistical power and Type I error rates (MacKinnon et al., 2002), it yields more stable estimates. To facilitate its use, Hayes created a series of numbered templates or models that represent commonly-tested models (such as the theoretical model proposed for this study). Whereas Model 6 tests the effects of multiple mediators on the relationships between two variables, Model 92 tests the moderating effect of a single moderator on these same mediated relationships. In sum, Model 6 was used to test hypotheses 1 through 4, and “employee status” was added to the Model (i.e., Model 92) to test hypotheses 5 and 6. In each case, the indirect effect is considered statistically significant if the confidence interval does not contain zero.

As shown in Table 2, both distributive and procedural justice were significantly related to psychological safety; therefore, the first group of hypotheses were supported. The second group of hypotheses predicted that distributive and procedural justice would also be significantly associated with organizational identification. The results revealed that distributive, but not procedural justice, was significantly related to organizational identification. Hence, only

hypothesis 2a was supported. Hypotheses 3 and 4 predicted that the justice-job engagement relationships would be sequentially mediated, first through psychological safety, and then through organizational identification. Table 2 indicates that the direct effect of distributive justice on job engagement was insignificant ( $B = .03, p > .05$ ). Further, bootstrap confidence intervals for the indirect effects of paths DJ to OI to JE, and DJ to PS to OI to JE were both above zero, indicating that the indirect effect for these paths was statistically significant. Thus, hypothesis 3 was partially supported. The results also revealed that the direct effect of procedural justice job engagement was insignificant ( $B = .12, p > .05$ ). In addition, only the confidence interval for the indirect effect of PJ to PS to OI to JE was entirely above zero, indicating that the indirect effect for this path is statistically significant. Hence, procedural justice influenced job engagement, first through psychological safety, and then through organizational identification; thereby, providing support for hypothesis 4.

INSERT TABLE 2 NEAR HERE

The final group of hypotheses proposed that status would moderate both the direct and indirect justice-job engagement relationships, such that these relationships would be strongest for civilian (i.e., low status) versus police officers (i.e., high status). Because PROCESS Model 92 only allows for testing the moderated mediation effects for a single predictor variable, separate analyses were undertaken for distributive and procedural justice. However, each of these variables was added as a covariate into the respective analyses to account for their effects. As illustrated in Table 3, none of the interaction effects involving the predictor variable, procedural justice, were significant; therefore, hypothesis 6 was not supported. On the other hand, Table 3 demonstrates that status was significantly related to organizational identification, as was distributive justice, and the interaction of employee status and distributive justice. Further, Table

4 demonstrates that the indirect effect of distributive justice on organizational identification was significant for police officers only as the confidence intervals did not contain zero. In other words, distributive justice was directly and significantly related to organizational identification and this relationship was strongest for police officers ( $t = 3.40, p = .001$ ). The interactions are depicted in Figure 2. As these findings were inconsistent with expectations, hypothesis 5 was not supported.

INSERT TABLES 3 AND 4 NEAR HERE

INSERT FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE

In addition to the study hypotheses, the results suggested that gender was significantly and negatively related to organizational identification (See Table 2). Independent t-tests revealed that women overall were significantly more likely ( $M=4.76; SD=1.27$ ) to identify with their organization than men ( $M=4.15; SD=1.59$ ),  $t(164) = 2.752, p = .007$ . Additionally, independent t-tests revealed there were no significant differences in mean identification scores between female civilians and police officers; however, the mean scores for male police officers ( $M = 3.85, SD = 1.64$ ) were significantly lower than those of civilian men ( $M = 4.96, SD = 1.13$ ),  $t(82) = 2.988, p = .018$ . Independent t-tests suggested that women were significantly more engaged ( $M=5.59; SD=1.02$ ) with their work than men ( $M=6.18; SD=1.57$ ),  $t(164) = 2.568, p = .011$ . Further, Table 2 suggested that organizational identification would be higher for whites than nonwhites. While independent t-tests revealed there were no significant differences by race for all police personnel, white women ( $M = 4.83, SD = 1.19$ ), were significantly more likely than racial or ethnically diverse women ( $M = 3.84, SD = 2.14$ ) to identify with the organization,  $t(80) = -1.699, p = .011$ . Finally, level (rank) had no effect on perceptions of psychological safety, attachment with the organization, or engagement with the work, even when analyzed separately for police officers.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was two-fold. One, to explore the direct and indirect relationships between organizational justice (i.e., procedural and distributive justice) and job engagement; and two, to determine whether the strength of these relationships was different for civilian staff versus police officers, as denoted by status within the organization. Building on prior justice research within policing, the study found that both distributive and procedural justice were significantly associated with psychological safety, although distributive justice had the strongest link. In turn, psychological safety was significantly associated to organizational identification, and organizational identification was found to be significantly associated with job engagement. Overall, those who felt that they were treated fairly and that outcomes were distributed equitably, had a greater sense of psychological safety, which enhanced their identification with the organization, and in turn, their engagement with their work. These findings are consistent with expectations, with one exception. Perceptions of equitable outcomes contributed to organizational identification, beyond that of the influence of psychological safety; thereby indicating an alternative path to enhancing job engagement.

Whereas the relationships between organizational justice and job engagement were expected to be more significant for lower status (i.e., civilian) police personnel, the study demonstrated that civilian staff were no less likely to perceive their workplace as psychologically safe or to be engaged in their work than police officers. However, they were more likely to identify with their organization than police officers. Further, perceptions of equitable outcomes were more likely to lead to increased identification for police officers rather than civilian employees. One explanation for these results may be that the enhanced scrutiny of the police,

coupled with the internal control mechanisms that seek to control officer conduct, have caused officers to be more sensitive to equitable outcomes.

Another interesting finding is that women were more attached to the organization and more likely to be engaged in their work than men (including both officers and civilians). Given the male dominated and often hostile working environment found within policing, these results were unexpected. Similarly, the findings suggested that civilian staff had a greater connection to the organization than police officers, with significant differences found between male civilians and police officers. Once again, the operational realities for police officers may have contributed to a reduction in police officer attachment to their organization. As expected, race influenced organizational identification, with racially/ethnically diverse women reporting lower levels of identification. Finally, level (rank) had no effect on any of the climate or outcome variables. While rank was not a focus of this study, based on prior research, it would still be expected that lower ranking officers would be less likely to perceive they are treated fairly or that the workplace is psychologically safe than higher ranking officers. Yet this was not the case in the current study. These findings may be partly explained by the low percentage of higher ranking officers within the study sample.

### **Implications for Research**

This study makes several important contributions to the literature. First, it extends research on organizational justice within policing. Previous research has shown that when police officers are treated fairly they are more likely to identify with the organization, to be committed to organizational goals (Bradford et al., 2014), to comply with the rules (Bradford et al., 2014; Tyler et al., 2007; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011), to have better relationships with members of the public (Myhill & Bradford, 2013; Tankebe, 2014; Trinkner et al., 2016), and to experience

overall job satisfaction (Donner et al., 2015; Rosenbaum & McCarty, 2017). Research by Wolfe and colleagues also found that fair treatment from senior leaders is a key consideration for federal agents in the United States, particularly when they are more uncertain about law enforcement and community relations (Wolfe et al., 2017). In contrast to previous studies (Bradford et al., 2014; Blader & Tyler, 2009; Greenberg, 2011), the current study found that distributive justice was favored over procedural justice, as distributive justice had a greater effect on the intervening factors of psychological safety and organizational identification. Secondly, this is one of a few studies to incorporate both civilian staff and police officers, and to explore the impact of employee status (i.e., civilian staff versus police officers) on the direct and indirect relationships between organizational justice and job engagement. Specifically, the current research found that civilian staff may have a more positive relationship with their organization than their police officer colleagues yet equitable outcomes seemingly matter more to police officers in terms of enhancing their relationship with the organization. Finally, this study provides empirical evidence that there are two significant pathways to increasing the engagement of police personnel. One, through a sequential combination of fair treatment, a psychologically safe work environment, and attachment to the organization; and two, through the enhancement of organizational identification arising from equitable outcomes.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study also have several implications for policing. Firstly, they suggest that the implementation of fair policies and practices have potential benefits for police organizations and the people within them, namely that fair treatment is associated with an enhanced sense of psychological safety, which in turn is related to increased attachment to the organization and higher levels of job engagement. Secondly, while the study findings imply that

fair treatment is likely to be important for both civilian staff and police officers, police officers may be particularly sensitive to fair distribution of outcomes. In the context of increased police scrutiny arising from concerns of racial profiling and misuse of force, these findings are not unexpected as they infer that certain environmental factors may weigh heavily on police officer interpretations of outcomes as well as influence the strength of the attachment officers have with their organization.

Further, due to the nature of police work, it would have been expected that police officers would be more sensitive to issues of psychological safety than civilian staff; however, the results showed there were no significant differences between the two groups. These findings may suggest that even within a more corporate environment, such as recruitment and staffing, civilian staff are not immune from concerns for psychological safety. Finally, prior studies have highlighted the challenges civilian staff have integrating into the policing environment (Bentley, 2013; Kiedrowski et al., 2015; Loveday, 2007), which may be due in part, to the strength of the police occupational identity and culture, and the process of socialization police recruits are exposed to (Charman, 2017). However, the current study found that civilian staff have a greater sense of belonging with their organization than police officers (Ashforth & Maek, 1989). These findings imply that in some environments, police leaders may need to be less concerned with the inclusion of civilian staff and more focused on promoting fair outcomes for officers.

While the focus of this current study was one police organization in Canada, the findings can be generalized to other policing jurisdictions based on extensive cross-jurisdictional research highlighting the similarities in the police occupational culture and identity, and the overall police socialization process. In sum, by implementing fair procedures and distributing outcomes equitably, along with creating the conditions for police personnel to feel psychologically safe and

secure in the process, police organizations can engender a more favorable internal environment in which civilian staff and police officers can become fully engaged with their work, including speaking up, asking for help, and learning from mistakes without fear of repercussions. Further, under conditions of increased police scrutiny and criticism, police leaders might consider implementing various practices that promote sense-giving (i.e., the process of attempting to influence the way others think and act; See Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) as another means of enhancing officer attachment to their organization. For instance, as organizational communication is key to sensegiving (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999), police leaders could share information that communicates the positive role police officers play in society, thereby enhancing the prestige of the police officer role, while simultaneously contributing to the officer's self-enhancement needs (Smidts et al., 2001).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although this study had several implications for research and practice, it also had some shortcomings. For one, the sample size was relatively small, and included police officers from only one division within a single organization who were at more junior levels in the hierarchy. In addition, the inclusion of civilian staff from corporate rather than more operational roles, such as criminal analysis or dispatch, may have biased the results. Second, the data were cross-sectional; therefore, no assessments could be made about causation. It is possible that other factors may have produced the effects that were reported. Future studies should consider using multi-methods. Another limitation of this study is that the sample was largely White; therefore, the implications of race could only be examined dichotomously rather than by specific racial/ethnic groups. Further, the study focused only on assessing organizational and not occupational identity. Thus, another recommendation for future study is to assess whether the changing nature

of policing has impacted the sense of meaningfulness officers have with their work, and in turn, their work-related identification (i.e., being an officer versus being associated to a police organization). Additionally, this study relied on individual perceptions about organizational justice and other factors, which may reflect the individual's own biases rather than the shared reality. Despite these limitations, the study offers one of a few attempts to survey the justice perceptions of both police and civilian personnel within one organization, and to assess how these perceptions influence job engagement.

### **Conclusions**

Consistent with prior research on police and organizational justice, this study demonstrated that fair treatment contributes to positive outcomes for police organizations and the people within them. Primarily, this study demonstrated that fair treatment contributes to a greater sense of psychological safety and increased attachment to the organization, thereby, enhancing the engagement police personnel have with their work. Building on the recommendations of other researchers (Nix & Wolfe, 2016; Wolfe et al., 2017), this paper argues that the traditional police management model needs to evolve to one that is founded on the principles of organizational justice. Not only should these actions promote a healthier work environment, they should also lead to improved relationships with communities (Spreitzer, 2007).

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