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Community Satisfaction and Police Officer Understanding of Community
Expectations:
A Quantitative and Observational Analysis

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ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE INFORMATION

Identifying the perceptions of community members, and officers' understanding of those perceptions, is key for facilitating positive community-police interactions, especially among community members of color. During ride-alongs with police, we examined (1) community members' perceptions of, and satisfaction with, officers' actions, language, and demeanors and (2) officers' perceptions of community member's satisfaction based on the officers' actions, language, and demeanors. Our study examined the perceptions of a racially diverse set of community members with the majority being people of color. We triangulated these quantitative findings with our observations of community-officer interactions. Findings reveal important similarities and differences between community members and officers. Given the media attention surrounding the killings of community members, and the resulting Black Lives Matter movement, our findings have important implications for improving these interactions.

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Now, more than ever, law enforcement agencies are being met with widespread backlash due to centuries of systemic oppression, misuse of force, and killings of people of color. While this study took place just before the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the resulting protests and media attention, it is nonetheless imperative to contextualize the importance of these current and ongoing manifestations of police brutality due to systemic violence and racism that people of color still face at the hands of law enforcement. The current events further highlight the importance of investigating and addressing areas of improvement and reform needed by law enforcement agencies, especially as it pertains to improving community members' perceptions of, and satisfaction, with officers. As this study demonstrates, the actions of police officers play a vital role in influencing community members' perceptions of law enforcement. In other words, officers have a great deal of influence over community members' views of police legitimacy as well as their relationships with the community through their own behavior. This study is important because it identifies specific aspects of officer actions, language, and demeanors that are associated with positive community-officer interactions among a sample primarily comprised of community members of color.

As gatekeepers of the criminal justice system (Bradley, 2009), police are the first point-of-contact that victims and witnesses have when reporting a crime. Indeed, the majority of crimes that police respond to are initiated by victims or witnesses (Crank, 2014). Whether or not these interactions are perceived as satisfactory by community members can have major effects on many people, including victims, witnesses, and the various actors in the criminal justice system. For example, community members' perceptions of interactions with police as positive can improve their physical and psychological recovery as well as increase community members' likelihood of cooperating with the investigation and later parts of the criminal justice process (Hilden et al., 2004). Based on officers' knowledge of their effect on community members, coupled with the training officers receive, the (a) actions, (b) language, and (c) demeanors officers display when interacting with community members may vary, resulting in some officers experiencing higher satisfaction ratings from community members. For the purposes of this study, *actions* pertain to activities, *language* concerns speech, and *demeanor* refers to community members' interpretation of the officers' attitudes.

While there is literature to suggest what actions, language, and demeanors community members prefer that officers display during community-police interactions, there is little to no

research addressing if those actions, language, and demeanors that officers' display reflect community members' preferences. For example, community members express greater satisfaction with police interactions when the officer responds to the scene quickly, provides information regarding victim services, and offers comfort (Percy, 1980; Skogan, 2005). One gap in the literature, then, is whether officers are aware or unaware of community member preferences and how, if at all, any potential awareness impacts their interactions with community members.

Importance of the Current Study

Given the pivotal role that police officers play in the lives of community members, victims, and witnesses of crime, it is imperative that police are aware of how their actions and speech impact the way that people perceive law enforcement. As will be detailed below, community members' satisfactory interaction with the police has been shown to significantly improve victim recovery through the avoidance of secondary victimization (Maier, 2008), increase the likelihood that victims will report crimes in the future (Garofalo, 1977), and increase community members' willingness to cooperate with all actors in the criminal justice system (Jackson et al., 2012; Mastrofski et al., 1996). Put simply, more satisfactory interactions between community members and police benefit more than victims and witnesses to crime; positive community-police interactions also benefit law enforcement officers and their fellow criminal justice system employees by improving community members' overall perceptions of the entire criminal justice system. For example, victims who are satisfied with their interactions with police are more likely to cooperate and engage with the later steps of the criminal justice process (Koster et al., 2016; Wemmers et al., 1995).

The current study addresses these gaps in knowledge about community members' and police officers' perceptions of (a) actions, (b) language, and (c) demeanors displayed by officers during community-police interactions. This study contributes to the criminal justice discipline by (1) expanding knowledge about community satisfaction with police interactions, (2) investigating whether officers are aware of community preferences and whether officers use this knowledge to increase community satisfaction during these interactions, and (3) examining community-police interactions among a sample comprised of mostly community members of color. This project involved original data collection including self-administered surveys of (1) active-duty police officers and (2) community members who have had an interaction with police (i.e., victims and witnesses, not suspects). Further, field observations of

community-police encounters contextualize these interactions. Below features a review of the relevant literature, followed by the findings from our original research. We then end our discussion of the results with policy recommendations aimed to improve community relations, which, in turn, we believe could improve overall perceptions of police legitimacy in those communities.

Literature Review

Citizen Satisfaction with Police Interactions

Our comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to community satisfaction with police interactions resulted in key findings that are organized into three major themes. The first theme that emerged pertained to the actions of police officers, which encompasses behaviors by police. The second theme that emerged was the language that police officers used when communicating with community members. The third and final theme that emerged from prior literature included the officers' demeanors, meaning the officers' behaviors and attitudes. The following review of the literature presents key findings that emerged within each theme.

Actions of Police Officers

For the purposes of this study, community satisfaction is defined as a positive view of the police officer's actions, language, and demeanors during their interaction. The following briefly presents well-established actions of police that influence community members' satisfaction with police.

Response Time. Naturally, quick response times have been shown to increase victim satisfaction with the police (Percy, 1980; Skogan, 2005). Yet some evidence suggests that victims' *perception* of the response time – not the *actual* response time – is more influential for victims' satisfaction with the police (Brown & Coulter, 1983). A quick response time is interpreted by community members as a greater effort made by the police (Skogan, 2005).

Active Investigation. Victims' perceptions of officers' time and effort spent investigating affect victims' satisfaction with their interaction with police (Koster et al., 2018; McNamara, 1967). Specifically, when community members perceive that officers spent a lot of time investigating their claims, their satisfaction with responding officers increased.

Emotional Comfort. Providing emotional comfort to victims has been found to increase satisfaction with a police interaction (Callanan et al., 2012; Foley & Terrill, 2008). Indeed, comforting victims is often considered to be an essential service expected of the police (Mastrofski, 1999). The only

time providing comfort appears to result in an unsatisfying interaction is when the timing of the provision of comfort is perceived as out of place (Glauser & Tullar, 1985).

Offender Arrest. As research on the topic continues to grow, it is increasingly more apparent that the decision to make an arrest increases satisfaction for some victims (Erez & Tontodonato, 1990; Wilson & Jasinski, 2004) but decreases satisfaction for others (Hickman & Simpson, 2003; Potter, 2010). This mixed finding may be attributed to the differing expectations of victims. That is, victims report greater satisfaction with the police if the officer makes the arrest decision in-line with the victims' preferences (Buzawa et al., 1992; Erez & Tontodonato, 1992).

Language of Police Officers

In addition to police actions, police language also plays an important role in increasing – or decreasing – victim satisfaction.

Communicate Available Services. Police officers provide victims with much information, including available services (Kesteren et al., 2014). Such services include mental health counseling, victim advocacy programs, or medical treatment. Similarly, victims are more likely to report being satisfied with the interaction if officers communicate about safety measures to protect themselves in the future (Johnson, 2007; Watson, 2014). Such measures may include filing for protection orders or going to a domestic violence shelter and are impacted by whether victims wanted such referrals (Apsler et al., 2003; Robinson & Stroshine, 2005).

Communicate Next Steps in the Criminal Justice Process. Many victims do not know what occurs after filing a police report, what might happen to an arrested offender, or what to expect about case proceedings in the court system. Victims report satisfaction with interactions when officers ask victims if they have any questions about the impending process (Hodgson, 2005). In other words, victims are more satisfied with the police when they are provided with information and are allowed to ask questions about the next steps in the criminal justice system.

Avoiding Victim-Blaming. Officers who use victim-blaming language decrease victims' satisfaction with the interaction (Hart, 1993; Holmstrom & Burgess, 2017). Officers may inadvertently contribute to victim-blaming by questioning the victims' actions or choices. For example, asking victims questions such as "What were you wearing?", "Were you drunk?", or "Do you often leave the door unlocked?" negatively impacts victims' perceptions of the police. Conversely, officers who use encouraging and reassuring phrases such as "You did

the right thing by contacting the police” increase victim satisfaction (Myhill & Bradford, 2012; Percy, 1980). Further, officers who use profanity have negative effects on community members’ perceptions of the police (Baseheart & Cox, 1993; Patton et al., 2017).

Demeanor of Police Officers

In addition to what police officers *do* (actions) and *say* (language), there are things that police officers *display* (demeanors) that affect community members’ satisfaction with police. Although some actions and languages may appear to overlap with demeanor, demeanor reflects community members’ perceptions of officers’ attitudes during the interaction (Jones, 2007; Webb & Marshall, 1995).

Respectfulness. Community members report higher levels of satisfaction when interacting with officers who were respectful (e.g., attentive, courteous, or polite; Bradford et al., 2009; Tewksbury & West, 2001). Respectful behavior towards community members improves community satisfaction through increasing trust and confidence in the police.

Appearing Rushed. Officers can avoid this demeanor by taking their time with the community member. Officers who do not rush their investigations or interviews can increase community members’ satisfaction because devoting adequate time to community members communicates that community members’ problems are important and worthwhile (Stroshine, 1999).

Listening. Community members report being highly satisfied with officers who made an effort to appear that they were listening by maintaining eye contact or nodding their head (Butterworth & Westmarland, 2015; Winkel & Vrij, 1990).

Believing Community members. Blaming victims or acting on stereotypes about “true victims” are some ways in which community members can interpret an officer as not believing them (Campbell, Ahrens et al., 2001; Madigan & Gamble, 1991). Examples of officers disbelieving victims can be interpreted through dismissive or laissez-faire investigating. Acting on stereotypes about “true victims” can include the officer viewing the event as non-criminal because weapons were not used or the victims and offenders were involved in intimate relationships (Estrich, 1987; Venema, 2016).

Showing Concern. Community members also report increased satisfaction with police interactions when they perceive that officers showed concern and interest in helping victims (Skogan, 2005; Skogan, 2006; Tewksbury & West, 2001). Officers who ask about injuries and provide information about safety measures that the community member can take

typically receive higher satisfaction ratings (Tewksbury & West, 2001). Concern and helpfulness can also be displayed through asking questions about the incident, providing referrals, or explaining the next steps in the criminal justice system to the community member.

Honesty and Fairness. Officers who acknowledge community member preference (such as in arrest decision-making) and who explain why certain actions can or cannot be taken typically receive higher satisfaction ratings (Skogan, 2005; Tyler, 1990). These factors can also be displayed by treating all community members equally, especially in terms of race and gender differences (Hickman & Sampson, 2003; Tyler, 2005).

Impact of Community Demographics on Satisfaction with Police

Community demographics are an important aspect in assessing satisfaction with police interactions. For the purposes of this study, we asked respondents to indicate their race, age, gender, education, and income. While each is considered important in the discussion of satisfaction with the police, we also acknowledge that caution must be used when making generalizations regarding community members’ perceptions of the police (see also Brown & Benedict, 2002 for a comprehensive summary of research on perceptions of police).

Race of Community members. As has been recently demonstrated by the increased attention by the media on the killings of Black community members by law enforcement, race is an important predictor of satisfaction with police. People who are white are more likely to report significantly higher satisfaction with the police than people of color, including Black or Hispanic individuals (Cao et al., 1996; Garcia & Cao, 2005). Compared to people who are Black, those who are white are more likely to perceive fair treatment by police and to be more satisfied with police response time, police services, confidence in the police, and perceived police protection (Brown & Coulter, 1983; Cao et al., 1996; Skogan, 2005). Therefore, it is likely that community members’ race, and, more importantly, the social experiences unique to racial groups, will impact their views of police officers’ actions, language, and demeanors.

Age and Gender of Community Members. Older individuals report higher satisfaction with the police (Brown & Coulter, 1983; Cao et al., 1996; Schafer et al., 2003). Yet the effects of gender on police satisfaction is more mixed. Some studies find that females are more satisfied with police than males (Cao et al., 1996; Schafer et al., 2003), while others find that males are more satisfied with police than

females (Correia et al., 1996; Hurst & Frank, 2000), and still others report no significant gender differences (Decker, 1981; Gainey & Payne, 2009; Kusow et al., 1997).

Education and Income of Community Members. While some studies show that more educated individuals report greater satisfaction than less educated individuals (Kusow et al., 1997; Priest & Carter, 1999), other studies find the opposite (Percy, 1980), and still other studies find no significant differences across education (Brown & Coulter, 1983; Cao et al., 1996; Correia et al., 1996). People with higher income, however, report greater satisfaction with the police (Schafer et al., 2003). Those with higher income are more satisfied with police response time, perceived police protection, and confidence in the police (Brown & Coulter, 1983; Cao et al., 1996).

Importance of Victim Satisfaction

Victim Satisfaction Avoids Secondary Victimization

When police officers' actions, language, or demeanors negatively impact victims, this is called secondary victimization (Williams, 1984). Specifically, secondary victimization refers to the negative emotions that victims experience as a direct result of the negative treatment at the hands of criminal justice actors (e.g., police officers) investigating their initial victimization (Maier, 2008). Secondary victimization by police can lead to the same negative effects as those that resulted from the initial victimization. For example, those with secondary victimization report psychological and emotional issues, such as anger, irritability, isolation, and feelings of being misunderstood (Campbell et al., 1999; Campbell, Raja et al., 2001). Others report feelings of dehumanization, helplessness, shame, fear, and increased self-blame (Hattendorf & Tollerud, 1997; Logan et al., 2005). Victims also report reduced emotional distress after having interacted with a police officer who did not make them feel revictimized (Patterson, 2011). In other words, police officers who actively avoid actions, language, or demeanors that may result in secondary victimization are more likely to increase community member satisfaction.

Victim Satisfaction Increases the Likelihood of Reporting Future Victimization to Police

Increasing victim satisfaction with police interactions is also important for increasing the likelihood of victims reporting future crimes (Garofalo, 1977). Given that the majority of crimes that come to the attention of the police are reported by community members rather than uncovered by police alone (Crank, 2014), if victims stopped reporting crimes that they experienced, the police would be

unaware of a significant percentage of crimes occurring in their jurisdictions. Therefore, increasing victim reporting habits aids the police in more effectively performing their duties.

Victim Satisfaction Increases Cooperation with the Police and the Criminal Justice System

Police officers who community members perceive as procedurally-just experience greater cooperation and compliance during future interactions (Jackson et al., 2012; Mastrofski et al., 1996). Procedural justice in this case is defined as victims' perceptions of officers acting neutral, respectful, trustworthy, and allowing victims to voice preferences related to the investigation (Tyler & Murphy, 2011). Similarly, community members who view the police as procedurally-just are more likely to assist in broader crime control efforts, such as participating in neighborhood watch programs or calling the police if they were to witness crimes in the future (Ziegenhagen, 1976). Not only do positive community-police interactions lead to supportive attitudes for the police, they also lead to supportive attitudes for the rest of the criminal justice system including prosecutors, judges, and defense attorneys (Koster et al., 2016; Wemmers et al., 1995).

This study aims to examine the perceptions of community members and police officers to better understand the factors that influence community satisfaction with police interactions as well as officers' understanding of community member preferences. The purpose of this study is to expand the literature on community satisfaction with police interactions while also emphasizing officers' understanding of this phenomenon. We answer the following research questions: (1) What specific officer (a) actions, (b) language, and (c) demeanors influence community satisfaction with police?; and (2) What specific (a) actions, (b) language, and (c) demeanors do officers believe influence community satisfaction with police?

Method

Research Setting

Original data, including self-administered surveys and observations, were collected in partnership with a large metropolitan county police department on the east coast of the U.S. The county consists of a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. This county was selected due to its diverse population and landscape. The county is mostly urban with urban borders, though it includes expansive suburban and urban areas throughout. The county has a high crime rate despite areas with higher wealth. Data were collected in all of the county's districts.

Data

Data collection took place from September of 2019 to March of 2020. The data for this project were obtained from ride-alongs with police officers that resulted in (1) surveys of community members, (2) surveys of county police officers, and (3) observations of the community-police interactions. Community members who were eligible for participation in this study were victims or witnesses to crimes that were reported to the police. Witnesses to crimes are included to capture the views of those who may have experienced victimization indirectly or vicariously. This study reflects a partnership with the county police, which permitted us to ride along with police officers who volunteered to participate in the study. This study was approved by our university institutional review board, and participants were afforded protections outlined therein.

Procedure

The first author went on 27 ride-alongs with county officers who volunteered to participate in this study. Each ride-along occurred during a 10-hour morning or evening shift. During each ride-along, eligible community members were invited to participate in a self-administered survey. Similarly, the participating officers also completed a self-administered survey. The first author also documented their own perceptions of the interaction between community member and officer. The following describes the procedure for each method of data collection.

Community Participation

During the course of each ride-along, police officers responded to a number of calls for service. It was during the moments where officers were not interacting with community members that the first author approached the community members to invite participation in the community survey. With the police officer's permission, the first author approached each individual community member, introduced the project, and invited participation in a survey developed for purposes of this study called the Citizen Attitudes, Language, and Demeanor Survey (CALDS). Community members were asked to respond anonymously and without compensation to questions about the officer with whom they interacted the most during the call for service.

Community members were asked to indicate if the responding officer displayed any of the actions, language, or demeanors as described earlier in our review of the literature, including making an arrest and investigating the scene, telling the community member about victim and medical services, and listening and making eye-contact. Community member participants

were also asked to indicate how each action, language, and demeanor affected their level of satisfaction with the officer. Community member participants were asked to complete the survey during the call for service, yet when time did not permit, the community member was allowed to return the survey later at their own convenience. Each community member was provided with a pre-stamped envelope addressed to a Post Office Box rented for the purposes of this study.

All community members (i.e., victims and witnesses) with whom the ride-along host interacted were eligible for participation. Exclusion occurred for (1) community members under the age of 18, (2) those determined to have intellectual disabilities, (3) those determined to be under the influence of drugs/alcohol, and (4) those who behaved belligerently. A total of 132 interactions between community members and the police occurred. Of the 132 total interactions, 95 occurred with community members who met the eligibility criteria for this study. Of the 95 eligible interactions, 88 community member surveys were disseminated, of which 32 were returned in person and five were returned via mail resulting in a response rate of 36%.

Officer Participation

Police officers were invited by the first author to volunteer as a ride-along host during day and evening (i.e., no midnight shifts) pre-shift roll call. Officers who volunteered to participate in ride-alongs were administered a survey developed for purposes of this study called the Officer Attitudes, Language, and Demeanor Survey (OALDS). Participating officers were asked to participate anonymously and without compensation. Participating officers responded to questions with their general beliefs regarding factors that may or may not influence community satisfaction during community-police interactions. To mirror the CALDS, the OALDS consisted of questions pertaining to officers' intentional display of the same actions, language, and demeanors and how officers believe these factors affect community satisfaction with the interaction.

Each participating officer had the option of filling out the survey at the time it was presented to them, during "downtime" on shift, at their own convenience after their shift had ended, or mailed at their own convenience. Officers were provided with a pre-stamped envelope addressed to the same Post Office Box rented for the purposes of this study.

The opportunity for officers to participate as a ride-along host was available to all officers within all districts within the county. Of the 14 officers invited to complete the survey, eight did so, resulting in a response rate of 57% for officers. Seven of the officers

returned their surveys by mail, and one completed the survey during the final moments of their shift.

Observations

To further assess community-police interactions, observations were recorded. Notetaking was implemented to document interactions in a natural setting (Emerson et al., 1995; Palmer, 2001). At the end of each ride-along, extensive field notes regarding the community-police interactions were recorded in an observation workbook. The workbook included all of the actions, language, and demeanors that are present in the OALDS and CALDS. The workbook also included a space to record any potentially relevant information that was observed during the interaction, such as the physical environment, other community members present, expressive culture, or ideational elements. The purpose of the field notes was to provide an independent assessment of community-police interactions (Palmer, 2001). During data analysis, these notes were compared against the community member and officer responses to assess where discrepancies between the two may exist. A total of 132 interactions were recorded. For purposes of this study, only the interactions between community members and those officers who returned their surveys were included in the final analysis. This resulted in 23 observations being reviewed herein, which excludes observations of officers who did not complete a survey.

Operationalization

Community members were asked which of the factors displayed by officers affected their own satisfaction, while officers were asked which factors that they do, say, and display when interacting with community members.

Actions. We presented community members and officers with a list of seven officer actions: (a) made an arrest, (b) arrived quickly, (c) allowed community member to express concern, (d) investigated the scene, (e) provided comfort, (f) asked questions, and (g) considered community members' opinion when making the arrest decision. Response options were yes (coded as 0) and no (coded as 1). Community members were asked whether or not officers portrayed any of the featured actions, and officers were asked whether or not they actively attempt to do any of the featured actions when interacting with community members. Officers were then asked, "What effect do you believe this had on the community member's satisfaction with the interaction?" Response options included the following: increases (coded as 0), decreases (coded as 1), no effect (coded as 2), and depends on the situation (coded as 3).

Language. Community members and officers were presented with a list of 11 forms of officer language: (a) informed community member about victim services, (b) told community member about medical services, (c) informed community member about safety information, (d) told community member about their rights, (e) informed community member about the next steps in the criminal justice system, (f) blamed the community member, (g) asked the community member if they had any questions, (h) repeated questions back to the community member, (i) used "swear" words (e.g., profanity), (j) said something to make the community member feel better, and (k) told community member that reporting was "a good thing to do." Response options were yes (coded as 0) and no (coded as 1). Community members were asked whether or not officers say any of the featured actions and officers were asked whether or not they actively attempt to say any of the featured language when interacting with community members. Officers were then asked, "What effect do you believe this had on the citizen's satisfaction with the interaction?" Response options included the following: increases (coded as 0), decreases (coded as 1), no effect (coded as 2), and depends on the situation (coded as 3).

Demeanors. Community members and officers were provided with a list of 10 forms of officers' demeanors: (a) respect, (b) listening, (c) made eye contact, (d) appear rushed, (e) appear concerned, (f) appear interested in helping community members, (g) appear to believe the community member, (h) fair treatment, (i) honesty, and (j) helpfulness. Response options were yes (coded as 0) and no (coded as 1). Community members were asked whether or not officers displayed any of the featured actions, and officers were asked whether or not they actively display any of the featured demeanors when interacting with community members. Officers were then asked, "What effect do you believe this had on the community member's satisfaction with the interaction?" Response options included: increases (coded as 0), decreases (coded as 1), and no effect (coded as 2). Officers were given the extra response option: depends on the situation (coded as 3).

Analytic Plan

Given the smaller sample sizes due largely to the premature data collection termination from the publicized onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020), descriptive statistics and univariate analyses are presented, and more sophisticated statistical analyses cannot be performed. The descriptive findings are contextualized with rich observational data that detail our observations across all community-police interactions.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Community Members

The sample consisted of 37 community members.¹ Consistent with the demographics of the county, the sample of community respondents were majority Black ($n = 22$; 59%), followed by 38% ($n = 4$) Hispanic, 14% ($n = 5$) White, and 8% ($n = 3$) identifying as other races. The majority of the community members ($n = 22$; 59%) were female. Nearly all of the participating community members ($n = 31$; 84%) identified as heterosexual. Almost one-third of community respondents were single ($n = 11$; 30%). Community respondents ranged in age from 18 to 75, with the average community member age of 43 ($SD=18$). Nearly one-third of community members had a college/university degree ($n = 11$; 30%), followed by some college/Associate's degree ($n = 8$; 22%), high school diploma/GED ($n = 7$; 19%), graduate level/ law/ medical school ($n = 5$; 14%), then grade 9-11 ($n = 1$; 3%). Almost one-third of community respondents ($n = 10$; 27%) claimed an income of between \$50,001 and \$80,000. Finally, the majority of community respondents indicated they were currently employed ($n = 22$; 59%) and not currently a college/university student ($n = 27$; 73%).

Officers

This sample consisted of eight county police officers. Of the eight officers, one volunteered as ride-along host twice, although was only surveyed once. Four of the participating officers were White, two were Hispanic, and one was Black. All seven officers were male and identified as heterosexual. Most of the officer respondents ($n = 5$) indicated that they were married. Officer respondents ranged in age from 26 to 39, with a mean age of 32 years old ($SD=4$).

The range of education for officers was high school diploma/GED ($n = 1$), some college/Associate's degree ($n = 4$), and college/university degree ($n = 2$). Most of the officer respondents ($n = 3$) claimed a household income of between \$50,001 and \$80,000. Finally, the length of time employed as a police officer ranged from 9 months to 10 years, with an average of 5 years ($SD=3$).²

Community Perceptions of Police

The vast majority of community members reported that they were overall very satisfied ($n = 31$; 86%) or satisfied ($n = 4$; 11%) with the responding officer. Only one community member (3%) reported being overall dissatisfied with their responding officer. The following results reveal how the officers' actions,

Table 1. Descriptive statistics among community member respondents ($n = 37$).

Black	22 (59%)
Female	22 (59%)
Heterosexual	31 (84%)
Single	11 (30%)
Age	Range 18–75
M (SD)	43 (18)
Education	
Grade 9-11	1 (3%)
High School diploma/GED	7 (20%)
Some College/Associate's Degree	8 (22%)
College/University	11 (30%)
Graduate/Law/Medical school	5 (14%)
Income	
Under \$20,000	4 (38%)
\$20,001-\$50,000	4 (38%)
\$50,001-\$80,000	4 (38%)
\$80,001-\$100,000	10 (27%)
Over \$100,000	9 (24%)
Employed	22 (59%)
Non-Student	22 (59%)

Note. Mean age excludes two participants who identified their ages in general terms as ">70" and ">65+."

Table 2. Descriptive statistics among officer respondents ($n = 8$).

	N
White	4
Male	7
Heterosexual	7
Married	5
Age	Range 26–39
M (SD)	31 (4)
Education	
Grade 9-11	0
High School diploma/GED	1
Some college/Associate's degree	4
College/University	2
Graduate/Law/Medical school	0
Income	
Under \$20,000	0
\$20,001-\$50,000	0
\$50,001-\$80,000	3
\$80,001-\$100,000	2
Over \$100,000	2
Years on the Force	Range <1-10
M (SD)	5 (3)

Note. One officer did not provide demographic data.

language, and demeanor affected the community member’s satisfaction with their responding officer.

In terms of citizen perceptions of officer actions, the majority of citizens reported being very satisfied ($n = 31$; 86%) or satisfied ($n = 5$; 14%). As for community perceptions of officer language, the majority of community members reported being very satisfied ($n = 30$; 83%) or satisfied ($n = 6$; 17%). Turning to community perceptions of officer demeanors, the majority of community members reported being very satisfied ($n = 31$; 86%) or satisfied ($n = 4$; 11%), with only one being dissatisfied ($n = 1$; 3%).

Table 3: Community satisfaction with officers overall ($n = 37$).

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dis-satisfied	Very Dis-satisfied
Overall	31 (86.11%)	4 (11.11%)	1 (2.78%)	0
Action	31 (86.11%)	5 (13.89%)	0	0
Language	30 (83.33%)	6 (16.67%)	0	0
Demeanor	31 (86.11%)	4 (11.11%)	1 (2.78%)	0

Note. While 37 community members participated in this study, one participant skipped this section of the survey resulting in rows totaling 36 as opposed to the full sample of 37 community members.

Actions

Two-thirds of community members ($n = 16$; 64%) indicated that the officer not making an arrest had no effect on their satisfaction with the officer. The majority of community members noted that officers arriving quickly ($n = 17$; 71%), allowing the community member to express concern ($n = 16$; 67%), and providing them comfort ($n = 14$; 61%) increased their satisfaction with the officer. Nearly half of the community members ($n = 10$; 46%) indicated that the officer actively investigating the scene increased their satisfaction with the officer whereas another 50% of community members ($n = 10$) indicated that the officer not questioning witnesses had no effect on their satisfaction with the officer. Finally, a third of the community members ($n = 5$; 31%) indicated that the officer considering their opinion when making an arrest decision had no effect on their satisfaction with the officer.

Language

The majority of community members indicated that saying something to make the community feel better ($n = 13$; 62%), being told about the next steps in the criminal justice system ($n = 10$; 50%) and asking the community member if they had any questions ($n = 12$; 63%) increased their satisfaction with the officer. Over a third of community members ($n = 7$; 37%) who were told about their rights believed that this increased their satisfaction with the officer, while the same number of community members indicated that not being told about their rights had no effect on their satisfaction with the officer. Just over half of community members indicated that the lack of victim service information being discussed ($n = 11$; 55%), the lack of medical service information being discussed ($n = 15$; 79%), the lack of safety information being discussed ($n = 9$; 45%), not blaming them for what happened ($n = 14$; 70%), not using “swear” words ($n = 12$; 60%), and not telling them that reporting to the police was a good thing ($n = 10$; 50%) had no effect on their satisfaction with the officer. Finally, about half of the community members ($n = 9$; 47%) indicated that their satisfaction with the officer was unaffected by the officer not repeating their questions back to them.

Demeanor

The vast majority of community members indicated that if the officer was respectful ($n = 16$; 73%), listened to them ($n = 14$; 70%), made eye-contact with them ($n = 12$; 71%), appeared concerned ($n = 14$; 74%), appeared interested in helping ($n = 15$; 71%), appeared to believe them ($n = 15$; 71%), treated them fairly ($n = 16$; 76%), if the officer was honest ($n = 15$; 71%), and if the officer was helpful ($n = 16$; 76%), their satisfaction increased. Finally, nearly half of community members ($n = 8$; 42%) indicated that the responding officer did not appear rushed and that this did not impact their satisfaction with the officer.

Officers’ Perceptions of Their Actions, Language, and Demeanors

Actions

The majority believed that the following actions increased community members’ satisfaction: arriving quickly ($n = 5$), allowing community member to express concern ($n = 6$), investigating the scene ($n = 5$), and providing comfort ($n = 5$). Officers indicated that the effect of making an arrest ($n = 4$) and considering a community member’s opinion when making an arrest decision ($n = 5$) would depend upon the situation as to whether or not community members’ satisfaction would be impacted. Finally, three officers indicated that they believed questioning

witnesses would increase a community member's satisfaction, two indicated that they believed questioning witnesses would have no effect on a community member's satisfaction, and three indicated that community satisfaction would depend on the situation when questioning witnesses.

Language

The majority of officers ($n = 6$) believed that telling a community member about victim services, telling community members about safety information ($n = 4$), telling community members about their rights ($n = 4$), saying something to make a community member feel better ($n = 6$), avoiding blaming the community member ($n = 6$), and asking if the community member had any questions ($n = 5$) would increase community satisfaction with the officer. There was no consensus among officers about the remaining language factors. For example, three officers believed that telling a community member about medical services would increase community satisfaction, two believed it would have no effect on community satisfaction, and three believed it would depend on the situation. Further, while four of the officers believe that telling the community member about the next steps in the criminal justice system will increase community satisfaction, the other four officers believe that it will decrease community satisfaction. Three of the officers indicated they believe it depends on the situation whether using "swear" words will affect community members' satisfaction with the officer. Finally, while four officers indicated they believe that telling community members reporting to the police was a good thing will increase community satisfaction with the officer, the other four indicated that they believe it would depend on the situation.

Demeanor

The majority of officers indicated that they believe being respectful ($n = 6$), listening ($n = 6$), making eye-contact ($n = 6$), appearing concerned ($n = 7$), appearing interested in helping ($n = 7$), appearing to believe the community member ($n = 5$), appearing to provide fair treatment ($n = 6$), appearing honest ($n = 5$), and appearing helpful ($n = 5$) will increase a community member's satisfaction with the officer. Finally, by appearing rushed, four officers believe this will decrease community satisfaction, while two believed this will have no effect on the satisfaction, one believed this will increase community satisfaction, and one believed this would depend on the situation.

Overall Summary of the Actions, Language, and Demeanors

In sum, community members and officers were in agreement regarding the impact officers' actions, language, and demeanor can have on community satisfaction with the officer. Further, community members appear to find the actions, language, and demeanors of officers to increase their satisfaction, though interestingly, the absence of many of the actions, language, and demeanors tended to have no effect on community satisfaction with the officer. Finally, responding officers appeared aware of what factors may increase or decrease a community member's satisfaction with the officer, though many officers indicated that situational factors play a large role in determining how the display of many of these actions, language, and demeanors would affect community members' satisfaction.

Observation Results

Observations of Community members

Community Member Age. We observed a relatively even split between community members exhibiting satisfaction and dissatisfaction with officers. These observed differences in satisfaction were most notable by community member age. Older community members, especially elderly (65+), appeared to be more welcoming of officers' presence and behaved courteously toward officers. For example, several of the elderly community members offered a seat and beverages to officers when entering their homes. On the other hand, younger community members appeared more likely to behave contentiously towards officers, even when the community member placed the call for service. In fact, it was the younger adults who appeared to distrust the police, wanted to rush the process, and were vocal about the police "not doing their jobs." It was much more common for younger community members to block their doorway to keep the officer from entering or seeing inside their household. These age-graded observations are in line with previous research where older community members reported higher satisfaction with officers than younger groups (Dai & Jiang, 2016; Kusow et al., 1997). Note that there was no recording of community members under the age of 18 given that the study focused on adults. Therefore, possible patterns of officer satisfaction among youth could not be determined and are outside the scope of this study.

Community Member Complaints and Confusion. Observations revealed that many community members appeared to either misunderstand or have different expectations of the responding officer's role. Many community members

did not seem to understand the role of a police officer, nor what an officer can and cannot do in given situations. It is possible that some of the community members' dissatisfaction ratings were a direct result of being unaware of the limitations that the departmental guidelines and local laws set in place for officers. For example, some community members wanted officers to remove an ex-partner or friend from their home. Due to the local tenant laws, officers may not remove an individual from a housing unit if they have lived there for a set period of time as they are considered to have established residency. Another community member complained about how long it took an officer to arrive to her scene (i.e., a car accident). Our observations revealed that there were higher priority calls put ahead of hers by dispatch (e.g., a dispute and a domestic/disorderly call), and there was increased traffic due to the rain that day.

Observations of Officers

With only one exception, all officers who participated in the study displayed satisfactory actions, language, and demeanor. From our observations, officer demographic factors (e.g., race, age, rank) did not correspond with differential actions, language, or demeanor. The following is a summary of observations from 23 individual interactions with the eight officers who participated in ride alongs and who also completed their survey.

Allowing the community member to express concern ($n = 18$; 78%) was the most common observable action displayed by officers. This appeared to be one of the most natural actions as one of the first questions asked by the officers was "Can you tell me what happened here?" While this question was not recorded as the officer "expressing concern," the officer's subsequent language was evidence of the officer expressing concern, including not interrupting the natural progression of the community member going into too much detail, going off-topic, or starting to interject opinions and feelings.

None of the officers *provided comfort* to community members, according to observations. Although prior literature shows that community members report increased satisfaction with a police interaction if they were provided comfort (Callanan et al., 2012; Foley & Terrill, 2008), it was methodologically difficult to measure the expression of comfort during these calls for service. For example, it would be inappropriate in most any situation for an officer to make physical contact with a community member, such as via a hug or pat on the back. Difficulties in defining providing comfort are further articulated in the discussion.

Telling the community member about the next steps in the criminal justice system ($n = 18$; 78%) was

the most common language displayed by officers based on the observations. Officers often explained to community members that the next step in the process was to visit the Magistrate's Office to file their complaint or the proper paperwork. Community members often called the police regarding situations where an officer can do no more than create a case number and provide the relevant information that the community member must then use in order for the criminal justice system to respond properly.

None of the officers *repeated community member questions back them*, according to our observations. First, this is likely a reflection of the limited instances recorded of officers asking if the community member had any questions ($n = 9$; 39%). Second, it is likely that many community members would find a repetition of their questions as annoying or patronizing, as opposed to as a tool to clarify what is being asked. Similarly, we observed that none of the officers *told the community member that reporting to the police was a good thing*. Indeed, four of the eight officers reported that they believed that the effect of *telling the community member that reporting to the police was a good thing* on a community member's satisfaction would depend on the situation. Although data were not gathered to expand upon officers' perceptions of these varying situations, it is possible that officers are trying to avoid their language being interpreted as patronizing.

Only one instance was observed of an officer *telling community members about victim services*, yet several ($N = 8$; 40%) community members said that they received this information. When officers explained how to go to the Magistrate's office to file a Protection From Abuse (PFA) for a domestic case, for example, we considered that to be *telling community members about the next steps in the criminal justice system*. It is possible that community members did not interpret this language the same way. We perceived that telling a community member about victim services would be evidenced by providing a hotline number or offering a victim services pamphlet (language that was only witnessed once).

Being *respectful* ($n = 21$; 91%) was the most common demeanor displayed by officers based on our observations. Respectful actions included wiping one's feet or removing headwear when entering a community member's home. Respectful language included addressing community members formally as "sir" and "ma'am."

Officers were least likely to *appear rushed*, based on our observations of their displayed demeanors ($n = 21$; 91%). This was characterized by patiently listening to the community member (e.g., not interrupting the community member's recounting of the events) and not making anxious movements (e.g.,

tapping their pen or foot, checking their watches, or interrupting the community member). Recall that demeanor can sometimes encompass both actions and language and that, for the purposes of this portion of the study, demeanor refers to our perceptions of the officer's attitude.

Discussion

As discussed in the literature review, there are many ways that officers can improve their satisfaction ratings among victims and witnesses of crime. As discussed earlier, this can include positively impacting victim recovery through avoidance of secondary victimization (e.g., Maier, 2008), increasing the likelihood that these community members will report future crimes (e.g., Garofalo, 1977), and increasing the likelihood that community members will cooperate with the whole of the criminal justice system (e.g., Jackson et al., 2012; Mastrofski et al., 1996). Next, we discuss the findings from our study and then provide promising policy suggestions that may improve community satisfaction with their interactions with police.

Review of Findings in the Context of Prior Literature

We found that the majority of community members were satisfied with the officers who responded to their calls for service. The survey results generally reflect that community members perceive positive actions, language, and demeanors displayed by the officers. Consistent with prior research, this study also found that community satisfaction was positively affected when an officer arrived to the scene quickly (Skogan, 2005), allowed the community member to express their concerns (Skogan, 2006; Tewksbury & West, 2001), and provided comfort (Callanan et al., 2012; Foley & Terrill, 2008). Relatedly, this study also found that community satisfaction increased with responding officers who discussed the next steps in the criminal justice system (see also Johnson, 2007) and asked if they had any questions (e.g., Hodgson, 2005). Also in line with extant research, community members in the current study were satisfied with officers who were respectful (Bradford et al., 2009; Tewksbury & West, 2001), listened and made eye-contact (Butterworth & Westmarland, 2015; Robinson & Stroshine, 2005), appeared concerned and appeared interested in helping (Skogan, 2006; Tewksbury & West, 2001), appeared to believe the community member (Campbell, Ahrens et al., 2001; Venema, 2016), and who provided fair treatment and were honest (Hickman & Sampson, 2003; Skogan, 2005; Skogan, 2006; Tyler, 2005). Our findings highlight the importance of such factors when

actively working to increase community members' satisfaction with officers.

Our study also offers new insight regarding officers' understanding of community members' expectations. We found that officers believe community satisfaction with officers will increase if the officer arrives quickly, allows the community member to express concern, investigates the scene, and provides comfort. Officers further believe that telling community members about victim services, safety information, and community member rights, asking if the community member has any questions, and saying something to make the community member feel better all increase community members' satisfaction with the officer. Finally, participating officers believe that being respectful, listening, making eye-contact, avoiding appearing rushed, appearing concerned, appearing interested in helping, appearing to believe the community member, appearing to be fair, appearing honest, and appearing helpful all increase community members' satisfaction with an officer. These findings reveal that the participating officers were generally aware of the preferences of community members when it comes to how the officer acts, the language they use, and the demeanors they display.

Older community members were observed to be more welcoming of police officers than were younger community member respondents. It is possible that there are differences in generational views of deference versus defiance when interacting with the police that are unrelated to the individual's age. Although it is beyond the scope of this project, some research examines the differential experiences of various groups (e.g., millennials versus boomers and persons of color versus those who are white) and their views of the police (Bradford, 2011; Smith et al., 2019). Future research may benefit from investigating if a general acceptance of the police by older adults is due to age, their generations' views of the police, or some combination of the two. This is even more pertinent at the time of this writing as younger generations become more vocal – and even are engaging in nationwide protests – voicing support for the Black Lives Matter movement against police brutality.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Though this study took steps to expand the current literature on satisfactory community-police interactions in unique ways, there are limitations to this study, which are acknowledged and should be addressed in future research. First, a selection bias among the participants was possible. Among community participants, it was possible that only those who were extreme in their satisfaction with the officer

(e.g., either very satisfied or very dissatisfied) agreed to take the survey. Similarly, it was possible that the officers most concerned with community satisfaction agreed to participate in the survey. As a participant under observation, it is also possible that officers may have changed their actions, language, and demeanor due to the researcher's presence. Given that observations were documented with one researcher, we were unable to assess inter-rater reliability. This project further relied upon self-report surveys as the primary source of data. While some researchers believe that the use of this method in surveying victims can gain greater insight into victims' experiences than can official data (Langton et al., 2017), others dispute its validity due to false reporting (Junger-Tas & Marshall, 1999; Lynch & Addington, 2010). This potential limitation was minimized due to the anonymity of both officer and community surveys.

There were two potentially important factors that were not addressed in the original surveys but possibly could have provided further helpful context for respondents' answers to satisfaction-related questions. First, a question that was not included in either the community or officer surveys was "How many people were on scene?" with response options for number of community members and number of officers present. This information may have shed light on how the presence of others – both community members and officers alike – may affect the respondents' perceptions of the interaction. For example, community respondents may see the presence of many officers as a reflection that their call was important. Conversely, an officer respondent may see the presence of many community members on scene as a potential for danger or disruption. Another important factor that was not addressed in this project was the location of the calls for service. Did the call for service occur in higher crime areas or with greater examples of victim-offender overlap? This could be important for community members who may be witnessing higher rates of crime and, therefore, more police presence. For officers, this could affect their behavior as they subconsciously react to responding to certain areas within their beats.

For several reasons, the project concluded with a relatively small sample size. One such issue was the result of being a sole researcher on the project. Issues with scheduling along with instances of being physically unable to attend ride-alongs due to temporary illness further delayed the data collection process. Had there been multiple researchers working on collecting these data, interruptions in the time spent attending role calls and ride-alongs would have been greatly reduced. Further, relying solely on voluntary ride-alongs led to multiple roll call attendances where no ride-alongs occurred. Another issue regarding the

small sample size was the majority of the data collection process being conducted during colder months. Colder months often experience reduced calls for service, therefore leading to fewer interactions with community members to provide the survey (Mares & Moffett, 2019). These winter dates also saw the increase of illness for officers, resulting in staffing shortages, which in turn decreased the number of available ride-along volunteers. The final issue related to the small sample size was the exclusion of certain populations. Due to certain restrictions, this project did not disseminate surveys to community members who were under 18 years old or to those who appeared under the influence. While this serves as a safeguard for protected populations, this does limit the potential sample and also loses possibly important information regarding how such populations perceive their treatment by officers. For example, differences in community member race, ethnicity, gender, and age have been shown to elicit differences in interactions with police and further exploring these differences is important for future research. Future research may also consider implementing some type of parental consent form and follow-up procedures for those who are unable to consent at the time of the interaction.

Finally, future research may want to evaluate processes that would increase officer and community member participation. For example, future researchers who collect county-wide data should also consider attending roll calls in only the districts with the highest rates of calls for service to maximize their exposure to more community members. Similarly, researchers may consider working with multiple jurisdictions to further increase the chances of participation by both community members and officers. Future researchers may also consider offering incentives to generate a higher participation rate of officers and community members (e.g., Erwin & Wheelright, 2002; Young et al., 2019).

Policy Implications

Public administrators are often tasked with finding ways to increase accountability and perceptions of legitimacy within their communities (McCandless, 2018). Due to the impact that interactions with individual officers has on community relations, law enforcement administrators would benefit from reviewing the following policy recommendations aimed at increasing satisfaction ratings of individual officers. This could, in turn, improve the community's perceptions of their local law enforcement's legitimacy and, thereby, improve community relations overall.

This study illustrates the importance of community-police interactions, and this has the potential to develop policy implications for

community-police interactions. Some research indicates that officers working alongside community members to address local issues is a strong predictor for community members' high satisfaction with the police (Gill et al., 2014; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Similarly, community members who perceive a strong police presence in their neighborhoods also reported high levels of satisfaction with the police (Lord et al., 2009).

Officers may also increase community satisfaction with law enforcement by working directly with community members through direct follow-ups of their call for service. Indeed, victims of crime report higher satisfaction with the police when proper follow-up investigations take place (Aihio, 2017; Myhill & Bradford, 2012). Those studies have found that quality follow-up can be more important than the initial investigation itself. This is extremely important as victims' satisfaction with the police tends to decrease over the stages of the criminal justice system.

Another area where police departments may be able to increase community satisfaction is the public's access to information. First, research indicates that media over-attentiveness to the negatives related to police work, such as crime stories as well as incidents of police misconduct, generally decreases community satisfaction (Graziano, 2019; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Police departments can increase community satisfaction by maintaining relationships with their local media providers. It is also important for police departments to release information regarding local crime and police misconduct in a timely manner. Second, the availability of information about local services and the quality of the government website has been shown to increase satisfaction with officers' communication effectiveness (Ho & Cho, 2017). More specifically, Ho and Cho (2017) found that regular updates to the Kansas City Police Department's social media sites (e.g., Facebook and YouTube) may have increased community satisfaction among the younger respondents (i.e., individuals 35 years old and under).

The afore-mentioned policy recommendations may reflect a need for training review and additions for police departments and their training academies. First, training that pays special attention to communication techniques with community members could likely increase satisfaction with officers in that area (Lum et al., 2012). Specifically, departments could also likely see increases in community satisfaction if officers avoided treating victims and witnesses as they do offending persons. It is important to not speak to community members with a demeanor of authoritarianism. Instead, departments could more likely increase community satisfaction by training officers to talk to

victims and witnesses with compassion and with keeping the community member's needs at the forefront (Skogan, 2005, 2006; Tyler, 1990). Third, departments with some knowledge regarding how to interact with and talk to the media could likely see increases in community satisfaction with their officers (Ho & Cho, 2017). Departments may also see increase in community satisfaction by being aware of the effects that social media plays in community members' perceptions of the police. Engaging the public through news outlets and social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Nextdoor) is a useful tool easily implemented within any department.

Conclusion

Our findings show that there are many ways that officers can increase the likelihood that community members will leave an interaction satisfied with officers. Whether law enforcement administrators are more concerned with victim well-being, the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, or impacting their community's view of police legitimacy, the results herein provide early guidelines of where improvements can be made directly by improving interactions with victims and witnesses of crime. However, it should be noted that it was beyond the scope of the study to examine the systemic racism within law enforcement that overshadows the perception of the police by people of color. Indeed, recall that a recurring theme within officers' responses was that situational factors often influence community member satisfaction. It should be recognized as equally possibly true, then, that situational factors may influence community members' reactions to police officers when an interaction occurs. It is not only the responsibility of policymakers to influence a change given that researchers can also play an important role in uncovering ways in which such changes are possible. Indeed, the current police reforms – and other calls for police reforms – will be key for improving community-police interactions (Arizona State University, 2020). As can be heard again and again by those speaking out against police brutality, “you gave us Black Lives Matter Plaza, what we asked for was change.” It is time, now more than ever, for law enforcement agencies to start listening to the needs and expectations of the communities they serve. This study provides empirical evidence for understanding the factors that contribute to community satisfaction with police interactions primarily among community members of color.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Note: One additional community survey was received via mail but excluded from the analysis due to respondent's hand-written confusion about how to answer questions and incorrect answer to responding officer's gender (e.g., respondent indicated they interacted with a female officer when no ride-alongs with female officers had been performed).
- ² Due to the small sample size, only actual numbers are reported (i.e., not percentages) for officers. Note, one officer did not provide demographic data.