

WHAT IS PROCEDURAL JUSTICE?: CRITERIA USED BY CITIZENS TO ASSESS THE FAIRNESS OF LEGAL PROCEDURES

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This paper examines procedural justice in the context of citizen experiences with the police and courts. It is based on interviews of 652 citizens with recent personal experiences involving those authorities. I will consider two issues: first, whether the justice of the procedures involved influences citizen satisfaction with outcomes and evaluations of legal authorities; and second, how citizens define "fair process" in such settings. The results replicate those of past studies, which found that procedural justice has a major influence on both satisfaction and evaluation. They further suggest that such procedural justice judgments are complex and multifaceted. Seven issues make independent contributions to citizen judgments about whether the legal authorities acted fairly: (1) the degree to which those authorities were motivated to be fair; (2) judgments of their honesty; (3) the degree to which the authorities followed ethical principles of conduct; (4) the extent to which opportunities for representation were provided; (5) the quality of the decisions made; (6) the opportunities for error correction; and (7) whether the authorities behaved in a biased fashion. I found that the meaning of procedural justice varied according to the nature of the situation, not the characteristics of the people involved.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1975 Thibaut and Walker hypothesized that litigants' satisfaction with dispute resolution decisions would be independently influenced by their judgments about the fairness of the dispute resolution process. This hypothesis was strongly supported by their data and by subsequent research (see Casper, Tyler, and Fisher, *in press*; Landis and Goodstein, 1986; Lind, 1982; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1987c; Tyler and Lind, 1986; and Walker and Lind, 1984). In addition, procedural justice concerns have been found to influence evaluations of the legal authorities and institu-

The data utilized in this paper were collected using funds provided by the National Science Foundation program in Law and Social Science, Grant SES-8310199. Support for analyzing that data and writing this article was provided by the National Science Foundation, the American Bar Foundation, and the Northwestern University Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research. I would like to thank Jonathan Casper, E. Allan Lind, Jo Perry, and Christopher Winship for comments on a draft of this paper.

LAW & SOCIETY REVIEW, Volume 22, Number 1 (1988)

tions responsible for settling disputes (Tyler, 1984b, 1987b; Tyler and Caine, 1981; Tyler, Casper, and Fisher, 1987; Tyler and Folger, 1980). It is clear from this research that citizen assessments of the justice of the procedures used by legal authorities to make decisions influence reactions to those decisions.

It is less clear *what* it is about a legal procedure that leads those involved to consider it to be fair.¹ The purpose of this study is to move beyond establishing the existence of procedural justice effects to examining this issue. Consideration of the meaning of procedural justice will involve a test of the importance of the criteria of procedural justice derived from the theories of Thibaut and Walker (1975) and Leventhal (1980).

I will explore the meaning of procedural justice within the arena first utilized by Thibaut and Walker: citizen contact with legal authorities. My focus has, however, been broadened to include both the study of contacts with the police and nondispute-related contacts with the courts. While the resolution of disputes in trial settings, which was examined by Thibaut and Walker, is an important symbol of our legal system that matters a great deal to those citizens involved in such disputes, most citizen contact with legal authorities does not involve disputes or occur in courtrooms. I will explore the natural range of such contact.

I also extend the original focus of Thibaut and Walker beyond judgments of the fairness of experiences to examine citizen judgments about the fairness of authorities. As a result, I can explore whether the same criteria of procedural fairness influence assessments of the fairness of personal treatment and of authorities.

I will examine three questions: (1) the importance of different criteria of fairness in the assessment of the justice of a personally experienced procedure; (2) the relationship of these criteria to each other; and (3) the universality of the importance ratings given to the criteria. Here I will consider the effect of the nature of the event and those involved on the criteria used by citizens to judge whether they received fair treatment.

A. Potential Procedural Justice Criteria

Two bodies of theory and research have independently addressed the issue of criteria that might be used by citizens to judge the fairness of a legal procedure: the work of Thibaut and Walker (1975) and the work of Leventhal (1980). Thibaut and Walker differentiated between two aspects of the control that parties might have over the procedure used to resolve a dispute: process control (control over the opportunity to present evidence), and decision control (control over the final decision). Leventhal identified six

¹ Another issue that has emerged in recent research is when procedural justice is more or less important (for a review of this work, see Tyler, 1987b, 1987c).

criteria: consistency, the ability to suppress bias, decision quality or accuracy, correctability, representation, and ethicality. Consistency refers to similarity of treatment and outcomes across people or time or both. The ability to suppress bias involves the ability of a procedure to prevent favoritism or other external biases. Decision quality or accuracy means the ability of a procedure to effect solutions of objectively high quality. Correctability means the existence of opportunities to correct unfair or inaccurate decisions. Representation refers to the degree to which parties affected by a decision are allowed to be involved in the decision-making process. Finally, ethicality refers to the degree to which the decision-making process accords with general standards of fairness and morality.

What is striking about these two bodies of theory is the extent to which the criteria they identify as potential bases for evaluating the justice of a procedure do not overlap. The only common criterion is representation (Leventhal's category for process and/or decision control). Even here it is unclear whether in Leventhal's typology representativeness refers to process control, decision control, or both. Leventhal (1980: 43) is ambiguous on this point, suggesting that representation means that "the concerns of those affected should be represented in all phases of the allocation process." The other issues raised by Leventhal are not discussed by Thibaut and Walker.

B. The Importance of Procedural Justice Criteria

Since there are varying criteria for evaluating the fairness of a procedure, it is important to know the weight that those affected by decisions place on each criterion. Research developing from both of the theoretical frameworks outlined above has addressed this issue, with the most extensive exploration provided by Thibaut, Walker, and their students. It has suggested that both types of control are important in procedural evaluations (Thibaut and Walker, 1975). More recent research has supported this, finding either that process control is more important than decision control (Tyler, Rasinski, and Spodick, 1985; Tyler, 1987a) or that only process control matters (Lind *et al.*, 1983).

A second area of research explores the importance of Leventhal's six criteria of procedural justice. The four studies that examined their importance to those affected by decisions found that consistency is the major assessment criterion (Barrett-Howard and Tyler, 1986; Fry and Leventhal, 1979; Fry and Chaney, 1981; Greenberg, 1986). Barrett-Howard and Tyler further divided consistency judgments between those involving consistency across time and those involving consistency across people and found that the latter was the primary means of evaluation.

While the criteria utilized by Leventhal and by Thibaut and

Walker have generally been examined separately, one exception to this approach is a recent study by Sheppard and Lewicki (1987). In that work managers and management students considered recent personally experienced incidents of fair and unfair treatment in dealing with a supervisor and generated the principle that led them to judge their treatment to be fair or unfair. Three of the principles outlined above emerged as especially important: consistency, representation, and accuracy.

Overall, there is considerable convergence of the results of studies exploring criteria of procedural justice. Such studies typically find an emphasis on consistency (Barrett-Howard and Tyler, 1986; Fry and Leventhal, 1979; Fry and Chaney, 1981; Greenberg, 1986; Sheppard and Lewicki, 1987). In addition, Barrett-Howard and Tyler (1986), Cornelius *et al.*, (1986), and Sheppard and Lewicki (1987) identify accuracy as important, and Barrett-Howard and Tyler (1986) discover that the related issue of bias suppression is a factor. Finally, work in the Thibaut and Walker tradition finds that representation is significant (Houlden *et al.*, 1978; Lind *et al.*, 1983; Tyler, 1987a; Tyler, Rasinski, and Spodick, 1985), a result consistent with the conclusions of Sheppard and Lewicki.

In this paper, I combine the criteria proposed by Thibaut and Walker (1975) and Leventhal (1980) to examine the importance of each to the citizens I interviewed. Only one prior study has conducted such an examination (Sheppard and Lewicki, 1987), and that effort was limited by the use of a methodology that did not allow the rated importance of the criteria outlined to be directly assessed.

C. The Relationship Among Procedural Justice Criteria

The existence of varying criteria of procedural fairness also raises the question of how those criteria are related. The importance of their relationship lies in the choice of decision-making procedures. In the distributive justice literature the decisions of leaders have been regarded as value trade-offs between objectives that cannot be simultaneously realized. For example, because many have argued that productivity and social harmony cannot be achieved at the same time, policy makers have had to move back and forth between the use of differing rules of distributive justice, each of which maximizes the attainment of one objective at the expense of the other (see, for example, Okun, 1975). The concern here is with the extent to which such trade-offs also occur with procedures.

An example of value trade-offs in the criteria of procedural fairness can be found in the literature on the psychology of judicial sentencing, which argues that magistrates can make high-quality decisions that particularize punishment to the situation of each individual defendant only if they have wide latitude to sentence in-

consistently, that is, to give very different sentences for the same crime (Galegher and Carroll, 1983). This argument suggests that consistency in sentencing is in conflict with decision quality, operationalized in this case by sentences that will effectively rehabilitate criminals.

The major effort to explore the relationship among procedural justice criteria was made by Thibaut and Walker (1975). They focused on one subissue of this general question: the relationship between process and decision control. Their studies and those of others have consistently found a positive relationship between assessments of these two criteria in natural settings. Unfortunately, studies developing out of the Leventhal (1980) framework have not examined the relationship among procedural justice criteria.

The relationship question leads into another issue: the possibility of underlying dimensions of procedural justice. Although Thibaut, Walker, and Leventhal have elaborated a set of potentially important criteria for assessing the fairness of procedures, and Sheppard and Lewicki (1987) have shown that an even broader set of concerns can be generated, these varying criteria may actually reflect several basic dimensions of procedural evaluation. Prior research suggests four potential underlying dimensions: consistency, decision quality, bias suppression, and representation. Consistency is based upon a comparison of the procedure to other procedures experienced either in the past or by others, while the latter three criteria refer to the quality of the process itself.

D. The Universality of Procedural Justice Criteria

It is also important to examine the universality of the meaning of procedural justice, that is, the degree to which the fairness of procedures is always judged by the same criteria. Two extreme positions might be imagined. One would emphasize the stability of criteria, with all citizens judging fairness by the same standards, irrespective of the nature of the dispute resolution or allocation problem. The other would hypothesize that the characteristics of the contact and the citizens involved would influence the criteria used to evaluate the fairness of the procedures chosen to deal with that problem.

Research has suggested that the meaning of justice will vary depending upon the nature of the dispute or allocation involved. Barrett-Howard and Tyler (1986) varied situations along four basic dimensions of interpersonal relations (Deutsch, 1982; Wish *et al.*, 1976; Wish and Kaplan, 1977) and found that in formal settings respondents place more emphasis on bias suppression, decision quality, consistency, and representation. In cooperative situations they focus more on consistency, decision quality, and ethicality. Sheppard and Lewicki (1987) found that the fairness criteria most important to parties affected by a supervisor's decision differed ac-

ording to the nature of the organizational roles of the parties (also see Lissak and Sheppard 1983; Sheppard *et al.*, 1986).

The present study will test the degree of variation in the meaning of procedural fairness by examining the effect of differences in the nature of citizen experiences with the police and courts on the way citizens evaluate whether they have received fair treatment. In addition, the effect of variation in the type of people involved in the interaction will be explored.

E. Situational Variations

This study will test the hypothesis that the meaning of procedural justice varies depending upon the circumstances of a citizen encounter with legal authority. Ideally such a test should be based on a typology of situations or people or both that leads to theoretically derived predictions about variations induced by circumstances. Unfortunately, no such typology has yet been developed for the study of either moral issues (Kurtines, 1968) or third-party conflict resolution. As a result, I derived the dimensions utilized and predictions about their effects from the literature on procedural justice and conflict resolution more generally.

1. Extensions of Thibaut and Walker. Two dimensions considered are variations of the original Thibaut and Walker (1975) research. The first variation considered was the authority encountered: police or courts. Thibaut and Walker examined formal courtroom settings. However, I extend the study to less formal contacts with the police. I examine the degree to which Thibaut and Walker's findings are specific to courtroom settings and do not generalize across the larger range of experiences with legal authorities. While formal courtroom trials are important to those involved, they account for only about 20 percent of the surveyed citizen contacts with legal authority.

I hypothesize that informal encounters with the police will be evaluated more on police efforts to be fair and less on adherence to formal issues of rights (i.e., on ethicality). I make this prediction because I anticipate that the more formalized courtroom situation will draw attention to issues of rights and that ethical standards will be clearer in that setting.

Thibaut and Walker's focus on disputes was also extended. Their study of trials led to a focus on disputes between contending parties. In many cases, however, citizens have contact with legal authorities for other reasons. For example, they may call the police for help. I hypothesize that disputes, because they involve contending factions, will lead citizens to place greater weight on whether they have an opportunity to state their case, on bias (i.e., favoring one party over others), and on consistency. In nondispute

settings I expect that respondents will judge procedural justice more heavily in terms of the quality of problem resolution.

2. Characteristics of the Experience. Several characteristics of the experience itself may also influence citizen views about the meaning of fair treatment. I hypothesize that citizens will be more concerned with the quality of decisions when the contact with the police or courts is voluntary and more concerned with attention to their rights when it is not.

The favorability of the outcome of a situation may also affect judgments of fairness. Those who have received poor outcomes will focus more on issues of bias, consistency, or dishonesty. Such judgments allow them to determine whether alternative dispute resolution procedures would have produced better outcomes (Folger, 1986a, 1986b). Those who received favorable outcomes, however, will, I hypothesize, tend to emphasize abstract issues such as ethicality. In other words, those who win can afford the luxury of thinking about issues such as their rights.

Citizens may also differ from each other in the degree to which they view it as important to receive favorable outcomes and/or favorable treatment in their dealings with the police or courts. Such variations in importance might influence how they define the meaning of procedural justice. Those to whom outcomes matter more might focus more heavily on outcome-related aspects of procedure such as consistency rather than on issues of ethicality.

3. Characteristics of the Person. I predict two types of personal characteristics will influence citizen views about the meaning of fairness. First, citizens may differ in their background characteristics and these differences may influence their views about the meaning of procedural fairness. Six potentially important factors are sex, age, race, education, income, and liberalism. I explored the influence of each. Only one specific prediction could be made based on the literature: The more highly educated and liberal will pay more attention to issues of ethicality in determinations of fairness (McClosky and Brill, 1983; Sullivan *et al.*, 1982).

Respondent's prior views or expectations about the police/courts might also affect their views about important criteria on fair procedure. Such differences are examined through the use of citizen assessments of the equality of the treatment citizens receive from the police/courts. Citizens were asked: 1) whether the police/courts generally treat citizens equally and 2) whether they treat people of the citizen's age, sex, race, or nationality worse than others. These two general assessments were hypothesized to lead to variations in the extent to which issues of bias influenced the meaning of procedural justice. If citizens expected unequal

treatment, or knew that it occurred, it was anticipated that they would assess the fairness of their own experience in terms of the bias or lack of bias they experienced.

II. QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

Before examining the meaning of procedural justice, I considered whether, as prior studies found, procedural justice figured prominently in citizen reactions to legal authorities. Given that procedural justice has a key role in mediating reactions to experiences with the police and courts, further analysis will explore how citizens define fairness.

To answer this question I first explored the impact of procedural justice on several dependent variables. The first is whether respondents indicated satisfaction with the outcomes and treatment they received from legal authorities. Also important are their affective reactions to the particular authorities they encountered. Finally, citizen generalizations from particular experiences to broader views about the authorities are considered, as is their support for those authorities (see Tyler, 1984b; Tyler and Caine, 1981; Tyler, Rasinski, and McGraw, 1985).

III. METHOD

A. *Subjects*

The participants in the study were 1,575 citizens of Chicago interviewed over the telephone during the spring of 1984. I chose respondents from a random sample, with 63 percent of those contacted yielding completed interviews. Of those interviewed, 733 (47 percent) indicated that they had had personal experience with the Chicago police and/or courts in the previous year; they formed the sample used. I interviewed those respondents about that experience or, in the case of multiple experiences, their most important experience.

Of the 733 respondents, 81 had had experiences that were too superficial for detailed analysis. These situations involved cases in which the respondent had called the police but not dealt with them personally. For example, some had reported suspicious behavior in their neighborhood but did not know what activities were generated by their call; others were told over the phone that the police could not handle their problem. These respondents were not included in the study. Hence, the sample size was actually 652. Of this group 47 percent had called the police for help, 31 percent had been stopped by the police, and 23 percent had been to court.

B. Questionnaire: The Meaning of Procedural Justice

1. Control/Representation. The first two potential criteria of procedural justice examined were those proposed by Thibaut and Walker (1975): process control and decision control. They also constitute Leventhal's (1980) dimension of representation.

The extent to which respondents had process control was measured by asking them "how much opportunity" they had had to present their problem or case to the authorities before decisions were made. Most felt that they had either "a great deal" (42 percent) or "some" (20 percent) such opportunity. Only a small group felt that they had "a little" (11 percent) or "not much" (28 percent) chance to state their case.

I measured respondents' perceived decision control by asking them how much influence they had had over the decisions made by the authorities. The majority felt that they had "little" (10 percent) or "not much" decision control (49 percent), with smaller groups indicating "a great deal" (19 percent) or "some" (22 percent) control.

As in prior correlational studies, process and decision control were highly interrelated ($r = .56$; $p < .001$). Because distinguishing between these two issues was not important in this study for such an effort (see Tyler, 1987a), I combined them into a single measure of representation.

2. Consistency. Leventhal's (1980) first criterion of procedural justice is consistency. I examined four types of consistency. First, respondents compared their recent experience to previous ones (consistency across time). Second, they compared their experience to their prior expectations, however derived. Third, they compared their experience to what they thought generally happened to others. Finally, they compared their experience to recent experiences of their friends, family, or neighbors. In each case they separately compared both their outcome and treatment to the standard.

Consistency across time was assessed by asking respondents to compare their outcomes and treatment to their outcomes and treatment in the past. In the case of treatment 54 percent said that their treatment was the same as in the past, 21 percent that it was better, and 11 percent that it was worse (15 percent had had no past experience). Fifty-five percent felt that their outcomes were similar in the past, 18 percent that it was better, and 10 percent that it was worse; again, 15 percent had had no past experience.

I also assessed consistency across people "in similar situations." Sixty-eight percent felt that their treatment was similar to that received by others, 22 percent that it was better, and 10 percent that it was worse. Sixty-four percent felt that their outcome

was similar to that of others, 28 percent that it was better, and 9 percent that it was worse.

Looking at consistency with prior expectations, 46 percent indicated that they were treated as they had expected, while 32 percent were treated better and 22 percent were treated worse. Forty-three percent received the outcome they had expected, while 32 percent received a better one and 25 percent a worse one.

Finally, I assessed consistency in relationship to the recent experiences of family, neighbors, and friends. Of the 33 percent who knew of experiences that members of one of these three groups had had in the past year, 58 percent indicated that their treatment was similar to that of the others, 38 percent that it was better, and 4 percent that it was worse. Fifty-four percent indicated that they had received a similar outcome, 32 percent that their outcome was better, and 14 percent that their outcome was worse.

For my analysis I created two indices of consistency: the average of respondent judgments concerning their outcome and the average of respondent judgments concerning their treatment.²

3. Impartiality. I operationalized impartiality or neutrality in three ways: as a lack of bias, as honesty, and as having made an effort to be fair. I established lack of bias in the authorities' behavior by asking respondents whether their treatment or outcome was influenced by their "race, sex, age, nationality, or some other characteristic of them as a person." In addition, in those cases (18 percent) in which there was a dispute between parties, I asked respondents whether the authorities had favored one party over another. Eleven percent indicated at least one of these types of bias.

I assessed impartiality as honesty by combining responses to two questions: (1) whether the authorities "did anything" that was "improper or dishonest" (21 percent said they had), and (2) whether officials had lied to them (16 percent said yes).

I also assessed the impartiality of the authorities more subjectively by asking respondents to indicate how hard the police or judge had tried to show fairness. Respondents differed widely on this dimension. Thirty-seven percent said that the authorities had tried very hard to be fair, 12 percent that they had tried quite hard, 26 percent that they had tried somewhat hard, and 26 percent that they had not tried hard at all.

4. Decision Accuracy. I established the accuracy or quality of decision making by combining responses to two questions. First, respondents reported whether the authorities involved had "gotten

² An alternative approach to creating consistency scales is to create separate scales for consistency with expectancies, across time, across people in general, and across friends and family. Although I also utilized this approach in analyzing the data, I did not report the results because they are weaker than those obtained from the other method.

the information they needed to make good decisions about how to handle” the problem. Eighty percent said that they had. Second, respondents indicated whether the authorities had tried to “bring the problem into the open so that it could be solved.” Sixty-three percent said that they had.

5. Correctability. I assessed correctability by asking respondents whether they knew of any “agency or organization” to which they could have “complained” about unfair treatment. Thirty-three percent indicated that they knew of such an agency.

6. Ethicality. Finally, I established ethicality by combining responses to two questions: whether the authorities had been polite to the respondents (83 percent said yes) and whether they had shown concern for their rights (76 percent said yes).

C. Questionnaire: Dependent Variables

The key dependent variable for the analysis of the meaning of procedural justice was the respondents’ judgment about the fairness of the process that characterized their experience with the police and/or courts. I asked respondents “how fair” the procedures used by the authorities were and “how fairly” they were treated, with both answers rated on a four-point scale (very fair, somewhat fair, somewhat unfair, and very unfair). Most respondents indicated that the procedures were fair (54 percent, very fair; 24 percent, somewhat fair) and that they were fairly treated (49 percent, very fairly; 32 percent, somewhat fairly).

I also asked respondents to assess the fairness of the authorities with whom they had dealt. They first indicated their assessment of the fairness of “the way the Chicago police [or courts] treat people and handle problems” (66 percent of those who had dealt with the police indicated that they were very or somewhat fair, compared with 53 percent of those who had dealt with the courts). They also gave their opinion of “how often the police [or courts] treat citizens fairly and handle their problems in a fair way” (53 percent said usually or often for the police, compared with 46 percent for the courts) and “how fairly” they thought they would be treated if they dealt with the police and/or courts in the future (90 percent said very or somewhat fairly for the police; 86 percent said the same for the courts). These questions related not to specific legal actors (i.e., a particular police officer) but to the general legal authorities they represent.

D. Does Procedural Justice Matter?

1. Independent Variables. To test the hypothesis that procedural justice is important in reactions to experiences with the police and the courts, I explored the influence of procedural justice

upon satisfaction and evaluations, controlling for the influence of distributive fairness and three nonfairness factors: the absolute favorability of the outcomes, the outcome favorability relative to several standards of reference, and the treatment favorability relative to several standards of reference.

I assessed procedural justice in the manner previously outlined. This analysis utilizes the scale assessing the procedural justice of the experience, not the overall procedural fairness of the authorities. I examined distributive justice using judgments of the fairness of the outcome received (57 percent reported it was very fair; 23 percent, somewhat fair) and of whether the authorities gave the case or problem the attention it deserved (58 percent said yes; 14 percent said it received more than it deserved; 28 percent said it received less than it deserved).

The first nonfairness factor considered was outcome favorability, which I measured in two ways. First, the respondents indicated the absolute quality of the outcome. This judgment was then weighted by the self-reported seriousness of the problem to produce an overall favorability rating. The nature of this assessment differed for each of the three types of experience examined. In the case of calls to the police, respondents reported whether the police had solved the problem and, if not, how hard they had tried to do so. For respondents who had been stopped, I asked whether the police had cited them for a violation of the law and/or arrested them and took them to the police station. Respondents involved in court cases reported whether they had won or lost their case.

Respondents also rated outcome favorability in relative terms, that is, in relationship to what they had expected prior to the contact, to what they had received in the past, to what others generally received, and to what their family, friends, or neighbors had received in the past. The nature of these assessments was outlined in our prior discussion of consistency measurement.³

³ The use of consistency scales at two points in this analysis highlights an important conceptual problem in procedural justice research. Past studies of the importance of procedural justice in reactions to experiences with legal authorities have been concerned with assessing that influence independent of outcomes. To do so researchers have treated judgments of outcome and treatment quality relative to various standards of comparison as nonfairness-based assessments. This is quite consistent with relative deprivation research, which examines outcome quality relative to various standards of reference (i.e., "Deprivation in comparison to what standard?"). A second question that has been addressed is the meaning of procedural fairness. In that literature consistency of outcome and treatment is viewed (by Leventhal (1980), for example) as one basis for assessing procedural fairness. The difference between the treatment of consistency in these two areas of study suggests that the consistency of the outcome with outcomes received in the past or by others is a judgment that is not necessarily ethically based. When people are judging whether they feel fairly treated, they may also consider consistency of outcome and treatment in making that assessment. So consistency is one criterion that could be used in judging procedural fairness and outcome fairness. It is also a nonfairness-based expectancy judgment.

While past treatments of reactions to contact with the legal system have tended to view nonfairness issues as involving violated expectations for outcomes, which is in keeping with both psychological theories of expectancy (Helson, 1964) and relative deprivation models (Crosby, 1976), it is also possible that respondents would be troubled by violations of how they expected to be treated. As with expectancy theory, such violations need not involve issues of fairness. To assess the impact of nonfairness-based expectancy violation in treatment, I asked respondents to rate their treatment relative to their past expectations and experiences and the experiences of others generally and of their friends, family, or neighbors.

2. Dependent Variables. The two dependent variables analyzed were satisfaction and evaluation. Satisfaction questions assessed the citizens' personal satisfaction with their outcome (46 percent, very satisfied; 23 percent, somewhat satisfied; 11 percent, somewhat dissatisfied; 20 percent, very dissatisfied) and treatment (53 percent, very satisfied; 23 percent, somewhat satisfied; 12 percent, somewhat dissatisfied; 12 percent, very dissatisfied). I examined three types of evaluation. First, respondents indicated whether they were angry (22 percent said yes), frustrated (32 percent said yes), or pleased with the authorities (55 percent said yes). I established generalizations to overall evaluations of the type of authorities through respondent ratings of the quality of the service those authorities provided and the extent to which they offered appropriate levels of service and fair treatment. These evaluations corresponded to what political scientists have termed "specific system support." The evaluation scale had fourteen items for the police and ten for the courts. It ranged from 1 to 5, with 3 indicating neutral feelings. Overall respondents had slightly positive feelings about the authorities they had dealt with (mean = 3.41).

Support for legal authorities assessed citizen feelings toward the authorities in a more generalized and affectively tinged way (see Easton, 1965). Support of this type corresponds to what political scientists refer to as "diffuse system support," involving long-term affective attachment to the authorities involved (see Tyler, 1987b). The support scale involved five items and ranged from 1 to 4. Overall, respondents were neutral about the authorities (mean = 2.53).

E. Dimensions of the Setting

The work of Thibaut and Walker (1975) focused upon trials. This means that the typical contact citizens had with legal authorities was not of the type studied by Thibaut and Walker. I expanded the focus to include the police and nondisputes.

I established the voluntary nature of the contact by asking the

respondents if they had a choice about whether to initiate the contact with the police or courts (62 percent said yes). Outcome favorability ratings ranged from 1 to 8, with high scores indicating favorable outcomes. The scale mean was 5.36. Overall 56 percent of the respondents received outcomes that they reported to be favorable.

The importance of the outcome to the respondents was established by asking them how much they cared about what outcome they received. Sixty-one percent indicated that it was very important. Similarly, 66 percent said that it was very important to them to be well treated.

I assessed prior expectations by asking respondents whether the police or courts generally treat citizens equally or favor some over others. In addition, I asked citizens whether people like themselves (i.e., those of their age, sex, race, nationality, and income) received the same treatment as the average citizen. Seventy-nine percent felt that the authorities they had dealt with generally treated people unequally; 28 percent said that the authorities generally treated people like themselves worse than the average citizen.⁴

I also measured six other respondent characteristics: sex, age, race, education, liberalism, and income. Interviewers indicated the respondents' sex after the interview (55 percent were women). Respondents reported their own age (51 percent were 34 or younger), and identified their race by answering the standard survey question: "What is your racial-ethnic background?" Of those studied, 52 percent were white. Education level was established by asking respondents to indicate the "highest grade or year of school" they had completed. Of those interviewed, 31 percent were college graduates; 28 percent had some college; 24 percent were high school graduates; and 16 percent had not finished high school. I assessed liberalism using a self-report methodology in which respondents classified themselves as conservative (39 per-

⁴ One difficulty with using respondents' answers to the question of equal treatment as a temporally *prior* expectation is that such an analysis is based on the assumption that prior views truly exist prior to experiences rather than being influenced by them. Since this study is a survey that assesses both sets of views at one point in time, it is possible that whether a person is treated equally by authorities determines their view about whether the police and courts generally treat people equally, rather than their experience being influenced by that prior view. While no definitive test of this possibility can be conducted using cross-sectional data, some evidence of its implausibility can be gathered. If the equality of one's own recent treatment relative to that of others influences one's views about whether the police generally treat citizens equally, we would expect some correlation between these two judgments. However, no such correlation was found in this study. Whether people received treatment that they viewed as equal to that of others was uncorrelated with whether they thought that the police generally provided equal treatment to citizens ($r = .05$; not significant). In other words, citizens' views about the equality of treatment do not develop out of what happens during their recent personal experiences with the police and courts.

cent), moderate (18 percent), or liberal (44 percent). Finally, I measured six categories of self-reported income. Of those interviewed, 38 percent had an annual income of under \$15,000; 71 percent, under \$30,000; and 90 percent under \$50,000.

IV. RESULTS

A. *The Replication of Procedural Justice Effects*

Past studies have consistently found that judgments of the fairness of the procedures that occur when citizens deal with legal authorities influence citizen satisfaction and evaluation of those authorities (see Lind, 1982; Tyler, 1984b; and Tyler, Rasinski, and Griffin, 1986). Prior to exploring the questions that form the heart of this paper, I will test the influence of procedural justice on the satisfaction and evaluation of the respondents in this study, a test which I expect will reveal that procedural justice is again the key issue to citizens.

The first question is the relationship between nonfairness-based judgments and experiences and judgments about distributive and procedural justice. Table 1 shows that although outcome favorability is related to judgments of distributive and procedural fairness (mean $r = .34$), the two are clearly distinct. In other words, as past studies have found, those receiving favorable outcomes think that those outcomes and the procedures used to arrive at them are fairer. On the other hand, favorability and fairness are not identical, and citizens are clearly making distinct fairness judgments. As has also been the case in other studies, distributive fairness and procedural fairness were highly related (mean $r = .61$).

The second question is whether fairness judgments influence satisfaction and evaluation. To address this question I used regression analysis, with satisfaction and evaluation as the dependent variables and both nonfairness- and fairness-based judgments about the citizens' experience as the independent variables. This analysis is shown in Table 2. Table 2 shows combined indexes of outcome and procedural favorability, since a more complex analysis using each judgment as a separate independent variable yields similar results.

The overall importance of fairness can be examined by comparing the increment in the square of the multiple correlation coefficient that occurs when one cluster of variables is entered following another (a "usefulness analysis"). That analysis shows that fairness judgments are the key influence on all five dependent variables. In each case fairness judgments explain a substantial percentage of variance that is unexplained by nonfairness factors (average $R^2 = 24$ percent), while nonfairness factors explain only approximately 1 percent of the variance unexplained by judgments of fairness or nonfairness.

Table 1. The Relationship Among Indexes of Outcome and Procedural Favorability and Distributive and Procedural Justice

Index	Outcome Favorability			Procedural Favorability			Fairness		
	Favorability	Expectations	Experiences of Others	Experiences of Friends, Family, or Neighbors	Past Experiences	Expectations of Others	Experiences of Friends, Family, or Neighbors	DJ1 ^a	DJ2 ^b PJ1 ^c
Nonfairness									
Outcomes									
Favorability									
relative to:									
Past experiences	.22 ^d								
Expectations	.42 ^d	.43 ^d							
Experiences of others	.33 ^d	.42 ^d	.49 ^d						
Experiences of family, friends, or neighbors	.07	.25 ^d	.20 ^e	.26 ^d					
Procedures									
Relative to:									
Past experiences	.14 ^f	.47 ^d	.26 ^d	.23 ^d	.14 ^f				
Expectations	.32 ^d	.34 ^d	.47 ^d	.31 ^d	.08	.21 ^d			
Experiences of others	.31 ^d	.38 ^d	.42 ^d	.62 ^d	.34 ^d	.24 ^d	.34 ^d		
Experiences of family, friends, or neighbors	-.01	.25 ^d	.15 ^f	.31 ^d	.47 ^d	.12 ^f	.20 ^e	.46 ^d	

Table 2. The Influence of Judgments About Personal Experience on Satisfaction and Evaluation

Independent Variable	Satisfaction				Views of Authorities					
	Outcome		Treatment		Affect		Evaluation		Support	
	R^2 ^a	β ^b	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β
Nonfairness										
Outcome factors ^c		.08		.06		.04		-.01		-.13
Procedural factors ^d		.00		.09 ^g		.07		-.14 ^f		-.13 ^g
Total (R^2)	.33 ^e		.36 ^e		.30 ^e		.12 ^e		.02	
Fairness										
Distributive		.44 ^e		.22 ^e		.28 ^e		.27 ^e		.15 ^g
Procedural		.33 ^e		.54 ^e		.45 ^e		.43 ^e		.42 ^e
Total (R^2)	.60 ^e		.64 ^e		.55 ^e		.34 ^e		.16 ^e	
Total (R^2)	.60 ^e		.65 ^e		.55 ^e		.36 ^e		.18 ^e	
Nonfairness beyond fairness	.00		.01		.00		.02		.02	
Fairness beyond nonfairness	.27		.29		.25		.24		.16	
					Usefulness Analysis					

a R^2 = adjusted square of the multiple correlation coefficient

b β = standardized regression coefficient

c Absolute favorability: outcomes relative to the past, expectations, and experiences of others and friends, family, or neighbors

d Treatment relative to the past, expectations, and experiences of others and friends, family, or neighbors

e $p < .001$

f $p < .01$

g $p < .05$

If fairness is examined to see whether distributive or procedural fairness causes the effects observed, both types of fairness are found to matter. As would be expected, distributive fairness has the greater impact when the dependent variable is outcome satisfaction ($\beta = .44$, versus $\beta = .33$ for procedural fairness), while procedural fairness matters more when the dependent variable is satisfaction with treatment ($\beta = .54$, versus $\beta = .22$ for distributive fairness). In the case of evaluations, procedural justice (mean $\beta = .43$) is uniformly more important than distributive justice (mean $\beta = .23$).

B. The Meaning of Procedural Justice

1. The Importance of Differing Procedural Justice Criteria. Based upon prior research I expected several factors to have an important influence on judgments about the fairness of the procedures citizens encounter in their dealings with legal authorities: consistency, accuracy, impartiality, and representation.

I tested the importance of these potential criteria of procedural fairness by looking at the relationship between citizens' judgments that their experiences were characterized by those criteria and their judgments that they were fairly treated. I conducted two types of analysis, the results of which are shown in Table 3. In the first I established the zero order correlation between each potential criterion and judgments of procedural justice. In the second I computed the beta weight for an equation in which all criteria were entered simultaneously. This latter number indicates the independent contribution of each factor.

The results of the regression analysis suggest that the criteria of procedural justice assessed explain most of the variance in citizen judgments about whether fair procedures were used (69 percent). Seven aspects of procedural justice make an independent contribution to assessments of process fairness: the effort of the authorities to be fair; their honesty; whether their behavior is consistent with ethical standards; whether opportunities for representation are given; the quality of the decisions made; whether opportunities to appeal decisions exist; and whether the behavior of the authorities shows bias.

These data provide partial support for the predictions made in the introduction. Impartiality proved to be important, but more in the form of subjective bias, the effort to be fair ($\beta = .30$; $p < .001$), and honesty ($\beta = .23$; $p < .001$) than in direct ratings of the degree of bias in the behavior of the authorities ($\beta = .07$; $p < .01$). Quality was also important ($\beta = .17$; $p < .001$), as was representation ($\beta = .17$; $p < .001$).

The results differed from the predictions in two ways. First, the consistency of outcomes and treatment with past experiences, expectations, or the treatment of others, was not important ($\beta =$

Table 3. Attributes of a Procedure That Lead Citizens to View It as Fair

Attribute	Fair Procedures			Fair Authorities				
	r^a	Rank	β^b	Rank	r	Rank	β	Rank
Representation	.62 ^d	3	.17 ^d	4	.35 ^d	3	.12 ^d	3
Consistency	.32 ^d	7	.04		.16 ^d		.03	
Impartiality								
Bias	.43 ^d	5	.07 ^e	7	.26 ^d	5	.05	
Dishonesty	.59 ^d	4	.23 ^d	2	.34 ^d	4	.11 ^f	4
Effort to be fair	.71 ^d	1	.30 ^d	1	.45 ^d	1	.27 ^d	1
Quality of decisions	.37 ^d	6	.17 ^d	5	.15 ^d	6	.02	
Correctability	.04		.14 ^d	6	-.03		.00	
Ethicality	.69 ^d	2	.21 ^d	3	.41 ^d	2	.15 ^d	2
R^{2c}			.69 ^d				.26 ^d	

^a r = Pearson correlation

^b β = standardized regression coefficient in an equation including all criteria

^c R^2 = adjusted square of the multiple correlation coefficient

^d $p < .001$

^e $p < .01$

^f $p < .05$

.04; not significant), although it was expected to be. Second, ethicality (i.e., whether the police and courts followed general principles of fair conduct) mattered ($\beta = .21$; $p < .001$), but prior research had not suggested that it would. The results, in other words, partially supported *and* contradicted the hypotheses.

The results also suggest that the criteria used to assess the fairness of an experience are similar to those used to assess the fairness of the authorities involved. In both cases the effort to be fair, ethicality, honesty, and representation were important. Since the correlation between these two assessments of procedural justice is .51, this is not surprising.

2. The Relationship Among Procedural Justice Criteria. A second question of importance is the relationship among the varying criteria of procedural justice outlined. Table 4 shows this relationship, and suggests that the criteria of procedural justice generally have a positive, overlapping quality (mean $r = .30$). In other words, citizens judge the fairness of process by using a variety of positively interrelated criteria.

Given that the varying criteria are clearly not identical, we can also ask about the presence of underlying dimensions. To identify such dimensions, I factor analyzed the criteria. The results, presented in Table 5, indicate that there were two underlying factors. The first (Factor One) includes assessments about the nature of the experience itself; opportunities for representation, impartiality, and the quality of the decisions made. The second (Factor Two) includes assessments that compare the experience to external standards. Consistency compares the experience to past experiences or the experience of others. Ethicality compares the experience to external standards.

3. The Universality of Procedural Justice Criteria. The third issue I consider is the extent to which different criteria are used to assess the justice of a procedure by different people or by people in different circumstances. To test for such variations I conducted a series of regression analyses in which the eight criteria of procedural justice were used to predict procedural justice, as in previously outlined analyses. In addition, I entered interaction terms for the interaction of each criterion with the situational/personal difference variable under consideration.

To explore the meaning of the regression results, I divided respondents into two groups using the situational/personal difference variables under consideration. I then performed a regression for each group, with the eight procedural criteria used to predict judgments in that group.

I distinguished two aspects of the experience: the characteristics of the situation and of the person. The six situational characteristics were the authority involved, whether the situation was a

Table 4. The Relationship Among the Attributes of a Fair Procedure^a

Attribute	Attributes											
	Representation		Consistency			Impartiality			Quality		Ethicality	
	Process Control	Decision Control	Outcomes	Process	Bias	Dishonesty	Effort	Decisions	Efforts	Correctability	Polite	Concern for Rights
Representation												
Process control												
Decision control	.56 ^b											
Consistency												
Outcomes	.03											
Process	.09	.14	.40 ^b									
Impartiality												
Bias	.31 ^b	.25 ^b	.09	.13 ^b								
Dishonesty	.33 ^b	.25 ^b	.07	.17 ^b	.36 ^b							
Effort	.58 ^b	.48 ^b	.02	.12	.36 ^b	.43 ^b						
Quality												
Decisions	.57 ^b	.33 ^b	.02	.17 ^b	.33 ^b	.39 ^b	.46 ^b					
Efforts	.57 ^b	.43 ^b	.02	.17 ^b	.32 ^b	.41 ^b	.62 ^b	.59 ^b				
Correctability	.10	.08	.06	.02	.04	.04	.09	.08				
Ethicality												
Polite	.47 ^b	.29 ^b	.28 ^b	.59 ^b	.37 ^b	.49 ^b	.47 ^b	.38 ^b	.03			
Concern for rights	.48 ^b	.35 ^b	.22 ^b	.56 ^b	.38 ^b	.53 ^b	.58 ^b	.51 ^b	.05	.59 ^b		

^a Entries are Pearson correlations.

^b $p < .001$

Table 5. Factor Analysis of the Attributes of a Fair Procedure*

Attribute	Factor One	Factor Two
Representation		
Process control	.78	
Decision control	.58	
Consistency		
Outcomes		.42
Process		.75
Impartiality		
Bias	.42	
Dishonesty	.49	
Effort	.75	
Quality		
Decisions	.66	
Efforts	.76	
Correctability		
Ethicality		
Polite		.78
Concern for rights	.43	.73

* Entries are from a factor analysis using Varimax rotation. Only loadings over 0.4 are listed.

dispute, whether the situation involved choice, whether the outcome was positive or negative, outcome importance, and the importance of fair treatment. Eight personal characteristics were also examined: two types of prior views, education, race, liberalism, sex, age, and income.

Each characteristic divided the respondents into two groups. The six situational characteristics and eight criteria of procedural justice led to forty-eight comparisons. Of those, sixteen were statistically significant (33 percent, a proportion higher than would be expected by chance). This suggests that the nature of the situation influences the meaning of procedural justice. In different situations citizens judge the fairness of procedures using different criteria. Table 6 shows how such judgments differ. I also considered eight personal characteristics, leading to sixty-four comparisons. Of these only five (8 percent) were significant, a level not different from the number of significant findings that would be expected by chance. There is no evidence, therefore, that different types of people think about the meaning of fairness differently.

The first situational characteristic I examined was the extension of Thibaut and Walker (1975) into noncourtroom experiences and nondisputes. I found that citizens dealing with the courts

Table 6. Attributes of a Fair Procedure Under Varying Circumstances^a

Attribute	Authority		Dispute Present		Choice		Outcome		Outcome Importance		Process Importance						
	Courts	Police	Differ- ence ^b	Yes	No	Differ- ence	Yes	No	Posi- tive	Nega- tive	Differ- ence	High	Low	Differ- ence	High	Low	Differ- ence
Representation	.15 ^e	.18 ^g		.38 ^g	.17 ^g	*	.13 ^e	.20 ^f	.15 ^f	.18 ^g	.17 ^f	.15 ^g	.19 ^g		.15 ^g	.19 ^g	
Consistency	.04	.05		.12 ^d	.03		.02	.08 ^d	-.04	.09 ^f	*	-.04	-.07		-.04	-.07	
Impartiality																	
Bias	.13 ^d	.02	*	.06	.00		.14 ^f	.04	.00	.09 ^f		.04	.13 ^e		.05	.08	
Dishonesty	.21 ^f	.26 ^g		.15 ^e	.23 ^g		.22 ^g	.23 ^g	.31 ^g	.21 ^g		.26 ^g	.15 ^f	*	.23 ^g	.25 ^g	
Effort	.26 ^f	.31 ^g		.07	.36 ^g	*	.35 ^g	.24 ^g	.20 ^f	.32 ^g	*	.29 ^g	.32 ^g		.29 ^g	.28 ^g	
Quality	.26 ^f	.14 ^e	*	.16	.08 ^d		.29 ^g	.03	.12 ^d	.18 ^f		.19 ^g	.10		.18 ^g	.12 ^e	*
Correctability	.25 ^f	.10 ^e	*	.08	.09 ^e		.23 ^g	.05	.09	.16 ^f		.13 ^f	.14 ^e		.17 ^g	.03	
Ethicality	.20 ^f	.20 ^g		.21 ^f	.23 ^g		.13 ^f	.27 ^g	.39 ^g	.15 ^f	*	.19 ^g	.27 ^g		.25 ^g	.18 ^f	*
R ²	.67	.71		.75	.67		.67	.66	.74	.66		.71%	.66%		.72%	.63%	

a Entries are beta weights when all criteria are entered at the same time.

b The significance of the difference in weights is assessed by using a regression equation that includes main effects and interactions terms for all eight criteria.

c R² = adjusted square of the multiple correlation coefficient

d $p < .10$

e $p < .05$

f $p < .01$

g $p < .001$

* Interaction terms that are significant at the $p < .10$ level or greater

were more concerned with issues of decision quality, bias, and correctness than were those dealing with the police. There was no evidence for the hypothesized greater attention to ethicality in courtrooms. Why would this be true? One possible explanation lies in the generally low esteem in which the Chicago courts are held by the public. Citizens approaching the courts may not think of them as places that emphasize rights. The police, in contrast, are viewed more positively by citizens. As a result, ethicality mattered equally in both settings. As hypothesized, those dealing with the police focused more on the effort to be fair (a nonsignificant difference).

I found that procedures used for resolving disputes were more likely to be judged in terms of opportunities for input and consistency of treatment (a nonsignificant difference), as hypothesized, but found no bias effect. Nondisputes were more likely to be judged in terms of the efforts made by the police officer or judge to be fair. Earlier I suggested that the general lack of consistency effects found in this study might stem from the fact that most of the respondents' experiences were not disputes between contending parties. This finding supports that suggestion because consistency matters more when disputes are involved. It is also noteworthy that judgments of procedural justice were better explained in the case of disputes ($R^2 = 75$ percent) than nondisputes ($R^2 = 67$ percent).

The two dimensions of the experience itself also showed an effect on the meaning of procedural justice. In the case of choice, citizens who voluntarily contacted the police or courts focused more heavily on the quality of the authorities' decision making, as hypothesized, while those without choice were concerned with the extent to which they had input into the decisions made and whether the police behaved ethically (nonsignificant differences).

Citizens who received a favorable outcome were more concerned with ethicality, as predicted, and also with honesty (a nonsignificant difference). Those who received negative outcomes evaluated procedural justice more heavily in terms of the effort of the authorities to be fair and the consistency of their actions with other situations. Predicted increased concerns with bias and dishonesty among this group were not found. Rather than focus on these issues, respondents reacted to their inference of whether the authorities had made an effort to be fair; in other words, they looked beneath the surface at motives.

Outcome importance was found to have only one influence on the meaning of procedural justice. When outcomes were more important, issues of honesty became more important. Treatment importance produced two effects. Those who regarded being well treated as more important paid more attention to ethicality and to the quality of the decisions made.

V. DISCUSSION

A. *The Importance of Procedural Justice*

The findings reported strongly support the suggestion of prior research that a key determinant of citizen reactions to encounters with legal authorities is the respondents' assessment of the fairness of the procedures used in that contact. There is also a lesser influence of distributive justice. Once such fairness factors are taken into account, there is little independent effect of the favorability of the outcomes or procedures involved.⁵

The results of this examination support the original Thibaut and Walker (1975) hypothesis that the way legal decisions are made affects litigant reactions to those decisions. This support is consistent with other post-Thibaut and Walker findings in the legal arena (Lind, 1982; Walker and Lind, 1984), in the political world (Tyler, 1986a; Tyler, Rasinski, and Griffin, 1986), and in work settings (Folger and Greenberg, 1985; Greenberg and Folger, 1983; Greenberg and Tyler, 1987). Similarly, the finding of effects on the evaluation of authorities is consistent with other recent discoveries of such effects in the legal (Tyler, 1984b; Tyler and Folger, 1980), political (Tyler and Caine, 1981; Tyler, Rasinski, and McGraw, 1985), and organizational (Bies, 1985) arenas. In other words, this result is quite in line with widespread suggestions that those affected by the decisions of third parties in both formal and informal settings react to the procedural justice of the decision-making process at least as much, and often more, than they react to the decision itself (Lind and Tyler, 1988).

B. *The Meaning of Procedural Justice*

These findings indicate that the judgment of procedural justice is complex and multifaceted. Citizens are not using any simple, unidimensional approach to such assessments. Instead, they pay attention to seven distinct aspects of process: the authorities' motivation, honesty, and ethicality; the opportunities for representation; the quality of the decisions; the opportunities for error correction; and the authorities' bias. It is noteworthy that the major criteria used to assess process fairness are those aspects of procedure least linked to outcomes—ethicality, honesty, and the effort to be fair—rather than consistency with other outcomes. This reinforces the earlier suggestion that procedural issues are distinct from concern with outcomes.

Following the lead of Thibaut and Walker, most researchers have focused on issues of process and decision control (i.e., repre-

⁵ In considering the conclusions of this study, it is important to remember that the data are correlational. As a result, the causal order assumptions cannot be rigorously tested. It should be recognized, therefore, that the conclusions are, of necessity, more tentative than if an experimental design had been used.

sentation) when exploring the meaning of procedural justice. These results suggest that representation, while important, is only one of a number of concerns that define fair processes.

1. The Effort to Be Fair. Judgments about “how hard” the authorities tried to be fair emerged as the key overall factor in assessing procedural justice. From an attributional perspective this represents a motive attribution and requires the respondent to think about whether the official involved was motivated to be just. As such it requires more effort than simpler behavioral judgments and might be expected to be avoided. Instead, however, citizens focus on this assessment, even though trait inferences are especially difficult to make and are less reliable when observers can only rely on information from a single interaction (Heider, 1958).

Others have also noted the desire of citizens to infer the motives of authorities. Lane (1986) writes that citizens focus heavily on inferences about the “benevolence” of political leaders, while Bies (Bies and Shapiro, 1987) suggests that workers are very concerned with the “sincerity” of managers. These issues reflect respondents’ desire to understand the dispositional tendencies of those making decisions. If they infer a positive disposition, they can trust that, in the long run, the leader will strive to serve their self-interest. It is for this reason that trust is such a key component of legitimacy (Barber, 1983; Tyler, 1986c).

2. Ethicality. While concern with ethicality has not figured prominently in past psychological discussions of procedural justice, it has emerged here as an important criterion of procedural fairness. Social scientists, including Leventhal (1980), have suggested that ethical appropriateness might be a key aspect of fair treatment. Lane (1986), for example, has noted its importance in political settings. He argues that one of the most significant aspects of procedural justice to citizens is that the procedures used support their sense of self-respect. Being treated politely and seeing one’s rights respected should strongly reinforce self-respect. The general importance of self-respect to overall psychological well-being has also been suggested (Campbell, 1980; Rosenberg, 1979). Its importance in the specific context of encounters with legal authority was suggested by Tyler and Folger (1980), who examined citizen-police contacts and found that a key issue to citizens in such contacts was “recognition of citizen rights” (p. 292). Similar evidence of a concern with interpersonal aspects of encounters with authorities has also been found in research on work organizations (Bies and Shapiro, 1987).

In this paper the concept of ethicality is operationalized in two potentially distinct ways: as politeness and as concern for one’s rights. These two items were combined into one index because I found them to be highly correlated ($r = .59$). If they are sepa-

rated, concern for one's rights is more strongly related to judgments of procedural justice ($r = .67$) than is politeness ($r = .58$).

3. Consistency. Perhaps the most striking deviation from the predictions is the failure to find strong consistency effects in citizen judgments of fairness. In this study citizens are not basing their judgments on a comparison of their outcomes or treatment with other experiences, either their own or of others'. Since consistency has been found to be a major issue in past studies, its insignificance here is puzzling. There are several possible explanations. One is that citizens lack the information necessary to make consistency judgments. Citizens might have contact with the police and courts for a wide variety of reasons, each with its appropriate type of treatment by those authorities. As a result, citizens may be aware of several instances of police or judge behavior but may not know how they relate to their own experience. Since similarity judgments are the key to comparisons (Festinger, 1954), this makes it difficult for citizens to assess relative outcomes and treatment. How, for example, can the result of a call to the police to stop a neighborhood disturbance be compared to not receiving a ticket when stopped for speeding? Citizens may thus lack the knowledge necessary for judging whether their outcomes or treatment were better or worse than those of others.

The idea that citizens can accept differences in treatment or outcomes if those differences are justified by differences in the problems being dealt with has been suggested by Bies and Shapiro (1987). It is also supported by the finding of Cornelius *et al.* (1986) that inconsistency of treatment does not lead to perceived unfairness if it is justified by differences in the nature of the task.

It may be that the lack of awareness of others' experiences is characteristic of only some populations. Special groups may have greater knowledge about others and rely more on others' experiences when evaluating their own. One such example is criminals. Casper's (1972, 1978) interviews with defendants in prison suggest that criminals have a great deal of knowledge about the typical behavior of the police and courts and use consistency with their expectations as an important basis for evaluating their treatment and sentences.

The difficulties that citizens have acquiring the appropriate information for social comparisons are similar to the more general difficulty they have drawing useful information from indirect sources such as the mass media. In the case of crime information, for example, these difficulties can be traced in part to the failure of the media to present citizens with the situational information they need to compare the factors involved in the crime victimizations they read about or see on television to their own situation and behavior to estimate their crime risks. (Tyler, 1984a; Tyler and Cook, 1984; Tyler and Lavrakas, 1985). In other words, a per-

son can know of instances involving others but lack the contextual information required to apply those data.

If citizens lack the information needed to rely on consistency, that is, on cross-situational comparisons, their alternative is to rely on judgments that can be made with the information that they do have. One type is information about the behavior of the official, which leads to inferences about their efforts to be fair. Others are information about their honesty as well as whether the official followed general ethical standards of conduct.

The need to rely on judgments based on a single experience suggests one reason that ethicality had a strong influence on judgments of procedural justice. Consistency with ethical principles is a type of judgment that allows citizens to assess the quality of police or court conduct within the context of one experience. Irrespective of the problem or issue at dispute, they can feel that the officials involved should follow general ethical guidelines. As a result, such judgments override the difficulties involved in social or temporal comparisons.

C. The Relationship Among Procedural Justice Criteria

These findings confirm the idea of positively interrelated clusters of procedural criteria. Their existence suggests that the choice of procedures for resolving disputes or solving problems does not require making the trade-offs discussed in the literature on distributive justice. Procedures that are viewed as leading to higher quality decisions, for example, are also more ethical and allow more citizen input. In other words, from the citizens' perspective, procedures exist that will promote all aspects of procedural justice simultaneously. This does not mean that the attainment of all criteria can be maximized at one time—it cannot. However, the harsh trade-offs described in the distributive justice literature do not appear in this study of procedural justice.

Factor analysis also suggests two underlying factors that can account for the seven independent criteria identified. The first is made up of experience-based judgments. The second consists of judgments that involve the comparison of the experience to other experiences or external ethical standards.

D. The Universality of Procedural Justice Criteria

The results of the regression analysis suggest that the meaning of procedural justice changes in response to the nature of citizens' experiences with legal authorities. While the pattern of the findings is complex, it points to the conclusion that individuals do not have a single schema of a fair process that they apply on all occasions. Instead, they are concerned with different issues under different circumstances. As a result, it is likely that there are no universally fair procedures for allocation and dispute resolution.

Instead, different procedures are appropriate under different circumstances.

As noted, Thibaut and Walker (1975) focused on issues of representation (process and decision control) when examining the meaning of procedural justice. The results of this study suggest that they may have overgeneralized from the dispute context of their own work to a general theory of fair process. In the context of disputes, representation is the most important issue (see Table 6). If the context is broadened, however, other issues emerge.

It is also interesting to note that the characteristics of the person do not influence the criteria used to assess whether a procedure is fair. In other words, different types of people within American culture define the meaning of procedural justice in a similar way. This suggests that definitions of the meaning of justice within particular settings may be part of the cultural beliefs shared by members of our society. This suggestion is also supported by recent ethnographic studies of the courts (Merry, 1985, 1986) and by studies of consensus in judging wrongdoing (Sanders and Hamilton, 1987). The lack of personal differences has very important consequences for interactions among citizens and between citizens and authorities. Since all parties to a problem share a common conception of the meaning of procedural justice, all will focus on similar issues in attempting to find a process for dealing with the question at issue. If this were not the case, police officers and judges would be required to make an initial effort to understand the definition of procedural justice held by each party who appeared before them. Developing agreements on these issues before attempting to choose procedures for resolving every problem legal officials must deal with would be both complex and time-consuming.

These results suggest that legal authorities are aided in their efforts to resolve public problems by shared cultural values about the meaning of procedural justice within the context of particular situations. These common values facilitate the efforts of officials by suggesting the public concerns they ought to focus on to gain citizen acceptance of their efforts. They also facilitate the acceptance of decisions in disputes, since both parties are likely to share a conception of what the authorities should be doing.

These results also suggest that efforts to develop a typology that will clarify when procedural justice will have different meanings should concentrate on developing a situational typology. People think about procedural justice in a similar way even if they differ from each other on background characteristics.

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