The Use of Humor for Emotion Management on the Job: An Exploration of 911 Communication Centers

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THE USE OF HUMOR FOR EMOTION MANAGEMENT ON THE JOB:
AN EXPLORATION OF 911 COMMUNICATION CENTERS

by

Jennifer Dell McLaughlin

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

THE USE OF HUMOR FOR EMOTION MANAGEMENT ON THE JOB:
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This study sought to understand how humor affects a person’s ability to cope and manage their emotions in a high stress organizational environment. 911 communication centers are work environments where stress is commonplace, and the work environment can instantly become erratic and chaotic.

This study explored the role humor has in assisting organizational members with emotion management in a high stress job and the types of humor used by members to handle their job and cope with the stress.

The results suggest that humor is pervasive in 911 communication centers, and dispatchers use humor for personal coping, co-worker bonding, and to change their work environment. Understanding how humor affects a person’s ability to cope and manage their emotions in a high stress job provides researchers with information to expand communication research pertaining to organizational communication, humor, humor orientation, and perceived coping effectiveness.
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Approved:

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Director

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Dean of the Graduate School
August 2012
DEDICATION

It is a pleasure to thank those who made this dissertation possible. I owe my deepest gratitude to my husband, Brian, and my daughters, Emily and Hannah. Their encouragement and support allowed me to complete this monumental goal. I would like to thank my parents, Bill and Mary Felder, Doug and Sheila McLaughlin, my sister, Robin Kuntz, my extended family, and my close friends. I would like to dedicate my dissertation to the memory of my grandparents, Jim and Dell Dunaway and Norman and Mary Margaret Stientenroth. I would like to thank Janey Mattina, who as a good friend was always willing to listen to me, give me the best advice, and encouragement during class and the dissertation process. I would also like to dedicate my dissertation to the memory Dr. Susan Mallon-Ross who lost her battle to cancer. She told me I could finish, and I believed her.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Humor is a communicative process by which we build relationships, create social and cultural boundaries, and provide comic relief. Humor is like kudzu; it can grow almost anywhere, and it is hard to eliminate. Humor finds its way into a myriad of organizational situations, such as conflict (Alberts, 1990; Bippus, 2003), negotiations (Bonaiuto, Datenllana, & Pierro, 2003; Martin, 2004; Martineau, W., 1972; Mullany, 2004), crisis (Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006), and comforting episodes (Bippus, 2000). Scholars have documented several ways in which humor influences organizational life positively and negatively. Scholars have found that humor’s positive effects can include establishing relationships (Collinson, 1988; Graham, 1995; Honeycutt & Brown, 1998; Meyer, 1997), relieving anxiety and uncertainty (Bippus, 2003; Graham, 1995; Meyer, 1997; Rizzo, Wanzer, & Booth-Butterfield, 1999; Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 2005), establishing a shared experience (Meyer, 1997), and creating cultural identity (Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006). The negative consequences of humor can be stress, burnout, and alienation (Alberts, Kellar-Guenther, & Corman, 1996; Avtgis & Taber, 2006). Humor can be used “as a key for opening up interpersonal relations” (Ziv, 1984, p. 29) and is situated in such a way that “humor and laughter imply a social relationship, in which there is a connection between self and other” (Fine, 1983, p. 160). Organizational members’ use of humor can provide insight to the organization’s culture. This study seeks to investigate humor in a highly emotionally charged environment, 911 communication centers.
Problem Statement

An initial project conducted by the researcher for a crisis communication class sparked the desire to conduct the current investigation. The researcher interviewed 911 dispatchers on-call during Hurricane Katrina to gain insight of what goes on communicatively during a crisis. From these interviews, it was discovered that some of the dispatchers would mention humorous incidents and stories in the midst of this natural disaster. Clearly, 911 communication centers are work environments where stress is commonplace, and the work environment can instantly become erratic and chaotic. Dispatchers are in an environment that teeters between calm and chaos, and in the midst of this environment, dispatchers have been trained to remain calm and in control at all times. Their job demands it because a dispatcher must obtain vital information that may mean life or death for the caller on the other end of the line. Since the stress level is high in communication centers, this study wants to discover how dispatchers handle the stress. What strategies do they use to manage their emotions? How do they communicatively relieve their stress? What role does humor play in this type of organization?

Rationale

This study undertakes to find out more about the workings of humor in organizational communication; humor is versatile because it can bind individuals together, create a release, or be harmful. Humor is a unique communication device because of its combination of ambiguity and clarity. Humor is pervasive to organizations; organizations are not immune to humor use by its members. The study seeks to make a contribution to communication scholarship by examining members of
911 communication centers to investigate emotion management, humor use, types of humor used, and types of strategies used in this particular organizational environment.

Significance of the Study

Dispatchers at 911 communication centers work in a job that is emotionally intense. This study’s purpose is to find out what role humor plays in assisting the dispatcher in managing emotion felt and emotion expressed among organizational members. Emotion management is an interesting angle for communication research because emotion management is common in most jobs. The organization studied is unique because emotion management is part of the job training for dispatchers, and the job demands it. Additionally, dispatchers must remain calm and in control to complete their task of obtaining vital and necessary pieces of information from the caller to dispatch the appropriate emergency personnel. Dispatchers have to remain calm, in control, and emotionally detached. This study sets out to explore the role humor plays in this emotionally intense and dynamic job. The literature review will explore research pertaining to organizational communication, 911 communication centers, emotion labor, emotion management, and humor as it relates to organizational communication and human service workers, particularly 911 dispatchers.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Organizational Communication

*History of Organizational Communication*

According to Eisenberg and Goodall (2004) organizational communication is the moment to moment working out of the tension between individual creativity and organizational constraint. It is a tenuous balance of coordination and cooperation to establish order. Organizational communication encompasses a network of groups seeking a shared meaning through the use of symbols to accomplish a goal. At times, the way employees communicate can be determined by the way the organization is directed to communicate. Three perspectives will be discussed: classical management, human relations, and human resources. The classical management approach is based on a more scientific approach to management. Several key theorists contributed to classical approach to management, and they are Frederick Taylor, Henri Fayol, and Max Weber (Hamilton, 2008). In this approach, there is a fixed division of labor and views management as a science with clearly defined rules, laws, and reinforced hierarchical division between superiors and subordinates. These managers view their employees as wanting direction, having no motivation to achieve unless controlled and directed, and disliking work. In addition, this approach is characterized by one-way communication, procedurally oriented, finds value in following the rules, fixed division of labor, and a rigid separation of personal life and work life (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004). Classical management focused on a top down approach to communication. The classical
management approach focused on a clear and fixed division of labor and a rigid separation of work and personal life.

The 1920’s and 1930’s marked a new approach to understanding human relationships and behaviors related to organizations and communication. Scholars such as Mayo, Parker-Follet, and Barnard paved a new way to understand organizations and communication (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004). This developed a need to understand why individuals need interpersonal relationships, especially cooperative relationships between managers and employees. Researchers began to develop theories to try to explain the best way to manage people in an organization as more participative and facilitative, and employees are given more autonomy. The key theorists of the human relations approach was Elton Mayo and Chester Barnard (Hamilton, 2008). This approach is characterized by improving human relations between employees and employer, open communication valued, and promote employee growth (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004).

The human relations approach gave way to McGregor’s Theory Y. McGregor (1960) proposed the idea of the human relations approach also known as Theory Y. This approach is concerned with the total organizational climate and views managers and “employees as having a high capacity for autonomy, responsibility, and innovation” (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004, p. 81). Managers using this style have a more participatory relationship with employees and values employees as a pivotal resource essential to the organization’s success.

Another way organizational communication scholars view organizations and communication is through a human resources perspective or Theory Z developed by William Ouchi (Hamilton, 2008). According to Ouchi and Jaeger, the “Type Z combines
a basic cultural commitment to individualistic values with a highly collective, non-individual pattern of interaction” (1978, p. 311). The type Z organization preserves the individual while encouraging affiliation.

Each of these are an interesting approach to viewing organizations and organizational relationships, and they give insight to how an organization like a 911 communication center is created, organized, and maintained. 911 communication centers are just one unit of a bigger system. Their success is dependent upon obtaining the vital pieces of information to dispatch the correct emergency personnel. Dispatching the correct emergency personnel can dictate the overall success of the emergency response system as a whole. For scholars, it is important to recognize how the organization interacts with itself, with individual members, and external organizations to complete its’ role in the larger emergency response system. The different perspective of management, classical approach, human relations, and human resources, assist in understanding how the organization functions, how managers view employees, and how employees interact with coworkers and superiors. This study seeks to understand the role humor has in assisting organizational members with emotion management in a high stress job and the types of humor used by the members to handle their job and cope with the stress. By knowing how the organization manages itself we can better understand the organization’s culture.

911 communication centers do not exist in isolation, and in addition, they are one part of a larger emergency response system. The centers and the dispatchers who work in them are constantly creating a balance between themselves and the people they encounter, such as police, fire, ambulance, and the citizens they serve. Each of these
approaches to viewing organizations may give us an indication to why 911 communication centers have their own unique culture. In addition, investigating how organizational members learn their organization’s culture gives insight to how members’ actions influence others to create the culture. The centers can go from clam to chaotic instantaneously. A contribution this study makes is discovering how the dispatchers learn to cope with this unique type of work environment.

Organizational learning theory, an extension of systems theory, developed by Senge (1990), provides crisis communication scholars a general framework for understanding how organizations adapt to crisis events. “Learning theory cultivates a dynamic view of organizations as they seek to maintain a balance between stability and change,” and “learning is both the process whereby members acquire new knowledge, response, or skills and the system wide modification of culture, procedures, and practices” (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 36). Learning theory is based on the acquisition of new knowledge, and members will use the knowledge to grow, change, and adapt to the environment, and this allows the organization a unique chance to gain “new information, skills, insights, and capabilities” (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003, p. 38). These changes can result in a positive chance to renew, eliminate old antiquated systems, and at times offer a clean slate from which organizations can build.

According to Huber (1996), there are four processes involved in learning: acquisition, distribution, interpretation, and storing. Acquisition involves acquiring new knowledge and information. Acquisition appears in five forms: congenital, experimental, vicarious, grafting, and searching. Congenital knowledge is present and available at the time of the forming of the organization. Experimental knowledge involves the use of
activities to form new knowledge. Vicarious knowledge is gained through secondhand learning obtained by observing and modeling others. Grafting involves the acquisition of new members, which provide new stores of information, and, lastly, searching the environment involves elements of boundary scanning and monitoring the organization’s environment. Distribution involves the dissemination of the new information to organizational stakeholders. Organizational members interpret the information based on commonly held values, attitudes, and beliefs. Lastly, organizational members store the new skills and information into memory banks for future use. These views of organizations can assist in understanding how 911 communication centers organize themselves. Also, the centers are in a dynamic and unique environment, which could directly determine how the members act and react, which in turns directly affects how the organizational culture is created.

The organization creates culture, but this leads to the question: How do the members fit into the puzzle? Taking these views of how to look at organizations can give us an opportunity to understand the 911 communication centers culture. The centers face regulations on how they should and can operate. In addition, 911 dispatchers are trained to follow strict protocol when answering emergency calls, which may constrain their actions. These constraints could have the ability to mold the culture and create ways for the members to learn their role. On the other hand, 911 communication centers have a dynamic environment that changes instantaneously, which causes the dispatchers to have to think quickly and make immediate decisions. Members can learn how to cope with the changes vicariously through how other members handle coping with the organizational constraints and controls. These new organizational experiences can be passed on to the
new members through grafting to indoctrinate them into the organizational culture. The culture of 911 communication centers likely influences the members, which in turn influence the organization’s culture. Could the culture of the 911 communication center determine how members react and act within the organization? The 911 dispatchers are often the first person contacted in an emergency response. This chaos sets the tone of the work environment. Do the 911 dispatchers learn how to deal with the chaos by learning from other members? Could the culture of the organization dictate how members respond to communication in their environment?

Organizational culture

Communication scholars have found that an organization’s culture can affect crisis communication positively and negatively (Alder, 1997; Kauffman, 2005; Salem, Barclay, & Hoffman, 2003; Schiffrin, 1984; Wise, 2003). Alder’s (1997) comparison of the Mann Gulch and Storm King Mountain fires found the “organization’s culture, practices, procedures, and not the individuals involved, are largely responsible for the fires” (p. 109). Alder (1997) claimed, organizational culture may be thought of as socially constructed, cognitive reality that is rooted in deeply held perceptions, values, beliefs, or expectations that are shared by and are unique to a particular organization. These shared values and beliefs underlying an organization’s culture result in behavioral norms or expectations that exert significant influence on employee behaviors and attitudes (p. 109).

Mann Gulch and Storm King Mountain firefighters used pre-existing organization rules, norms, and relationships to make decisions during the crisis, which resulted in the members continuing to make detrimental decisions leading to the tragic death of
numerous organizational members (Alder, 1997). Both of the fires were a result of a lightning strike, they started small, and windy conditions increased the fire. According to Alder (1997), in the Mann Gulch tragedy, the crew members did not know their superior. He used foreign techniques not recognized by organizational members, and requests made by him went against procedural rules, which caused the crew to make their own decisions and caused their untimely death. In addition, the results from Alder’s study (1997) found the smokejumpers in the Storm Mountain fire did not know who was in charge and too many people were giving orders and trying to be the leader. In each forest fire, there was “an absence of preexisting relationships of mutual relationship between leaders and crew members, as well as, the lack of effective communication in the form of voice and procedural explanations, may all have contributed to this paradox of obedience” (p. 108).

Kauffman’s (2005) investigation of NASA’s Columbia disaster discovered the “space agency must fix flaws within its organizational culture because they caused the agency to make errors” (p. 263). NASA has a culture of being right when it pertains to explanation of technical issues. This caused them to be blinded by their own expertise, which resulted in NASA not exhausting all potential causes of the disaster.

Salem, Barclay, and Hoffman (2003) found that a crisis at a Long Term Care facility caused a “bifurcation point, which led the members to create their own culture of how to deal with the situation” (p. 1). Through the crisis, members established new roles, rules, and shared experiences, and these changes forced the culture to adapt and change. An organization’s culture is a driving force that influences organizational members.
Wise (2003) conducted a study investigating Griffin Hospital’s reaction to an anthrax crisis. He found the hospital’s culture was an open system, and this open system culture allowed the hospital to mitigate the crisis. This claim is reiterated by Fearn-Banks (1994), who noted that “communication is the key,” and “organizations need to remain an open system” (p. 23). In addition, Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998) stated, “existing evidence points to deficiencies in communication climate that constrain open communication about problems and breakdowns as well as disruption of coordination as the most common communication-based cause of crises” (p. 241).

Organizational culture can be defined as “a socially constructed, cognitive reality that is rooted in deeply held perceptions, values, beliefs, or expectations that are shared by, and are unique to, a particular organization” (Alder, 1997, p. 10). Schein provides another definition, stating an “organizational culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that have been invented, discovered, and/or developed by a group as it learns to cope with problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (as cited in Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004, p. 118). To understand an organization’s culture scholars have to understand the symbolic constructs used to create it. The symbolic constructs can be created through stories, allocation of resources, views of power, standard practices, rules, artifacts, rituals, and norms. The study of organizational culture is in essence the study of the symbols used to create a shared identification. Oat reiterated this point: “culture is transmitted in part by stories, symbols, slogans, jargon, ceremonies, and principle statements” (as cited in Hamilton, 2008, p. 56). In addition, Meyer (1995) said “an organization’s culture is built on the values which motivate member’s behavior, and organizational narratives are integral to such construction,” and “narratives serve to
encapsulate and entrench the values which are key to an organization’s culture” (p. 210). An organization’s culture can directly affect crisis communication and is “extricably linked from the decisions about what to communicate to the content of the messages that are communicated” (Diers, 2007, p. 12). An organization’s culture thus has a crucial effect upon organizational communication. Organizational members both create the culture and are created by the culture.

The type of organization focused on in this study is 911 communication centers; they are one part of an emergency organization, which by their very nature can be chaotic and stressful. How do the dispatchers deal with the chaotic and stressful nature of their job? Could the organizational culture create how dispatchers interact and respond to the environment? Humor, as a likely cultural element, is versatile because it can bind individuals together, create a release, or be harmful to relationships. Humor is pervasive to organizations and often is a crucial element of their culture. This study seeks to find out more about the workings of humor in organizational communication and how dispatchers manage emotion felt and emotion expressed. 911 communication centers are organizations with unique characteristics, and these characteristics may have a direct impact on the organization and its members.

911 Communication Centers

History of 911 Communication Centers

According to Allen (2010), the “first ever 911 call in the United States was placed by Alabama Speaker of the House Rankin Fite from Haleyville City Hall to U.S. Representative Tom Bevill at the city’s police station” (p. 3) in 1968. The concept of an emergency number preceded the first official call, and the United States was not the only
nation developing an emergency call number. Britain implemented the 999 emergency number in 1937, and Australia implemented the 999 emergency service number in 1957 (Allen, 2010). New Zealand followed suit with its 111 emergency number in 1958, and the first North American emergency number 999 was established in Winnipeg in 1959 (Allen, 2010).

Philip Hawkins reported in *The Wall Street Journal* on January 12, 1968, about AT&T’s plan to unveil a single emergency number that had the capability of streamlining emergency call procedures by allowing all callers to dial a 3-digit unified number for an emergency (Allen, 2010). Bill Glimer, the president of AT&T at that time, stated the number will be easy to remember and provide callers a 3-digit number for police, fire, ambulance, and other emergency services, and “it will be designed to get fast assistance in any emergency, regardless of condition” (as cited in Allen, 2010, p. 1). The key features of 911 are to “allow calls from any phone, route call to proper emergency agency, and display caller’s location (ALI) and phone number (ANI)” (Allen, p. 1).

The 911 system is an intricate process. The first component is the person’s telephone number. When a 911 call is placed, it is identified through an Automatic Number Identification system, and at that point it is routed to the 911 system. From here the call is identified and the address is confirmed through the Automatic Location Identification system. This system generates a physical address based on the telephone number’s records. Based on the Master Street Guide created by public safety agencies the call is routed to the proper public safety jurisdiction (Allen, 2010). The process is done in a matter of seconds. The history of 911 and the complexity of the system allow us to understand how long 911 systems have been in operation and the basics of what
happens when a 911 call is placed. What about the dispatcher who answers the 911 call? What are their responsibilities once the emergency call is placed by a citizen? Next, the job responsibilities of a dispatcher will be discussed.

According to the United States Department of Labor, **Summary Report for 43-5031.00-Police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers**, the daily responsibilities of a police, fire, and ambulance dispatcher is to “receive complaints from public concerning crimes and police emergencies. Broadcast orders to police patrol units in vicinity of complaint to investigate. Operate radio, telephone, or computer equipment to receive reports of fires and medical emergencies and relay information or orders to proper officials” (2010, p. 1). The median wage for a dispatcher is $33,670, as reported in the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Handbook (2008). In addition, the education or training requirements are minimal. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the education requirements are that the “worker have a high school degree and develop the necessary skills in about 3-6 months of on-the-job training,” and “some states require specific types of training or certification from a professional association” (p. 1). The specific job tasks or skills required to dispatch are to “question callers to determine their locations, and the nature of their problems, receive incoming telephone or alarm system calls regarding emergency and non-emergency police and fire service, determine response requirements, record details of calls, dispatches messages, retrieve information from teletype networks, maintain access to sensitive data, relay information to and from emergency sites, to law enforcement, and all other individuals or groups requiring information, scan status charts, scan maps, and maintain files” (United States Department of Labor, 2010, p. 1). In addition to the tasks involving calls,
dispatchers have to have competent technology skills to use 911 system information
databases, such as, the National Crime Information Center, automatic call distributing
consoles, radio scanners, computer aided dispatch software (CAD), multi-line phone
systems, digital recording equipment, word processing software, two-way radios, word
processing software, such as Corel WordPerfect and Microsoft Word, and desktop
computers (United States Department of Labor, 2010, p. 2). Also, other skills necessary
for the job as reported by the United States Department of Labor (2010) is the ability to
actively listen, convey accurate information effectively, critical thinking skills, complex
problem solving skills, interpersonal relationship skills, and being able to coordinate the
work and activities with others.

The telephone is used on a continual basis during working hours. Also, 96% of a
dispatcher’s time is spent sitting, and 99% of their time they have contact with others,
such as coworkers, callers, or other emergency response agencies (United States
Department of Labor, 2010, p. 25). The dispatchers are place-bound, and they are
engaging with others, such as co-workers, emergency response personnel, and callers, the
majority of their time during working hours. In addition, 91% of a dispatcher’s time is
spent completing repetitive tasks.

An initial project conducted by the researcher interviewed 911 dispatchers on-call
during Hurricane Katrina to gain insight into what goes on communicatively during a
危机. The interviews were conducted at the 911 communication centers. The researcher
gained first-hand knowledge of the physical work environment of 911 communication
centers. One general physical characteristic of 911 communication centers as observed
by the researcher is that the dispatchers sit close together. The dispatchers’ close
proximity to one another causes the noise level of the call center can be high at times. In addition, the close working quarters allows organizational members to know what the other person is doing and saying; there is no privacy in this working environment. The technology used by the dispatcher is located in front of them or in viewing range above their main console. The dispatchers interviewed worked in shifts ranging from eight to twelve hour shift with two to three consecutive days off. 911 communication centers are just one entity of the larger emergency management response team, but they coordinate all the communication between each of these teams, such as, police, fire, ambulance, and civil defense. The centers are at times isolated from the other departments. 911 communication centers are unique organizations, and dispatchers’ responsibilities on the job and their ability to perform these tasks with precision and accuracy can mean life or death in an emergency situation. In training, dispatchers are trained to remain calm no matter the circumstances. Studying this type of organization in the context of humor use can shed light on humor use in organizations where the employees work in a high stress environment, small groups, place-bound work, and working with others.

Emotional Labor

*History of emotional labor*

Hochschild (1979) embarked on her journey exploring emotion work, feeling rules, and social structures. She defined emotion work as “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling” (p. 561) through deep acting or surface acting. Deep acting consists of the person managing the emotion and believing in the change. Surface acting consists of the person managing the emotion, but always being conscious of the incongruity. Additionally, emotional laborers “engage in communication that
results from either the expression of felt emotions or a decision to disguise or manage them” (Kruml & Geddes, 2000, p. 10). Emotional laborers are trained to follow particular emotion rules, and they are encouraged to follow the rules. According to Hochschild, feeling rules are guidelines people follow in expressing emotions, and they are dependent upon social rules. Hochschild’s (1983) book, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, sparked the curiosity of scholars about emotion’s role in the organizational experience. Hochschild exposed the negative aspects of human service work and managed emotions. Fineman (1993) brought forward the notion that emotions “reflect the structure and culture of organizations” (p. 9), and “over time and under pressure, the emotional labor takes a toll; the act can go stale, and the private feelings leak through the mask” (p. 18).

A qualitative study conducted by Kruml and Geddes (2000) found that emotional laborers battle with emotion felt and emotion expressed, and the results revealed that the older workers were better at controlling their emotions and creating the proper emotional displays when compared to younger workers. Additionally, they found that participants used past experience and training to assist in displaying the correct emotion. Henning-Thurau, Groth, Paul, and Gremier (2006) suggested that emotional labor is a self-regulatory process, which is a conscious effort to maintain the proper emotional expression at the appropriate time through deep acting or surface acting. In the study, “employees who express authentic emotions by engaging in deep acting facilitate customer positive affect to a much greater extent” (Henning-Thurau et al., 2006, p. 66). The participants in the study were more affected by the smile if they felt like it was authentic instead of controlled. In contrast, if the participants felt like the smile was fake
it was not as effective. Henning-Thurau et al. (2006) concluded “that employees’ emotional displays affect customers’ emotional states, but this process appears to be driven primarily by the authenticity of the emotional labor display rather than by primitive emotional contagion through employee smiling” (p. 66). The conclusion is interesting because emotion management and labor are necessary for organizational members, but in this study, Henning-Thurau et al. (2006) found that the management of emotion has to be perceived as authentic for it to be effective.

Tracy’s (2005) study investigating correctional officers’ emotional labor found that this type of human service worker is managing a multitude of emotions on a daily basis ranging from fear and disgust to suspicion and anger. She found that correctional officers’ interaction with “similar others allow employees to engage in hidden transcripts, social support, and role-distancing behaviors that aid in the (re)construction of a preferred sense of self and thus ease emotion work” (p. 279). Dispatchers usually work in close proximity to other dispatchers; the close work environment may assist in dealing with the emotional side of their job.

Scott and Myers (2005) expanded the emotion management research by investigating firefighters. The researchers selected a qualitative methodology consisting of interviews and field observations. The results revealed that firefighters continually manage their emotions, such as fear, stress and disgust, and acknowledge that if they did not, the emotions could interfere with their job responsibilities. Participants engaged in “double-faced emotion management, which is neutralizing their own emotions in order to calm the strong emotions of patients and loved ones” (Scott & Myers, 2005, p. 76). Firefighters are trained to manage emotions, and the organizational culture reinforces
these rules through member socialization and repeated exposure to emotionally charged situations. This repetition normalized the emotional response for the participants. Miller (2002) found similar results in how an organization creates an emotional culture.

Miller’s (2002) study dealt with her response to emotion in the workplace in the midst of tragedy. The data utilized was her experience as a professor at Texas A & M when a bonfire collapsed and killed several students. Miller (2002) found that the organization socialized members’ emotions through rituals, public ceremony, and organizational communication, which created a sense of community. She concluded that the sense of community caused the organization to return to a normal emotional state.

Bolton’s (2000) study expanded the emotional labor research into the health care field. Bolton (2000) interviewed and made field observations of nurses. The study found that “the emotional stresses of the job bring the greatest potential for job satisfaction” (p. 585). Additionally, the nurses used shared experiences to find common ground between emotion felt and emotion expressed. The organizational members used each other to create a shared experience and the feeling rules the members should follow.

The literature reveals that emotions are a part of every organization, and organizational members can experience several polarized emotions that need to be managed. Emotional laborers are trained to follow particular emotion rules, and they are encouraged to follow the rules. Working in 911 communication centers can be very emotional and stressful (Fineman, 1993; Tracy, 1997; Tracy & Tracy, 1998; Zimmermann, 1992). This emotional experience can be erratic, and dispatchers experience a wide range of emotions on a daily basis (Shuler & Sypher, 2000; Tracy & Tracy, 1998; Tracy, 2005). Dispatchers are dealing with emotion management on the
job. The literature suggests a key question. Could the nature of their job make them prone to use an outlet to manage the daily stress of their job? This study sets out to explore strategies dispatchers use to manage or deal with the daily stress of their job.

Emotion Management

Organizations are not just the buildings, desks, and offices; they are also made up of people. Fineman (1996) invoked the notion that emotions are part of the human experience, and “emotions are situational and particular displays of emotion are attached to specific social encounters” (p. 546). If organizations are made up of people and emotions are part of the human experience, then one can posit that emotions are ensconced in organizational life. Additionally, Fineman (1993) stated that “emotions and feelings contribute to and reflect the structure and culture of the organization” (p. 9). Emotions are part of the organizational environment, and the organizational environment gives rise to the emotions. In addition, Miller, Considine, and Garner (2007) stated that “emotion is indeed a central and important aspect of working in America, and communication is an integral part of that emotional experience” (p. 241).

Albas and Albas’ (1988) study of emotion work and emotion rules pertaining to taking exams found that students use several strategies to deal with their emotions both before and during an exam. The participants created a balance between emotion expressed and emotion felt. A participant in the study commented that “even when I am so well-prepared that I have no worry at all, I do not dare let on to the others,” and “I mask my feelings and pretend to be nervous and uptight because one is not supposed to be too cocky or too teary-eyed; it is best to be just a touch anxious” (Albas & Albas, 1988, p. 264). The results showed the students creating a balance between their emotions
they feel and the emotions they expressed. This emotional management could benefit the
student and their peers.

Tracy’s (2005) qualitative study investigating emotion management in a
correctional facility found that correction officers manage their emotions on the job.
Correctional officers in the study alluded to the notion that they must suppress weak
emotions to appear tough, such as not showing fear, disgust, and anger, while
maintaining a warm, respectful demeanor. The results showed part of the training
received by correction officers reflects this following ideal: “interacting with inmates is
essential for the development of a positive climate” (Tracy, 2005, p. 268). Correctional
officers are to stifle their true emotions and feelings for the greater good of the
organization and organizational environment. The participants in the study commented
that they are occasionally spit on, cussed at, and verbally degraded by the inmates. The
correctional officers reported that they must “mask anger, fear, and disgust because you
do not want to allow the inmates to push your buttons,” and “if you show that you’re
mad, they’ll probably just keep doing it again and again” (Tracy, 2005, p. 278). For
example, a participant in the study revealed inmates have thrown feces at the officers as
they are walking by to make their rounds through the correctional facility. The
correctional officers’ management of emotion was part of their job training, and it was
part of their organizational culture. The study revealed that emotion management proved
to be a positive way for the participants to deal with emotions felt and emotions
expressed because management of their emotions gives them the upper hand in the
situation.
In a similar vein, Scott and Meyers’ (2005) investigation of emotion management in human service work found that “firefighters recognized a need to manage their own emotions and those of their clients in order to deliver adequate service” (p. 67). Firefighters deal with a wide range of emotions, such as, fear, stress, and disgust, which could possibly impede their judgment and or ability to focus on their job. Participants commented that they could not allow common human emotions to take over or become center stage because they would not be able to perform their job.

The dispatchers studied in Shuler and Sypher’s (2000) investigation found that emotion management was part of the culture. Dispatchers in the study expressed that they have to often suppress emotions, such as, “frustration with stupid people who call about piddly things” (Shuler & Sypher, 2000, p. 65). Dispatchers are trained to stay emotionally neutral, which means staying calm and in control. This emotional management is beneficial because it allows the dispatcher to accomplish the main goal of obtaining key pieces of information from the caller. The participants in this study also expressed that they had a rule in place to suppress “sorrow with one another” (Shuler & Sypher, 2000, p. 65). One dispatcher commented on taking a suicide call and wanted to talk about it with a supervisor, and the supervisor recommended they get counseling and keep it to themselves. Dispatchers are involved in an organizational environment that can be calm one minute and out of control the next minute. They deal with stressful events and situations on a daily basis. 911 communication centers are a small part of the emergency management system, but yet each is an entity in itself. The 911 communication center environment can be chaotic, stressful, and erratic. Dispatchers are trained to stay calm and in control of the situation; this assists them in accomplishing
their main goal, which is to get crucial information from the caller so that appropriate emergency personnel can be dispatched. This communication interaction can mean life or death for the caller. The dispatchers must manage their own emotions, plus the emotions of the caller, as they deal with these emergency situations. How do dispatchers handle their emotions at work? What strategies do they use? The research shows that human service workers manage their emotions to possibly follow the organizational rules, keep calm and in control, and keep a clear mind so they can focus on the task at hand (Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006). Could the nature of their job make them prone to use a communicative outlet to manage the daily stress of their job? If so, could laughter assist the dispatcher in handling their work environment?

Humor

Theories of humor

Humor research has revealed three theories of humor; incongruity theory, superiority theory, and relief theory. Scholars claim that humor emerges in one of these three ways. Incongruity theory claims that “people laugh at what surprises them, is unexpected, or is odd in a non-threatening way” (Meyer, 2000, p. 313). In contrast, superiority humor is directed to another person, and people laugh inwardly or outwardly at the expense of the other person. This humor engagement makes one feel better than or superior to the other person. Relief theory claims that people use humor to relieve some form of stress or anxiety. Meyer (2000) presented the dualistic nature of humor and expanded the theory by formulating functions of each. He states that laughter “produces simultaneously a strong fellow-feeling among participants and joint aggressiveness against outsiders” (p. 317). Humor can function as identification, clarification,
differentiation, and enforcement. Studies have found that humor can cause people to have a shared experience, imply a social relationship or social solidarity, relieve stress and tension, enforce rules and norms, create relational boundaries, and distinguish one group from another (Bippus, 2000; Bippus, 2003; Collinson, 1988; Meyer, 1997; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006; Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 2005).

Humor is primarily a communicative activity, which “implies a social relationship that is a connection between self and other” (Fine, 1983, p. 160). Bippus’ (2003) study of humor use in conflict episodes between friends found that participants reported that they use humor to remind the friend of something they had in common; humor use deflated the conflict episode. The study revealed humor helps establish common ground between the participants, and humor usage improved the participants’ mood. Additionally, participants reported they would use humor in a conflict episode to ease their own or others anxiety about the conflict.

Collinson (1988) studied members of a factory; he interviewed over 250 members of the organization. He found that humor plays an integral role in organizational life, and humor creates the culture and assists in creating a bond between the members. The researcher found that humor on the shop floor allowed the organizational members to create a cultural identity, breakdown relational boundaries, and gave the members a sense of autonomy and freedom. For example, the participants reported that “having a laugh allowed the men to resist their mundane circumstances” (Collinson, 1988, p. 185). One of the participants reported they increased the number of pranks they played at work to stop boredom. Additionally, the participants reported having to show they were manly enough to take a joke. Participants expressed they devised humorous nicknames and
were the ones who used the nicknames. These nicknames bonded the group together because they were the ones who knew the nicknames and the background behind the name. This inadvertently became part of their cultural identity within the group. The participants also reported using humor to separate themselves from management. They felt they were free to act like their true selves on the shop floor as opposed to the managerial offices or when the managers were on the floor. These types of joking behaviors give the group a sense of self, which was separate from the managers.

Honeycutt and Brown (1998) investigated humor in the context of marriage, and they found humor created a bond between the couples and enhanced intimacy. Tracy, Myers, and Scott (2006) found similar results in a study investigating human service workers. They found that “by laughing and joking about unwieldy situation, employees remind themselves and each other that the world, their work, and the people they deal with may be unexpected, bizarre, and beyond their control, but they can laugh rather than try to control it” (Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006, p. 294.) Also, they found that emergency dispatchers’ humor created distance between them and the callers. They create an organizational culture that is separate from the people they encounter. Plus, the participants used humor “to highlight the way their work was incongruous, chaotic, and threatening” (Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006, p. 293). Even through these chaotic events, the dispatchers must remain emotionally neutral. One may posit that this suppression and management of one’s emotion may be the cause of the emotional release allowed through humor.

Graham (1995) reiterates this point by stating that “humor is capable of helping smooth the work in everyday conversation, as well as offering us a chance to play: to
present self, test for common ground, and create rapport in an entertaining fashion” (p. 162). The participants exhibiting a high sense of humor reported a perceived reduction of uncertainty. High sense of humor groups were reported to have an advantage over low sense of humor groups because “there was a greater desire on the part of conversation partners to engage in future communication with members in the high sense of humor group” (Graham, 1995, p. 165). Other humor attributes can include positive perceptions of leadership abilities (Martin & Gayle, 1999; Martin, 2004). Martin and Gayle’s (1999) study explored humor in management style; the study wanted to discover if managers recognize their humor use as part of their management style. The participants responded to the Communicator Style Instrument and the Uses of Humor Index. The study found organizational leaders use humor as part of their managerial style. Additionally, participants reported using more pro-social humor rather than anti-social. The researchers concluded that managers used humor like other organizational members; they reported using “stories, jokes, and anecdotes to build group cohesion” (Martin & Gayle, 1999, p. 77).

Meyer (1997) conducted a case study of a child care facility to explore the functions of humor within that organization. He found that humor can provide a bridge between people, work, and cultural boundaries, and humor has a dualistic nature of uniting and dividing. The results revealed that humor enforced behavior rules, bound the group together, relieved tension, and created distinctions between members and non-members. Meyer (1997) investigated humor by studying the narratives the participants used to talk about humor in the workplace. The participants reported that humor made the workplace pleasant and fun. Humor usage also was used to relieve the stress and
tension that arises from working with children on a daily basis. The participants reported playing practical jokes, like “dropping water balloons on staff members passing below the window” (Meyer, 1997, p. 197). The study found that organizational members recounted humorous stories pertaining to the children; these humorous events provided the members amusement. The events were retold among the participants interviewed, which alluded to the notion that the retelling of the humor events is part of the culture of the organization and created a bond between the members. The humor episodes united the workers, but also separated them from the children. At times, the children would do or say something funny without knowing it. The organizational members would use these events as a way to cope with the stress of their job and create commonality between the members, and these types of humorous events delineated the workers from the children.

Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (2005) investigated humor coping strategies in health care settings. The researchers’ study goal was to flesh out what type of humorous strategies organizational members would use to cope with the stress of their job. The study found that nurses used humorous calendars, cartoons, and funny cards to get a laugh among other organizational members. In addition, the nurses would make silly comments among each other about their work experiences or daily task. The nurses reported actually attempting to be funny to create levity in the situation, such as using the “Seymour Heinies” (Wanzer et al., 2005, p. 119) joke to relieve stress. Additionally, these forms of humor separated the nurses from the patients because the majority of the time the patients do not know they are the subject of a humor episode, and the humor episodes create a collective culture among the nurses. The nurses participating
in the study reported using humor with their patients to relieve patient stress, deflate an embarrassing situation, and calm their fears. Bippus’ (2000) study, also, revealed that humor used in comforting episodes relieved tension and stress caused by the event. Participants reported laughing made them feel distracted from the problem, have a more positive attitude, and overall good feeling about their ability to deal with the problem. Humor is a versatile communicative strategy, which can be used in many communication settings. Although humor seems to be the best medicine for many organizational situations, humor can be harmful.

According to several scholars, a dark side to humor exists (Alberts, Kellar-Guenther, & Corman, 1996; Bonaiuto, Castellana, & Pierro, 2003; McGuffee & Powell, 1988; Young & Bippus, 2001). Humor can be verbally aggressive, used to disparage, or express hostility. Smith (2000) agrees by stating that “humor can be useful in defusing and reducing organizational conflict,” but “humor can be conveyed in a myriad of ways, ranging from vindictive sarcasm, banter, and telling jokes” (p. 608). Professional leaders in the McGuffee-Smith and Powell (1988) study received low ratings if humor was used to deprecate group members. Self-deprecation is different than putting down others. In this study, the researchers found that participants felt compassion for the person being teased. In a similar vein, aggressive humor was ranked the least desirable tactic when resolving conflict (Smith, 2000). Aggressive humor is a form of an attack guised in the package of laughter, which gives it an elusive form.

Alberts et al. (1996) study investigating teasing found that humor has dual meanings, especially teases, because they are contradictory; they are playful yet aggressive. The researchers used a survey instrument containing open-ended questions
pertaining to teasing to elicit responses from the participants. The participants’ responses elicited a myriad of topics pertaining to teasing ranging from appearance to a person’s abilities. The researchers found that the participants’ response to the tease can be positive, negative, or neutral, and also, the participants noted that they use background knowledge, context, and self-identity to determine if they felt positive, negative, or neutral about the teasing event.

According to Bonaiuto, Castellana, and Pierro (2003), humor can be used as an indirect challenge in negotiation situation, and the study discovered that arguing and laughing in negotiation situations found the “humor can be used to delegitimize or undermine another’s proposal in a negotiation conflict.” (p. 213). The researchers found that humor used in negotiation situations can be used as an indirect challenge and allows the author of the joking comment time to negotiate about the seriousness of their comment.

Young and Bippus’ (2001) study investigating humor messages in relationships found that humor lessens the attack. The participants in the study responded to a questionnaire pertaining to humor messages and relationships and recalled a time when a person close to them said something to hurt their feelings. The results showed that “humorous hurtful messages were perceived to be less hurtful than non-humorous comments” (Young & Bippus, 2001, p. 42). In addition, participants would perceive humorous messages as less intentional than hurtful messages. Dews, Kaplan, and Winner (1995) found that humor allows the speaker to save face by being indirect, causing a person to seem less angry and more in control. The ironic statements and literal statements were used in the vignettes; participants’ responses to the ironic statements
when compared to the literal statements were more positive. The ironic statements contained criticism but were not viewed as harshly as literal criticism, which causes humor to be a unique communication device because of its combination of ambiguity and clarity.

For 911 dispatchers, exposed to myriad of calls, the stress of facing crises each day can be mitigated by the use of humor. Any given call could range from mundane to a full blown crisis. Could the dispatchers’ use of humor help avert the harshness of a caller? 911 dispatchers may package the event in a humorous way to prove they can handle their job and nothing gets to them as a face-saving strategy to show they are tough or emotionally impervious. Could the ironic statements made by dispatchers about calls and or callers reduce the callousness of their comments? Humor has many faces and uses in organizational situations. This study seeks to understand the role humor has in assisting organizational members with emotion management in a high stress job and the types of humor used by members to handle their job and cope with the stress.

Hypotheses

Humor research reveals that individuals “who enact humor frequently and perceive themselves as successfully funny exhibit a trait termed humor orientation, people with high HO report using humor across a wide variety of situations, work or social, formal or informal” (Booth-Butterfield, Booth-Butterfield, & Wanzer, 2007, p. 302). High humor orientation individuals will exhibit high ratings of effectiveness, perceived self-efficacy in coping with stress, and higher job satisfaction (Booth-Butterfield, Booth-Butterfield, & Wanzer, 2007; Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 2005). Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield’s (1991) preliminary study
investigating individual differences in the communication of humorous messages found that people use humor differently, and the participants who perceived themselves as funny showed higher ratings for reporting more situations in which they would use humor. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) stated that “communicators who perceived themselves to be funnier reported more situations where they would produce humor and fewer where they would not compared to communicators with lower humor orientation scores” (p. 211). The results indicated that people high in humor orientation perceived more situations appropriate for humor use. A study conducted by Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) found that people rated high in humor orientation not only perceived themselves as funny but were perceived as more humorous when compared to participants who ranked low on the humor orientation scale. Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (2005) found higher humor orientation increase coping efficacy and job satisfaction ratings in health care settings. Additionally, Booth-Butterfield, Booth-Butterfield, and Wanzer (2007) investigated college students’ ability to balance work and academic demands and found humor orientation related to students’ perceived ability to manage and cope with stressful situations and higher job satisfaction.

Moran and Massam stated that “a common thread among much of the humor research is that humor production and or exposure serves as a viable means of helping individuals, organizations or both to cope with stress (as cited in Wanzer, Sparks, & Frymeir, 2009, p. 128). This study seeks to understand the role humor has in assisting organizational members (911 communication dispatchers) with emotion management in a high stress job and the types of humor used by members to handle their job and cope with the stress. The following hypotheses are proposed to determine whether humor has a role
in their organizational environment and how it functions. The Humor Orientation Scale (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991) has been used to determine two trait dimensions of humor, high humor orientation and low humor orientation. Each of these trait orientations has shed light on how individuals employ humor strategies. In essence, high humor orientation individuals may feel that more situations are appropriate for humor use. This literature therefore suggests the following hypothesis:

H1: Humor orientation is positively associated with the reported number of situations appropriate for humor use and negatively associated with the number of reported situations inappropriate for humor use.

Additionally, 911 communication centers by their nature are highly charged environments, and dispatchers have to deal with stress on a daily basis. The unique features of the 911 dispatcher job, daily tasks, technological competency requirements, and physical setting may cause the dispatcher to employ coping strategies to maintain a sense of control and calmness. This study seeks to find if Booth-Butterfield, Booth-Butterfield, and Wanzer (2007) and Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield’s (2005) claim that individuals who have high humor orientation report a better perceived ability to cope with stressful situations. Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield’s (2005) study also indicated that high humor orientation was related “positively with coping efficacy and individuals rated their humor attempts as more effective than low humor oriented individuals” (p. 115). In addition, Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) indicated that high humor orientation individuals were “more likely to be aware of distressed emotions and use humor as a treatment” (p. 151). The literature thus suggests the following hypothesis:
H2: Humor orientation is positively associated with self-perceived coping effectiveness in the context of 911 call centers.

Research Question

The humor orientation scale is a one-dimensional scale that determines frequency to enact humor and ability to employ humor strategies. Humor can function as identification, clarification, differentiation, and enforcement. Studies have found that humor can cause people to have a shared experience, imply a social relationship or social solidarity, relieve stress and tension, enforce rules and norms, relational boundaries, and distinguish one group from another (Bippus, 2000; Bippus, 2003; Collinson, 1988; Meyer, 1997; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006; Wanzer & et al., 2005). In light of this research, there may be another alternative to investigating humor. Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, & Weir (2003) proposed the Humor Styles Questionnaire. The Humor Styles Questionnaire “assesses four dimensions related to different uses or functions of humor in everyday life” (p. 51). The Humor Styles Questionnaire consists of 32 items, and is “useful for assessing both positive and negative styles of humor in correlations to the role of humor in psychological and physical health and well-being, friendship relationships, etc.” (Martin & Puhlik-Doris, 2010, p.1). The four styles delineated in the scale are affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating.

Affiliative style is marked by the individuals who tend to say funny things, to tell jokes, and to engage in spontaneous witty banter to amuse others, to facilitate relationships, and to reduce interpersonal tensions. Self-enhancing dimension involves the individuals having an overall humorous outlook on life and a tendency to frequently be amused, and Aggressive humor relates to the use of
sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, put-down or disparagement humor. In general, it relates to the tendency to express humor without regard for its potential impact on others. And lastly, self-defeating humor involves excessively self-disparaging humor attempts to amuse others by doing or saying funny things at one’s own expense as a mean of ingratiating oneself or gaining approval, allowing one self to be the butt of others’ humor, and laughing along with others when being ridiculed for disparaged (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir 2003, p. 53).

Martin et al. (2003) developed the scale to go beyond the onedimensional approach established by the Humor Orientation Scale (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991). In developing the Humor Styles Questionnaire, Martin, et al. (2003) found that “all four scales show adequate internal consistencies, as demonstrated by Cronbach alphas ranging from .77-.81, and the intercorrelations among the four scales were generally quite low, indicating that they measure dimensions that are relatively distinct from one another” (p. 57). From these statistics one can conclude that the Humor Styles Questionnaire assesses four dimensions of humor. Saroglou and Christel (2002) tested the HSQ with Belgian high school and college students and found that the Humor Styles Questionnaire “32-item scale received cross-cultural validation among French-speaking Belgian students” (p. 54). Cann, Zapata, and Davis (2009) compared the Humor Orientation Scale and the Humor Styles Questionnaire to determine the positive and negatives of using each of these scales in humor communication research. The study found that the Humor Styles Questionnaire has to ability to extend the Humor Orientation Scale to assess humor on two dimensions, humor enhancing versus damaging relationships with others and benign-benevolent versus demeaning humor.
Cann, Zapata, and Davis (2009) found the Humor Styles Questionnaire was able to explain twice as much of the variability in relationship satisfaction when compared to the HO Scale, and the scholars called other researchers to expand the Humor Styles Questionnaire research beyond romantic relationships. In addition, “the HO scale does not tap into self-defeating styles of humorous communication-humor that is self-directed and negative and is designed to ingratiate oneself with others” and “the fact that aggressive humor uses were positively associated with the HO Scale scores suggests that the HO Scale does not differentiate between the benevolent and non-benevolent joking that is reflected in affiliate versus aggressive humor” (Cann, Zapata, & Davis, 2009, p. 461). Cann and associates suggested that the “next step would be to use a measure of humor styles like the HSQ to identify how the different styles vary in their impact across other relationships and circumstances” (Cann et al., 2009, p. 466). The study seeks to make a contribution to communication scholarship by examining members of 911 communication centers to investigate emotion management, humor use, types of humor used, and types of strategies used in this particular organizational environment. Scholars have documented several ways in which humor influences organizational life positively and negatively. By using both the Humor Orientation Scale and the Humor Styles Questionnaire this study could potentially see how both the scales work during the same study in determining humor use and functions of humor in organizational environments. From the literature, one could assert that the Humor Styles Questionnaire would be able to differentiate between four distinct styles. Thus the following research question is asked:
RQ1: Are there significant differences in the use of affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humor styles for 911 dispatchers?

Working in High Stress 911 Communication Centers

The dispatchers’ duties include handling emergency 911 phone lines, police and fire radio, communication between officers and state agencies, and community service calls, while working in close proximity to other organizational members. Dispatchers are also required through their training to uphold emotional neutrality throughout emergency calls. Emotional neutrality is beneficial because it allows the dispatcher to focus, keep the caller calm, and obtain the vital pieces of information necessary to execute the proper emergency response.

Several studies support the notion that emotions can impede a person’s judgments (Fineman, 1993; Fineman, 1996; & Miller, Stiff, & Hartman Ellis, 1988). Specifically, Miller and her associates point to the fact that “the sharing of one’s emotions hampers one’s ability to be communicatively responsive” (1988, p. 255). Tracy’s (1997) initial study investigating 911 centers revealed that the dispatchers and citizens have differing levels of perceptions of the type and amount of information that is expected. The study exposed several key points, including that dispatchers cannot tell the citizen with certainty when assistance will arrive, that dispatchers rarely know the end result of the calls, and that a dispatcher’s communication is related to their need to get specific pieces of information from the individual. A follow-up study conducted by Tracy and Tracy (1998) took the original study and expanded it to include the emotional stress of a dispatcher’s job. The results discovered that “call-takers manage the emotion of two parties at the same time, those of self and those of the caller” and “giving advice calms
down the caller and reduces call-takers’ own feelings of powerlessness” (p. 407). The main conclusion presented by the researchers was that 911 call-taking is highly stressful and very emotional with the call-taker using a multitude of strategies to deal with the stress.

Fineman’s (1996) study stated that emotional displays are the link to specific social encounters. Dispatchers’ jobs expose them to a wide range of social encounters. They deal with the public during emergency and non-emergency calls, fire department, police department, emergency medical technicians, and other dispatchers. This wide range of social encounters can elicit different sets of emotions the dispatchers have to deal with on a daily basis, which may cause them to grapple with emotion felt and emotion expressed. In addition, the physical make-up of the organization may influence how the dispatcher acts and reacts to these different types of social encounters. The 911 communication centers are at times in isolation from other emergency response teams, which may create a group membership between the dispatchers.

The training dispatchers receive teaches them to be emotionally neutral, so they can maintain a sense of calmness, which allows them to obtain information from the caller. Studies show that dispatchers are conscious of emotions during a call and use their training and experience to suppress felt emotion (Shuler & Sypher, 2000; Tracy & Tracy, 1998). Additionally, Albas and Albas (1988) found that students do spend time trying to suppress or enhance emotional displays in order to express the appropriate emotion.

Tracy and Tracy (1998) conducted a case study of a 911 communication center and found that dispatchers “utilize different emotions to deal with the emotional stress of
their job” (p. 390). Their conclusion was that dispatchers have a highly stressful job in which they not only handle their own emotions, but the emotions of the caller. Additionally, the emotions felt and expressed by the dispatchers at times were blurred and disorganized, complimenting Fineman’s (1996) conclusions that emotions felt and expressed in situ are never clear cut.

Both Shuler and Sypher (2000) and Tracy and Tracy (1998) found similar results. Shuler and Sypher’s results indicated that dispatchers follow the rule of emotional neutrality, and “the rule keeps dispatchers from expressing sorrow to one another” even when the call is over (p. 65). Dispatchers are trained to manage felt emotions, and this study shows that the organizational culture reinforces the implementation of the rule even when talking with supervisors and other organizational members. Additionally, Shuler and Sypher (2000) found dispatchers looked “forward to calls that challenged their ability to remain emotionally neutral” (p. 66). Their main conclusion was that dispatchers felt they received some positive benefits of their successful implementation of emotional labor, such as comic relief, a fix, and altruistic service, which is in contrast to Hochschild’s (1983) claim that emotional labor can have negative implications.

Hochschild (1983) maintained that the employees’ struggle to maintain identity through surface acting or deep acting, and these actions to maintain a particular emotion replaces the person’s true self. In essence, through the acting the employee becomes the person they are trying to portray, which may not be who they really are. Additionally, Tracy and Tracy (1998) concluded that “through giving advice, call-takers can avoid their own feelings of powerlessness while simultaneously channeling and controlling the stress of the caller” (p. 402). The call-takers use various strategies to manage and channel their
own emotion, which is a positive benefit of emotion management because staying calm and in control allows them to gather information so help can be dispatched.

Pemberton (1991) concluded that during a crisis, people use a “wide range of talk patterns due to the emotions people are feeling, uncertainty, and stress levels” (p. 375). In addition, dispatchers are affected and sensitive to silence on the line, which can cause an emotional reaction to the call (Zimmermann, 1992); this could be directly related to the fact that all of the dispatchers’ communication is dependent upon the voice on the other line and the responders on the scene. This literature suggests several pertinent questions. What happens when the call is over? How do the dispatchers cope with felt emotion and expressed emotion? Miller, Considine, and Garner’s (2007) qualitative textual analysis found that “emotion is indeed a central and important aspect of working in America, and they found that communication was an integral part of that emotional experience” (p. 241). Several conclusions can be drawn from the literature. Dispatchers are involved in an emotionally intense job, and they have to deal with the incongruity of emotion felt and emotions expressed and deal with their own emotions and the caller’s.

Emotional laborers may be under intense conditions, in which they use emotional management rules to conduct communication activities. Working in 911 communication centers and managing emotions can be very stressful (Fineman, 1993; Tracy, 1997; Tracy & Tracy, 1998; and Zimmermann, 1992). This emotional experience can be erratic, and dispatchers experience a wide range of emotions on a daily basis (Shuler & Sypher, 2000; Tracy & Tracy, 1998; Tracy, 2005). In the midst of such intense and dynamic jobs, scholars have found that humor permeates such organizations, including 911
communication centers (Bolton, 2000; Scott & Myers, 2005; Shuler & Sypher, 2000; Tracy, S., 2005; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006).

The current study’s purpose was to find out what role humor plays in managing emotion felt and emotion expressed among organizational members, as well as strategies used by dispatchers to handle the stress of their job. Dispatchers have to remain calm, in control, and emotionally detached. Burnout, stress levels, and turnover are high in this type of human service work is due in part to the emotional intensity of the job. The study is warranted because it would expand research on emotional labor by discovering what types of communicative strategies dispatchers use to handle emotions, find out how humor assists in managing the incongruity of emotion felt and emotion expressed, and what types of humor are used by members in this kind of organization to handle their job. In addition, the study will meet Cann, Zapata, and Davis’ (2009) call to expand the Humor Styles Questionnaire to other types of relationships and circumstances. By using both the Humor Orientation Scale and the Humor Styles Questionnaire, this study could potentially see how both the scales work during the same study in determining humor use and functions of humor in organizational environments. Also, the study helps extend humor orientation and coping efficacy research to 911 communication centers. Can organizational members’ ability or perceived ability to use humor assist them in coping with the incongruity of emotion felt and emotion expressed?

Several conclusions can be drawn from the literature. Dispatchers are involved in an emotionally intense job, and they have to deal with the incongruity of emotion felt and emotions expressed and deal with their own emotions and the caller’s. The review of literature focusing on organizational communication, emotion management, emotional
labor, and humor shows the complexity of emotion management in the workplace.

Accordingly, five general research questions guide the investigation in addition to the two hypotheses. Given the need to manage emotion, especially in a stressful job, further research will investigate how organizational members deal with emotion management:

RQ2: How do the dispatchers express emotions at work?

Additionally, the dispatchers’ job entails the need to manage contradictory emotions solidly during high stress decision making, this study seeks to understand the following:

RQ3: How do the dispatchers handle the clash of emotions?

The literature surrounding humor and humor use in organizations suggest the following research question:

RQ4: What role does humor play for dispatchers in dealing with their work environment?

The study also wants to uncover the following:

RQ5: What types of humor do dispatchers use to handle their work environment?

These research questions, in addition to the two hypotheses, guided the study and provided a focus for the investigation.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to understand the role humor has in assisting organizational members in emotion management in a high stress job and the types of humor used by members to handle their job and cope with the stress. The study will employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods through the use of survey instruments and interviews utilizing open-ended questions to investigate humor in 911 communication centers. To test the hypotheses and answer the first research question, three surveys, a two-item opened ended questionnaire, and 8-item interview questionnaire were utilized with each participant. The university’s Institutional Review Board approved all portions of the study.

Survey Development

Since this study is primarily interested in the use of humor for emotion management in a high stress job and how humor affects a person’s ability to cope with job stress, a modified version of the Humor Orientation Scale (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991) and a modified version of the Humor Styles Questionnaire (Martin et al., 2003) were used. In addition, the Perceived Coping Effectiveness Scale (Wanzer et al., 1996b; 2005) was used to measure humor orientation, humor styles, and coping effectiveness, respectively. The Humor Orientation Scale and Coping Effectiveness Scale tested if high humor orientation individuals show a higher perceived coping effectiveness. In addition, the Humor Styles Questionnaire has the ability to differentiate between four distinct humor styles. The HSQ will be used to determine if it had to ability to distinguish the four styles in the 911 communication center setting, and
which style is more prevalently used in 911 communication centers. The modified
versions of the Humor Orientation Scale and Humor Styles Questionnaires were tailored
to 911 communication centers. The modifications included adding the phrases “at the
911 call center” or “at work” to the survey instrument. The researcher modified Humor
Orientation Scale questions 1, 2, 5, 9, 15, to read “at the 911 call center” and modified
questions 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, to read “at work” (See Appendix B for a full
documentation of modifications).

The researcher modified Humor Styles Questionnaire questions 5, 7, 11, 15, 20, to
read “at the 911 call center” and modified questions 1, 12, 16, 17, 19, 26, 30, read “at
work.” (See Appendix D for a full documentation of modifications.) This study sought
to investigate humor use in 911 communication centers, so the modifications were made
to the humor orientation scale and humor styles questionnaire to fit the purpose of the
study to investigate specific humor use at 911 communication centers rather than general
humor use.

In addition, two open-ended questions were included asking the participant to list
situations when they “would use” humor and situations when they “would not.” The
questions are “Please list some work situations when you would use humor” and “Please
list some work situations where you would avoid the use of humor.” These questions
were used to discover if high humor orientation participants would list more
communication situations when they would use humor.

The qualitative portion of the study involved interviewing dispatchers based on
eight open-ended questions to elicit thick descriptions about what type of work situations
elicit humor use, types of humor used, and types of strategies used. The open-ended
questions expand the study by giving the researcher in-depth reports about humor usage. Interviews of dispatchers were conducted using eight open-ended questions to allow for elaboration, adding richness to the study.

The interviews allowed the researcher to compare the Humor Styles Questionnaire and its results of distinguishing four functions of humor to actual accounts given by the dispatchers. The interview portion of the study allowed the researcher to make connections between what happens realistically in the 911 communication center and the dispatchers’ response to the survey instrument to see if any of the four functions in the Humor Styles Questionnaire emerge in the thick descriptions. (See appendix F for a full documentation of interview questions.)

The Humor Orientation Scale developed by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) is a 17-item self-report that measures “individual differences in the predisposition to enact humorous messages” (p. 205). The surveys’ questions are placed on a 5-point Likert type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In the preliminary study to develop the humor orientation scale, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) reported that “the item-whole correlations all were at or above .5 for the 17-item scale, and internal consistency estimates also indicated a strongly unidimensional scale” with Cronbach’s alpha, .90 and corrected spilt-half reliability, .92 (p. 209). Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield reported the mean as 59.4 and SD = 9.4 with the “range of scores 35 to 85 (possible range 17-85; hypothetical neutral point is 51) and a mean item score of 3.5 on a 5 point scale” (p. 209). In the Booth-Butterfield, Booth-Butterfield, and Wanzer (2007) study the Humor Orientation Scale mean was 63.9, with an alpha of .93 and SD = 9.8. In addition, Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-
Butterfield (1995) reported HO mean 61.2 and SD = 9.5. The scale has continually performed with high internal and test-retest reliability.

Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir’s (2003) Humor Styles Questionnaire shows internal consistencies and has the ability to distinguish between four humor styles, affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. The Humor Styles Questionnaire “assesses four dimensions relations to different uses or functions of humor in everyday life” (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003, p. 51). This study applied the Humor Styles Questionnaire to 911 communication centers to see which type of humor showed up as used most by members on the job. Dispatchers at 911 communication centers work in a job that is emotionally intense. This study’s purpose is to find out what role humor plays in assisting the dispatcher in managing emotion felt and emotion expressed among organizational members. The Humor Styles Questionnaire allowed the researcher to discover how dispatchers feel about their humor use and what type of humor style they employ while on the job. Reliability tests were conducted on the modified scales.

To test Hypothesis 2, the coping efficacy scale was used. The Coping Effectiveness Scale by Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1996b; 2005) is an 8-item scale that measures a person’s perception about their ability to cope with job stress on an everyday basis. The instrument has a 5-point scale design with Likert-type format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In the Wanzer, Sparks and Frymier (2009) study the Coping Effectiveness “mean was 29.3 with an alpha of .77, which is comparable to the reliability of .76” reported by Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (2005) (p. 305).
The two open-ended questions included in the research instrument were designed to elicit a descriptive list about when a person “would use” or “would not” use humor. The questions are “Please list some work situations when you would use humor” and “Please list some work situations where you would avoid the use of humor.” These questions were used to discover whether high humor orientation participants reported more communication situations when they would use humor. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) used a similar research procedure, and in the study, “respondents were asked to generate in writing situations where “they would” and “would not” attempt humor and to describe their behavior, and “descriptive analysis of the scale showed a mean (59.9) and standard deviation (8.7) that was very similar to the overall sample. Item-whole analysis revealed that all items correlated at or about .40 and 14 of the 17 items correlated about .50” (p. 211). Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) reported that “internal consistency estimates supported a unidimensional scale (alpha=.91; corrected split-half=.88)” (p.211). This study follows the same procedure and included two open-ended questions. The research instrument is designed to elicit descriptive list about when a person “would use” or “would not” use humor to determine if High humor- oriented individuals listed more situations in which they would use humor when compared to Low humor- oriented individuals. A necessary element of any study is to establish parameters around the data to be analyzed. For the purposes of this study, the survey asked participants to list situations when they “would” or “would not” use humor in boxes on the questionnaire to help delineate the responses as in Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991). Thematic analysis of this section of the survey instrument was conducted to discover the total number of situations the
participants reported when they “would use” or “would not” use humor. The participants responses in each section were counted and totaled for situations when participates “would” use humor or “would not” use humor.

The in-depth interviews were conducted to elicit thick descriptions of humor use and personal accounts of what type of work situations elicit humor and what type of strategies are used. Interviews were conducted to expand the richness of the study and give participants a chance to explain their thoughts. A constant comparative method was performed on the interview portion of the study, and themes allowed to emerge (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The open coding identified descriptions of strategies used to handle emotions at work, situations when humor is used, and types of humor used at work. This type of opening coding utilized by Canary (2008) was successful in producing thematic categories in a study addressing family narratives about how they cope with ability and disability. The data were compared to the characteristics of the Humor Styles Questionnaires four humor styles: affiliative style, self-enhancing, aggressive humor, and self-defeating humor (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003).

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame consisted of 911 communication center dispatchers in the southeast who attend a state-wide training for 911 dispatchers. United States Department of Labor, Summary Report for 43-5031.00-Police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers, reported job titles for 911 dispatchers include dispatcher, communications operator, public safety dispatcher, communications officer, police dispatcher, telecommunicator, communications specialist, 911 dispatcher, communications supervisor, emergency
communications dispatcher. Any participant with the titles mentioned above was included in the research results. Approximately 150 dispatchers were used for the study, and participants were given the survey instrument containing the Humor Orientation Scale, Perceived Coping Effectiveness Scale, Humor Styles Questionnaire and two open-ended questions. Dispatchers taking the survey instruments were given an opportunity to volunteer to be interviewed to provide a chance to elaborate on the eight-open ended questions pertaining to humor use in the work environment. The decision to include 150 participants was to ensure that the sample size was large enough to formulate generalizable conclusions about the population being studied, namely 911 communication center dispatchers.

The humor orientation research has investigated several types of groups: health care workers (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Buttefield, 2005), college students (Booth-Butterfield, Booth-Butterfield, & Wanzer, 2007), marriage relationships (Honeycutt & Brown, 1998), and student-teacher relationships (Wanzer, 1998). Using dispatchers extended the humor orientation research into the 911 communication centers. The open-ended questions can expand knowledge about what type of humor strategies are used in the work environment to manage emotions, and also give insight into how humor enables people to cope with a high stress job.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the surveys, Humor Orientation Scale, Perceived Coping Effectiveness Scale, and Humor Styles Questionnaire, consisted of descriptive statistics and reliability tests, such as Cronbach’s alpha, to determine the consistency and stability of the HO modified, HSQ modified, and Coping Efficacy scales. To test Hypothesis 1,
humor orientation was correlated with the number of situations participants reported as appropriate and the number reported as inappropriate for humor use. Also, an ANOVA was used to compare high humor-orientation individuals to low humor-orientation individuals on the number of situations participants reported as appropriate and the number reported as inappropriate for humor use. To test Hypothesis 2, humor orientation was correlated to coping effectiveness. To address research question the frequencies with which participants used the four HSQ styles were compared. Paired sample t-tests were used to compare all possible combinations of the humor styles to determine which style was used more by the 911 dispatchers.

The interviews provided the researcher with the ability to compare the Humor Styles Questionnaire and its results of distinguishing four functions of humor to actual accounts given by the dispatchers. The interview portion of the study allowed the research to make connections between what happens realistically in the 911 communication center and the dispatchers’ responses to the survey instrument to see if any of the four functions in the Humor Styles Questionnaire emerged in the thick descriptions. The interview questions were worded thus: “Tell me the daily responsibilities you encounter as a dispatcher?”; “Explain how stress affects your work environment?”; “Please explain how you handle your emotions when you are at work?”; “Recall a time when humor is used at work?”; “Describe what type of situations that happen at work when humor is involved.”; “Explain how you use humor at work?”; “Describe the funniest event you can remember happening at work.”; “How did this event affect the work environment?”; and “Please explain your feelings about using humor at work?” The themes that emerged from the interview responses gave a more
detailed description of ways humor is used by emergency workers engaged in intense emotional labor.

A thematic analysis was used to analyze the narratives, and the dominant themes allowed to emerge from the narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Owen, 1984). This study mirrored its thematic analysis after Owen (1984), in which the themes were categorized into groups based upon their recurrence, repetition, and similarity of statements and meaning. Recurrence criterion refers to participants telling and retelling the same incidents but possibly in different wording. Repetition criterion refers to the participants repeating the narrative using the exact same wording. This type of analysis has been done before on narratives with success (Meyer, 1995; Meyer, 1997). The constant comparative method was used to analyze interview transcripts (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding was employed to identify descriptions of dispatcher responsibilities, stress and the work environment, handling emotions at work, and humor use at work. The researcher combined all of the transcripts for each question, and then each of the eight interview questions was analyzed separately. A complete thought by the dispatcher was considered a response. The initial coding resulted in a total of 41 codes for the interview questions. The codes were a representation of repeated responses made by the dispatchers for each of the interview questions. Broader axial codes were generated by analyzing the initial codes and their connections between the first-order codes. This stage resulted in six thematic categories. A discussion of themes, examples, and how the participants view their work responsibility, emotions, and humor use is presented in the results section. The themes, in showing how 911 dispatchers use
humor to cope, suggest how humor is invoked in many high-stress situations to facilitate work, social relationships, and cushion emotional blows that are part of the job.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The survey instrument was numbered and disseminated during two separate 911 communication dispatcher conferences in the southeast. A total of 150 surveys were distributed, and 139 survey instruments were returned to the researcher, a 92% response rate. Six of the survey instruments were eliminated from the data set because the participant did not fully complete the survey instrument, which resulted in 133 usable survey instruments. Eighty-one participants completed the open-ended questions for when they “would” or “would not” use humor. Each of the data sets was entered by the number given to each of the survey instruments. This technique was very useful to match each respondent to their individual data set. It was important to create the distinction because the researcher needed to be able to compare participants’ surveys. Each of the survey instruments included a volunteer sign-up form for a follow-up interview to be conducted at a later date. Thirty-eight dispatchers volunteered to be interviewed. Four of these were not followed up because the participant only included a first name and no other contact information, the participant worked in medical response not as a dispatcher, the participant’s title was office clerk, and one form was a duplicate, which left 34 volunteers. Volunteers were contacted for a follow-up interview, which resulted in 10 dispatchers agreeing to a follow-up interview. One participant did not respond to the follow-up calls to set up an interview time, which resulted in a total of nine interviews conducted, a 24.7% response rate. The nine interviews produced 107 minutes of interview time and 36 pages of transcript data.
Preliminary Results

In order to analyze the data, the statistical program SPSS was used. Examination of each of the modified HO, modified HSQ, and Coping Efficacy Scale responses indicated that they performed consistently with other administrations. See Table 1. In addition, the 32-item Humor Styles Questionnaire alpha was .793, which suggests the items have relatively high internal consistency.

Table 1

*Reliability statistics for modified HO, modified HSQ, and Coping Efficacy Scales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HO</td>
<td>60.61</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSQ Affiliative</td>
<td>40.48</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>.724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSQ Self-Enhancing</td>
<td>39.60</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>.779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSQ Aggressive</td>
<td>24.79</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>.618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSQ Self-Defeating</td>
<td>24.27</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>.737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Efficacy</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>.890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tests of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 predicted that high humor orientation individuals list more communication situations appropriate for humor use when compared to low humor orientation individuals in the context of 911 call centers. The Humor Orientation scale
yielded a mean of 60.61 (SD 11.7) and an alpha of .909. The HO total score and the would use variable correlated positively (r = .193, p = .042, n=81), but weakly. The correlation between the HO total score and the would not use variable was not statistically significant (r = .101, p = .184, n=81). Hypothesis 1 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted humor orientation is positively associated with self perceived coping effectiveness in the context of 911 call centers. The mean and standard deviation for the HO scale were 60.61 and 11.7, and the mean and standard deviation for the Coping Efficacy scale were 30.42 and 5.7. A correlation between the two scales was computed. The two variables were moderately correlated, r(133) = .322, p < .01. High humor orientation individuals report higher coping efficacy when compared to low humor orientation individuals. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 asked which HSQ style, affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, or self-defeating, would be more prevalent among the 911 dispatchers. The descriptive statistics for each style see Table 1 and a graph of HSQ style means is provided in Figure 1.
Figure 1. HSQ Style Means. HSQ Style Mean ranges from 0-50. Each of the four styles is labeled, and their mean is graphed on the chart.

To determine which humor style was more prevalent, an ANOVA and paired sample t-test were computed. The repeated measures ANOVA indicated there were significant differences among the means for the four style variables ($F=354.079$; $df =1,131$; $p<.001$). See Table 2.

Table 2

One way ANOVA for HSQ variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>factor1</th>
<th>Type III SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>factor 1</td>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>26568.429</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26568.4129</td>
<td>354.079</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quadratic</td>
<td>4.547</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.547</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cubic</td>
<td>5255.919</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5255.919</td>
<td>94.805</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error(factor1)</td>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>9829.631</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>75.035</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quadratic</td>
<td>5572.703</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>42.540</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cubic</td>
<td>7262.531</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>55.439</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*HSQ paired samples t-test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Style 1</th>
<th>Style 2</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>Affiliative</td>
<td>Self-Enhancing</td>
<td>40.48</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td>1.330</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>Affiliative</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>40.48</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8.156</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td>17.220</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 3</td>
<td>Affiliative</td>
<td>Self-Defeating</td>
<td>40.48</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8.156</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td>17.305</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 4</td>
<td>Self-Enhancing</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>39.60</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8.973</td>
<td>.781</td>
<td>14.126</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 5</td>
<td>Self-Enhancing</td>
<td>Self-Defeating</td>
<td>39.60</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8.973</td>
<td>.781</td>
<td>14.006</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 6</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Self-Defeating</td>
<td>24.79</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8.053</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td>1.330</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>.186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paired-samples t-test were conducted to compare all possible combinations of HSQ style totals. These results reveal differences in the scores for affiliative and self-enhancing, affiliative and aggressive, affiliative and self-defeating, self-enhancing and aggressive, and self-enhancing and self-defeating. The affiliative and self-enhancing styles were used significantly more than aggressive and self-defeating styles by 911 dispatchers.

The four remaining research questions guiding this study were: how would dispatchers deal with emotions at work, how would dispatchers handle the clash of emotions, what role humor plays in handling their emotions, and the types of humor used
by the dispatchers, which are now presented and discussed in coordination with their respective theme. Several themes emerged as the participants talked about their job responsibilities, their coworkers, and the 911 call center. Initially, each of the eight interview questions was examined separately. The data from this initial review of the transcripts were divided into segments and examined for commonalities. Codes were developed based on the repetition of the idea in the narratives, and they were examined for properties that characterized each category. The codes were used to categorize the narratives and identify the themes. Participants indicated through their narratives that their job is stressful but very important because their response to the caller could mean life or death. In addition, they described feeling good about serving and assisting the general public in obtaining emergency help. The dispatchers expressed a sense of pride about keeping their officers and the public safe. Specifically, dispatchers said that stress controls the environment in the call center, and at times they are involved in multiple actions, which add to their stress level. Dispatchers clearly indicated that stress and tension is a common work experience, and they have to put their emotions aside every time they answer a call. Dispatchers said that humor is a tool they use to handle the stress, and they use it frequently for all types of work situations. Humor is used by the dispatchers as a coping mechanism, stress reliever, a bonding agent, and to lighten the work atmosphere. The following section elaborates on the research questions, themes and includes excerpts from the interviews. Six themes emerged from analysis of participant responses: multi-tasking needed, stress level fluctuation, suppressing emotions, regular co-worker bonding through humor, humor for changing their environment, and humor for personal coping. The table provides a list of the themes, an
example narrative of each, and number of occurrences of the theme. Total number of
dispenser responses was 423, and of these “other” responses comprised 92 occurrences,
which resulted in 21.7%. “Other” responses were responses not related to humor use,
911 dispatching, or humor use not used on the job. See Table 4.

Table 4

*Themes generated and example of narrative*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example of narrative</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-tasking needed</td>
<td>“We answer 25 administration lines.  We have radios we answer on the police side,</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and there are up to 5-6 channels we listen to all day long. We have to run NCIC.</td>
<td></td>
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the room is stressed for the moment. And when the call is over, the stress level drops back down.”

**Suppressing emotions**

“I put my emotions aside, but basically we know we got a job to do and we got to do it. There is no way out of it. We have to get the information, so we can get the information out to the units. I let the emotions wait until later.”

**Regular co-worker bonding through humor**

“Humor brings everyone closer together because you sit around and talk about it and laugh together. It lightens the atmosphere.”

**Humor changing their environment**

“The morale can be low; it just seems sometimes you are getting beat down by every call you take.”

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The first two themes presented provide clarity and understanding of a dispatcher’s responsibilities and how stress influences the work the environment. The dispatchers’ job responsibilities vary throughout the work day, and they have to have to ability to handle and manipulate a variety of pieces of equipment and job tasks simultaneously. Dispatchers expressed that multi-tasking and chaotic pace of their job contributes to the
stress level in the call center. In addition, dispatchers said that stress dominates their work environment on a daily basis.

Multitasking Needed. The dispatchers handle multiple agencies during their normal shift. In addition, dispatchers use several pieces of high-tech equipment daily, and they have to be able to answer multiple phone lines. Most of the dispatchers expressed that they “do it all.” Their primary job is to keep officers and the public safe. One dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) explained, “We answer 25 administration lines, and we have radios we answer on the police side. Plus there are up to 5-6 channels we listen to all day long. And we have to run NCIC (National Crime Information Center). Lastly, we have 5 radios we monitor that have 18 different channels we answer. Plus, 911 calls.” Dispatchers (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) mentioned they have to have multi-tasking skills to be able to work in dispatcher because “we use a computer, CAD service, we have EMD protocols, and we answer administration line, 911 lines, maintain officer safety and deal with inmate issues.” The dispatchers expressed there is always action in a 911 center, and dispatchers have to have an investigated instinct. A dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) explained, “We answer the phones to check on officers and dispatch calls. We answer administration lines and answer 911. We dispatch for fire and first responders. We transfer calls to Triple A, and we have to listen to officer radio traffic and dispatch wreck. We use NCIC; basically, we do it all.” The narratives suggest that a dispatchers’ job goes beyond just taking 911 calls; they are the central communication unit for all emergency response. The dispatchers’ descriptions of their daily responsibilities reflect the fact they have an enormous amount of
responsibility at work, and they have to manage many task simultaneously to do their job proficiently.

*Stress level fluctuation.* Beyond job tasks and responsibilities, dispatchers responded that they deal with high levels of stress on a daily basis. Dispatchers expressed that stress controls the call center environment, and the high stress levels can be present one minute and gone the next, causing emotional highs and lows. A dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) provided a general description of how stress controls the environment, and said, “When it is your normal average day and nothing going on, and then we get phone calls and as calls begin to rise and the heat of the call rises and the stress level of the room jumps from, if you are using a scale of 1 to 10; it goes from a 2 to a 10 quick, and it is everybody in the room that is stressed out for the moment. And when the call is over the stress level drops back down.”

When the calls are intense and the call center tension level is high, dispatchers mentioned taking out their frustrations on coworkers. One mentioned that “when it gets intense in here everybody can get a little bit snappy with each other. You have an officer, fire, or medics who need information and coworkers are trying to get it as fast as they can, but you find yourself stressed out, and you bark at them” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). The results found at times dispatcher reactions are due to the high stress level in the call center. In addition, dispatcher and officer communication can become strained under the stress, for example, “the officer may say negative things or something rude and the dispatcher responds back rudely to the officer” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1,
2010). Callers can make dispatchers’ stress level rise. One dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) said, “We are the first person they talk to; we have to handle whatever mood the caller is in whether they are scared, angry, or hurt. We have to adjust our thinking cap to fit their mood. So, we have a mood swing with them.” In addition, a dispatcher (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) stated that, “It is an adrenaline flow. I guess you could say, but it shoots up and gets your motor running quicker and faster. Makes your thinking cap go faster, and when it is all said and done the adrenaline drops. Then you just fall back and take a deep breath. The stress is so much like a roller coaster.” This up and down fluctuation of stress level can take its toll on the dispatchers. One mentioned that “this is one reason why she sees dispatcher burn out” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). The fluctuations of stress levels at a 911 call center is best described as an emotional roller coaster, in which, dispatchers have to endure on a daily basis.

The second research question asked, “How do dispatchers deal with emotions at work?”, and the third research question asked, “How do dispatchers handle the clash of emotions?” Several themes emerged as dispatchers talked about their job responsibilities, emotions, and how they handle their emotions at work. Dispatchers indicated they must put their emotions aside and deal with them at a later time. Dispatchers expressed an urgency to deal with the call or task before they can allow their emotions to manifest. Dispatchers conveyed they have a job to do, and they cannot let their own emotions distract them from the task at hand because their reaction or lack action could mean life or death for the caller.
Suppressing emotions. Dispatchers put emotions aside when they are at work. They have a job to do and how they handle the call can mean life or death for the caller; for example, “I put my emotions aside, but basically, we know we have a job to do, and we got to do it. There is no way out of it. We have to get the information, so we can get the information out to the units. I let the emotions wait until later” and “I just try not to think about my emotions, and I mean it is hard. You have to remember that what is going on it not your fault. It is just your job” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Some dispatchers took action-oriented measures to deal with their emotions, such as, “I say my peace about this situation, and I am done with it. I don’t keep it in. The first year that I worked I wouldn’t say a whole lot, and I would keep it in. The stress from work would be something I would bring home. Now, I say my peace, and I am done with” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Also, dispatchers mentioned taking a break, not taking the situation personally, or talking the situation over with coworkers can help them deal with their emotions. A dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) described how they cope by saying, “Sometimes, I go outside and take a breath. Sometimes, I just get out of the call center; it helps me from responding in a negative way.” And another said, “I try to keep things in check and remember that I did not cause this accident to happen or these bad things to happen to good people. I am here to intervene and help any way that I can”, and “I just don’t take it personally. I continue to ask questions to get the information that I need or what I need and when I am through with the caller; I am through with the caller” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Talking to other dispatchers proved to be a
beneficial way for dispatcher to deal with their emotions, as explained, “I talk about the situations with other employees. We talk about what is going on. We talk with other dispatchers in here. When we have problems or whatever or we get emotional about a call or something we talk it over with each other because they understand. It makes me feel better to know that someone understands” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Even though dispatchers have to suppress their emotions and deal with them at a later time, the narratives suggest they do try to deal with them in their own way, whether it is through venting, deep breathing, or taking a break from the call center.

The fourth research question was, “What role does humor play for dispatchers in dealing with their environment?” Lastly, the fifth research question asked, “What types of humor do dispatchers use to handle their work environment?” Dispatchers discussed their interactions with callers, co-workers, and emergency personnel. Several themes emerged dealing with the role humor plays for the dispatchers and how they use humor in their work environment.

Regular coworker bonding through humor. The narratives showed the dispatchers using humor to bond with each other. Dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) said, “We always joke around with each other because we have crew members who have nicknames for themselves. We will say put “Big Sexy” on a call. And we got one joke about a bariatric truck; they guy can’t say bariatric he says ‘perryactic’; we laugh about that.” In addition, dispatchers find humor in their coworkers. A dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) explained, “When someone makes a mistake can be funny. It wouldn’t be funny to
you, but for us it is side busting hysterical. We use to have a woman who worked in here who was all business. She was trying to tell someone to come to the sheriff’s office. And she got her words confused and she told the person to report to the ‘asshole office.’ It went all over the scanners and radios; it was hilarious. We were in here crying with tears running down our face; we still laugh about it.” Also, one explained, “After the call is over and when it has been handled and everything was a good outcome, we can sit around and joke about it. We can joke around about what was said, like, we had a dispatcher give out a call for an officer to contact a female complaint regarding ‘herass’ and that was actually meant for harassment/stalking. But the way she said it had come out as a different connotative meaning” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010).

Lastly, some of the humor can be sarcastic, for example: “I have seen how some dispatchers use humor on some calls they receive. They may hang up from the caller and make a sarcastic joke or remark. I believe it is a way to handle their stress”; and “I have seen dispatchers laugh at somebody getting hurt or if somebody dies or if somebody fires a gun at somebody. I don’t think it is an intentional hateful laugh, but I think it is a stress laugh” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). The narratives showed that humor episodes are frequent in 911 call centers, and the narratives showed that dispatchers will use humor in a variety of situations, for example, “we use humor a lot at work; it is how everybody copes with the stress level of dispatching” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Humor situations can range from caller interactions to coworker interactions.
Humor changing work environment. Dispatchers work in a high stress environment, and they use humor to change the environment. Their work environment includes the surroundings or conditions in which a person operates. The dispatchers’ environment is the setting where a particular activity is carried out. Humor is used to lighten the mood, to create a stress relief, to bond with each other, and to keep their mind off of the bad situations. These actions change their setting and surroundings to allow them to co-exist with the stress. Humor creates a buffer between the dispatcher and their environment. The dispatchers’ use of humor to change the work environment seemed to be a conscious effort in creating a new environment for everyone; the dispatchers narratives alluded to the fact they did not just want to laugh for a moment, but create an emotional overhaul of the whole center. A dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) explained, “The morale can be low; it just seems sometimes you are getting beat down by every call you take. You know you might have a wreck this morning and someone dies. It seems you are getting hammered and every which way you turn there is gloom and we are there to bring you up.” The narratives showed that the dispatchers look out for one another and are in tune to their coworkers moods and attitudes, for example: “I generally use humor as a stress relief. I may tell jokes or talk about a certain situation or tell something that happened outside of work. I tend to use it more if another coworker is stressed or something is bothering them” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Dispatchers mention that humor keeps the mood light and “humor keeps everybody happy and working together, which makes work less stressful and run smoother.” One dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) mentioned telling jokes to
make others laugh by saying, “I am going to move like arthritis; I am going to move to the next joint.” The dispatchers expressed a need to change the atmosphere of their work and create a positive atmosphere. Humor seemed to be one of the strategies they used to bring up morale and help everyone deal with the stress of their job.

The stories expressed by the dispatchers reflected how they used humor at work to affect their work environment, especially after mistakes occurred. Dispatchers found humor in radio mistakes made by other dispatchers. A dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) explained, “We had a new girl that worked here. We have a street ‘Bonner Drive’. She dispatched a call to ‘boner drive’; she said it and then repeated it. We couldn’t correct her because we were laughing so hard. The officer in the field told her to repeat it, and she repeated it. And told her he wasn’t familiar with that. It is probably not funny to anybody else, but we couldn’t catch her soon enough. We repeat the story and we make sure that any new person knows that road because we don’t want to put that over the air again.” The dispatcher mentioned repeating this story again for humor purpose, but also, repeating the story again so another dispatcher would not make the same mistake.

The retelling of humor stories was common in the dispatcher narratives. As one dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) put it, “we tell this story again and again, so we can laugh all over again. Even yesterday we were standing out and I asked do you remember the lady that came home and found her husband with another woman. We dispatched an officer to the house, and the officer told the woman, ‘well maybe you are not taking care of him at home.’ Then we received another call and the woman had hit the officer in the head with a pickle jar. So, then we
had to send an ambulance, but after it was all said and done we all laughed. And we are still laughing and that was 10 years ago.” Another dispatcher said, “The guy calling wanting the ‘perryactric’ truck is an on-going joke now. Whenever someone needs that truck we call and say we need the ‘perryactric’ truck out there” (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Lastly, a dispatcher retold “the taxi story’ that is repeated all the time. He said, “The taxi story gets retold. One of our taxi cab company’s drivers went through a check point and was arrested. We had to contact the taxi company, and there was a language barrier. We were calling to say she needed to come pick her taxi up because her driver was arrested. She thought we said that she was getting arrested because she did not have a taxi available. She said, ‘you can’t take me to jail because I don’t have a cab’; it was definitely hilarious” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Humor bonds the dispatchers together, which creates a relationship between them. “Humor brings everyone closer together because you sit around and talk about it and laugh together; it lightens the atmosphere,” explained one dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010).

In sum, dispatchers joked around with each other often to change the work environment. A dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) said, “There was a new young lady. It was her first 911 call. She said, ‘hello ummmm 911 ummmm what is your emergency.’ The caller said let me speak to somebody else because you already sound like you don’t know what you are doing or talking about. The caller was so right because it was her first day. Everybody laughed. The new person may not found it funny then, but she learned to laugh too.” Another example would be
when a dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) said, “after the hurricane we were having a lot of radio trouble, so we made our director at the time a foil hat with antennas, so he could stand outside and we could get better reception. But of course that was a joke. But it was humorous because he put it on and wore it all around the call center that day.” Dispatchers use humor regularly and apply it to many different situations because, as one dispatcher said, “you have to have a sense of humor here because when people come here to work that take everything so serious they don’t stay” (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Dispatchers’ use of humor allows them to function in this high stress environment.

_Humor for personal coping._ Dispatchers expressed a need for humor in their environment; it is used for survival because humor can relieve stress, get rid of emotional baggage, and allow the dispatcher to separate from reality.

Dispatchers use humor to relieve stress and tension; as one dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) said, “It helps ease the tension of the knuckle whitening experience. Imagine sitting knowing that every call could take you to that ridged point. You can’t understand unless you have been there. You are at that ridged point then someone breaks the ice and says something funny. Then you go ‘ahhhh’ and you can breathe again.” Also, a dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) explained that “humor is the best way not to think about the stress or take it personally. If we get a call about something weird, we will laugh, talk, and joke about it and pass it on to each other to give someone a good laugh, and that actually helps with stress.” At times the caller can provide a dispatcher a reason to laugh. According to one dispatcher, “Some of the calls we get are hilarious. An
officer was running a warrant on a young man because the computer was saying some tickets had not been paid. I called the residence and ask to speak to Ms. Johnson. She said, ‘she is not here.’ I said this is the police department needing to talk to her about her son. The caller said hold on and came back on the phone trying to disguise her voice different, but I knew it was her the first time,” and “I laughed and told others right then” (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010).

Dispatchers did mention that malicious humor is not appropriate to use. A dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) stated, “Humor is great. I couldn’t make it without it. I think sometimes you get to a place where your body movements and everything reflect your stress level. You become rigid. Just being with the girls at work and being able to laugh is good. It is never at some else’s expense. It is just over the situation of the call that is funny.” Using humor allows dispatchers to release their emotions in a positive way, for example: “I think humor is a way we start to get rid of some of the emotional baggage that we take on when someone calls us. We take on a percentage of their crisis. We take it with us; we carry it around with us. The little bitty things that happen that we find funny help us release some of it” (Dispatcher, personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). Dispatchers described how trying not to think about the situation helps them deal with their emotions and trying to put it out of their mind. One dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) said, “I see dispatchers using humor to separate themselves from the reality of how severe the situation is. I think I would also say I see some of the dispatcher using humor as bravado of toughness. Like, it is ok because it doesn’t bother me. And since it doesn’t bother me; I can think it is funny.” Dispatchers did reveal that
some situations are not appropriate for humor, such as, “humor is ok, as long as, it is not malicious,” and “I think it is ok, as long as, the situation is appropriate” (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010). We had a call about a man getting shot in the butt. You know getting shot in the butt would be funny, but it is actually not because he could have lost his life.” Dispatchers spend long shifts and an enormous amount of time with their coworkers, and some expressed that they feel like their coworkers are part of their own family. A dispatcher (personal communication, November 17 - December 1, 2010) said, “We spend more time with our coworkers than we do our own family. They are our family. I feel that the more laugh and carry on the better we will be.” Even though dispatchers feel humor is necessary for survival and will employ humor in many different situations; they do feel that some humor use is inappropriate, such as malicious humor, even for their work environment. Dispatchers use a variety of humor strategies in their work environment.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study provide useful insights concerning humor use in 911 communication centers. The study set out to investigate humor use in 911 communication centers, and its focus was to explore how dispatchers handled their emotions at work and what type of strategies they employ to handle their emotions. Results indicated dispatchers work in a high stress environment, which fluctuates continuously throughout the work day. Dispatchers reported suppressing emotions, so they can focus on the caller and the task at hand, which is getting the essential information from the caller. Scott & Myers (2005), Tracy (2005), and Tracy, Myers, & Scott (2006) showed similar results. Human service workers, such as firefighters, dispatchers, correctional officers, suppress emotions and use humor to cope with the stress of their job and to give them ability to focus on their job and not let their emotions cloud their judgment.

This study showed that the ability to list situations when humor would be appropriate was positively correlated with the HO total, but the relationship was of a minor magnitude. In addition, the correlation between HO total and the ability to list situations when humor would not be appropriate, which was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 1 was partially supported. This study expanded the work of Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield (1991) and Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield (1996b) to include 911 call centers. Replicating studies allows for generalizability; it was expected based on past research results that the Hypothesis 1 would have been fully supported. However, data indicated that there was a relationship of a minor magnitude when
comparing humor orientation individuals and their ability to list more situations appropriate for humor use. One possible explanation of these findings could be that 911 call centers are highly stressful and serious environments, which may cause 911 dispatchers to not perceive many situations as appropriate for humor use. In addition, dispatchers are trained to deal with adverse situations, and they may not have perceived humor in situations as one of the coping techniques they would employ to deal with work.

Hypothesis 2 predicted humor orientation is positively associated with self perceived coping effectiveness in the context of 911 call centers. The findings indicate a significant difference between high and low humor orientation individuals and perceived coping effectiveness ratings. High humor orientation individuals reported higher coping efficacy when compared to low humor orientation individuals. These findings replicate previous studies done by Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield (2005) and Booth-Butterfield, Booth-Butterfield, & Wanzer (2007). A conclusion that could be drawn is that high humor orientation individuals feel a perceived success in their abilities to enact humor as a coping strategy, and as a result, they perceive they are able to cope with their work situation.

Research Question 1 asked are there significant differences in the use of affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humor styles for 911 dispatchers. The results indicated that overall 911 workers were associated more frequently with the affiliative and self-enhancing styles. The affiliative style and self-enhancing styles are marked by key attributes, such as, “they tend to say funny things, engage in spontaneous witty banter to amuse others, to facilitate relationships, and self-
enhancing involves the individuals having an overall humorous outlook on life and a
tendency to be amused” (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003, p. 53).

This study also expanded previous research conducted by Cann, Zapata, and
Davis (2009), finding that the Humor Styles Questionnaire does have the ability to assess
four distinct humor styles in 911 communication centers. Dispatchers expressed they
used these styles for various coping strategies while at work. When comparing the
narratives to the four humor styles presented by Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and
Weir (2003), the researcher found evidence of the four styles in the qualitative data as
well. Dispatchers use affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating styles.
Lastly, the narratives reveal that some of the dispatchers looked at humor use as a
survival tool, and they would use the tool even if it meant they were the joke.

Humor use in 911 call centers is common, and dispatchers use it to bond with
others, change the work environment, and relieve stress. The data reflects several
qualitative studies focusing on humor and humor use in organizations. Honeycutt and
(2006) discovered that humor use assists individuals in creating a shared experience,
which bonds the individuals together. In addition, Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-
Butterfield (2005) found that workers in health care settings use humor to relieve stress
and tension, which assists in their ability cope with their job.

In addition, Hochschild’s (1979) seminal work exploring “emotion work” defined
emotion work as “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling”
(p. 561) through deep acting or surface acting. The results of this study revealed that the
dispatchers do grapple with their emotions and are conscious of the incongruity. In
addition, the study discovered there is a push and pull of emotions the dispatchers have to deal with to handle their job, and the dispatchers suppress their true emotions to handle their job. Also, Kruml & Geddes (2000) and Henning-Thurau et al. (2006) reported that emotional laborers battle with emotion felt and emotion expressed, and they self-regulate their emotion, so they can maintain the proper emotional response. The dispatchers in this study recognized the emotional clash between emotion felt and emotion expressed; they relied on their training to regulate their response to the caller to complete their job task, which is to obtain the vital pieces of information from the caller to send the appropriate emergency response.

Several studies have indicated that humor use can cause people to have a shared experience and bond with one another (Bippus, 2003; Collison, 1988; Meyer, 1997; Tracy, Meyers, & Scott, 2006). The narrative nature of humor and the person’s willingness to share reflects Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir’s (2003) affiliative style. This style is marked by the person using humor to build relationships with others. Lynch (2002) stated, “A communication-centered study of social humor can provide a better understanding of the dualistic nature of the paradoxes of humor” (p. 424). These contradictions were discovered in this study because dispatchers reported using humor to cope with the serious nature of their job, which meant at times laughing at serious situations. A dispatcher stated, “I have seen dispatcher’s laugh at somebody getting hurt or if somebody dies or if somebody fires a gun at somebody. I don’t think it is an intentional hateful laugh. I think it is a stress laugh.” In addition, dispatchers in this study would use humor to self-deprecate; the irony with this type of humor is that you have used a negative about yourself to create a positive. This study discovered that
humor functions in a variety of ways in the 911 call center, which supports Meyer’s (2000) finding that humor serves different functions in communication. Since humor can function in a myriad of ways, the dispatchers have the ability to create their own reality through their humor use.

The qualitative data proved to be a great resource to expand the this study beyond the survey instruments and take an in-depth look at how dispatchers handle their emotions at work and what role humor plays in their work environment. The results show that dispatchers handle more than just 911 calls, and they handle multiple agencies and deal with high-tech equipment on a daily basis. The stress level of their job is referred to as a roller coaster of emotions with high and low stress levels fluctuating throughout the course of their day. The dispatcher’s responsibility, high stress level, and multiple tasks, create a tension filled environment they must deal with everyday they come to work. Humor is part of their organizational environment, and dispatchers use it regularly to cope with the stress and tension, bond with each other, and change the atmosphere of their environment. They are not afraid to use humor and will use it in a variety of situations. The results showed that dispatchers in the midst of their high stress moments they have to put their emotions in the background. This technique proves to be beneficial when dealing with the caller because it allows them to stay focused on the caller and get their job done. Suppressing emotions can take their toll on the dispatcher, which creates an added stress. Other researchers (Fineman, 1993; Scott, 2006; Scott & Myers, 2005; Tracey, 1997; Tracy & Tracy, 1998; Tracy, 2005; Tracey, Myers, & Zimmerman, 1992) had similar findings that emotional laborers are trained to follow particular emotional rules, and they are encouraged to follow the rules, and working in
911 communication centers can be very emotional and stressful. The dispatchers expressed trying to manage their emotions during the call, so they could get the information they needed. Humor is a release for these pent up emotions. Wanzer et al. (2005) also found humor use gives individuals a way to relieve stress and tension in the work environment. In addition, dispatchers employ other release techniques, such as venting, talking with other coworkers, and taking a break from the call center. Narratives are told and retold as a way to laugh all over again, indoctrinate new people, and bond with each. Bolton (2000), Bippus (2003), and Meyer (1997) similarly found that humor episodes were told and retold, which created commonality between the individuals. In essence, humor was used to help the dispatchers cope with their job, which for some eased the stress enough that they would come back the next day.

Study Limitations

The study is primarily interested in the use of humor for emotion management on a high stress job and how humor affects a person’s ability to cope with job stress. The researcher employed quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate this communication phenomenon. One of the dilemmas encountered conducting the study was participants not completing all of the surveys included in the survey instrument. Secondly, the researcher was not in control over when the participants took the survey during the conference and how much time the participants to take it; the researcher was at the mercy of the conference coordinators. Thirdly, it was difficult to schedule and coordinate the participant interview around their work and daily schedule.
Participant Population

Due to the specific nature of the study, only individuals who were 911 dispatchers were included in the study. One hundred thirty-nine survey instruments were collected, and 133 surveys were useable for the study. These results of the study are only specific to 911 dispatchers. The study focused on one particular organization and type of emergency personnel by selecting 911 communication center dispatchers as the focal group. This limitation only allows the researcher to make generalizations about the particular group studied; however, the study does expand the humor orientation research by expanding the research to this particular organization. Humor use, crisis, and stressful work environments are not limited to 911 communication centers, so the results from this study can be used to understand other organizational environments.

Survey Dissemination

The survey instrument was disseminated at two different 911 dispatcher conferences (summer and fall). The researcher did not know if some participants attended both summer and fall conferences, which may have resulted in duplication of survey instruments. Duplication was evident in the section for volunteers because a participant volunteered to be interviewed two different times--once at the summer conference and once at the fall conference. In addition, if a participant completed a survey at the summer conference and completed a survey at the fall conference, they would have already had prior knowledge to the survey instrument and the purpose of the study, which may have skewed their answers. At the summer and fall conferences, there was a time limitation on completion of the survey instrument. This time limitation may have caused participants to rush through the instrument and or not have time enough to
complete the survey. A survey instrument not filled out correctly or duplicated could skew the quantitative statistics. Being able to disseminate the survey at two different times did allow the researcher to determine how long it took the participants to fill out the survey. During the fall conference, the researcher requested a designated time on the agenda to ensure participants had enough time to fill out the survey, but there was still a time constraint. At the fall conference, the researcher made an announcement to the participants that if they filled out the survey before, they should not fill it out a second time. Surveying the dispatchers at the two different conferences was beneficial because it allowed for a more diverse group of dispatchers to participate in the study, along with quick and easy access to that widely diverse group of dispatchers.

*Survey Exhaustion*

The survey instrument contained the Humor Orientation Scale (17-items), Humor Styles Questionnaire (32-items), Coping Efficacy Scale (8-items), 2 open ended questions, and a form to volunteer to be interviewed at a later date. The survey instruments’ length and the time constraint could have caused participants to not complete the instrument and or rush through the instrument. Eighty-one participants completed the open-ended portion of the survey instrument, which resulted in 60% completion on that particular section of the survey instrument. A total of 40% of the participants did not fill out that portion of the survey instrument, which could have skewed the results. The open-ended questions were the next to the last part of the survey instrument; the participants could have been exhausted by the time they reached this section of the survey instrument, which cause them not to respond to the questions.
Qualitative Data

A limitation to the qualitative data is the low number of participants. Only nine interviews were conducted, but 107 minutes and 36 double-spaced pages of transcripts were generated from these nine interviews. Again, the survey exhaustion and time constraint may have played an integral part in causing people not to volunteer for the follow-up interview.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies could expand upon the Humor Styles Questionnaire’s ability to differentiate between four distinct humor styles in other situations. Cann, Zapata, and Davis (2009) called for researchers to expand the research in this area beyond romantic groups; this study accomplished this goal, but more needs to be done to determine the reliability of this scale.

Secondly, researchers could continue to use the Humor Orientation Scale and the Humor Styles Questionnaire simultaneously to compare the scales and their ability to measure humor. In addition, more needs to be done to discover if high humor orientation individuals are associated with one or more of the four humor styles outlined by the Humor Styles Questionnaire.

Thirdly, this study has practical implications. 911 dispatchers receive training on how to manage calls, manipulate equipment, and handle stress. The results of the study indicate dispatchers suppress their emotions, which takes its toll on the emotional health of the dispatcher. In addition, the results show humor use is natural part of the 911 call center, and dispatchers use humor regularly to relieve stress, bond with co-workers, and change their work environment. 911 dispatcher trainers could use this information to...
emphasize that emotions are a natural part of being a 911 dispatcher, and at times, this emotional upheaval will be continuous with high and low points. In addition, trainers could include humor use as a tactic to use to help the dispatchers cope with their work environment and relieve stress. Humor is pervasive to organizations; organizations are not immune to humor use by its members, which is why more studies need to be conducted to tie theory to real-world situations. Finally, emotion management is a crucial element in high stress jobs such as 911 communication centers. Future researchers could expand humor research to other high stress jobs, which would help us understand how humor affects a person’s ability to cope and manage their emotions in this type of organizational environment. Future research in this area will provide researchers with information to expand communication research pertaining to organizational communication, humor, humor orientation, and perceived coping effectiveness.

Summary of Findings

In sum, this study found the following

- Dispatchers work in high stress environments, which fluctuates continuously throughout the work day.
- Dispatcher’s suppress their emotions, so they can focus on the caller and the task at hand.
- High HO individuals reported a higher perceived coping efficacy when compared to low HO individuals.
- Humor use in 911 call centers is common, and dispatchers use it to bond with others, change the work environment, and relieve stress.
• Dispatchers grapple with their emotions, are conscious of the incongruity, and recognized the clash between emotion felt and expressed.

• HSQ was able to distinguish between four humor styles overall, and 911 workers were associated more frequently with the affiliative and self-enhancing style.

• The narratives were told and retold as a way to laugh all over again, indoctrinate new people, and bond with each other.

In essence, humor was used to help the dispatchers cope with their job, which for some eased the stress enough they would come back to work the next day. Organizations are not immune to humor use by members, which is why more studies need to be conducted to tie theory to real-world situations. Finally emotion management is a crucial element in high stress jobs, such as, 911 communication centers. Future researchers could expand humor research to other high stress jobs, which would help us understand how humor affects the person’s ability to cope and manage their emotions in this type of organizational environment.
APPENDIX A

HUMOR ORIENTATION SCALE (ORIGINAL)

Below are several descriptions of how you may communicate in general. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to your communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I regularly tell jokes and funny stories when in a group.
2. People usually laugh when I tell jokes or funny stories.
3. I have no memory for jokes or funny stories.
4. I can be funny without having to rehearse a joke.
5. Being funny is a natural communication style with me.
6. I cannot tell a joke well.
7. People seldom ask me to tell stories.
8. My friends would say I am a funny person.
9. People don’t seem to pay close attention when I tell a joke.
10. Even funny jokes seem flat when I tell them.
11. I can easily remember jokes and stories.
12. People often ask me to tell jokes or stories.
13. My friends would not say that I am a funny person.
14. I don’t tell jokes or stories even when asked to.
15. I tell stories and jokes very well.
16. Of all the people I know, I am one of the funniest.
17. I use humor to communicate in a variety of situations.
HUMOR ORIENTATION SCALE (MODIFIED VERSION)

Below are several descriptions of how you may communicate in general at work. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to your communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I regularly tell jokes and funny stories when in a group at the 911 call center.
2. People usually laugh when I tell jokes or funny stories at the 911 call center.
3. I have no memory for jokes or funny stories told on the job.
4. I can be funny without having to rehearse a joke with my coworkers.
5. Being funny is a natural communication style with me at the 911 call center.
6. I cannot tell a joke well at work.
7. People seldom ask me to tell stories at work.
8. My coworkers would say I am a funny person.
9. People don’t seem to pay close attention when I tell a joke at the 911 call center.
10. Even funny jokes seem flat when I tell them at work.
11. I can easily remember jokes and stories told at work.
12. People often ask me to tell jokes or stories at work.
13. My coworkers would not say that I am a funny person.
14. I don’t tell jokes or stories even when asked to at work.
15. I tell stories and jokes very well at the 911 call center.
16. Of all the coworkers I know, I am one of the funniest.
17. I use humor to communicate in a variety of situations.
APPENDIX C

HUMOR STYLES QUESTIONNAIRE (ORIGINAL)

People experience and express humor in many different ways. Below is a list of statements describing different ways in which humor might be experienced. Please read each statement carefully, and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it. Please respond as honestly and objectively as you can. Use the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Totally Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I usually don’t laugh or joke around much with other people. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. If I am feeling depressed, I can usually cheer myself up with humor. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. If someone makes a mistake, I will often tease them about it. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I let people laugh at me or make fun at my expense more than I should. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I don't have to work very hard at making other people laugh -- I seem to be a naturally humorous person. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. Even when I’m by myself, I’m often amused by the absurdities of life. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. People are never offended or hurt by my sense of humor. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. I will often get carried away in putting myself down if it makes my family or friends laugh. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. I rarely make other people laugh by telling funny stories about myself. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. If I am feeling upset or unhappy I usually try to think of something funny about the situation to make myself feel better. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. When telling jokes or saying funny things, I am usually not very concerned about how other people are taking it. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. I often try to make people like or accept me more by saying something funny about my own weaknesses, blunders, or faults. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. I laugh and joke a lot with my friends. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. My humorous outlook on life keeps me from getting overly upset or depressed about things. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. I do not like it when people use humor as a way of criticizing or putting someone down. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. I don’t often say funny things to put myself down. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. I usually don’t like to tell jokes or amuse people. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

18. If I’m by myself and I’m feeling unhappy, I make an effort to think of something funny to cheer myself up.  

19. Sometimes I think of something that is so funny that I can’t stop myself from saying it, even if it is not appropriate for the situation.  

20. I often go overboard in putting myself down when I am making jokes or trying to be funny.  

21. I enjoy making people laugh.  

22. If I am feeling sad or upset, I usually lose my sense of humor.  

23. I never participate in laughing at others even if all my friends are doing it.  

24. When I am with friends or family, I often seem to be the one that other people make fun of or joke about.  

25. I don’t often joke around with my friends.  

26. It is my experience that thinking about some amusing aspect of a situation is often a very effective way of coping with problems.  

27. If I don't like someone, I often use humor or teasing to put them down.  

28. If I am having problems or feeling unhappy, I often cover it up by joking around, so that even my closest friends don’t know how I really feel.  

29. I usually can’t think of witty things to say when I’m with other people.  

30. I don’t need to be with other people to feel amused -- I can usually find things to laugh about even when I’m by myself.  

31. Even if something is really funny to me, I will not laugh or joke about it if someone will be offended.  

32. Letting others laugh at me is my way of keeping my friends and family in good spirits.
APPENDIX D

HUMOR STYLES QUESTIONNAIRE (MODIFIED VERSION)

People experience and express humor in many different ways. Below is a list of statements describing different ways in which humor might be experienced. Please read each statement carefully, and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it. Please respond as honestly and objectively as you can. Use the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Totally Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I usually don't laugh or joke around much with other people at work.  
2. If I am feeling depressed at work, I can usually cheer myself up with humor.  
3. If someone makes a mistake at work, I will often tease them about it.  
4. At the 911 call center, I let people laugh at me or make fun at my expense more than I should.  
5. I don't have to work very hard at making other people laugh -- I seem to be a naturally humorous person at the 911 call center.  
6. Even when I'm by myself at work, I'm often amused by the absurdities of life.  
7. People are never offended or hurt by my sense of humor at the 911 call center.  
8. I will often get carried away in putting myself down if it makes my coworkers laugh.  
9. At work I rarely make other people laugh by telling funny stories about myself.  
10. At work if I am feeling upset or unhappy I usually try to think of something funny about the situation to make myself feel better.  
11. When telling jokes or saying funny things at the 911 call center, I am usually not very concerned about how other people are taking it.  
12. I often try to make people like or accept me more by saying something funny about my own weaknesses, blunders, or faults at work.  
13. I laugh and joke a lot with my coworkers.  
14. My humorous outlook on life keeps me from getting overly upset or depressed about things.
15. I do not like it when people use humor as a way of criticizing or putting someone down at the 911 call center.

16. I don’t often say funny things to put myself down at work.

17. I usually don’t like to tell jokes or amuse people at work.

18. When I am at the 911 call center by myself and I’m feeling unhappy, I make an effort to think of something funny to cheer myself up.

19. Sometimes I think of something that is so funny that I can’t stop myself from saying it, even if it is not appropriate for the situation at work.

20. I often go overboard in putting myself down when I am making jokes or trying to be funny at the 911 call center.


22. If I am feeling sad or upset at work, I usually lose my sense of humor.

23. I never participate in laughing at others even if all my coworkers are doing it.

24. When I am with coworkers, I often seem to be the one that other people make fun of or joke about.

25. I don’t often joke around with my coworkers.

26. It is my experience that thinking about some amusing aspect of a situation is often a very effective way of coping with problems at work.

27. If I don't like someone at work, I often use humor or teasing to put them down.

28. If I am having problems or feeling unhappy, I often cover it up by joking around, so that even my closest coworkers don’t know how I really feel.

29. I usually can’t think of witty things to say when I’m with other coworkers.

30. I don’t need to be with other people to feel amused -- I can usually find things to laugh about even when I’m by myself at work.

31. Even if something is really funny to me at work, I will not laugh or joke about it if someone will be offended.

32. Letting others laugh at me is my way of keeping my coworkers in good spirits.
APPENDIX E

COPING SCALE

Below are descriptions of how you handle situations in general. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to your communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. I seldom let life get me down.
2. I handle problems effectively.
3. I handle stressful situations in a calm manner.
4. I cope well with stressful situations.
5. The coping methods that I use to handle stress are effective.
6. I use a variety of ways to cope with my stress.
7. I don’t let stressful situations affect other parts of my life.
8. I am productive of how I handle stress.

How many years have you worked as a dispatcher? ____________________
APPENDIX F

OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Please list some work situations when you would use humor.

2. Please list some work situations where you would avoid the use of humor.
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. Tell me the daily responsibilities you encounter as a dispatcher?

2. Explain how stress affects your work environment?

3. Please explain how you handle your emotions when you are at work?

4. Recall a time when humor is used at work?

5. Describe what type of situations that happen at work when humor is involved.

6. Explain how you use humor at work?

7. Describe the funniest event you can remember happening at work. How did this event affect the work environment?

8. Please explain your feelings about using humor at work?
APPENDIX H

VOLUNTEER FOR FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

We are seeking to interview dispatchers more in-depth about their humor use in the work environment. The interview will consist of 8 questions and approximately take 30-40 minutes to complete. The researcher will contact you at a later date to determine the time and location of the interview.

Name:
____________________________________________________________________
Title:
____________________________________________________________________
Company Name:
____________________________________________________________________
Address:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Work Phone Number:
____________________________________________________________________
Cell Number:
____________________________________________________________________
Work Email:
____________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX I

ORAL PRESENTATION FOR SURVEY PORTION OF STUDY

This study is an investigation of communication strategies employed by dispatchers. We hope from this research we can learn more about how people communicate in this type of organizational setting. We need 200 dispatchers to participate in the study.

You will be asked to read and respond to four different surveys. In addition, you will be provided an opportunity to volunteer for a follow-up interview pertaining to humor use in the work environment.

All of the participants’ responses will be kept confidential and secured in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator’s office.

The results of this study should assist us in better understanding organizational communication, emotional labor, and humor use in the work environment. The information that you provide will be completely anonymous. The results from the study will be kept confidential. We do not see any unforeseen risk to you by participating in this study.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you will be excused. Even after you volunteer, if you decide to stop answering questions, you may do so without penalty. If the survey becomes emotionally stressful, you may leave at any time.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at (601) 266-6820. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and subjects may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Any questions about the research should be directed to Jennifer D. McLaughlin at (601) 222-2208, (601)-276-2432 or (601) 876-1180.

________________________
Signature of Person Giving Oral Presentation

________________________
Date

________________________
Witness
This study is an investigation of communication strategies employed by dispatchers. We hope from this research we can learn more about how people communicate in this type of organizational setting. We need 20 dispatchers to participate in the study.

The interview will consist of approximately 8 scheduled questions with appropriate follow up questions.

All of the participants’ responses will be kept confidential and secured in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator’s office. Please do not say your name during the interview process and only refer to yourself as “dispatcher.” The researcher will record the responses by hand and by the use of a digital recorder for transcription purposes only. The researcher will not write down names to ensure confidentiality. Only the researcher will have access to the recorded data, and after the transcription process is complete the digitally recorded data will be destroyed. The transcript data will remain archived indefinitely in the principal investigator’s office. Additionally, participants’ responses will be confidential and referred to by number or position title.

The results of this study should assist us in better understanding organizational communication. The information that you provide will be completely anonymous. The results from the study will be kept confidential. We do not see any unforeseen risk to you by participating in this study.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you will be excused from the interview. Even after you volunteer, if you decide to stop answering questions, you may do so without penalty. If the interview becomes emotionally stressful, you may leave at any time.

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Signature of Person Giving Oral Presentation

Date

Signature of Participant
APPENDIX K

IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

TO: Jennifer D. McLaughlin
227 Buck Bridge Road
Tyler, MS 39667

FROM: Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 10041501
PROJECT TITLE: The Use of Humor for Emotion Management on the Job: An Exploration of 911 Communication Centers

Enclosed is The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee Notice of Committee Action taken on the above referenced project proposal. If I can be of further assistance, contact me at (601) 266-4279, FAX at (601) 266-4275, or you can e-mail me at Lawrence.Hosman@usm.edu. Good luck with your research.
APPENDIX L

IRB NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Tel: 601.266.6820
Fax: 601.266.5509
www.usm.edu/irb

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the “Adverse Effect Report Form”.
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 10041501
PROJECT TITLE: The Use of Humor for Emotion Management on the Job: An Exploration of 911 Communication Centres
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 05/01/2010 to 12/31/2011
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation or Thesis
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Jennifer D. McLaughlin
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts & Letters
DEPARTMENT: Speech Communication
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 04/20/2010 to 04/19/2011

[Signature]
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

[Signature]
Date
APPENDIX M

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM

Name: Jennifer D. McLaughlin
E-Mail Address: jennmclaughlin@att.net; jmcLaughlin@smcc.edu
Mailing Address: 227 Buck Bridge Road, Tylertown, MS 39667
College/Division: College of Arts and Letters
Department: Speech Communication
Department Box #: 5131
Proposed Project Dates: From May 2010 To December 2011
Title: The use of humor for emotion management on the job: An exploration of 911 communication centers.

Funding Agencies or Research Sponsors: n/a
Grant Number: n/a

New Project
X Dissertation or Thesis
Renewal or Continuation: Protocol #
Change in Previously Approved Project: Protocol #

Jennifer D. McLaughlin
Principal Investigator
Date: April 2, 2010

Advisor
Date: April 5, 2010

Department Chair
Date: 4-20-10

RECOMMENDATION OF HSPRC MEMBER

Category I, Exempt under Subpart A, Section 46.101 ( ), 45CFR46.

Category II, Expedited Review, Subpart A, Section 46.110 and Subparagraph 45CFR46.

Category III, Full Committee Review.

Scott A. Hoff
HSPRC College/Division Member
DATE 4-22-10

HSPRC Chair
DATE
REFERENCES


