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Leading Through Laughter: Humor and Perceived Effectiveness of P-12 Principals

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LEADING THROUGH LAUGHTER:

HUMOR AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF P-12 PRINCIPALS

by

LAURIE B. MASCOLO

(Under the Direction of Teri Denlea Melton)

ABSTRACT

The field of leadership has yielded boundless research studies across disciplines, with a plethora in the business and political realms. The medical field and other social science have also joined the ranks, with education now entering the landscape. Educational leadership is a burgeoning field of research, but very little has been studied regarding the impact of humor and educational leadership. The purpose of this study was to determine whether a relationship exists between the humor style and the perceived effectiveness of school principals, the leadership style and the perceived effectiveness of school principal, as well as possible relationships between and among subtypes of humor and perceived effectiveness with subtypes of leadership style. Data were collected on each variable using established survey instruments: perceived effectiveness was measured on a Likert scale rating; leadership style was assessed by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio & Bass, 2004); and, humor style by a modified version of the Humor Style Questionnaire (Martin et al., 2003). Opportunity for comments (optional) was also provided. Participants were teachers in a regional area in the southeast United States; the total number of valid participants was 164.

Findings indicated that high ratings of perceived effectiveness by the rated principal were positively related to transformational leadership ($r(162) = .648$, p < 0.01). High rating or

perceived effectiveness also demonstrated a positive correlation to two specific humor styles—

affiliative ($r(162) = .291$, $p < 0.01$) and self-enhancing ($r(162) = .345$, $p < 0.01$). In addition,

transformational leadership style and affiliative/self-enhancing humor styles were shown to have

significant positive correlations. These findings are crucial to the educational leadership field as it

seeks to better understand the aspects of what makes principals most effective in the ever-changing

P-12 educational landscape. Research into the dimension of humor and leadership in education is

in its fledgling stages. This study lays groundwork from which research can begin to develop and

further investigate these findings.

INDEX WORDS: Leadership, Leadership styles, Humor, Humor styles, Transformational

leadership, Principal leadership, Principal effectiveness, Principal humor styles

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HUMOR AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF P-12 PRINCIPALS

by

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DEDICATION

Leading Through Laughter is dedicated to my parents, Jim and Janet, who taught me that laughter and a sense of humor is necessary to live and live well. Through your example, I have always been able to find the humor in the craziest times and circumstances while weathering whatever came my way.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my children, Jessica, Michael, Zachary, Hannah, and Paige. My dreams for your futures are that you find what makes each of you happy, remain strong in who you are, and share laughter with each other and the world every single day of your life. May you find your way in this world knowing that the faith and belief you had in me, I will forever have in you.

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I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Teri Melton, for never letting me doubt myself for more than twenty-four hours, believing in the worthiness of my study, and for leaving messages for my girls about Mom's progress on the "Big Book". I would also like to thank Dr. Brinson and Dr. Boncana for their commentary and assistance with all the pieces that would become this dissertation. The feedback and questioning made this a stronger study, and me a better and more confident researcher; for that I am grateful. I'd also like to thank my cohort peers; I hope I've made believers out of you.

Unbeknownst to him, I blame my mentor, Dr. Jim Marchand, who pointed me down the educational leadership path, for all this. If it weren't for him and the laughter we shared, I wouldn't be enjoying my career as a building administrator, nor would I have spent the past three years in GSU's library! Nevertheless, I'm indebted to him for shoving me in the right direction. Though they know I am thankful for all their support, I simply must acknowledge my family and friends who have provided the extra "oomph" needed to get to the finish line. Your cheerleading and well placed "oohs" and "ahhs" for each hurdle, got me over Heartbreak Hill to the finish line. As for my friends, there really are too many to mention individually, which makes me a very lucky person! Thank you all.

Jessica and Michael, you've been through this for three degrees! Thank you for always being there to help me, Dad, and the "babies". Without your help, none of this would have been possible. Zachary, Hannah, and Paige, you've been through it for three degrees too, but this is the first one you really ever felt. Thanks for giving Mom the time to work on the Big Book for the past year worth of Saturdays.

Hannah and Paige, you have no idea how much I needed your 7 year old encouragement when you hugged me, looked me in the face, and declared, "We believe in you, Mom. You can do this." I wrote more that day than any other. And Zachary, your nonchalant, "Way to go, Mom," when I came home

from that final defense made me chuckle, but it was your incredulous look when I asked you how you knew I passed, paired with a beaming, smiling, "I knew you could do this," that made the journey worthwhile.

And to my husband David, who believed in me from the minute this crazy idea hatched, I owe every word found on these pages to you. Not only did you shove me out the door to read and write, write, write, but you also never doubted I could do it. Thank you for giving me (and making me take) the time every weekend for the past year or so to write the "Big Book". Whether laughing from lack of sleep, the funny things the kids do and say, or at each other, I'm glad you were alongside me for this journey and can't wait to chuckle through whatever adventure is next. We did it!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From the giggles of infancy to the anecdotes shared in old age, humans want to laugh.
Life's idiosyncrasies are accepted and ambiguity managed more positively when approached
with humor (Hatch, 1997; Huang & Kuo, 2011). Humans seek humor, both contrived and
spontaneous, in order to make sense of the incongruities that inevitably exist in this world.
According to Nash Information Services (2014), one of the movie industry's tracking services,
U.S. movie-goes have spent $38.7 million viewing comedies since 1995; the film genre now
captures 22.3% of the movie market. On the small screen, *America's Funniest Videos* reports
receiving nearly 104,000 video clips of serendipitous moments of hilarity over the past 22 years
(Raftery, 2011). In laughter's newest market, the Internet, funny YouTube videos go viral
virtually instantaneously. Scripted or just part of the ordinary, people simply love to laugh.

Philosophers dating back to Aristotle and Plato have commented on humor's impact on
power structures (Bardon, 2005) and current research provides insight into how humor affects
organizations. Numerous studies endorse humor as a means of alleviating stress and releasing
tensions (Arendt, 2009; Hughes, 2009; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006), while others espouse its
virtue in mitigating the hierarchal power structure found in organizations (Cronis, 1982; George,
2013; Mora-Ripoll, 2010). Humor also has a foundation in communication, as it can
communicate cultural norms and reinforce expectations (Cronis, 1982; Holmes & Marra, 2006;
Hughes, 2009; Lynch, 2006). Collectively, research has concluded that context of humor is
inextricably tied to its uses. Some of those contexts, such as easing stress, moderating power
structures, and communication skills, are crucial elements of effective leadership.

A sense of humor has been noted as an important feature of leadership in various fields. IBM and Hewlett Packard provide professional development in the area while Southwest Airlines has assessed it in the hiring process (Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Klein, 2012). The United States Military, as well as the Royal Navy, not only identify humor as a facet of leadership but also dedicate training time regarding the use of humor for rising leaders (Department of the Army, 2002; George, 2013; Priest & Swain, 2002). The medical field holds a plethora of research on the effects of humor on practitioners and patients, notably how humor can be used to strengthen relationships, enhance resilience, decrease stress, and mitigate professional burnout (Feagai, 2011; Mora-Ripoll, 2010).

Educational research has centered on the use of humor in the student/teacher relationship, instructor humor largely at the postsecondary level, and humor as a generator of creativity. In a recent study, Vecchio, Justin, and Pearce (2009) examined how leader humor of head teacher/high school principal relationships interacted with leader behavior and follower outcomes. Their findings indicated a positive pattern of humor by leaders influencing followers' (teachers) performance. Vecchio et al. (2009) concluded that the role of humor in leadership needs to be more closely examined and its impact ferreted out with future research. Westwood and Johnson (2013) agreed, as their findings indicated a need to examine humor in context rather than as a separate function. Outside of the aforementioned research, little has been studied about the overarching role of humor in leadership, and even less about the role of humor in educational leadership. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to: 1) examine whether a relationship exists between leader humor and perceived effectiveness of school principals, 2) examine whether a relationship exists between leader humor and leadership style, and 3)

examine whether a relationship exists between humor style, leadership style, and level of perceived effectiveness of principals

There are currently three leadership styles at the forefront of leadership research: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire (T. D. Melton, personal communication, July 4, 2014). The three styles are considered to be on a continuum of leadership styles and are offered as the framework this study utilizes.

Transformational leadership as developed from Burns' (1978) original concept and expounded upon by Bass and Avolio (1994) provides a paradigm of leadership advantageous to managing dynamic organizational changes through deep relationships (Arendt, 2009; Stewart, 2006). P-12 leadership demands that principals be able to navigate the rapidly changing landscape of education for and with followers. By recognizing the needs of individuals within the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2000; Greenleaf, 1977), specifically at the individual school level, and building relationships with and among followers, today's school leaders guide, model, and motivate followers in accepting change while thriving in their roles (Arendt, 2009; Priest & Swain, 2002; Stewart, 2006).

Transactional leadership was also a component of Burn's work (1978). Burns recognized that much leadership was a result of transactions between leaders and their followers. Transactional leadership is largely dependent upon contingency reward, such as being promoted for meeting job expectations, and is less concerned with personal relationships and motivating individuals to go beyond everyday expectations (Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012). Management by exception, active, is a component of transactional leadership. This is an active avoidance style whereby leaders are largely hands-off and intercede to highlight problems, issues, and short-comings (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Avolio and Bass (2004) have asserted that transactional

leadership compliments transformational leadership as appropriate to needs and tasks within organizations.

Rounding out the scope of leadership constructs being used for this research is passive avoidant leadership, often referred to as laissez-faire leadership. Laissez-faire leadership, as described by Avolio and Bass (2004), is the lack of presence by a leader. When that leader is present, the leader avoids making decisions or confronting issues or urgent questions. Laissez-faire leaders do not insert themselves into the evolving needs of the organization nor do they attempt to discover problems to be remedied. Instead, they take a largely hands-off approach until issues arise; then their process tends toward focusing on the negative aspects of the organization and/or individuals. Management by exception, passive, whereby the leaders only inserts him/herself when problems arise, is also a component of laissez-faire leadership style Avolio & Bass, 2004).

The above referenced leadership styles are important to this study as each hold value in the goals of leadership. In the case of this study, exploring relationships of humor and perceived effectiveness needed to be grounded in a quantifiable leadership foundation. The choice to use Avolio and Bass' Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) (2004) was based on its recognition in the field as being a valid tool, as well as it measures the aforementioned leadership styles that act on a continuum. As being a P-12 principal is not a static profession, exploring the relationships of humor and effectiveness within the context of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles provided additional depth to this study, notably paired humor and leadership styles that have lesser or greater relationships to perceived leadership effectiveness.

Rapidly evolving technology and science, mega-mergers in the corporate world, and the expanding demands of consumers require leaders of virtually every industry to respond rapidly to organizational needs. The field of education is no exception. Educational leaders today must be adroit at mitigating evolving educational demands and accompanying incongruities while eliciting optimism, creativity, and resilience in teachers and staff. Hatch (1997) fittingly associated irony and the appropriate use of sarcasm as a means leaders have at their disposal to meet the needs of followers. "If irony can constitute contradictory emotional and mental states, then it can support stability and change as contradictory realities and may even help us to understand the paradoxical relationship between them" (p. 283). The stress inherent in concurrently embracing change while maintaining stability is tremendous and invariably necessary in the rapidly advancing educational landscape. Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, and Viswesvaran (2012) found positive use of humor buffered employees from workplace stresses as well as enhanced perceptions of leader performance. A logical connection to education is that in poking fun at the incompatibility of continuous competing demands found in the P-12 setting, educational leaders have the potential to navigate changes alongside staff in a collegial and transformational manner. In acknowledging the challenges of enigmatic expectations, the effective leader diminishes the power such contradictory elements have on educators.

Despite the many aspects of leadership, including the interaction between humor and leadership, that have been studied, little has been done to connect humor with effective educational leadership. The overview of literature indicates that empirical research specifically citing humor as a component of effective leadership in the P-12 educational setting is lacking, though studies are beginning to emerge. Taking social sciences research and framing findings in the context of humor having a relationship with leadership provides connected insight with

modern leadership theories. It is possible that by incorporating the use of humor and humor styles with the concept of effective leadership by the P-12 principal, many facets of leadership, such as communication, motivation, school culture and climate, goal attainment, and more, can be more thoughtfully developed. In pairing this information with leadership styles, the potential to enhance the concept of what makes a P-12 leader effective exists within this study.

Problem Statement

As educational initiatives evolve, leaders must continually engage and encourage school staff to embrace challenges inherent to growth. Principals must champion implementation of new curricula, accountability of teachers, academic measurements of students, and a plethora of increasing—often contradictory—demands aimed at improving P-12 education. Principals must be adept at communicating changes, implementing new designs and/or curricula, and managing multiple demands from stakeholders, all while elevating staff and mitigating the stress associated with the field of teaching. In order to accomplish such monumental tasks, teachers and staff must perceive their principal as an effective leader.

In these times of rapid change and growth aimed at P-12 education, educational leaders and researchers are obligated to determine if similar findings of a relationship between humor and perceived effective leadership exist in the teacher-principal relationship developed through leadership style. Humor and its relationship to leadership in other fields (military, medical, corporate/customer service industry) has the research; it is time for the field of education to join their rank.

Though humor intertwines with theories and constructs of leadership, it has yet to solidify its role in educational leadership. Melton, Tysinger, Mallory, and Green (2010) presented a validation study of the *School Leadership Dispositions Inventory©*, a measurement tool meant to

capture the dispositions of leaders in context through responses to scenarios. In their research, Melton et al. described the difficulty of defining dispositions despite dispositions being a component of educational leadership certification standards throughout the country. There were commonalities of dispositions: relationship building, collaboration, persisting/resilience, and calmness, being frequently mentioned; these commonalities have hereunto been explained as frequent outcomes of humor. Citing results attained in one study by the Charlotte Advocates for Education (2004), Melton et al. asserted that principals who attained positive school climates were, "described as individuals who exhibited a belief in developing meaningful relationships with others, and they often demonstrated a sense of humor" (p. 6). Though not stated as such, one may infer that humor has the potential to be an element of dispositions essential to positive outcomes in educational leadership, and thus this study endeavored to do just that.

Studies in the military, business, and medical communities have found the use of humor to be associated with perceived leadership effectiveness in areas that impact educators as well, such as improving cohesiveness of teams, facilitating cooperation among constituency groups, lessening hierarchal barriers, increasing mental functioning (creativity and flexibility), and mitigating both personal and professional stressors (Banas, Dunbar, Rodrigues, & Liu, 2011; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Hughes, 2009; Klein, 2012; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Mora-Ripoll, 2012; Priest & Swain, 2002). However, studies that explore the relationship between educational leadership and humor are minimal, and studies examining the relationship between educational leadership style, humor, and leadership effectiveness are non-existent to date.

Hence, the purpose of this study was to determine whether a relationship exists between the humor style and the perceived effectiveness of school principals, the leadership style and the

perceived effectiveness of school principal, as well as possible relationships between and among subtypes of humor and perceived effectiveness with subtypes of leadership style.

Research Questions

In delving into the potential relationship between humor, leadership style, and effective leadership in the P-12 setting, particularly the leadership of the school principal, the following overarching question and secondary questions drove this study: Is there a relationship between humor style, leadership style, and higher levels of perceived school leadership effectiveness? In connection to this overarching question, the following sub-questions guided the investigation:

1. Does a relationship exist between principal's humor styles and perceived school leadership effectiveness?

2. Does a relationship exist between principal's leadership styles and perceived school leadership effectiveness?

3. Does a relationship exist between principal's leadership style and principal's humor style?

Reframing the research questions as hypotheses, the study sought to prove or disprove the following:

$H_0 1$: No relationship exists between principal's humor style and perceived school leadership effectiveness.

$H_0 2$: No relationship exists between principal's leadership style and perceived school leadership effectiveness.

$H_0 3$: No relationship exists between principal's leadership style and principal's humor style.

In answering these questions, this study used a non-parametric design intended to gauge strength of relationship between the independent variables (humor style and leadership style) with the dependent variable (perceived effectiveness).
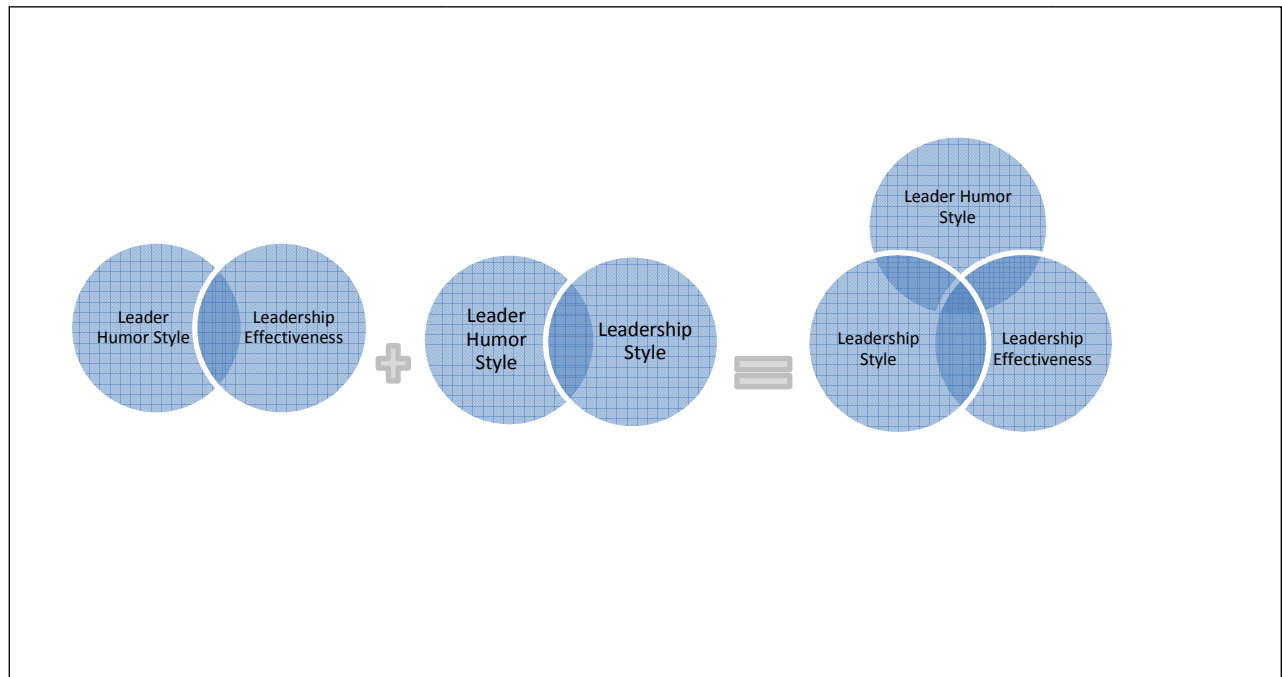
Significance of Study

As in other occupations, education is constantly striving to better the effectiveness of the organization through the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of the building level leader—the principal. Within that paradigm, the role of principal is crucial to the success of individual schools and, subsequently, a host of other organizational concerns (student achievement, staff retention, state and federal requirements). However, when it comes to identifying effective principals, districts do not take into account specific humor style and its impact on the educational environment. By advancing this study, the educational community can determine the role that humor plays in leadership style and perceived effectiveness, as well as how humor style and leadership style, in tandem, relate to perceived leadership effectiveness. This holds a

host of implications for school districts in terms of school improvement, culture, hiring practices, and mentoring potential leaders within educational systems.

Additionally, the research will broaden the base of literature in the areas of principal effectiveness, leadership styles, and leader humor style, as well as affective traits of principals perceived as effective. In adding to the literature of the field, P-12 educational leaders at building and district levels will have access to more updated and comprehensive information regarding an aspect of educational leadership (humor style) that has hereinto received little attention in terms of research.

Procedures

To answer the research questions posed, a quantitative study design was used to gather data on the variables of humor style, leadership style, and perceived effectiveness of P-12 principals. The choice for a quantitative study was made based on the desire to gain knowledge relating three specific variables. A qualitative study was rejected for several reasons: 1) the researcher's desire for a correlation analysis of factors, and; 2) the availability of current instruments measuring the ascribed variables.

A modified version of Martin et al.'s peer rated Humor Styles Questionnaire, (2003) was used with participants to identify a leader's (previous year's principal) humor style, while Avolio and Bass's peer rated Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (2004) was administered to participants to ascertain their previous year's principal's leadership style. The researcher also posed one Likert scale question on the overall effectiveness of the principal based on the rater's experience. One open-ended response question was included so participants had an opportunity to expound on the topic as they saw fit. Correlational analysis was used to determine relationships between and among the three variables.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of this study were highly dependent upon participation rates. The study did not garner the number of participants desired. This impairs generalizing results to P-12 public schools in general, as well as hinders interpreting meaning for principals at each level.

Another limitation of this study involved perceptions. As participants were asked to evaluate their previous principal's effectiveness, the reader must take into consideration that participants internalize terminology differently. Likewise, personal understanding of humor and interpretation of questions regarding such topic may have played a factor in how participants rate their principals.

A delimitation of this study was its geographical parameters. The limiting of participants to one regional educational center in a southeastern state was to decrease the participant pool to a large but manageable number of potential responses. By utilizing one state-designated regional area, results might have been generalizable to the state as the regional educational centers tend to reflect similar overall clusters of vital demographics (socio-economic status, school sizes, local income averages, etc.).

The choice was made by the researcher to limit participants to those teaching at public P-12 schools to control for professional certification norms required for teachers and principals. The study also sets the P-12 building leader, the school principal, as the educational leader to rate; results cannot be generalized to teacher leaders, central office leaders, or higher education settings and leaders. Additionally, as teachers were being asked to rate their previous year's principal, only those teaching 2 or more years were eligible to participate, thus excluding the first year teacher. Lastly, the recruitment of those actively teaching excluded educators currently not working in their field for one reason or another.

Definition of Key Terms

Affiliative humor style. For the purpose of this research, affiliative humor is defined as a style of humor that is typically benevolent, and whereby the humorist, in this case, the leader (principal), intends for the humor to develop rapport and enhance existing relationships with followers (teachers). This style of humor is largely viewed as positive. Leader's affiliative humor style will be identified by scores in each area of the modified, peer rated Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) (Lynch, 2002; Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray & Weir, 2003; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009).

Aggressive humor style. For the purpose of this study, aggressive humor style is defined as a style of humor generally used to manage others (followers, i.e. teachers) and situations to the benefit of the humorist (leader, i.e. principals). This style of humor is largely viewed as negative. Aggressive humor style will be identified by scores in each area of the modified HSQ (Lynch, 2002; Martin et al., 2003; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009).

Effective leadership. For the purpose of this study, effective leadership in education is defined as leadership that supports and enables teachers to focus on instruction aimed at advancing each student's acquisition and application of skills (Bolman & Deal, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Greenleaf, 1997). Effective leadership is represented as a score on a Likert-rated statement as to the participant's perception of his/her principal's effectiveness

Humor. For the purpose of this research, humor is defined as the ability to perceive, appreciate, and express comical elements one is party to or observes (Hughes & Avey, 2009; Martin, 2007).

Humor style. For the purpose of this research, humor style is defined as a classification of the type of humor used most frequently by a person. This was measured by the modified,

peer-rated HSQ which measures affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating styles of humor (Martin et al, 2003; Veselka, Schermer, Martin, & Vernon, 2010).

Laissez-faire leadership style. For the purpose of this research, laissez-faire leadership is defined as a passive leadership style whereby the leader has an absent, hands-off approach and functions from a reactive standpoint for the most part. Laissez-faire leadership style is identified by score garnered from the peer-rated MLQ-5X and includes management by exception, passive form (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Leadership. For the purpose of this study, leadership is defined as the ability to apply skills and traits effectively to influence followers (in this case teachers) to achieve desired results Avolio & Bass, 2004; Greenleaf, 1977; Northouse, 2010).

Leadership style. For the purpose of this study, leadership style is defined as the predominant style by which a leader operates from on a regular basis. Recognizing that leadership styles fluctuate for a multitude of reasons, this study utilizes the peer rated Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X (MLQ-5X) to identify leadership style (laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational) of participants' principals (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Transactional leadership style. For the purpose of this research, transactional leadership is defined as a leadership style that capitalizes on give and take relationships between leader and followers in order to accomplish organizational goals. Transactional leadership style is identified by score garnered from the peer-rated MLQ-5x and includes management by exception, active form (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Transformational leadership style. For the purpose of this research, transformational leadership is defined as a leadership style that motivates followers to achieve more than initially thought possible, and includes the ability to develop relationships with and among

followers to amass collective effort. Transformation leadership style is identified by

score garnered from the peer-rated MLQ-5x (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Leithwood & Sun,

2012).

Self-enhancing humor style. For the purpose of this research, self-enhancing humor is defined as

a style of humor by which the humorist (leader, i.e. principal) regulates his/her own

emotions, and likely aids those around them (followers, i.e. teachers), by taking a

humorous perspective on situations. This style of humor can be detrimental but is

generally benevolent or benign. Leader's self-enhancing humor style will be identified

by scores in each area of the modified, peer rated HSQ (Lynch, 2002; Martin et al., 2003;

Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009).

Self-defeating humor style. For the purpose of this study, self-defeating humor style is defined as

a style of humor by which the humorist (leader, i.e. principal) uses humor at the expense

of themselves in order to amuse others (followers, i.e. teachers). This style of humor is

largely viewed as negative, however the careful use of self-disparaging remarks can be of

positive influence. Leader's self-defeating humor style will be identified by scores in

each area of the modified, peer rated HSQ (Lynch, 2002; Martin 2003; Wilkins &

Eisenbraun, 2009).

Organization of the Study

This chapter was meant to provide an overview of the study. In laying the foundation for

the study, a broad synopsis of humor styles and leadership styles, and their respective subtypes,

was presented. Given the needs of effective school leadership in today's rapidly changing

demands, a clear purpose for this study and its significance to the educational community has been established.

Chapter 2 covers a review of the dominant literature in the fields of leadership, leadership styles, and humor. In addition, humor and leadership as a collective is also discussed. Chapter 3 discusses in-depth the methodology used for this study, including understanding of the instruments selected, how data were collected and the processes that were used for analyzing the data obtained.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss data analysis and discussion of findings respectively. Chapter 4 provides the particulars gleaned from the data as well as explores any relationships that may or may not be evident through data analysis. Chapter 5 synthesizes the findings into conclusions based on the data analysis and provides a discussion of the results.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Reasons for using humor and how it is interpreted are as numerous as those who partake; each situation must take into account the initiator, intended receiver, and context—variables allowing for countless arrays of responses. Though the actual experience of humor is incalculable, commonalities of the results associated with humor, such as the release of stress and development of camaraderie among those sharing in the humorous moment, are recognized elements of leadership. As the study of humor comes from many fields and in relationship to every aspect of being human, a leader's use of humor can be influential in systems as it provides for a number of benefits both physiologically and psychologically (Hughes, 2009; Veselka et al., 2010). Whether ascribing to theories of flexible leadership, active leadership, servant leadership, contingency models, transactional models, or transformational models, humor is undeniably tied into the art of leadership (Arendt, 2009; Gordon & Yukl, 2004; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). This chapter will provide an overview of literature from the fields of humor, humor styles, leadership, and leadership style, as well as provide a foundation for the intertwining of leadership and humor.

Humor

Definitions for humor vary from source to source, but it is generally agreed upon that its components are one's ability to understand, enjoy, or express that which is amusing or absurd. For the purpose of this study, humor is defined as the ability to perceive, appreciate, and express comical elements one is party to or observes (Hughes & Avey, 2009; Martin et al., 2003).

Humor began to emerge as a topic in research in the mid 1950's and has been sporadic (Westwood & Johnston, 2013). Research in humor itself crosses social sciences. In psychology,

motivation theories are used to explain the phenomena of humor. In the field of sociology, Identification and Differentiation and Control and Resistance theories are put forth (Lynch, 2002). In the field of communication, humor is viewed from a personality theory perspective (Banas et al., 2011).

In examining the literature base for humor in regard to organizations, Westwood and Johnston (2013) contended that most research has looked at humor in its functional sense and that research within context lags behind. Martin (2007) added that the brunt of research regarding humor within organizations is observational, particularly in the educational field where the emphasis is on humor in the classroom. This researcher found this to be true, as literature and research stemming from functional aspects of humor were more easily accessible. Be that as it may, studies included herein attempt to encapsulate the dynamic natures of humor and leadership at various levels, as well as relate humor's functionality with leadership needs found in various organizations, including educational leadership.

Humor Theories

The major psychological theories are: superiority theory, incongruity (also called cognitive) theory, and relief (also called arousal or release) theory (Hatch, 1997; Hughes, 2009; Lynch, 2002; Lyttle, 2001; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). Historically, *superiority theory* proposes that humor comes from the misfortune of self or others, and is generally seen as a way of elevating self (Hughes, 2009). Plato and Aristotle viewed humor as malicious and intending only to ridicule, clearly endorsing superiority theory at its worst (Lyttle, 2001). Conversely, modern ideas frame superiority theory as having the ability to neutralize power structures, particularly with the effective use of self-disparaging humor (Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Hatch, 1997). Broadening superiority theory is the concept that one's ability to laugh at situations infers

that one believes he or she can rise above the circumstance thus being "superior" to personal concerns (Lyttle, 2001). Recognition of the benefits of humor from this particular conception of superiority theory allows for powerful communication when calming concerns of followers.

Incongruity theory, a psychological theory often referred to as cognitive theory, relies heavily on context and paradox. In groundbreaking research, Hatch (1997) spoke greatly to this in discussing the use of irony and how leaders can use such humor to be effective in managing stability and change at the same time. As all leaders are subject to driving continuous change, the ability to communicate relationships of what has been with what needs to be is critical. In making use of incongruity theory, leaders demonstrate shared values and norms while making room for adjustments. Allowing others to laugh at contradictions reduces tension and enables followers to recognize that change within an organization is part of the natural evolution of organizations (Hatch and Ehrlich, 1993).   It is the cognitive recognition of the paradox or discrepancy by both leader and followers that enables this construct of humor to be effective. As a result, some theorists have termed it the cognitive theory of humor (Lynch, 2002; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). In Wilkins and Eisenbraun's (2009) words:

> The incongruity theory emphasizes cognition; individuals must have rationally come to understand typical patterns of reality before they can notice differences. A humorous situation must involve the perceiver simultaneously having in mind one view of the situation that seems normal and another view of the situation in which there is a violation of the natural order. (p. 352)

The third, psychological theory, also referred to as relief theory, proposes the purpose of humor is to serve as an emotional valve for negative or uncomfortable feelings, perceived threats, or stressors (Hughes, 2009; Lynch, 2002; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). From this

perspective, leaders make use of humor when navigating the organization through high stressors in order to provide a mechanism for followers to release tensions and anxieties in an emotionally safe manner. By being able to relinquish some negativity, followers are inherently reinforced from the positive effect provided in accordance to relief theory (Banas et al., 2011; Robert & Wilbanks, 2012).

Similar connections can be made with the sociological perspectives of relief theory and control/resistance theory. When framed from the sociological perspective of relief theory, humor allows for those in high stress jobs to release tension, thereby enabling them to better perform their jobs (Lynch, 2002).

In regard to the identification/differentiation sociological theories, humor can be used to reinforce or lessen power structures as well as mitigate hierarchal status (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2012) asserted that leaders who use humor in diffusing stressful situations are viewed as approachable by followers and as diminishing the hierarchal distance between leader and follower. Likewise, Hughes (2009) concluded humor used in leader/follower exchanges aids in reducing power structure, thereby increasing a leaders' accessibility.

As can be inferred from the discussion thus far, humor is a component of communication; a great deal of research addresses humor as a communication tool (Lynch, 2002; Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 2005). Research was abundantly clear that context is crucial when using humor as a means of communication (George, 2013; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Hurren, 2006; Priest & Swain, 2002). Figure 2 provides a visual depiction of these connections.

Figure 2. Humor Theory Relationships

Communication Theory – Context dependent	
Psychological Theory	**Sociological Theory**
Communication Theory—intended use of humor in context conveys intended message of power structure and roles with organizational hierarchy	
Superiority—conveys the hierarchy within the organization or system; can reinforce or mitigate the levels of superior/subordinate roles within the organizational structure	Identification/Differentiation—conveys the group in which the received of the humor belongs to; can mitigate interrelated ties to multiple groups within the organization
Communication Theory—intended use of humor in context is to point out incongruities, establish or challenge norms, and provide socially acceptable means of doing so	
Incongruity (Cognitive)—highlights contradicting expectations; provides opportunity to reinforce individual teams or to exclude others from a group; gives a socially acceptable manner in which to challenge the norms and culture found within an organization or its structure	Control/Resistance—provides a socially acceptable manner to challenge authority and/or the norms or an organization; can be used to reinforce norms and culture or to challenges norms and culture of an established organization
Communication Theory—conveys humor and its participants within a particular context may use humor highly relevant to the situation to release stressors and tension	
Relief—provides a psychological release of anxiety, tension, and stress from a situation or setting that protects the individual	Relief—provides a socially acceptable use of humor among the constituents of a particular situation or circumstance that may otherwise appear inappropriate

Figure 2. Summarizes the major contributions of each social sciences' theories of humor and relates those findings to one another under the unifying concept of context and intent of communication theory.

Embedded within the psychological and sociological theories of humor, humor can be used by leaders to shape organizational culture, increase group cohesion, comment on strengths and weaknesses in a non-threatening manner, lessen group tensions, and encourage creative thinking and problem solving (Hughes, 2009; Klein, 2012; Lynch, 2002; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

Particularly important with regard to context is who the humor is intended for and what circumstance lead to it. Leaders must be cautious as humor may be considered irreverent by those outside of a particular situation, but not by those on the inside (Feagai, 2011; Lynch, 2002; Robert & Wilbanks, 2012). For example, a medical team may joke about a serious moment found within an intense situation, producing a humorous response among those involved; those not privy to the circumstance could find such commentary crass or even utterly offensive. For those in leadership positions, context and intended audience is highlighted as being of the utmost importance when dealing with humor.

Bolstering psychological and sociological concepts through a communication lens, is how humor is used to communicate incongruity and irony within situations and provide an emotional release within that shared group experience (Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Feagai, 2011; George, 2013; Wanzer et al., 2005). This includes non-verbal communication.

Non-verbal communication is also a facet of humor. For instance, George (2013) found that a cheerful leader inspires confidence and capability, sets the mood and tone of an organization, and is used to break down barriers of rank and status among service members. George (2013) further asserted that different groups charged with the same tasks were more successful when the leader understood how to use soft-skills, such as humor, to motivate and sustain group effort. Validating George's work is Priest and Swain's (2002) dual study of United

States Military Academy cadets' view of good leaders. Priest and Swain found that, "In both studies, the relation between leadership effectiveness and warm humorous style was a very strong one," (p. 185).

Enhancing the concept of humor as a form of non-verbal communication is how it nurtures desirable relationships and connectedness between leader and follower(s). Feagai's (2011) work in the nursing field concluded that humor communicates warmth and approachability, which produces a connectedness among group members that translates to the leader/follower role as an increase in the credibility of the leader. Mora-Ripoll (2010) reinforced the concept as her work affirmed humor as providing an oft unspoken shared understanding between patient and physician and a mechanism for building rapport. As medical professionals understand the physiological benefits of humor and laughter as it activates different body systems (circulatory, endocrine, immune, and respiratory) and embrace the psychological impacts of easing stress, enabling resiliency, and increasing flexibility in a time of uncertainty (Feagai, 2011), the above referenced studies give credence to the three theories of humor producing their respective outcomes.

The communication elements of rapport, mitigating stress, increasing resiliency, and enhancing flexibility are found across fields of research on humor and leadership (Avolio, Howell, & Sosik, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Hughes, 2009; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). Effective leaders harness this powerful communication tool to assist followers in managing highly anxious times by providing a means of releasing anxieties in a non-threatening manner. Using humor does not deny there are tensions, but rather it serves as a stabilizer in dealing with the stressful situation (Mesmer et al., 2012).

Literature is rich with studies showing that humor and laughter used in a positive fashion aid in decreasing stress levels, increasing coping abilities, and increasing one's ability in accepting life's idiosyncrasies (Banas et al., 2011; Hatch, 1997; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Veselka, Schermer, Martin & Vernon, 2010). Humor also relaxes and puts others at ease, facilitates communication by enabling individuals to "save face" in a group, and provides individuals a means to express conflict in a less threatening manner (Banas et al., 2011; Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Hatch, 1997; Priest & Swain, 2002).

In understanding the significance of the psychological, sociological, and communication theories of humor, readers can easily associate the benefits of humor for all persons. Having identified humor's benefits for managing daily stressors, communication within an organization, forming, changing and/or maintaining organizational culture, and as a source needed for mitigating continuous change, it is also important to acknowledge the insight humor provides as a mechanism to persevering in meeting the multiple demands of educators and educational leaders in the P-12 setting. As such, examining predominant humor styles is vital to this research.

Humor Styles

Across social science disciplines, categorical styles of humor are endorsed. Though variances are acknowledged and overlap exists, current research appears to agree on four primary humor styles--*affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating* (Hughes, 2009; Lynch, 2002; Priest & Swain, 2002; Veselka et al., 2010). Viewed primarily as more positive are affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor; viewed more along a negative spectrum are aggressive humor and self-defeating humor (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Though a majority of

this section will speak to the positive aspects of humor, though discussion regarding the negative

aspects is provided within.

Affiliative humor is humor used to lessen the hierarchal structure or power status found

in organizations (Martin & Gayle, 1999; Veselka et al., 2010). Robert and Wilbanks (2012) have

suggested that sustained affiliative humor increases leader/follower trust as well as provides for

shared experiences that organization members can draw upon in times of organizational distress.

Previous research by Lynch (2002) supported the use of affiliative humor as a component in

developing a more inclusive leader/follower structure in which there are lines of authority within

a feeling of collegiality between and among leaders and followers. Holmes and Marra (2006)

stated functions of humor were to strengthen collegiality and working relationship along with

increasing rapport among varying groups; affiliative humor would likely be the means used to

achieve pre-determined, collaborative goals often found in P-12 education.

Another humor style, self-enhancing, is typically viewed as positive. Building on

Romero and Cruthirds (2006) explanation, persons described as using self-enhancing humor tend

to manage stressors better and are considered to have a humorous and generally more positive

perspective on life in general. Martin et al. (2003) described it as more of an individual use of

humor and a useful coping skill when faced with stressful situations in life. Those with self-

enhancing humor see the lighter side of things. Perhaps you could include more of a description

of it. It is not clear what a person with this style of humor does/acts.

Conversely, aggressive humor is not often thought of in a positive fashion and leaders

need to be vigilant in using it with purpose and intent. Romero and Cruthirds (2006) emphasized

aggressive humor can serve in a positive manner when it is in mild form and with a positive

tenor. They argued that good natured teasing can communicate norms and allow for conflict in

less threatening ways. Martin (2007) provided examples of mild aggressive humor that enhanced the work environment citing observational studies whereby blue collar workers tried to outdo one another with witty remark; another example was competitive quips that were socially supportive of the main goal. Priest and Swain's (2002) work supported that assertion with examples of good natured teasing among cadets and instructors. George (2013) referred to such as banter, a playful and respectful mocking of one another.

Typically viewed as a negative humor style, self-defeating humor also has its merits within a leadership role. Martin et al. (2003) considered a well-placed, self-disparaging comment as a positive use of humor in affecting culture and relationships. Using self-deprecating humor demonstrated a leader's ability to laugh at him/herself, whereby demonstrating a sense of humor in general along with increasing the accessibility of the leader (Hughes, 2009). Self-disparaging remarks were found to add to the cohesiveness of a group as the leader's remarks decrease the social distance (Hughes, 2009). Romero and Cruthirds (2006), however, cautioned leaders to be aware of their audience; too many self-disparaging quips in front of superordinates may foster a concern for the leader's capabilities.

Holmes and Marra (2006) asserted, and Banas et al. (2011) confirmed, that intent within context is what determines the negative or positive connotation of humor between and among leaders and followers. As such, leaders must be acutely aware of how humor is being perceived by its recipients as well as tremendously cognizant and intentional in his/her use of humor. In summation, the appropriate use of humor spans the breadth of duties and responsibilities inherent in the role of leaders, impacting leader/follower interpersonal and group dynamics, both of which are critical particularly in the rapidly changing educational settings of the 21st century.

Leadership

Leadership has been studied and definitions refined over the past century. Such definitions vary widely and cover a breadth of social sciences, including sociology, linguistics, psychology, and education, all which hold relevance in discussions and conceptualizations of leaders and leadership. Conceptualizations of leaders and their leadership take differing forms. Ultimately, leadership is one's ability to apply skills and traits effectively in various situations to affect productive outcomes (Northouse, 2010; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Theories have advanced aspects of leadership from a largely trait-based or skill set model (behavioral theory) to contingency theories, power-based models, and functional modes, all of which focus on the application of a variety of skills and traits by leaders (Brooks, 1992; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Though certainly evolving over time, there is yet to be one universally accepted definition of leadership (Gordon & Yukl, 2004; Priest & Swain, 2002). While the broadest definition of leadership is the ability to influence a group, for the purpose of this study, leadership will be defined as the ability to apply skills and traits effectively to influence followers (in this case teachers) to achieve desired results. Currently, there are three major leadership styles at the forefront of leadership theory: *transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership* (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Gordon & Yukl, 2004; Stewart, 2006).

Transformational Leadership

Crant and Bateman (2000), as well as Rowold and Laukamp (2009), declared transformational leadership capitalizes on a leader's charisma and social exchange to inspire all followers in moving toward challenging goals. More recently, Kouzes and Posner (2007) related transformational leadership to champions of garnering support for shared values and goals. Both tenets seek to produce highly desired outcomes at consistent levels and serve as pathways for this

research. Transformational leadership can be summed up as the leadership style that motivates and enables followers to transcend what they thought initially impossible to achieve greater outcomes (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Transformational leadership has been embraced across varying organizations, education being one of them. Today's educational leaders, notably principals, are faced with managerial responsibilities, financial accountability, and interacting with all stakeholders, much like corporate CEOs (Onorato, 2013). Principals are also charged with instructional tasks often handed down through federal and state law. Onorato, contended that transformational leadership, with its emphasis on relationships and organizational development, meets the ever-changing demands of educational leadership. Onorato's research yielded confirmation that transformational leadership is frequently the desired leadership style of principals with 69% of the sample endorsing transformational leadership as their leadership style.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership was also a component of Burn's work (1978). Burns recognized that much leadership was a result of transactions between leaders and their followers. Transactional leadership is largely dependent upon contingency reward, such as being promoted for meeting job expectations, and is less concerned with personal relationships and motivating individuals to go beyond everyday expectations (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012). Basically, transactional leadership is a give and take between leader and follower.

Management by exception is also a component of transactional leadership. This is an active avoidance style whereby leaders are largely hands-off and intercede to highlight problems, issues, and short-comings (Avolio & Bass, 2004).   Avolio and Bass (2004) asserted that

transactional leadership compliments transformational leadership as appropriate to needs and tasks within organizations.

Laissez-faire Leadership

Rounding out the scope of leadership style constructs being used for this research is passive avoidant leadership, often referred to as laissez-faire leadership. Laissez-faire leadership, as described by Avolio and Bass (2004), is the lack of presence by a leader. When that leader is present, the leader avoids making decisions or confronting issues or urgent questions. Laissez-faire leaders do not insert themselves into the evolving needs of the organization nor attempt to discover problems to be remedied. Instead, they take a largely hands-off approach until issues arise; then their process tends toward focusing on the negative aspects of the organization and/or individuals.

Although each leadership style has its own benefits and drawbacks, each has its place along the leadership continuum. Accordingly, effective leadership looks different and means many things to differing organizations. Ultimately, it comes down to leadership that produces the desired outcomes of the organization. In terms of educational leadership, Leithwood and Sun (2012) proclaimed, "TSL [transformational school leadership] is especially strongly related to perception of leaders' effectiveness," (p. 404). Couching the discussion of humor and leadership in the three leadership styles of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire serves the greater contextual purpose of taking an element—humor—considered a skill, trait, or embedded disposition, and examining it as relational to effective leadership (Gordon & Yukl, 2004; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010; Wanzer, Frymier, & Irwin, 2010).

Humor and Leadership

Leadership has been studied in terms of traits, skills, and behaviors, and the combined implementation of those within an organizational structure. In many non-education arenas, an element of leadership being studied and found to be correlated with effective leadership is humor (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). As Hughes (2009) succinctly put it, "leader's humor style will interact with leadership to elicit these effects [defined outcomes]," (p. 417).

Studies in the military, business, and medical communities have found the use of humor to be associated with perceived leadership effectiveness in areas that also impact educators, such as improving cohesiveness of teams, facilitating cooperation among constituency groups, lessening hierarchal barriers, increasing mental functioning (creativity and flexibility), and mitigating both personal and professional stressors (Banas et al., 2011; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Hughes, 2009; Klein, 2012; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Mora-Ripoll, 2010; Priest & Swain, 2002). However, studies that explore the relationship between educational leadership and humor are scant.

Holmes and Marra (2006) contended that, "The ability to use humor effectively has been identified…as an important aspect of 'good' leadership," (p. 119). Klein (2012) endorsed this in his case study, notably in the discussion of Southwest Airlines (SWA). Of their core beliefs, one-third of the values espoused and nurtured at SWA is having fun while working to high standards and not taking one's self too seriously or as being above any other. Klein furthered this, explaining the expectation at SWA is that all personnel, most especially shift and team leaders, model these beliefs in every interaction with their peers and the customer. Priest and Swain's work with the United States military in 2002 had also found this. In their study, participants rated "good" leaders high for the following areas related to humor: displaying a

quick wit, joking about problems, using humor to maintain group morale, utilizing a good natured humor that puts others at ease, and habitually using humor.

When it comes to quick wit and using irony, intelligence and alertness are inescapable leadership traits. The adept leader uses these moments to convey multiple messages dependent upon context (Banas et al., 2011; Lynch, 2002). The leader's intent, as well as the followers assessment of the context in which the humor is provided, develops the message. Inflexible mandates can be eased, tensions diffused, intense emotional responses neutralized, and cultural norms reinforced when an effective leader reacts nimbly to highlight what is going on for the individual or group (Feagai, 2011; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012) . In essence, effective leaders skillfully use their abilities appropriately and purposefully inject humor, thereby evoking the response from followers that will meet the needs of the situation (Holmes & Marra, 2006; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012).

Veselka et al. (2010) asserted that the use of affiliative and self-enhancing humor provides individuals with a greater endurance to adversity and higher levels of emotional control. Effective leaders are those who manage adversity regularly, shielding followers from having to deal with situations irrelevant to them individually, as well as those who can skillfully manage their own emotions regardless of their immediate feelings. Thus, resiliency of a leader is highly valued. Veselka et al. (2010) aptly described endurance of an effective leader stating:

> It may be the case that mentally tough individuals make conscious use of both affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles, which allow them to gain and maintain social support – a buffer between psychological and physiological distress itself – and to view the world in an optimistic way. (p. 447)

Veslka et al's statement on affiliative and self-enhancing humor is well supported in multiple fields as providing benefits for leaders and their followers (Feagai, 2011; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

The anchor for humor as a means of interacting meaningfully with school personnel and the cornerstone for its connectedness to leadership comes from Lynch's merging of sociological and psychological research into the use of humor developed through a communication context of research. Lynch (2002) contended that all humor is fundamentally a communication activity. Lynch takes the psychologically motivated theories of superiority, relief, and incongruity, and the sociological theories of identification and differentiation and control and resistance, and reframes them as a communication context quite relevant to that of the school leader.

As is evident in other fields, humor serves multitudes of purposes in educational leadership, all of which directly impact the leader/follower relationship. Vecchio, Justin, and Pearce (2009) provided an educational perspective. Using 179 principal/teacher pairs (principal randomly paired with respondents from his/her school), Vecchio et al. found that higher levels of leader humor had a positive impact on follower behavior, particularly when correlated with contingent reward. The study further concluded that humor alone does not fully influence follower outcomes, yet maintained that there was an interaction between humor and other leadership qualities. As part of the discussion, Vecchio et al. asserted that the study "offers insights for understanding the dynamics of humor in the context of an educational system" (p. 186).

Chapter Summary

Though humor intertwines with theories and constructs of leadership, it has yet to solidify its role in educational leadership. Melton, Tysinger, Mallory, and Green (2010) presented a validation study of the *School Leadership Dispositions Inventory©*, a measurement tool meant to capture the dispositions of leaders in context. In their research, Melton et al. described the difficulty of defining dispositions despite dispositions being a component of educational leadership certification standards throughout the country. Citing results attained by the Charlotte Advocates for Education (2004), Melton et al. asserted that principals who attained positive school climates were, "described as individuals who exhibited a belief in developing meaningful relationships with others, and they often demonstrated a sense of humor" (p. 6). Though not stated as such, one may infer that humor has the potential to be an element of dispositions essential to positive outcomes in educational leadership, and thus this study aims to do just that.

Studies in the military, business, and medical communities have found the use of humor to be associated with perceived leadership effectiveness in areas that impact educators as well: cohesiveness of teams, cooperation among constituency groups, lessening hierarchal barriers, increasing mental functioning (creativity and flexibility), and mitigating both personal and professional stressors (Banas, et al., 2011; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Hughes, 2009; Klein, 2012; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Mora-Ripoll, 2012; Priest & Swain, 2002). However, studies that explore the relationship between educational leadership and humor are minimal, and studies examining the relationship between leadership style, humor, and leadership effectiveness are non-existent to date.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed overview of how the study was conducted. The chapter includes a discussion of the research design, population and sample, data collection and analysis procedures, and how findings are presented.

Research Design

To answer the research questions posed, a quantitative approach was used to gather data on the independent variables of humor style and leadership style, and the dependent variable, perceived effectiveness of P-12 principals. The choice for a quantitative approach was made based on the desire to ascertain possible relationships specific to subtypes of humor and leadership styles and principals' effectiveness as perceived by teachers. Moreover, results obtained through a quantitative approach are better able to be generalized to the study's population, thereby allowing for inferences to be made (Creswell, 2013; Cronk, 2012). A qualitative approach was rejected for several reasons: 1) the researcher's desire in determining if relationships exist among and between specifically identified independent variables and dependent variable, and 2) the lack of availability of current instruments for conducting a qualitative study. There was, however, an opportunity for participants to expound on their thoughts regarding the topic through an open-ended response at the end of the survey.

This study sought to explore the relationships between P-12 principals' humor and leadership styles with their effectiveness as perceived by their teachers. Correlation research is intended to measure relationship strength, positive or negative, between ascribed variables (Appalachian State University, 2014). It is deliberate in nature given that selected variables are believed to have some relationship and the researcher sought to understand and ratify those

relationships. In this study there are two independent variables (humor style and leadership style) and one dependent variable (perceived effectiveness) whose relationship between and among each other are being investigated. Accordingly, a correlational research design was employed.

In contrast, a causal-comparative design was considered and subsequently rejected. Considering that causal-comparative design 1) compares two groups after implementing or withholding one variable and, 2) attempts to find a cause and effect association, it was clear this particular design would not suffice in answering the research questions of the study (Appalachian State University, 2014; Cronk, 2012). Causal-comparative design was rejected inasmuch as this research is not intended to imply a causal nature of the independent variables (humor style and leadership style) on the dependent variable (perceived leader effectiveness).

Population and Sample

The population this research study is investigating is P-12 public school educators in one geographic area of one southeastern state. According to that State's Department of Education's website (2013; most recent statistics available), there are more than 175 public school districts in the state, employing close to 115,000 teachers. The state divides the school districts into Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESA), each serving multiple districts through resources, professional development, and other service as needed. In general, the state attempted to design RESAs to be representative of the state as a whole in terms of socio-economics, rural, developing, pseudo-urban, and urban schools, and local and county boards of education (T. D. Melton, personal communication, July 4, 2014).

There are more than 15 RESAs in the state; the intended sample for the study consisted of certified teachers employed by school districts in one RESA. For the purpose of this study, this

RESA is referred to as SERESA (a pseudonym). The districts in the selected RESA employ

approximately 9,000 certified staff (SERESA, personal communication, July 7, 2014).

The sample is a convenience sample as they are from one specific RESA and accessible

to the researcher. Dependent upon the response rate, the study may be generalizable to the

RESA and potentially the state as whole. With a population size of approximately 9,000, in

order to achieve a confidence level of 95% with a confidence interval of 5, a minimum of 368

participants is needed. If 620 participate, the confidence level can be raised to 99%. Ideally, the

researcher sought to have 954 respondents; this would provide for a 95% confidence level with a

confidence interval of 3 (www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm).

In garnering participation from superintendents of the entire SERESA for this study,

seven district superintendents agreed to serve as gatekeepers and allowed access to their teachers

through district email. Within those seven districts there are currently 2,120 certified teachers

(district personnel, personal communication, September 18, 2014), which would require a

minimum of 325 participants (www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm) to achieve a confidence level

of 95%. As the original pool of potential participants was significantly reduced (from 9,00 to

2,120), the desired minimum number of participants was not achieved.

Instrumentation

In Part A, after participants completed one demographic question (grade(s) currently

teaching), the researcher posed one Likert scale question on the overall effectiveness of the

principal based on the rater's experience. Participants responded to, "Using the following scale,

please rate how effective your principal is," by selecting a numerical indicator as follows: 1-not

at all; 2- somewhat; 3-fairly; 4-generally; 5-mostly, and; 6-almost always/always. Additionally,

Part D provided one open-ended response question so that participants had an opportunity to expound on the topic as they saw fit.

Avolio and Bass's (2004) peer-rated Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was administered to participants to ascertain a leader's leadership style. Avolio and Bass developed the MLQ as a means of examining transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership styles (including Laissez-faire). Its intent was dual purpose: field/laboratory research and identification of candidates/employees for leadership programs and/or opportunities. It is available as self-rated and peer-rated formats; the peer-rated format will be used in this study as teachers were responding to the leadership styles of their principals. Previously a 63-item survey, the MLQ is now 45 items and referred to as the MLQ Form 5x-Short (MLQ 5X). Reliabilities for each factor assessed by the instrument ranged from .63 to .92 initially and .64 to .92 in replication (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In this research study, this survey is referred to as Part B at the data collection website.

Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir (2003) designed the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) to assess and measure four styles of humor—affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. Originally designed as a self-rating tool, it was expanded to include a peer-rater format, which was used for this study. The HSQ–Peer Rated is a 32-item survey by which participants rated their principals. Each domain is comprised of 8 items, some being reverse-scored.

In developing the peer-rated format, construct validity was tested and the correlations found between self-ratings and peer-ratings deemed valid (Martin et al, 2003). The original form (self-rated scales) provides additional support for reliability and validity of the HSQ. Cronbach's

Alphas for item reliability for each style ranges from .82 to .88, while Cronbach's Alpha for the instrument range between .71 to .81 with test-retest ranging from .80 to .85 ($p<.01$).

Permission from the corresponding author, Rod Martin, to use and slightly modify the HSQ self-rating and/or peer-rating scales for the purpose of this study was obtained. The peer-rated version of Martin et al.'s Humor Styles Questionnaire (2003) was slightly modified (with permission) in wording to be applicable to the educational field (in other words, in place of words such as "boyfriend/girlfriend" the word "principal" was used) and will be used by participants to identify a leader's humor style. This portion of the research study will be referred to as Part C at the survey site.

Data Collection Procedures

The sample was accessed through SERESA district superintendents who agreed to allow their respective districts to participate and who served as gatekeepers for this research study. Each superintendent received an email to forward to their certified teaching staff. The email included a brief summary of the study, the complete anonymity of the study, the link to the data collection site, and a request to participate during non-instructional time. The email also clearly stated that no one, including the superintendents, will have access to individual responses or participation rates. Those choosing to participate accessed the study surveys via the embedded link. Once at the site, all required information was provided, including a statement about implied consent by participating in the survey and a check box verification of selection criteria by asking the participant to confirm that s/he meets the following criteria: 1) was a certified teacher currently teaching; 2) has taught a minimum of one year; and 3) affirm s/he teaches in one of the districts included in the SERESA (districts were listed).

Those choosing to respond were directed to an internet-based research/data collection tool to digitally participate in the research. By using this venue, data collection will be more accurate and efficient, and anonymity will be preserved as there was no direct contact with the researcher nor was the researcher able to associate participants from any one set of responses. Once at the site, participants accessed a cover page explaining the nature of the study, including anonymity. Passive consent was given if the individual chose to enter the survey. Participants were then taken to a page for verification of selection criteria. The Qualtrics ™ system used embedded logic to move participants to the correct section of the survey based on responses. Those answering "no" to passive consent or do not meet selection criteria were diverted to a "thank you" page and exited from the survey. Those responding "yes," were routed to the survey instrument itself.

Once participants moved from the cover page, a cover letter with directions was presented and linked the participant to parts A through D of the study. Part A consisted of one demographic question regarding the grade(s) the participant currently teaches. This demographic was selected for collection as grade level taught may have a relationship(s) that can be studied in future research. The second component to Part A was a six scale Likert-rating of the effectiveness of the participant's principal. In addition, Part A restated that superintendents will not have access to any information collected or who participated in the study. Parts B and C contained the MLQ 5X leadership style survey and the modified HSQ humor style survey respectively. Part D consisted of one open-ended question inviting participants to comment on principal leadership effectiveness, humor style, and/or leadership style further should they elect to do so.

Once emails were forwarded to districts' certified teachers via the district superintendents, a 10-day data collection period was begun. After the 10-day response time, a suitable response rate had not been achieved, and superintendents were asked to send a reminder to teachers asking if they have not responded, to please do so. In an additional attempt to solicit more participation, social media was used to remind those in the seven participating districts that the survey was still open and that they could access it through the invitation to participate found in their county email. At the close of the response window, information was downloaded from the data collection site and stored on an external hard drive. This hard drive has been locked with other research documents and not be accessible to anyone other than the researcher.

Data Analysis

In preparing data for analysis, all data collected via Qualtrics™ was downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet and saved in raw form. Once saved, the data was scrutinized for incomplete surveys, which were then eliminated from the sample. Any items needing to be reverse-scored were, and the data set saved as the working sample set. As there are several different composite scores required in order conduct the statistical analysis, those composites were calculated. Composite scores were required in the following areas: transformation leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, and self-defeating humor. Though not a composite score, a value was ascertained for bands of effectiveness as well.

In order to calculate each composite score, the questionnaire responses comprising each composite were calculated per the instruments instructions and given a separate column within the data collection spreadsheet. Hence, the raw data was converted to provide two composite areas, a leadership style composite (transformational, transactional and laissez-faire) and a

humor style composite (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating). These composite scores were used in both descriptive and inferential statistics. Once complete, the data spreadsheet was then uploaded for analysis using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21.

Descriptive statistics provided include the number (n) of participants, n for each composite leadership style and n for each composite humor style, as well as the n for each band of effectiveness attained from the survey. As grade level taught was the demographic data collected, n was provided for participation at each grade level individually and also in grade level bands commensurate with the most common grade groups of SERESA schools (PK-5, 6-8, and 9-12).

As this study sought to determine relationships between variables, a correlation design was used. Consequently, a non-parametric Spearman correlation coefficient was used to determine strength of relationships between each independent variable (humor style and leadership style) with the dependent variable (perceived effectiveness of the principal). The Spearman correlation coefficient is able to be used with the ordinal data obtained via the survey. Pearson's correlation coefficient had to be rejected as the data obtained was not normally distributed, thereby calling for the use of Spearman's Rho (Cronk, 2012).

Since the researcher wished to establish if there are relationships between the independent variables and dependent variable, a non-parametric design is best suited (Cronk, 2012; D. Tysinger, personal communication, June 20, 2014). Spearman's Rho provided a measure of strength of relationship, positive or negative, between the variables, thus providing the research literature new information as to relationships of humor, leadership style and perceptions of effectiveness.

Presentation of Findings

Findings are presented by research hypothesis using narratives supported by tables and figures as applicable. For the open-ended questions, a frequency table has been used to highlight the most frequent categories of responses.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In delving into the potential relationship between humor, leadership style, and effective leadership in the P-12 setting, particularly the leadership of the school principal, the researcher focused her investigation on assessing the variables through the eyes of teachers. As such, participating teachers answered survey questions on their principals from the previous school year.

This chapter provides the results of the study. Included herein are: response rate, basic demographics, and sample descriptive statistics. Following general descriptive statistics, data analysis of results is presented for each research question/hypothesis. A summary of all results is provided at the conclusion of the chapter. Both narrative and graphic forms are used to aid the reader to better understand the findings.

Research Question

This study sought to determine if relationships existed between and among the leadership style, humor style and perceived effectiveness of principals as assessed by teachers. Questions driving the study are:

1. Does a relationship exist between principal's humor styles and perceived school leadership effectiveness?

2. Does a relationship exist between principal's leadership styles and perceived school leadership effectiveness?

3. Does a relationship exist between principal's leadership style and principal's humor style?

Reframing the research questions as hypothesis, the study sought to prove or disprove the following null hypotheses:

H_01: No relationship exists between principal's humor style and perceived school leadership effectiveness.

H_02: No relationship exists between principal's leadership style and perceived school leadership effectiveness.

H_03: No relationship exists between principal's school leadership style and principal's humor style.

Respondents

The survey instrument was initially made available for a ten-day period in mid-September. The initial duration did not garner as many participants as desired; superintendents were asked to send a reminder email to their teachers and the survey window was extended by four days. Social media outlets were also used to remind those in the seven SERESA districts participating of the opportunity to participate by accessing the survey link in their district email.

Based on the population of the full SERESA (9,000+/-), the researcher originally sought a response rate of close to 368. As 7 of the 15 districts within SERESA agreed to participate, the population being invited to participate was reduced to 2,120, which called for a response rate of 325 (www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm). Upon the close of the survey, 213 potential participants accessed the survey site, which represented 66% of the adjusted number (n=325) of participants. Of those who did respond, 29 did not meet the participation criteria and were exited from the online survey, leaving 184 participants. Of those, 9 were excluded from the sample as

they did not complete the all parts of the survey, leaving the valid sample at 77% of original 213

potential participants (N=164).

Demographic information collected was grade level(s) taught by participant in the current

school year. Teachers were given the opportunity to select more than one grade, as many

teachers, particularly at the secondary level, teach more than one grade. This information is

provided in Table 1. As participants were able to select more than one option, the total number

of participants per grade exceeds the actual number of participants (N = 164).

Table 1

Respondents by Individual Grade Level(s)

Grade Level(s) Taught	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Number of Respondents	19	29	32	34	34	29	34	13	17	15	31	39	38	21

Note: Grade levels taught by teacher (n=385) exceeds participant rate (N=164) as teachers were able to select one or more grades based on their current teaching schedule.

When the grade levels taught per individual were grouped categorically into elementary

school (P-5), middle school (6-8), and high school (9-12), there were six participants that

reported currently teaching in more than one of the defined grade level bands. The grade level

breakout is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Respondents by Grade Level Bands

Grade Level Band	Elementary School (P-5)	Middle School (6-8)	High School (9-12)	More than one band (P-12)
Number of Respondents (N=164)	96 (58.5%)	20 (12.2%)	42 (25.6%)	6 (3.7%)

Data Analysis

Effectiveness of the principal was gauged on the teacher's perception of effectiveness on

a scale of 1-6, with 1 representing very ineffective; 2, ineffective; 3, somewhat ineffective; 4

somewhat effective; 5, effective; and 6, very effective. Of the 164 responses, participants

overwhelmingly rated their previous year's principal as effective or very effective (n=126;

76.8%). Conversely, very few rated the principal as ineffective or very ineffective (n=10; 6.1%).

In the more neutral territory of somewhat ineffective (n=2; 1.2%) and somewhat effective (n=26;

15.9%), the response rate was skewed toward effectiveness at some level. Table 3 provides this

information. If the results were to be split into simply two categories, ineffective (ratings 1-3)

and effective (ratings 4-6), the overriding results indicate that 92.7% of participants believed

their last year's principal was effective (n=152).

Table 3

Perceived Level of Effectiveness of Principal

Perceived level of Effectiveness	Very ineffective	Ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very Effective
Rater's score	1	2	3	4	5	6
Number of Principals (N=164)	8 (4.9%)	2 (1.2%)	2 (1.2%)	26 (15.9%)	65 (39.6%)	61 (37.2%)

Humor styles, as assessed through the survey, are also comprised of multiple items to

attain a composite score. In this case, four styles were considered with the highest ranking being

the most common mode of humor for the rated principal; as in leadership styles, humor style is

not static. These styles—affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating—will be

referred to as AF, SE, AG, and SD respectively. The number of principals for each humor style

is reported in Table 4. Martin et al.'s (2003) Humor Styles Questionnaire was used to assess

each humor style.

Table 4

Predominant Humor Style of Principals

Humor Style	Affiliative	Self-Enhancing	Aggressive	Self-Defeating	Combination
Number of Principals	80 (48.8%)	64 (39.0%)	8 (4.9%)	4 (2.4%)	8 (1 SE/SD; 7 AF/SE) 4.9% (0.6%; 4.3%)

(N=164)

Two humor styles are generally viewed as positive humor styles—affiliative and self-

enhancing. Affiliative humor style is typically benevolent and intended to develop rapport or

enhance existing relationships between leader and follower. Survey items (Martin et al., 2003)

related to AF included phrases such as, "naturally humorous" and "tell[s] funny stories about

him/herself". Study participants rated 48.8% (n=80) of their principals as having this style of

humor. Self-enhancing humor style takes a humorous perspective on situations in order to help

both leader and follower manage their emotions. Items related to SE included phrases such as,

"can usually cheer him/herself up" and "amused by absurdities of life". Respondents rated 39%

(n=64) of principals as having this type of humor style. 4.3% of the principals (n=7) were rated

as equally AF and SE in humor styles; this is not surprising given that the two have similar

elements and are generally perceived as positive. Taken collectively, 87.8% (n=144) of

principals were rated as having humor styles considered to be generally positive.

Aggressive and self-defeating humor styles are generally perceived to be negative humor

styles. Aggressive humor style is defined as a humor style often used to manage people and

situations to the benefit of the leader. Survey items (Martin et al., 2003) related to AG included

phrases such as, "offended or hurt by my principal's sense of humor" and "uses humor or teasing to put [someone] down". Of the principals rated by participants, 4.9% (n=8) were found to be perceived as aggressive in their humor style. Self-defeating humor style is when the leader uses humor at the expense of self in order to amuse others. 2.4% (n=4) were categorized as self-defeating. Phrases associated with this style of humor on the survey include those such as, "let's people laugh or make fun at his/her expense more than they should" and "the one that other people make fun of".

Of note is that one principal (0.6%) was rated as being SE/SD; this is not entirely surprising. Though generally considered to be a negative humor style, Martin et al. (2003) pointed out that some self-deprecating humor can be used to enhance cohesiveness or decrease distance in a hierarchy. In that respect, it is possible to see how a principal could be rated as SE/SD.

Leadership styles, as assessed through the survey, are comprised of multiple items leading to a composite score. These composites—transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership—are assigned to leaders based on the highest score in one area. Though one composite score is being assigned to leaders for the purpose of this study, it should be noted that leadership is dynamic; therefore, it operates on a continuum. The number of leaders rated as transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire, henceforth referred to as TF, TA, and LF respectively, is provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Predominant Leadership Style of Principals

Leadership Style	Transformational (TF)	Transactional (TA)	Laissez-faire (LF)	TA/TF
Number of Principals	129 (78.7%)	19 (11.6%)	15 (9.1%)	1 (0.6%)
(N=164)				

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that seeks to motivate followers to achieve at high levels and emphasizes relationships used to gain collective effort (Avolio & Bass, 2004: Leithwood & Sun, 2012). TF was assessed by questions from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) such as, "helps me develop my strengths and goes beyond self-interest for the good of the group," (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Respondents rated 78.7% of principals (n=129) as operating predominantly from this leadership style.

Transactional leadership is a leadership style operates on a give and take relationship between leader and follower designed to achieve specific goals (Avolio & Bass, 2004: Leithwood & Sun, 2012). TA was assessed by questions from the MLQ-5X such as, "expresses satisfaction when I meet expectations, and keeps track of all mistakes," (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Respondents rated 11.7% of principals (n=19) as functioning primarily from the transactional leadership style.

Laissez-faire leadership is a passive leadership style whereby the leader has an absent, hands-off approach and operates mostly from a reactive standpoint. Respondents in the study identified 9.1% of principals (n=15) as LF in their approach. LF was assessed though survey items such as, "delays responding to urgent questions," (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

One (0.6%) principal's leadership style, as assessed through the survey instrument, was tied between TF and TA. As there was no interaction with those who participated in the study, there is no means of assessing further if TF or TA is greater in this principal.

In determining if relationships exist between the variables, Spearman correlation coefficient, Spearman's *rho*, was calculated for each pairing of variables. The use of Spearman correlation coefficient was warranted as this study sought to determine if relationships existed between variables: Spearman's *rho* provides the benefit of knowing if there is a negative or positive relationship as well. Significant correlations establish that there is a reliable relationship between the variables in a positive or negative direction (Cronk, 2012).

A Spearman *rho* correlation coefficient was calculated for each humor style and perceived effectiveness. A moderate positive correlation was found between perceived effectiveness and both affiliative humor style ($r(162) = .324$, $p < 0.01$) and self-enhancing humor style ($r(162) = .356$, $p < 0.01$). Conversely, a moderate negative correlation was found between perceived effectiveness and aggressive humor style ($r(162) = -.352$, $p < 0.01$). No relationship was established between perceived effectiveness and self-defeating humor style.

Among the humor styles themselves, a strong positive correlation was observed between affiliative humor style and self-enhancing humor style ($r(162) = .715$, $p < 0.01$). Moderate positive correlations were observed between affiliative humor style and self-defeating humor style ($r(162) = .316$, $p < .01$) and aggressive humor style and self-defeating humor style ($r(162) = .373$, $p < 0.01$). A weak correlation between self-enhancing and self-defeating humor styles ($r(162) = .252$, $p < .01$) was also observed (see Table 6).

Table 6

Spearman Correlation Coefficients for Perceived Effectiveness and Humor Styles

			Effective	AF	SE	AG	SD
Spearman's *rho*	Effective	Correlation Coefficient	1.000				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.				
		N	164				
	AF	Correlation Coefficient	.324[**]	1.000			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.			
		N	164	164			
	SE	Correlation Coefficient	.356[**]	.715[**]	1.000		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.		
		N	164	164	164		
	AG	Correlation Coefficient	-.352[**]	.044	-.019	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.576	.813	.	
		N	164	164	164	164	
	SD	Correlation Coefficient	-.041	.316[**]	.252[**]	.373[**]	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.605	.000	.001	.000	.
		N	164	164	164	164	164

Note: Effective = perceived effectiveness; AF = affiliative humor style; SE = self=enhancing humor style; AG = aggressive humor style; SD= self-defeating humor style
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The Spearman *rho* correlation coefficients were calculated for the relationship between perceived effectiveness and leadership style and are provided in Table 7. Significant correlations were observed between perceived effectiveness and all three leadership styles. A fairly weak, positive correlation was established for transactional leadership ($r(162) = .347$, $p < 0.01$). Moderate correlations were established for both laissez-faire and transformational leadership styles, negative and positive respectively. Perceived effectiveness and laissez-faire leadership style had a negative correlation ($r(162) = -.547$, $p < .01$) while transformational leadership correlated positively with perceived effectiveness ($r(162) = .648$, $p < 0.01$).

Among the leadership styles themselves, transactional and transformational leadership styles both correlated negatively with laissez-faire leadership style. A mild negative correlation was observed with transactional ($r(162) = -.303$, p < 0.01), while a moderate negative correlation was observed with transformational ($r(162) = -.636$, p < 0.01). Transactional and transformational leadership styles were observed to have a moderately strong positive correlation ($r(162) = .680$, p < 0.01).

Table 7

Spearman Correlation Coefficients for Perceived Effectiveness and Leadership Styles

			Effective	TA	LF	TF
	Effective	Correlation Coefficient	1.000			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.			
		N	164			
Spearman's *rho*	TA	Correlation Coefficient	.347**	1.000		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.		
		N	164	164		
	LF	Correlation Coefficient	-.547**	-.303**	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	
		N	164	164	164	
	TF	Correlation Coefficient	.648**	.680**	-.636**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	164	164	164	164

Note: Effective = perceived effectiveness; TA = transactional leadership style; LF = laissez-faire leadership style; TF = transformational leadership style
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed

In addition to correlations made between perceived effectiveness with leadership style and humor style, Spearman correlation coefficients were also obtained for the paired variables to leadership style and humor style with results contained in Table 8. In general, no significant correlations existed between any of the leadership styles and self-defeating humor; mild negative correlations were made between aggressive humor style and transactional and transformational

leadership, and; negative relationships were observed between laissez-faire leadership style and

affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles. Moderate positive relationships were observed

between aggressive humor style and laissez-faire leadership style (r(162) = .394, p < .001) as

was a moderate relationship observed between transactional leadership with affiliative humor

style (r(162) = .291, p < .001) and self-enhancing humor style (r(162) = .345, p < .001).

Moderate positive correlations were also established between transformational leadership style

and affiliative humor style (r(162) = .523, p < .001) and self-enhancing humor style (r(162) =

.581, p < .001).

Table 8

Spearman Correlation Coefficients for Leadership Style and Humor Style

			AF	SE	AG	SD
	TA	Correlation Coefficient	.291[**]	.345[**]	-.172[*]	.151
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.027	.053
		N	164	164	164	164
Spearman's rho	LF	Correlation Coefficient	-.239[**]	-.286[**]	.394[**]	.097
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.000	.217
		N	164	164	164	164
	TF	Correlation Coefficient	.523[**]	.581[**]	-.297[**]	.108
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.169
		N	164	164	164	164

Note: TA = transactional leadership style; LF = laissez-faire leadership style; TF = transformational leadership style;
AF = affiliative humor style; SE = self=enhancing humor style; AG = aggressive humor style; SD= self-defeating
humor style
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Participants were also given the opportunity to provide comments at the completion of

the survey. Table 9 provides the frequency of common themes found in the comments.

Table 9

Common Themes from Comments

Common Theme	Frequency
Positive impact on atmosphere/climate	13
Put others at ease with leader	12
Provided stress/tension relief	10
Aided in situation	7

Note: Many comments submitted (N=39) had more than one theme.

This study sought to determine if relationships existed between and among the leadership style, humor style and perceived effectiveness of principals as assessed by teachers. As such, a non-parametric Spearman correlation coefficient was used to determine strength of relationships between each independent variable (humor style and leadership style) with the dependent variable (perceived effectiveness of the principal). The data obtained using the Spearman correlation coefficient and presented in this chapter provides a foundation from which to explore relationships between the variables and will be expounded upon in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

Human beings love to laugh. We seek laughter in our everyday lives, including our work lives. In order to have laughter, we must have a sense of humor. Educators and educational leaders seek laughter in their days, especially in these times of increasing demands from stakeholders and increasing needs of students. To that end, those working in the educational field must possess a sense of humor. This study sought to determine if there are relationships between humor and aspects of educational leadership, namely the leadership provided by school principals.

Studying humor is not new. Plato and Aristotle observed the impact of humor on power structures (Bardon, 2005) and today's researchers seek to understand humor beyond function and in context (Westwood & Johnson, 2013). Various fields have taken on the task of studying and evaluating humor for its uses in order to categorize them into theories; however, three fields seem to hold the vast majority of the research: psychology, sociology, and communication. The psychology field developed widely accepted theories of humor—superiority theory, incongruity (cognitive) theory, and relief theory (Martin, 2007; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). The sociology field conceptualizes humor into three theories as well—relief theory, control/resistance theory, and identification/differentiation theory (Lynch, 2002; Robert & Wilbanks, 2012). And in the communication field, sense of humor is viewed as a component of personality and as inextricably tied to context (George, 2013; Lynch, 2002; Wanzer et al., 2005). In essence, communication is the umbrella under which the psychological and sociological theories operate.

As a result, across the social sciences, categorical styles of humor are recognized. Though overlap and some variance occurs, current research appears to agree on four primary humor styles—affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating (Hughes, 2009; Lynch, 2002, Veselka et al., 2010). These styles, ranging from largely positive to quite negative, are not mutually exclusive. Instead, people tend to have preferred styles of humor, ones they default to on a regular basis (Martin et al., 2003; Martin, 2007). This study sought to capture the preferred humor style of principals as viewed by their teachers and the impact it had on teachers' perceptions of the principal's effectiveness.

In order to study the principal's humor style and effectiveness, it was necessary to couch the study in solid leadership theory. Leadership theory has been studied for some time with conceptualizations evolving over the past century. Though many models and theories exist, there are three major leadership styles currently at the forefront of leadership theory—transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Stewart, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). The three leadership styles are considered to be a continuum and, similarly to humor style, indicate the style a leader tends to operate from most often.

Avolio and Bass (2004) described these leadership styles as such: transformational leadership is leadership that seeks to motivate individuals to greater achievements than they thought possible; transactional leadership is leadership that leverages contingency reward and a give and take nature between leaders and followers; lastly, laissez-faire leadership is an absent leadership style whereby the leader remains largely hands-off until an issue emerges.

When examining humor paired with leadership, far less research exists, particularly in the field of education. However, other fields have examined the role of humor in leadership. Studies in military, business, and the medical community have found the use of humor to be

associated with effective leadership indicators such as improved cohesiveness, cooperation, and mitigating stressors (Banas et al., 2011; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Mora-Ripoll, 2010). If other industries see a benefit in leadership coupled with humor, then it seems likely that education would benefit from this relationship of styles as well. This study may begin to fill that void in current educational leadership literature.

In order to study the relationships between humor style, leadership style, and perceived effectiveness of P-12 principals, a correlation study was designed. In using a correlation design, the researcher was able to look at relationships between and among humor styles and perceived effectiveness, leadership styles and perceived effectiveness, and humor style and leadership style. As there were well-established instruments available to categorize principals as having preferred humor styles and leadership styles, the study used a quantitative approach. In addition, the researcher opted to use a simple Likert scale question that allowed participants to assign a level of effectiveness of their principal. (Note: participants were instructed to rate their previous year's principal for this study due to the time of year the study took place.)

Analysis of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between humor style, leadership style, and higher levels of perceived school leadership effectiveness. As such, the study sought to prove or disprove the following guiding hypotheses:

$H_0 1$: No relationship exists between principal's humor style and perceived school leadership effectiveness.

$H_0 2$: No relationship exists between principal's leadership style and perceived school leadership effectiveness.

H_03: No relationship exists between principal's school leadership style and principal's

humor style.

Each hypothesis was used to guide the development of correlation matrices found in the tables

located in Chapter 4. These hypotheses are restatements of the study's guiding questions

previously discussed in chapter 1.

Humor Style and Leadership Effectiveness

H_01: No relationship exists between principal's humor style and perceived school

leadership effectiveness.

In regard to humor style and perceived effectiveness, H_01, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Moderate relationships were established using the Spearman correlation coefficient between

perceived effectiveness and three of the four humor styles. Moderate positive correlations

existed between perceived effectiveness and affiliative humor style ($r(162) = .324$, $p < .01$) as

well as between perceived effectiveness and self-enhancing humor style ($r(162) = .356$, $p < .01$).

A moderate negative correlation was observed between perceived effectiveness and aggressive

humor style ($r(162) = -.352$, $p < .01$).

Leadership Style and Leadership Effectiveness

H_02: No relationship exists between principal's leadership style and perceived school

leadership effectiveness.

As for leadership and perceived effectiveness, H_02, the null hypothesis is rejected.

In the case of leadership styles, all three had a moderate correlation to leadership effectiveness.

Transformational leadership style had a high moderate positive relationship ($r(162) = .648$, $p <$

$.01$) and transactional leadership style exhibited a mild moderate positive relationship ($r(162) =$

.347, p < .01). Observed as having a negative moderate relationship with effectiveness was

laissez-fair leadership style (r(162) = -.547, p < .01).
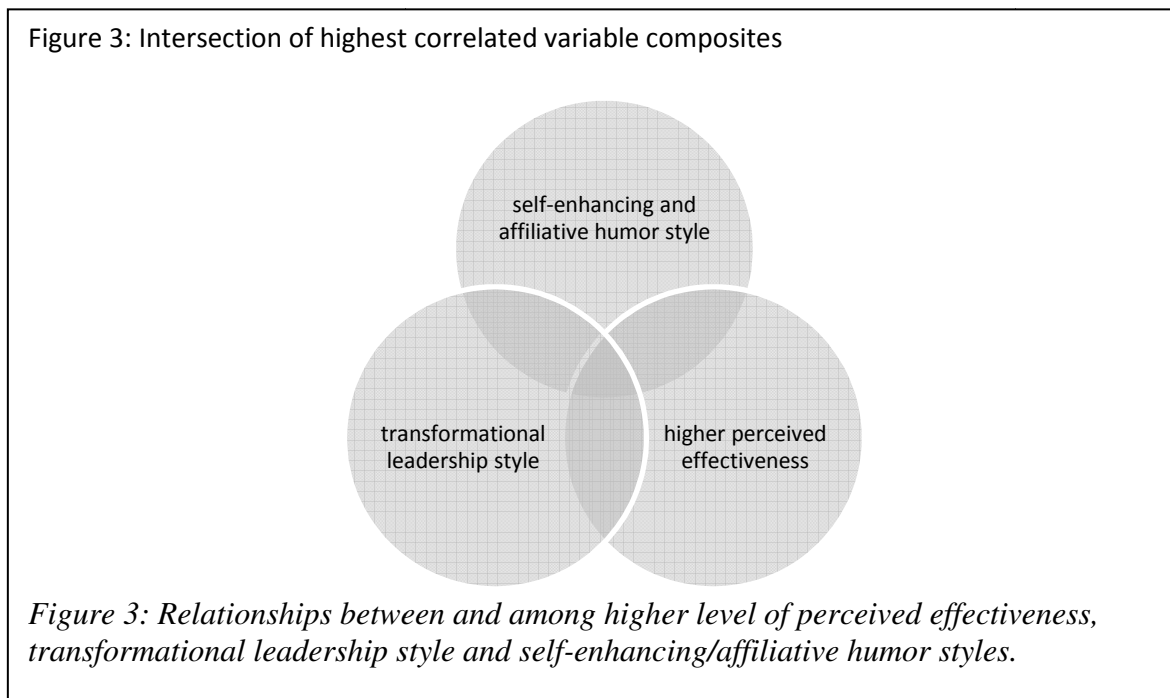
Leadership Style and Humor Style

H$_0$3: No relationship exists between principal's school leadership style and principal's

humor style.

The final hypothesis, H$_0$3, also had to be rejected as all humor styles, with the exception

of self-defeating humor style, had some correlation with leadership style. Weak negative

correlations were observed between aggressive humor style and both transformational (r(162) =

-297, p < .01) and transactional (r(162) = -.172, p < .05) leadership styles. Other weak negative

correlations observed were between affiliative (r(162) = -.239, p < .01) and self-effacing (r(162)

= -.286, p < .01) humor styles with laissez-faire leadership style.

Weak to moderate positive correlations were observed between transformational and

transactional leadership styles and affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles. In the case of

affiliative humor, a weak positive relationship was observed with transactional leadership (r(162)

= .291, p < .01) while a moderate positive relationship was observed with transformational

leadership (r(162) = .523, p < .01). With regard to self-enhancing humor, a mild moderate

positive correlation was established with transactional leadership (r(162) = .345, p < .01) and a

moderate positive correlation was established with transformational leadership (r(162) = .581,

p < .01).

Humor Style, Leadership Style and Leadership Effectiveness

Within these variable sets—humor style and effectiveness, leadership style and effectiveness, and leadership style and humor style—there appears a woven relationship. Using the highest positively correlated pairs, Figure 2 shows the relationship between and among said pairs.

Figure 3: Intersection of highest correlated variable composites

self-enhancing and affiliative humor style

transformational leadership style

higher perceived effectiveness

Figure 3: Relationships between and among higher level of perceived effectiveness, transformational leadership style and self-enhancing/affiliative humor styles.

In examining the intersections of these pairs, the highest positive relationships of perceived effectiveness overlap with both transformational leadership style and self-enhancing/affiliative humor styles, as a significant positive correlation was reported earlier between the affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles to transformational leadership style. Additionally, correlations reported in Chapter 4 also endorsed positive relationships between perceived effectiveness with transformational leadership style as well as perceived effectiveness with affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles.

When placing these relationships into a Venn diagram, the intersection of all three variables appears to endorse a relationship between the aforementioned humor styles, leadership style, and perceived level of effectiveness of the P-12 principal.

Discussion of Research Findings

When reviewing the results of this study, it is difficult to do so in response to the guiding research questions (see Chapter 1) as the concepts are inextricably woven together. Hence, the researcher is opting to use the overarching research question—is there a relationship between humor style, leadership style, and higher levels of perceived school leadership effectiveness—as this section's guide. Overall, the findings of the study appear to mimic the impact of humor and leadership in other fields.

Humor Style and Perceived Effectiveness

To begin with, this study found there to be moderate positive relationships between effectiveness and affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles. As both humor styles tend towards enhancing relationships, mitigating hierarchical structures, collegiality, and a generally happy outlook, the findings of other fields are supported. In the military, George (2013) noted that within the British Royal Navy, cheerfulness inspired confidence and capability in followers. In their study of the U.S. Army, Priest and Swain (2002) found that there was a strong relationship between leadership effectiveness and a warm humorous style. Klein (2012) found this type of humor to be advantageous in the business arena as well; Klein specifically describes Southwest Airlines. The airline company believes that although there is a power structure, the structure should not delineate roles in a finite manner, thus calling for fluidity in the hierarchy, an element of affiliative humor. Affiliative humor is also known to increase leader/follower trust (Robert &

Wilbanks, 2012) while self-enhancing humor carries with it the concept of taking one's self not

so seriously, both hallmarks of Southwest Airlines corporate beliefs (Klein, 2012).

Another correlation found was a mild moderate negative correlation between perceived

effectiveness and aggressive humor style. As observers of humor, Plato and Aristotle believed

the purpose of humor was aggression and was meant to reinforce the hierarchical structure of

their times. In current research, aggressive humor is highly context dependent, and relies heavily

on non-verbal communication when used (Lynch, 2002; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Banas, et al.,

2011). Used to put others down, embarrass, or to mock it is a negative force, however, good-

natured teasing has been noted as a positive. Martin (2007) observed mildly aggressive witty

remarks, by which one worker was trying to outdo the other, resulted in a competition of quips

that resulted in attaining the workers' goal. George (2013) and Priest and Swain (2013) both

noted that playful banter and respectful mocking between officers and enlisted military supported

their work environment.

The researcher wishes to draw attention to two interesting correlations observed: 1) the

high positive correlation of affiliative humor style to self-enhancing humor style ($r(162) = .715$,

$p < .01$); and, 2) weak to mild correlations of self-defeating humor to the other humor styles but

no significant correlation to perceived effectiveness. With regard to the former: humor styles (as

leadership styles) function as a continuum and often overlap one another, particularly when both

are generally thought of as similar (positive or negative), which is the case as affiliative and self-

enhancing humor styles a considered positive humor styles. As such, the high correlation

between the two is not surprising; rather is it confirmation of their interconnectedness when it

comes to the humor styles leaders operate within. With regard to the latter, self-defeating humor

is a double-edged sword. Martin (2007) and Hughes (2009) considered this humor style to be

capable of enhancing relationships and increasing the accessibility of a leader when s/he pokes

fun at his/herself thereby demonstrating their humanness. Conversely, Romero and Cruthirds

(2006) cautioned leaders with using this humor style often, citing that it may actually undermine

their leadership with subordinates and give pause to the superordinates.

Leadership Styles and Perceived Effectiveness

Important, though doubtfully surprising, correlations found were those related to laissez-

faire leadership style. Laissez-faire leadership was observed to have a moderate negative

correlation with perceived effectiveness ($r(162) = -.547$, $p = < .01$). This was the only negatively

correlated leadership style in this pairing of variables. Of interest was the negative relationships

laissez-faire had with both transactional ($r(162) = -.303$, $p = < .01$) and transformational ($r(162)$

$= -.636$, $p = < .01$). The relationships observed herein appear to reinforce the assertion that all

three leadership styles are on a continuum rather than entirely separate entities (Avolio & Bass,

2004). The correlation of transformational to transactional ($r(162) = .680$, $p = < .01$) within this

study itself further reinforces the notion of a leadership style continuum.

Based up the current literature, it is likely not surprising to read that transactional and

transformational leadership styles both hold a moderate positive correlation to perceived

effectiveness. In the case of transactional leadership style ($r(162) = .347$, $p = < .01$), the

correlation is a smaller moderate positive correlation than that of transactional leadership style

($r(162) = .648$, $p = < .01$). These relationships favor the concept of leadership styles being on a

continuum, particularly when looked at in conjunction with the correlation for laissez-faire in

this pairing of variables.

The overall results of the relationships between effectiveness and leadership style

conform to that which was found in recent literature. Kouzes and Posner (2008) championed

transformational leadership as that that supported shared values and goals and Avolio and Bass (2004) endorsed it as enabling followers to surpass that which they initially believe possible to attain greater outcomes. Onorato (2013) studied educational leaders and contended that transformational leadership is the desired style for principals who are now faced with being CEO and instructional leaders in one. One can infer that of the three styles, transformational appears to be the style yielding the greatest results.

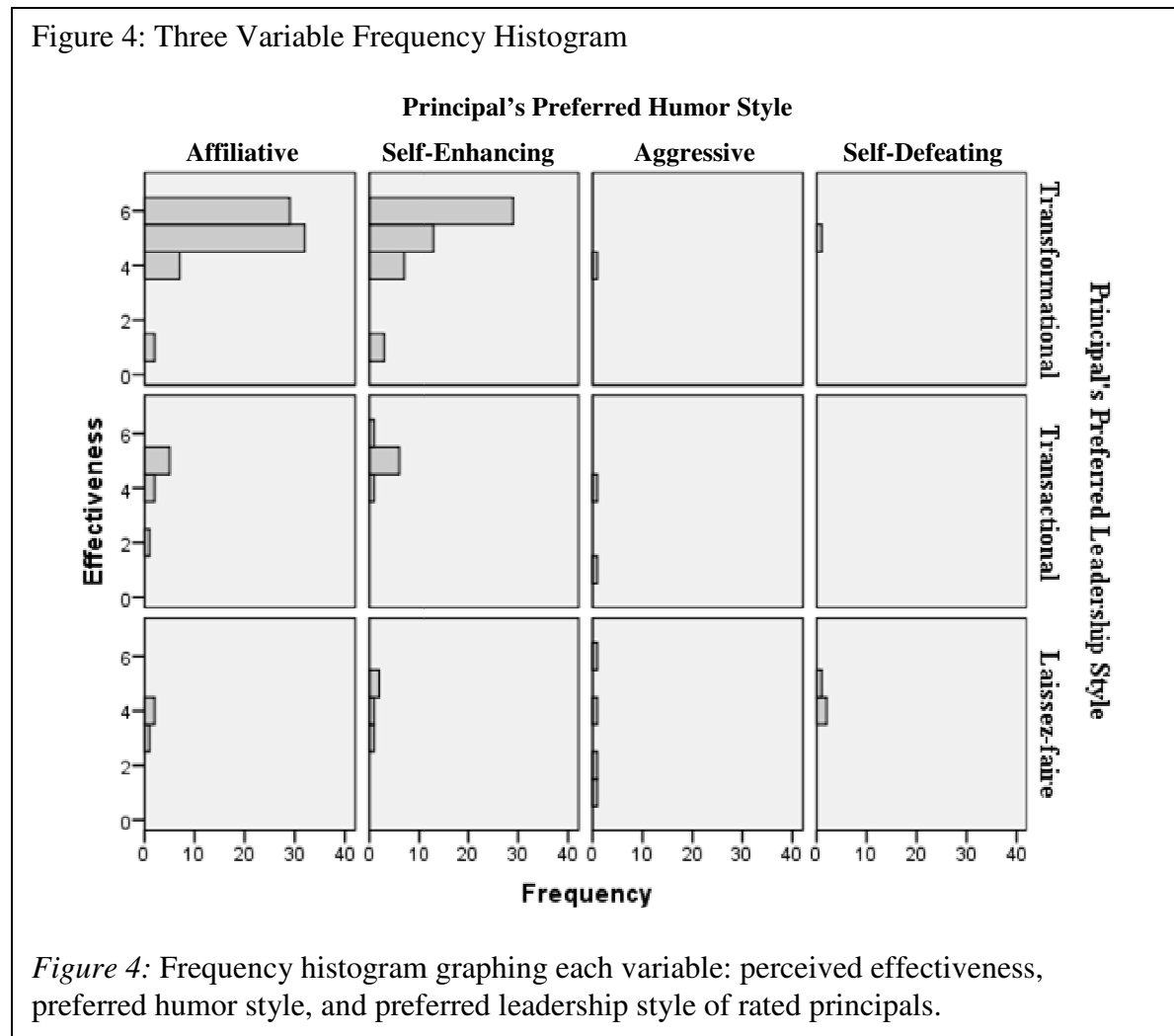**Leadership Style and Humor Style**

The correlations observed in this pairing of variables demonstrated moderate positive correlations of transformational leadership styles to affiliative ($r(162) = .523$, p = < .01) and self-enhancing ($r(162) = .581$, p = < .01) humor styles. These relationships appear to be supported by the research literature. Veslka et al. (2010) asserted that the use of affiliative and self-enhancing humor provides individuals with greater endurance to adversity. Holmes and Marra (2006) stated humor strengthens collegiality and working relationships, and also remarked that effectively using humor is a component to good leadership. These statements lend themselves to a positive relationship being established between transformational leadership and affiliative and self-enhancing humor.

<div align="center">**Conclusions**</div>

In this study, correlations were found to exist between humor and perceived effectiveness, leadership style and perceived effectiveness, and humor style and leadership style.

To further explore what appeared to be a woven relationship among perceived effectiveness, transformational leadership and affiliative/self-enhancing humor styles, frequency data was graphed using a histogram, which allows for the pictorial representation of all three in one graph. The results provide confirmation of the potential that there exists an intersection

where leadership style and humor style are maximized for the highest effectiveness of the

principal as leader, specifically when transformational leadership combines with affiliative

and/or self-enhancing humor styles.

Figure 4: Three Variable Frequency Histogram

Figure 4: Frequency histogram graphing each variable: perceived effectiveness, preferred humor style, and preferred leadership style of rated principals.

Caution is warranted with this study as the sample size (N=164) is not large enough to

generalize to the population of SERESA as a whole, thus limiting the study's generalizability to

the field of education outside of the sample.

Implications

Implications of this study for practitioners in the field of education are, first and foremost, understanding how and which humor styles and leadership styles of principals tend to most positively influence effectiveness in the P-12 educational setting. Second to that would be for those at the P-12 district level begin to examine if and how to incorporate humor styles and leadership styles into practice to elevate effectiveness of new hires, while also looking at how current principals' humor and leadership styles might be capitalized on to produce higher levels of perceived effectiveness.

Implications of this study also reach beyond the P-12 setting into higher education. Educational leadership preparations programs for P-12 may want to examine the relationship between humor styles and leadership styles, and determine if inclusion of humor styles is warranted in several instances: 1) as being a facet of leadership worthy of discussion as part of the preparation program; 2) acknowledge with students personal humor styles potential to influence personal leadership style, and; 3) augment understanding of leadership styles with knowledge of predominant humor styles.

Lastly, this study will contribute to the literature not only in the field of educational leadership but also to the field of humor as humor in education is an under-tapped area of research. There is potential for the study to also be included in the literature of leader development.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research include replication of this study at the end of a school year. Due to the timing of the study, the participants rated the previous year's principal. Consideration of time lapse effects should be held; replication of the study at the end of a school

year would eliminate that time lapse. As this study was of teachers' perceptions of their principals, it may be worthwhile to undertake the study from a top-down approach whereby principals' evaluators are the participants. This may not yield statistically significant results; however, it may provide individual principals and districts will valuable perception data.

Another avenue of research stemming from this study would be statistical analysis of the same variables by grade level bands as the needs of elementary, middle, and secondary school staff may differ in terms of leadership. Furthermore, there exists the possibility of research into the perception of effectiveness of a principal using teachers' personal humor styles and principals' humor styles.

Dissemination

The researcher plans to seek opportunities to present the data and conclusions herein at conferences aimed at P-12 educational leaders, both school and district level. In addition, summary findings of this study will be sent to the participating districts as well as an invitation for the district to undertake a similar process with their own principals. Lastly, there are several opportunities to release this study and its results to educational publications and journals, be it as condensed articles focusing on one aspect or in its entirety.

Concluding Thoughts

People want to laugh, and since we spend so much of our waking time in the workplace, being able to use humor and elicit laughter during working hours is not only logical, but most likely necessary for workers in education and in every field of work. Having leadership that enables positive forms of humor to be ever present in the environment is simply good sense.

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Appendix A

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021 P.O. Box 8005
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To: Laurie Mascolo
                    Dr. Teri Melton

cc: Charles E. Patterson
                    Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
                    Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
                    (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Approval Date: 9/5/14

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

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After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H15047** and titled **"Leading Through Laughter: Humor and Perceived Effectiveness of P-12 Principals,"** it appears that your research involves activities that do not require full approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to federal guidelines.

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):

B2   Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (I) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (II) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that your research, as submitted, is exempt from IRB approval. No further action or IRB oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. If you alter the project, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB and acquire a new determination of exemption. Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, this project does not require an expiration date.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer