

## **Privacy and Procedural Justice in Organizations**

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*This paper advances the argument that individual privacy is a procedural justice issue in organizations. A review of the organizational privacy literature supports this argument, and new directions for procedural justice research are suggested. In addition, it is argued that a focus on individual privacy highlights the political and paradoxical implications of procedural justice issues in organizations.*

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**KEY WORDS:** legitimacy; social control; fairness; distributive justice; procedural justice; social accounts.

After health care, privacy in the workplace may be the most important social issue in the 1990s. (Paul Saffo, Institute for the Future, quoted in Hoerr *et al.*, 1988)

Consider the following cases:

1. A truck driver for the Safeway Co., a retail grocery chain, has a small computer on the dashboard of the truck that keeps track of his speed, shifting, and the length of stops for a coffee break or lunch (Marx and Sherizen, 1987).
2. A manager is up for promotion. The company hires an investigator to conduct a "background" report. The investigator reports "evidence" of marijuana smoking by the manager years earlier and the information that the manager and his wife had seen a marriage counselor. The manager does not receive the promotion (Solomon, 1989).
3. A drugstore employee refuses to take a lie detector test during an investigation of product shortages. The employee is fired, even

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though ordering the test is a violation of state law (Hoerr *et al.*, 1988).

4. As part of a company-mandated drug testing policy, a woman is rushed into the ladies room and an employee of the drug-testing lab holds the stall door open and watches the woman lower her pants and urinate into a cup (Hoerr *et al.*, 1988).

The four incidents share two commonalities. First, all of the incidents actually happened, they are true. Second, each of the incidents involves an invasion of privacy.

The right to privacy—or the “right to be let alone” (Warren and Brandeis, 1890)—is a right valued and cherished by most citizens. One survey found that 75% of respondents believe individuals have a basic right to privacy (Harris and Westin, 1979). In addition, there is a growing general concern among people about invasions of their privacy. A 1990 Harris poll found 79% of respondents expressing concern about threats to their personal privacy, a figure up from 47% in 1977 (a study reported in Schwartz, 1991).

While privacy as a right is typically conceptualized in terms of individual–government or individual–society relations, concerns and issues about privacy are growing in a new context: the organization. There is evidence of a significant concern among employees in organizations about threats to their privacy (Hoerr *et al.*, 1988), suggesting that people have an internal psychological “boundary” demarcating their private and public spheres of life in organizations. For example, almost 75% of a U.S. sample of respondents (Harris and Westin, 1979) and 63% of a Canadian sample of respondents (Vidmar and Flaherty, 1985) believe organizations ask for more sensitive information than is necessary. When employees feel their privacy has been invaded, they are increasingly taking legal action. A survey by Shepard and Duston (reported in Hoerr *et al.*, 1988) found 97 jury verdicts against employers from 1985 to mid-1987, with an average damage award of \$316,000, while before 1980 employee lawsuits for invasion of privacy almost never reached a jury. Taken together, these data suggest that we may be witnessing a growing belief “that the rights we attach to citizenship in society—free expression, privacy, equality, and due process—ought to have their echo in the work place” (Westin, quoted in Hoerr *et al.*, 1988, p. 68).

Prior to the mid-1960’s, there was little, if any, research on organizational privacy. But seminal works on organizational privacy, such as Westin’s (1967) book, *Privacy and Freedom*, Guion’s (1967) *Annual Review of Psychology* chapter, and Schein’s (1977) challenge to personnel psychologists, generated greater interest on the part of researchers. That interest

resulted in a series of studies in the 1980s dealing with privacy issues primarily in the context of personnel selection, drug testing, and company policies on the disclosure of personal information (see Stone and Stone, 1990, for a comprehensive and excellent review of this literature).

The purpose of this paper is put forth by the argument that organizational privacy issues are also procedural justice issues. Specifically, I will draw on the extant research on organizational privacy to show how it can inform and broaden our current view of procedural justice, as well as suggesting new directions for justice research. I will argue that current procedural justice theory has much to offer in an analysis of organizational privacy, including the generation of new questions for empirical research. The analysis will also focus on responses to the invasion of privacy. Finally, I will argue that a focus on privacy will highlight the political and paradoxical aspects of justice issues in organizations.

## PRIVACY AND PROCEDURAL JUSTICE: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### Privacy: An Individual–Organization Tension

In her insightful and provocative analysis, Schein (1977) argues that the issue of privacy emerges because of a fundamental tension between organizational needs and individual rights. More specifically, organizations face increasing pressures to gather information in order to operate the organization effectively and individuals have a moral expectation or perceived right to decide what information about themselves should be disclosed and in what manner.

#### *Pressures on Organizations*

The pressures on organizations to gather information about their employees is great and growing. For example, managers need accurate and in-depth information to make decisions about employees on a variety of issues, including hiring, motivation, performance appraisal, disciplinary actions, conflict management, and termination. The need for such information is even greater today, as managers are under increasing pressure to monitor and improve productivity in a competitive, global marketplace (Culnan *et al.*, in press).

There are additional problems facing organizations that increase pressures for gathering more information. For example, managers have a grow-

ing concern about product security, employee theft, and drug use at work (Greenberg, 1990a), which are costly and increase the need for surveillance of employee activities. At the same time, managers are asked to “manage” the rising costs created by medical and health insurance costs, which often results in more in-depth screening of job applicants and monitoring of current employees.

Apart from these internal pressures, organizations are “bombarded” with requests from other organizations on present or past employees for reference checks, credit checks, and security checks. Such information is quite easily released to other organizations. For example, in a survey of Fortune 500 companies by David Linowes, former chairman of the U.S. Privacy Protection Committee, over three-quarters of the companies reported they provide personal information to an employee’s potential creditor without a subpoena, and almost 60% will give information to landlords (reported in Solomon, 1989).

### *Moral Expectations of Individuals*

Against the backdrop of these pressures on organizations to collect, store, and use greater amounts of information about their employees, employees expect their privacy to be protected (Stone and Stone, 1990). It is an expectation as simple and fundamental as that. This expectation of privacy is also consistent with the norms of society (Culnan *et al.*, in press).

### **Privacy and Procedural Justice: The Conceptual Linkage**

Privacy as a concept has a multifaceted meaning (see Stone and Stone, 1990, for a discussion). For the purposes of this analysis, privacy will be defined in terms of information control, a perspective dominant in the works of several organizational researchers (e.g., Stone and Stone, 1990; Westin, 1967). More specifically, “individuals have privacy when they are able to manage or control information about them and the subsequent impressions that others form about them” (Stone and Stone, 1990, p. 354).

Privacy becomes a procedural justice issue when people’s moral expectations about control over their personal information are violated, a view first articulated by Leventhal (1980) in his seminal theory of procedural justice. Leventhal identified privacy as a procedural justice issue in his analysis of the ethicality rule to judge procedural fairness. The ethicality rule dictates that “allocative procedures must be compatible with the fundamental moral and ethical values accepted by that individual” (p. 45). More specifically, Leventhal (1980) stated that “when applied to gathering

information about potential receivers, the ethicality rule may dictate that methods of observation that . . . invade privacy are unfair” (p. 46). Consistent with Leventhal’s speculation, Bies and Moag (1986) reported that job applicants found certain interviewer questions to be an invasion of privacy and procedurally unfair, regardless of whether they received a job offer.

Unfortunately, procedural justice research on privacy is nonexistent, Bies and Moag (1986) to the contrary. But fortunately, there is research on organizational privacy that carries implications for procedural justice theory and research. This research is reviewed below, followed by an analysis of implications for procedural justice theory.

### A Review of the Organizational Privacy Research

A review of the empirical research on privacy finds seven factors relevant to perceptions of procedural justice. These factors include (a) authorization of information disclosure, (b) advance notice of information gathering, (c) types of selection procedure used for information gathering, (d) relevancy of information used in decision making, (e) intrusiveness of the information-gathering procedure, (f) target of information disclosure, and (g) outcome of information disclosure. Each of these factors, and the empirical evidence, are discussed below.

#### *Authorization of Information Disclosure*

Control of information about one’s self is central to privacy in organizations (Stone and Stone, 1990). Thus, the degree to which one controls the access of others to personal information should directly impact the perceived invasion of privacy. One means of control is granting permission or authorization to others to access to personal information.

Empirical evidence supports this line of reasoning. In a laboratory experiment, Fusilier and Hoyer (1980) found that when individuals gave permission for disclosure of information from their “personnel file,” they were less likely to perceive an invasion of privacy than when no permission was given. In a vignette study of a job promotion decision with full-time employees, Tolchinsky *et al.* (1981) also found that individuals are less likely to perceive an invasion of privacy when permission is given rather than not given. In addition, Tolchinsky *et al.* (1981) found a two-way interaction between permission and location of disclosure (internal vs. external to the organization), which will be discussed in greater detail below.

### *Advance Notice of Information Gathering*

Providing advance notice prior to any decision or testing procedure should allow individuals time to make any changes in their personal behavior necessary to pass the test. As such, advance notice gives individuals a greater ability to control information about themselves, and thus should influence perceptions of invasion of privacy.

Empirical evidence supports this line of reasoning. In a vignette study with blue-collar employees of a manufacturing firm, Stone and Kotch (1989) found that attitudes toward drug testing are significantly less negative when employees are provided advance notice of drug-testing relative to the absence of such notice. Stone *et al.* (1989) also found that advance notice reduces the negativity of attitudes toward testing for illegal drug use.

### *Types of Selection Procedure for Information Gathering*

In any testing procedure, but particularly with that dealing with the detection of drug usage, there is always the issue of who must take the test and how that selection process occurs. In the case of drug testing, there are typically one of three selection procedures used: (a) all applicants are selected, (b) random selection, and (c) selection based upon reasonable suspicion of drug use (Stone and Bowden, 1989). The types of selection procedure used could result in a perceived invasion of privacy testing. For example, a random selection process fails to meet a "reasonable suspicion" criterion associated with due process, as does testing all individuals, thus creating an unwarranted access to personal information in the eyes of some individuals. Also, random testing allows individuals less control over personal information than testing all applicants, due to the uncertainty of whether one will be tested.

Two studies provide support for this line of reasoning. In a survey by Masters *et al.* (1988), only 30% of respondents agreed that random testing for drugs was acceptable, while almost three-quarters of the respondents found testing acceptable when there is reasonable suspicion of drug use. In a vignette study with employees of a chemical company, Stone and Bowden (1989) found that random testing of job applicants is perceived more negatively than either testing all applicants or limiting testing to only those suspected of drug use. However, once the applicant received the job, random testing was no longer perceived more negative than testing all applicants, and in fact, was perceived more positive than testing based on suspicion of drug use.

### *Relevancy of Information Used in Decision Making*

Organizations gather information about their employees for a variety of purposes (e.g., hiring, performance appraisal). Whether such information gathering is viewed as an invasion of privacy may depend on the relevancy of the information to given purpose of data collection (Stone and Stone, 1990). That is, information that appears unrelated or indirectly related to a decision may increase perceptions of invasion of privacy.

Several studies support this line of reasoning. In a study of subjects concerns about questions in a personality test, Simmons (1968) found that perceived invasion of privacy was greatest when the content of the questions was perceived least relevant to the stated purpose of the data collection (e.g., job application, medical examination). Rosenbaum (1973) found job applicants view requests for some types of information (e.g., management of one's finances, family background) as less relevant to the decision at hand, and thus a greater invasion of privacy, as compared to requests for other types of information (e.g., personal history, interests). Surveys of U.S. respondents (Harris and Westin, 1979) and Canadian respondents (Vidmar and Flaherty, 1985) report similar findings that requests for some types of information (e.g., financial/home ownership status) as less relevant to a hiring decision and thus perceived to be an invasion of privacy.

Research in field settings report similar findings. Tolchinsky *et al.* (1981) found subjects reported greater invasion of privacy when less relevant data (e.g., personality information) was used to make a promotion decision rather than more relevant performance data about the candidate. A survey of employees of five multinational companies by Woodman *et al.* (1982) reported that employees viewed relevancy of personal information for organizational decision making as central to perceptions of invasion of privacy. In particular, employee financial and medical information was viewed as irrelevant to internal organizational decision making.

### *Intrusiveness of Information-Gathering Procedure*

The view of privacy as information control is not just limited to the relevancy of information for a specific decision or whether the individual authorized the disclosure of information. In addition, as Schein (1977) argues, one must consider the psychological impact of information-gathering procedures on the individual. That is, if the procedure is too psychologically intrusive or invasive to the individual, such information gathering may be perceived as invasion of privacy.

Two studies support this line of reasoning. Stone *et al.* (1989) found individuals were more likely to accept a job offer if job applicants were not directly monitored when providing a urine sample for drug testing. In a survey of private and public sector employees by Le Roy (1990), over 75% of respondents reported acceptance of drug testing in the work place “*under controlled conditions where the individual’s privacy is protected*” (p. 167, emphasis added).

### *Target of Information Disclosure*

A key determinant of self-disclosure is the identity of the individual to whom one might disclose the information (Jourard, 1966). The disclosure of information to others who are strangers or outsiders, or who are antagonistic toward us, may be perceived as an invasion of privacy relative to disclosing the same information to those who know us or insiders, or those who share our interests. In other words, the target of information disclosure should influence perceptions of invasion of privacy.

Two studies support this line of reasoning. Woodman *et al.* (1982) found respondents were much more concerned about the disclosure of information to people outside of the organization relative to disclosure of the same information for the internal uses of the organization. Tolchinsky *et al.* (1981) found subjects reported greater invasion of privacy with external disclosure than with internal disclosure. In addition, they also found a two-way interaction between location or target of disclosure and permission. More specifically, the target of disclosure had no effect on perceptions of invasion of privacy when permission was granted for disclosure; but when no permission had been granted, external disclosure was perceived a greater invasion of privacy relative to internal disclosure.

### *Outcome of Information Disclosure*

The outcomes people receive may influence the extent to which they perceive an invasion of privacy as the result of information-gathering procedures (Stone and Stone, 1990). For example, if a job applicant provides very sensitive information to a recruiter, he or she would likely react very positively to a job offer and the invasion of privacy may be less troublesome. Conversely, if the job applicant provided the same sensitive information and received no job offer, we would expect a very negative reaction by the applicant. In other words, individuals do a “cost–benefit” analysis in assessing their outcomes as the result of providing sensitive information (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). From such an analysis, a positive net outcome



should be less likely to result in the perception of invasion of privacy than would a negative net outcome.

Empirical evidence supports this line of reasoning. Fusilier and Hoyer (1980) found that subjects who received a positive outcome (job offer) as a result of information disclosure perceived that disclosure as less of a perceived invasion of privacy relative to those who received a negative outcome (no job offer). Tolchinsky *et al.* (1981) also found that when individuals received favorable consequences (job promotion) there was less of a perceived invasion of privacy than when individuals received unfavorable consequences (no job promotion). Stone and Kotch (1989) found that blue-collar employees viewed drug testing more negatively when the consequences of detected drug use was the discharge of an employee (an unfavorable outcome) rather than referral to an employee assistance program (a more favorable outcome by comparison).

### **Implications for Procedural Justice Theory and Research**

The review of empirical studies on organizational privacy uncovers five variables that are consistent with current procedural justice theory, although with some new operationalizations. In addition, two new variables were identified, suggesting the need to elaborate our current views of procedural justice. An analysis of these variables and implications for future research are discussed below.

#### *Evidence Consistent with Current Views of Procedural Justice*

The studies on organizational privacy provide evidence of five variables that are consistent with current procedural justice theory. First, authorization of information disclosure is a form of decision control, a key dimension of procedural justice identified by Thibaut and Walker (1975). The authorization of information disclosure would be a relevant variable in studying the procedural fairness of many managerial decisions (e.g., hiring, promotion, job reference).

Second, the type of selection procedure used in drug testing—testing all applicants, random testing, or testing based on reasonable suspicion—provides evidence in support of Leventhal's (1980) consistency rule for judging procedural fairness. As suggested by Leventhal, testing all applicants or only those suspected of drug use (consistent application of standards) was viewed more favorably than random testing (inconsistent application). This focus on type of selection procedure is also reminiscent of the discussion of "microjustice and macrojustice" by Brickman *et al.*

(1981). This variable would be relevant to the study of a variety of organizational issues, including employee theft and product quality control.

Third, research on the relevancy of information used in decision making is quite consistent with Leventhal's (1980) accuracy rule in which "procedural fairness is violated when performance is evaluated on the basis of inappropriate information" (p. 41). Relevancy is also consistent with findings from justice research on performance appraisal (e.g., Greenberg, 1986) and the analysis of fairness in performance appraisal processes (Folger and Greenberg, 1985). The relevancy variable could explain, in part, the perceived fairness of promotion and tenure decisions, and disciplinary actions.

Fourth, research on the intrusiveness of the information gathering procedure is quite consistent with Leventhal's (1980) ethicality rule and findings on the fairness of stress interviews in the corporate recruitment context (Bies and Moag, 1986). These findings on the effects of intrusiveness also suggest the people want respect and protection of their dignity, which is an emerging theme in procedural justice theory (Folger and Bies, 1989; Tyler and Bies, 1990). The intrusiveness variable would be relevant for the study of the procedural fairness of different methods of performance appraisal (e.g., self-appraisal vs. direct observation vs. technological monitoring of performance).

Finally, the privacy research provides consistent evidence that outcomes influence perceptions of invasion of privacy. That is, as Katz and Tassone (1990) found in their review of public opinion surveys on privacy, people feel comfortable with divulging privacy sensitive information if they get tangible benefits. In other words, the "ends may justify the means." These privacy research findings are contrary to findings from some justice research (Greenberg, 1987b), but consistent with the research on the self-interest bias in justice perceptions (Greenberg, 1983). As such, this suggests the value of studying justice issues in the context of organizational privacy.

### *Elaborating the Current View of Procedural Justice*

Two new variables emerged from the review of privacy research. First, advance notice of information in gathering was key in perceptions of invasion of privacy. While advance notice is often associated with the notion of due process (Forkosch, 1958), it is not included in current procedural justice theory. Advance notice would be a key variable in analyzing the procedural fairness of performance appraisal, disciplinary actions, layoffs—indeed, any decision involving bad news (Bies, 1992).

Second, research on the target of information disclosure suggests that people not only have a boundary between themselves and the organization,

but one between their organization and other organizations. Such in-group/outgroup demarcation suggests a more macrodimension to the group-value model of procedural justice (Lind and Tyler, 1988). The disclosure of information across organizational boundaries would be relevant to an analysis of the fairness of job references, as well as perhaps the fairness of disclosing information across intraorganizational units in promotion and performance appraisal decisions.

### IMPLICATIONS OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE THEORY FOR PRIVACY RESEARCH

There is growing evidence that procedural justice theory is relevant for analyzing and understanding a variety of organizational processes (Greenberg, 1990b). In this section, procedural justice theory will be applied to an analysis of information disclosure and perceptions of invasion of privacy. In particular, the analysis will focus on three variables that are associated with procedural justice in organizations: voice procedure, accounts, and the publicity of the context for feedback giving.

#### *Voice Procedures*

Stimulated by the pioneering studies of Thibaut and Walker (1975), a primary focus of procedural justice research in organizational settings has been on comparing the fairness of different decision-making procedures (Greenberg, 1987a). Such a comparison is found in research on "voice" and "mute" procedures (Folger, 1977). Voice procedures are those that allow individuals an opportunity to provide inputs to a decision maker, and mute procedures are those that do not provide such an opportunity. One of the consistent findings of this research has been that individuals perceive voice procedures as fairer than mute procedures (see Greenberg, 1990b, and Greenberg and Folger, 1983, for reviews of these studies), even when an action or outcome is unfavorable to them (see Lind and Tyler, 1988, for a review of these studies).

The opportunity for voice, or its absence, may, in part, explain the nature of people's reactions to information disclosure, particularly in the context of work performance and productivity. For example, in an analysis of court cases alleging invasion of privacy from electronic monitoring of work behavior in the private sector, Susser (1988) concluded that the "concern for 'privacy invasion'—in fact refers to the fairness with which such systems are applied in the work place" (p. 593). Susser goes on to argue

that “since workers have commonly been excluded from the design, testing, utilization, and adjustment of monitoring techniques it should not be surprising that such systems can engender hostility and have adverse consequences for a company’s overall employee relations program” (p. 593). In other words, the presence or absence of voice may be a key procedural variable that can explain people’s reactions to information disclosure and concerns for privacy invasion. Relevant contexts to test this prediction not only include electronic monitoring of work behavior, but also in the design of systems for employee drug testing—indeed anywhere there is a technological monitoring of individuals in organizations.

### *Accounts*

People in organizations expect a decision maker to provide an account for a decision (Sitkin and Bies, in press—a), particularly when the outcome is unfavorable. An account is an explanation given by people to minimize the apparent severity of their actions (Scott and Lyman, 1968) and consistently shown to enhance procedural fairness judgments (see Tyler and Bies, 1990, for a review of these studies). One type of account is an *excuse* in which people acknowledge the severity of consequences caused by the action, but attempt to minimize their personal responsibility. Another type of account is a *justification* in which people admit their responsibility for an action, but attempt to minimize the negativity of consequences associated with the action—or argue that the action actually has positive consequences.

The use of excuses and justifications may, in part, explain the nature of people’s reactions to the disclosure of sensitive and private information about themselves. Take the case of excuse making. If a manager or decision-making authority discloses “private” information in a personnel-related situation, such as a job promotion, an individual may react very negatively, particularly if there was no promotion granted. Further, a worst-case reading of the decision maker’s motives and intentions may lead the individual to view the decision-making process as unfair (Bies, 1987). However, if the manager or organizational authority provides an excuse claiming mitigating circumstances for the invasion of privacy, it may reduce the perception of procedural unfairness, as suggested by several studies on the effects of excuses (Tyler and Bies, 1990).

Now take the case of a justification. This strategy may be used in requesting the disclosure of very sensitive or private information by individuals. Specifically, the justification would focus on the positive consequences for the individual that would follow from such information

disclosure. Given the outcome of information disclosure has a strong impact on privacy concerns, a justification may eliminate much, if not all, of the concern for privacy invasion.

### *Publicity of Context for Feedback Giving*

Central to the process of performance appraisal is giving feedback (Ilgen *et al.*, 1979). Bies and Moag (1986) argue that the communication of negative performance feedback in a public context will be viewed as procedurally unfair, an argument supported by some anecdotal evidence (e.g., "No Yelling," 1985). The disclosure of negative feedback in a public context may also be viewed as an invasion of privacy because it violates a norm of confidentiality between boss and subordinate.

Such an argument was recently put forth by Greenberg *et al.* (1991). Greenberg *et al.* suggest that publicly ridiculing an employee about substandard performance may be seen as an unfair invasion of the employee's privacy inasmuch as discussions of job performance are widely regarded to be a private matter between superior and subordinate. Employees who feel they may be humiliated by a superior are likely to decry those actions as unfair. Testing this proposition would extend both procedural justice and privacy literatures.

## RESPONSES TO THE INVASION OF PRIVACY

An analysis of privacy concerns raises the issue of how people respond to the perceived invasion of privacy. With few exceptions, which will be noted below, privacy researchers have not focused on either attitudinal or behavioral responses, choosing to focus on the invasion of privacy as the primary dependent variable. Procedural justice theory can suggest a variety of responses to perceived privacy invasion. In addition, privacy invasion may suggest new dependent variables to justice researchers.

In terms of attitudinal responses, justice theory would suggest that feelings of anger and resentment, and perceptions of injustice should result from privacy invasion. Similarly, feelings of cooperation, as well as citizenship behaviors and loyalty to the organization, may be influenced by privacy invasion, because trust in the fairness of decision-making procedures has eroded (Lind and Tyler, 1988).

Privacy invasion can also broaden the set of dependent variables studied by justice researchers. For example, given that private information is made public, feeling embarrassment and betrayal, as well as feeling pow-

erless over the control of one's life, emerge as possible responses. In addition, third-party perceptions of an individual's reputation could be influenced by the release of private information that is "damaging," which is a justice issue as in the case of libel and slander (Bies and Tripp, in press). One could also study how resistant to change the "adjusted" reputation is following the disclosure of private personal information.

In terms of behavioral responses, perceptions of privacy invasion may influence the quality and quantity of productivity, particularly in the case of electronic monitoring of work behavior. The potential for privacy invasion in drug-testing practices may influence whether one chooses to work for an organization, as suggested by one study (Stone and Bowden, 1989). But that finding was based on attitudes toward a *hypothetical* drug-testing procedure, and given the research suggesting strong effects for outcome on perceived privacy invasion reviewed earlier, its generalizability is questionable.

The focus on privacy invasion raises the possibility of individuals engaging in strategies to protect their privacy—as a means of regaining a perceived loss of freedom or control (Brehm, 1972)—as a new direction for justice researchers. One such strategy is to withhold information that one deems too private and improper to disclose to organizational authorities. However, such a nonresponse strategy may backfire. For example, a study by Stone and Stone (1987) found that job applicants who failed to answer a question about criminal convictions were viewed less qualified for the job than those who reported no conviction. In other words, being principled may not be practical.

## CONCLUSION: POLITICAL AND PARADOXICAL IMPLICATIONS

The focus on privacy issues highlights the political implications of justice in organizations. Privacy issues are political in the sense that there is the question of what is the proper balance of individual and organizational interests in the disclosure of information. Determining what is the proper balance of interests is not a straightforward rational process; indeed, the balancing of interests may be shaped by the push and pull of conflict and negotiation internal to the organization, which are further shaped by court cases and legislative mandates in the larger political-legal environment (Culnan *et al.*, in press).

Privacy issues are political also in the sense they have implication for organizational governance. From the balancing of interests and resolution of ensuing conflicts comes the emergence of formalized procedural safeguards and establishment of rights for individuals (Selznick, 1969), with cor-

respondent managerial responsibilities and obligations (Folger and Bies, 1989). The fulfillment of those managerial responsibilities often requires those in power to make judgments that attempt to balance the rights-based concerns of individuals with the organizational interests of efficiency and control, thus further highlighting the political aspects of justice issues. Indeed, as one executive stated, "Where do you draw the line? That's the question. It takes good judgment and a sense of fair play" (DeGennaro, quoted in Zalud, 1989, p. 40).

Ironically, the politics of balancing interests can highlight some paradoxical consequences of procedural justice. In particular, an emphasis on procedural justice may undermine the broader social interests of distributive justice (Sitkin and Bies, in press—b). For example, as Schein (1977) observed, "privacy regulations may conflict with requirements for equal employment compliance, which call for increased data collection, longitudinal research, and the need for common identifiers" (p. 161).

Finally, and in a more fundamental political sense, the concern for privacy follows from the assumption that an individual has an "inviolable personality . . . [and] the individual's independence, dignity and integrity" (Bloustein, 1964, p. 971) is violated when one's privacy is invaded. Human dignity as a key variable in understanding procedural justice in organizations is an emerging theoretical perspective (Folger and Bies, 1989; Tyler and Bies, 1990). Human dignity as an end represents a "radical" justice criterion to judge the processes and outcomes of organizations. Furthermore, for those of us theorists and researchers who adopt human dignity as a core assumption of procedural justice theory, our role will be that of a social critic: on the margin, not in the mainstream, motivated by what Beaney (1966) calls "a never-ending quest to increase the respect of all . . . for the essential values of human life" (p. 271).

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