CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC SCRUTINY
FOR LEADERS AND
THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

by

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Printed at INSEAD, Fontainebleau, France.
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September 25, 1995

Prepared for Research in Organizational Behavior

We wish to thank Blake Ashforth, Thomas D'Aunno, Jane Dutton, Kimberly Elsbach, Gary Alan Fine, Daniel Julius, Roderick Kramer, and W. Richard Scott for their contributions to this essay, which was prepared while the first author was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. The second author wishes to the thank the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada for their support. We are grateful for financial assistance provided by Hewlett-Packard and the National Science Foundation (SBR-9022192).
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ABSTRACT

Much research emphasizes that leaders and organizations that are noticed by and please others will be rewarded with power, legitimacy, and resources. This literature implies that leaders, and others in symbolic roles, must work under close scrutiny if they wish to garner such rewards for themselves and their organizations. Yet little theory or research considers the consequences of such scrutiny. This essay lays groundwork for research on public scrutiny by defining it, specifying its consequences, and identifying defenses that may reduce its negative consequences. The content of public scrutiny may be positive or negative. This intense and intrusive form of attention is characterized by a blend of persistent attention to the leader or organization, close and persistent performance monitoring and evaluation, frequent interruptions, and relentless questions about past, current, and future actions. If unchecked, these distractions are proposed to cause cognitive overload, with attention focused on how the leader or organization appears to others and explaining such appearances. Overload is also proposed to generate negative affect (especially evaluation apprehension), which is accentuated during interruptions. Consequences for leaders and their organizations include: (1) delays in ongoing tasks; (2) attention and effort devoted toward symbolic activities, away from other kinds of activities; (3) greater adherence to injunctive norms, less adherence to descriptive norms; (4) attention and effort focused on well-rehearsed acts, away from acts that require learning or creativity; and (5) greater perseverance at ongoing and planned activities. We identify interpersonal, procedural, and structural defenses that leaders and organizations use to reduce scrutiny and its negative consequences. We then consider the limitations and drawbacks of such defenses. Finally, we suggest directions that future work on scrutiny might take.
CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC SCRUTINY FOR LEADERS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

Much research emphasizes that whether leaders and their organizations flourish or fail depends on their ability to attract and manipulate public attention. This scholarly research reflects the popular view that image is crucial to organizational success and that leaders are responsible for "imparting positive spin." But the public spotlight is a double-edged sword. The same public attention that leaders draw on to shape and mold their organizational or personal images can become a harsh and intrusive spotlight with unintended, and often harmful, consequences.

Consider CEO John Mars and his highly successful Mars Company. Reporters, financial analysts, academics, and competitors are constantly trying to break through the wall of secrecy erected by the publicity shy Mr. Mars and other Mars executives, partly to understand why this candy company is so successful (Brenner, 1992). This scrutiny ranges from constant attempts to arrange unwanted press conferences, to conversations with Mars family neighbors, to spying on the Mars home. Organizational research has much to say about the explanations, structures, and procedures that John Mars should use to please various constituencies. But it has little to say about how John Mars, other Mars executives, or the Mars company will be affected by such persistent and intrusive attention. Important questions that are left largely unanswered include: What are the elements of public scrutiny and how are they experienced by leaders and their organizations? What cognitive and emotional responses are triggered by such scrutiny? What are the consequences for leaders and their organizations? What sort of defenses are available against scrutiny?

This essay takes initial steps toward answering these questions. Our review indicates that there has not been a prior attempt to develop such a perspective. Most related literature emphasizes the need for leaders and their organizations to attract and manipulate public attention in order to be successful, not public scrutiny per se. This broad literature has been labeled the symbolic perspective (Pfeffer, 1981). Symbolic research that draws on psychological theory (e.g., Tedeschi, 1981) considers the verbal accounts that leaders use to enhance their organizations' reputations (Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1993; Staw, McKechnie, & Puffer 1983). Macro
sociological work considers how structures and procedures are used to acquire organizational legitimacy rather than to achieve technical efficiency (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Recent research has combined these psychological and sociological perspectives to explain how leaders use verbal accounts that refer to organizational structures and procedures (Elsbach, 1994). Other research uses economic theories on agency and signaling to examine stock market reactions to top managers' announcements during accidents, scandals, and product safety incidents (Marcus & Goodman, 1991). Despite varied nuances, these writings all convey that people and organizations that are noticed by, and please, their publics will garner legitimacy, power, and resources.

While symbolic research implies that most leaders, and other people in visible roles, carry out their responsibilities under close public scrutiny, this point is rarely made explicit. Yet observers must devote critical attention before they can be pleased (or offended) by a person or organization. Little research considers the consequences enjoyed or suffered by leaders and organizations that face the bright, and sometimes harsh, spotlight of attention from others. Some aspects of this topic are addressed in the psychological, sociological, and organizational behavior literature, notably in Tetlock's (1985;1991) work on accountability, Kanter's (1977;1979) writings on life at the top of organizations, and Kramer's (1994;1995) research on hostile scrutiny as one of the elements that brings about paranoia in leaders. We draw on this literature. We also draw on popular writings to ground our assertions. Finally, although we draw primarily on existing sources, we also use data from the six months we spent trying (and ultimately failing) to study race relations in a government agency that faced intense scrutiny\(^1\) and from informal interviews with purveyors and targets of public scrutiny.\(^2\)

This essay focuses on intense scrutiny, on defining it, describing its consequences, and identifying the defenses used to reduce its negative consequences. Figure 1 summarizes the preliminary perspective on the consequences of scrutiny developed in this essay. This perspective summarized in Figure 1 is not sufficiently refined to be described as a complete, integrated, or falsifiable theory. Rather, Figure 1, as with the rest of this essay, is an initial effort to sort and
weave together what is known about public scrutiny so that complete, integrated, or falsifiable theory can be developed and tested in subsequent work.

This preliminary perspective reflects that, beyond the importance of being noticed and appreciated by others to obtain legitimacy and resources, leaders and organizations benefit in other ways from public scrutiny. We conclude that, on balance, however, unchecked scrutiny has greater negative than positive consequences. We suggest that scrutiny is an intensive and obtrusive form of attention from others, comprising: (1) persistent attention to the leader or his or her organization; (2) close and persistent performance monitoring and evaluation; (3) frequent interruptions, and (4) relentless questions about events that have occurred, are occurring, and will occur, along with requests that the reasons for such actions be explained. Our view is that, although elements of scrutiny have been examined in past empirical and conceptual work, this blend and its consequences have not been the subject of systematic theory development or testing.

We suggest that, if unchecked, these forces cause those under scrutiny to experience constant distraction punctuated by episodes of more pronounced interference with thought and action. These constant and intermittent pressures lead to cognitive overload, with attention focused on how the leader or organization will appear to others and how to explain such appearances. This overload is also proposed to cause negative affect (especially evaluation apprehension) which will be heightened during unwanted interruptions. Figure 1 lists five consequences of these psychological processes for leaders and their organizations that follow from some or all of these proposed intervening forces: (1) Delays in ongoing tasks; (2) attention and effort devoted toward symbolic activities, away from other kinds of activities; (3) greater adherence to injunctive norms, less adherence to descriptive norms; (4) attention and effort focused on well-rehearsed acts, away from acts that require learning or creativity; and (5) greater perseverance at ongoing and planned activities.
This essay first explicates the framework outlined in Figure 1. We then identify interpersonal, procedural, and structural defenses against intense scrutiny. Next, we consider the drawbacks of such defenses, focusing on how these methods can create new problems for leaders and organizations. Finally, we discuss directions that future research on scrutiny might take.

ELEMENTS OF INTENSE PUBLIC SCRUTINY

Figure 1 indicates that the content of public scrutiny may be positive or negative from the perspective of a leader or organization. We consider the effects of positive versus negative scrutiny later in this essay. But we are more interested in the similarities than the differences between scrutiny that comes from historically hostile, supportive, or neutral sources, or that is generated by positive or negative features of the leader or organization. We found many important similarities, for example, in the content and the consequences of the scrutiny that leaders of the Wallace Company encountered after winning the prestigious Malcolm Baldridge quality award (Hill, 1993) and the scrutiny that leaders of General Motors encountered when they were accused of making low quality and obsolete cars (Yates, 1983).

As a result, this essay focuses more heavily on the form than the content of public scrutiny. Intense public scrutiny occurs during episodes (from minutes to years in duration) characterized by an intense and obtrusive form of attention from others. These episodes occur when there is something sufficiently novel, interesting, or important about the leader or organization to attract close attention and interference from observers and exchange partners. Various people or groups may help shine the spotlight including friends, enemies, customers, suppliers, stockholders, board members, regulators, internal revenue agents, competitors, superiors, co-workers, subordinates, the press and, in the case of widely recognized public figures such as entertainers, athletes, and politicians, the general public. Scrutiny takes place through numerous human and technological means. Interpersonal settings include one-on-one interactions, interactions with small groups, performances in front of live audiences, or covert observations. A variety of technologies can be used to help shine the spotlight, including tape recorders, cameras, and telephones.
Intense public scrutiny is present when top managers or other organization members face a relentless stream of persistent and curious people who use such interpersonal and technical means of intrusion. Scrutiny is related to but distinct from accountability (Tetlock, 1985;1991). When a person is accountable, it means that he or she held responsible and is obligated to explain or justify something; when a person is scrutinized it means that he or she is examined closely and methodically, the subject of a "minute inquiry" (The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition). Tetlock (1991) implies, but does not explicitly state, that real and imagined closed examination by others is a consequence of being accountable, not accountability itself. Moreover, although leaders are often scrutinized closely because they are presumed to be accountable for the actions of their organizations, they may also be scrutinized for other reasons, for example, because they charming, funny, or beautiful.

So public scrutiny, as used here, refers to episodes where leaders and their organizations are examined in a close and obtrusive fashion. Moreover, the diverse evidence from popular and academic sources, as well as pertinent scholarly theory, we reviewed led us to view public scrutiny as a blend of unobtrusive and obtrusive actions that audience members take toward a leader or organization, not a single action. We propose that intense and unchecked public scrutiny is a blend of persistent attention, performance monitoring and evaluation, frequent interruptions, and questions from audience members. We explicate these four elements below.

1. Persistent Attention Devoted to the Leader or Organization

Leaders (and others in symbolic roles) often report that everything they say, write, and do is watched closely, and that little of what they say, write, or do is likely to stay private despite efforts to keep such information away from watchful constituencies. Leaders face such pressures because, as the people who symbolize what the organization means to both insiders and outsiders, every detail of their lives — both on and off the job — is subject to intense interest and careful observation. Kanter (1979:35) asserts "Life at the top is life in a goldfish bowl, an existence in which all boundaries can be rendered transparent at the twitch of the public's curiosity. The room at the top is all windows."
Top administrators in the public agency we tried to study reported that the press, government officials, the courts, the union of minority employees, the union of (mostly) white employees, lawyers, consultants, and clerical employees watching and dissected their every move. A top administrator said: "We feel like we are under a microscope; every move we make is magnified a hundred times." John Mars, the billionaire CEO of Mars Inc. described earlier, prefers to keep a low profile and routinely refuses (or doesn't bother to respond to) requests for media interviews. But he continues to be hounded by reporters for interviews, and other Mars family members (who are executives or heirs) are watched closely. A Washington Post reporter (Brenner, 1992) who was spying on Mars and his family (and talking to their neighbors) reported, for example, that his house is weathered, his roof sometimes leaks, his shoes are unpolished, and he drives a fourteen-year old Mercedes. Similarly, A. Bartlett Giamatti described how his life changed after becoming president of Yale University:

Not that I've been treated unfairly, but you go from being a private person to [everyone] suddenly reading descriptions of your face, your clothes, the way your hands look. (Horton, 1992:38-39)

High levels of attention may also be devoted to visible organizational decision-makers who are not top managers. Pressures for accountability of public officials have resulted in laws that require open records and open meetings (Bok, 1982; Cleveland, 1985). These "sunshine laws" often mean that decision-makers must use processes in which everything they do and say has the potential to be broadcast to thousands -- or millions -- of people. McLaughlin and Reisman (1986) conducted a case study of how the University of Florida chose a new president under such laws. Selection committee members found that sunshine laws meant that little evaluation and discussion of candidates was allowed without representatives of diverse constituencies and the press present. The law required that candidate interviews be conducted in public forums. When committee members began an informal group discussion outside of the public spotlight "Vice Chancellor Steve McArthur reminded them that further discussion was inappropriate since the meeting was officially adjourned" (McLaughlin & Reisman, 1986:479).
Especially high levels of public attention are evident when political leaders are involved in alleged scandals. Garment (1991:63) reports that, when President Reagan's national security advisor Richard Allen was suspected of taking a bribe from Japanese journalists in exchange for setting-up an interview with Nancy Reagan, the media began a "death watch," or a stakeout of Allen's home "so they would not miss a single one of his comings and goings."

Finally, the rise of computerized data bases means that close and persistent attention can occur even without any interaction with -- or knowledge by -- the leader or organization in question. Rothfeder (1992) documents how easy it is to use existing data bases to learn numerous details about any person or organization. He describes an advertisement for "Tracers Worldwide," a "superbureau" that sells (often unlawful) information about people and organizations:

Its latest service guide, which I received in the mail, promises to supply telephone records, credit card usage reports, workman's compensation records, earnings reports, names and addresses of employers, Social Security numbers, and reports of bank account searches -- "just a few of our more than 100 services." (Rothfeder, 1992:81)

2. Close and Persistent Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

Intense scrutiny entails more than just close attention from others; it is typically combined with close performance monitoring. Such monitoring is rarely uncritical; people and organizations under the spotlight usually face a constant stream of (often unsolicited) evaluation and advice about what actions they should and should not take. Members of England's Royal family face pronounced public attention, especially Diana Princess of Wales. The introduction to Morton's (1992) book Diana: Her True Story thanks Diana's close family, friends, and counselors, and the royal household (especially her brother) for providing revelations about her. Morton reports that members of Princess Diana's social network do more than just observe her; friends, members of her staff, her estranged husband, her estranged husband's staff, Queen Elizabeth, Queen Elizabeth's staff, a diverse set of paid and unpaid personal counselors, and the media industry of "royal watchers" provide persistent evaluation and advice. She is evaluated and advised on seemingly everything, including how she raises her children, how she looks at her husband, which issues she supports and ignores, and her clothes, weight, and posture. Morton reports that the
Queen's private secretary, Sir Robert Fellows, criticized Diana for kissing her handsome Italian driver on the cheek and for praising the Prime Minister for his handling of the Gulf War.

Princess Diana faces some of the most relentless evaluation and advice on Earth. Top managers and others in visible roles face similar, if less pronounced, pressures. A CEO told us that he was interviewed by two reporters from the same newspaper at the same time just after he took over a Fortune 50 company. One criticized him for not being confident enough; the other praised him for not being arrogant like other CEOs. Stock prices of publicly held companies are published in the press each day, as are the win-loss records of sports teams. Because the performance of leaders and their organizations are so closely intertwined in the minds of observers (Meindl, 1990), such data are construed as valid evidence about how leaders and their organizations are performing. Quantitative performance data, along with more subjective information, are used by observers to form judgments and shape advice for leaders and organizations. A former Nike manager, who is married to a former top Nike executive and crony of Phil Knight (Nike's CEO), wrote an "unauthorized" account of life inside this multi-billion dollar shoe company (Strasser & Becklund, 1991). It praised Knight and fellow "buttfaces" (the word top managers used to describe themselves) for developing inspired products, aggressive marketing, manufacturing savvy, and being lighthearted and fun. It criticized them, especially Knight, for faults including under-the-table payments for amateur athletes, violating the letter and spirit of other rules governing college athletics, arrogance, meanness, and greed.

Similarly, John Mars, his family, and their privately-held company not only are the subject of persistent attention, they also face persistent evaluation and unsolicited praise and criticism from their various publics. The Washington Post article mentioned above (Brenner, 1992) is filled with praise and criticism from diverse sources. The family's frugal ways are described in largely positive terms, but the article includes critical remarks by a personal shopper who refused to work for John Mars' sister, Jacqueline Mars, because "She wanted me to shop at Sears, not Saks." The company and the Mars family is praised for its commitment to quality, profits, cleanliness, efficiency, and high paying jobs. They are criticized by past and current employees for being
secretive, throwing tantrums, imposing excessively tight control, pressuring employees to work too hard, and doing a poor job of managing the succession to the next generation of Mars children. Alfred Poe, a disgruntled former executive asserted "If they didn't invent it" then "they don't want it." The family is even criticized for giving R. Bruce Murrie (son of a former Hershey president) insufficient credit for developing the hugely successful M&M candy by Mr. Murrie's daughter.

3. Frequent Interruptions

People who watch, evaluate, and provide advice to those in the spotlight are often not passive, or even polite, observers. Those in the spotlight often face many interruptions. Research indicates that interruptions are a defining feature of the executive role (Bass, 1990). Mintzberg's (1973) widely cited research indicates that the executives are constantly interrupted by phone calls and unscheduled meetings. Thompson's (1967) conceptual work suggests that top managers buffer the organization's technical core from external intrusions of all kinds, including interruptions from people inside and outside of the organization. As Mintzberg (1975) put it, "Someone, only half in jest, once described the manager as that person who sees visitors so that everyone else can get their work done." A related reason that a leader is likely to be interrupted frequently is that, as symbolic head of an organization, he or she will be viewed as responsible for -- and in control of -- most actions that occur within an organization. Top managers may have only moderate control (Bass, 1990), or even little control (Pfeffer, 1977), over most events associated with the organizations they lead. But work on the romance of leadership suggests that organizational participants and other observers talk and act as if leaders have great control (Meindl, 1990). As a result, leaders are typically besieged with requests to explain, assist with, or repair a host of (often trivial) details of life within their organizations.

One executive told us that he was "hound" by interruptions at every turn, via phone messages, e-mail, FAX messages, and people "camping out" in front of both his home and office. Similarly, Bennis (1979:38) described the (largely minor) interruptions that he faced one day during the time he was president of the University of Cincinnati:

A student complains that we won't give him course credit for acting as assistant to a city councilman. Another was unable to get into the student health center. The
teacher at my child's day school, who goes to UC, is dissatisfied with her grades...... An alumnus couldn't get the football seat he wanted. Another wants a coach fired. A teacher just called to tell me the squash court was closed at 7 p.m., when he wanted to use it.

Political leaders face even more pronounced interruptions. Questions about leaders' personal affairs now often arise in places and at times that were once reserved for issues of State. An NBC reporter who was visiting the Oval Office bluntly asked (then President) Bush if he was having an extramarital affair. Bush, clearly angered, retorted that the question only perpetuated sleaze and should not be asked in the Oval office (Sabato, 1993:275). The shocking nature of the question perhaps received more attention in the media than the policy issues faced by the Bush administration.

4. Questions about what has happened, is happening, will happen, and why

These interruptions often entail requests for explanations about why events have occurred or have not occurred, or why plans have been made or not been made. Research on information processing indicates that human beings are constantly searching for explanations of their own behavior and of others, that people routinely request causal explanations from others for their behavior, and that they are strongly influenced by such explanations (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). As a result of this endemic and powerful human tendency, the literature on impression management by leaders and other organizational spokespersons indicates that they devote much energy to answering implicit and explicit questions from real and imagined audiences about why events occurred, will occur, or have not occurred. The notion that leaders spend much of their time and resources answering real and imagined questions is a ubiquitous theme in literature on organizational impression management (Ginzel et al, 1993). Staw, McKechnie, and Puffer (1983), for example, found that much information in letters from CEO's in corporate annual reports focuses on explaining organizational financial performance.

Requests for explanations sometimes come from the press. Reporters are trained to push interviewees to explain past or planned events. Teel and Taylor (1988:124) exhort aspiring reporters: "You have to ask questions and sometimes you have to irritate your interviewee a trifle. If you are not intrinsically curious and inquisitive, the business of journalism is probably not for
you." The reporters surrounding Richard Allen's house during the "death watch" described above shouted questions each time he arrived at or left his house. Garment (1991:64) notes:

At times during the Allen episode the stakeout of his home consisted of as many as 50 to 60 reporters and their crews, plus the television cameras, sound trucks, and all the cable that goes with them, camped out on the remains of lawn and littering the premises with McDonald's Styrofoam. One group of reporters, Allen complained at the time, had even approached his six-year old daughter, one of his seven children, and tried to interview her. These journalists, when they heard Allen's complaint, protested their innocence. They said that they had merely approached the little girl and asked her nicely "Is your daddy home."

Implicit or explicit requests for top managers to explain events and plans do not, however, come from the press alone. None of the complaints Bennis dealt with in the above example came from the press, but all required him to explain why the various problems he faced had arisen, what he was or was not going to do about each one, and why. Similarly, Sutton and Callahan (1987) found that leaders of computer firms that filed for protection under Chapter 11 of the Federal Bankruptcy Code devoted much time to answering tough questions about why the financial troubles occurred and what was being done to save the company from an array of sources including creditors, board members, lawyers, employees, suppliers, and customers -- and only occasionally -- from reporters. Existing literature emphasizes how the answers that leaders provide influence the "audiences" who are targets of such explanations. But our perspective turns attention inward. We focus on the consequences for leaders (i.e., thoughts, feelings, and actions) and their organizations of encountering such questions and having to develop such causal explanations.

**THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING UNDER PUBLIC SCRUTINY**

This blend of attention from others, performance monitoring and evaluation, interruptions, and questions has not been examined in past research. But aspects of scrutiny have been the subject of theory and research, especially in writings by social psychologists. Our reading of this literature, along with our modest original qualitative data, suggests that people experience intense scrutiny as a constant source of distraction punctuated by episodes of more pronounced interference with thought and action.
The social psychological literature suggests three reasons why high levels of sustained attention from others, especially from others who are evaluating performance, will be distracting. First, people who are closely watched and evaluated (or who hold symbolic roles in organizations that are closely watched and evaluated) may devote time and attention to monitoring the reactions of audience members for evidence of approval and disapproval. This search for cues indicating approval and disapproval from others can create further distraction because it is often fraught with apprehension (Geen, 1991). In extreme cases, like former FBI head J. Edgar Hoover (Gentry, 1992) and President Lyndon Johnson (Kramer, 1995), a leader's devotion of time and energy to audience reactions can resemble a paranoid obsession. Kramer illustrates this "hypervigilance" by quoting Herring's (1993:95) description of Johnson as "A compulsive reader, viewer, and listener who took every criticism personally and to heart." "Hypervigilance" has a negative connotation. But devoting close attention to the preferences and evaluations of crucial exchange partners and sources of personal and organizational legitimacy is essential for leaders who seek to be powerful and respected (Pfeffer, 1992). Similarly, recent popular literature on customer satisfaction and quality argues that managers should be relentless in attending to their customers' concerns and criticisms (e.g., Sviokla & Shapiro, 1993).

Second, in addition to devoting attention to audience reactions, people who are watched and evaluated by others will often ruminate about which responses to make. Other people, especially people who are evaluating a person (or an organization that reflects on the person's reputation), may introduce uncertainty about what responses will be needed. The person being attended to and evaluated by others may, as a result, be distracted by ruminations about which responses are appropriate and which are not (Zajonc, 1972, cited in Guerin, 1986:39).

These distractions were evident in the public agency that we attempted to study. Administrators reported that the press, government officials, courts, union of minority employees, union of (mostly) white employees, lawyers, and consultants were watching and dissecting their every move. Even the structure of the top management team was changed so that the former head of the black employees' union and a (hostile) training director could help assure that court-ordered
procedures were followed. So it wasn't possible for top management to meet as a group and be free from outside attention. This scrutiny was justified given past racist and sexist actions by this organization; but these administrators were constantly distracted by concerns about how to avoid offending these ever-present outsiders. The former agency head told us "We spent all of our time worrying about how to save our reputations and the reputation of the department." Similarly, Herring (1993:95) reported that Lyndon Johnson was "obsessed with, answering every accusation, responding to every charge."

Third, purveyors of scrutiny may create pleasant as well as unpleasant distractions. Baron (1986) proposes that evaluative others may be fun to interact with or to watch. The president of a real estate company that we interviewed came up with the idea of building an affordable "dream house." He convinced a newspaper and a television station to publicize the contest to design the house, the building of the house, and the reactions from the large crowds of people who visited the house. The president told us that this valuable publicity created an array of pleasant, but time-consuming, distractions he hadn't anticipated. He was fascinated with newspaper and television reporters and photographers, and would spend precious time watching them work and asking them about their jobs instead of doing his own.

In addition to these ongoing distractions, people under scrutiny face interruptions. Scrutiny results in chronic distraction punctuated by acute interference with ongoing thoughts and actions. Alecia Swasy, a staff reporter from the Wall Street Journal who covered Procter & Gamble, and author of a book that was critical of this company (Swasy, 1993), led a barrage of negative publicity about Procter & Gamble's products, practices, and executives. Her efforts were a chronic source of distraction for CEO Ed Artzt and other top executives. Swasy also interrupted these executives in ways that caused acute and pronounced interference with what they were thinking and doing. Once, while Artzt was playing golf in Pebble Beach, California, Swasy left him two phone messages, sent him a FAX, and talked to his wife "who assured me that she'd give her husband the message to call me when she saw him at lunch" (Swasy, 1993:292). Artzt was distracted (and irritated) by this intrusion.
Similar examples of acute interference with thought and action are illustrated by the complaints made by search committee members who selected the president of the University of Florida. The presence of "sunshine laws," which required open meetings and open interviews at all stages in the selection process, meant frequent interruptions. McLaughlin and Reisman (1986:480) found:

Some committee members had found the audience of reporters a distraction, since reporters scribbled notes throughout the interviews, and flash bulbs went off frequently. One committee member recalled that a reporter had leaned over her shoulder during an interview too see what she had written even though, according to the sunshine law, personal notes that are not entered into committee records can remain private.

The president of the construction firm we interviewed indicated that articles and television stories about the project not only prompted inquires from potential home buyers, it resulted in many unwanted calls and visits. He was interrupted by people who wanted to sell him construction materials he had purchased or would not need. But he admitted that he often found conversations with builders, architects, and others who heard about the project to be more interesting than the boring (but pressing) task that he was working on at the moment. His tendency to answer his cellular phone almost no matter what was doing supports Marshall McLuhan's (1964:238) description of the phone as "an irresistible intruder in time and place."

**PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES TRIGGERED BY SCRUTINY**

Figure 1 shows that this blend of constant distraction and more pronounced interference with thought and action is proposed to trigger two psychological responses, one cognitive and the other emotional. First, we suggest two closely linked cognitive responses: a) cognitive overload and b) a narrowing of attention toward how the leader, or his or her organization, appears to others and how to explain such appearances. The psychological literature helps explain why intense public scrutiny will create cognitive overload. Baron (1986) points out, following work by Kahneman and Cohen, that distractions created by the presence of others, especially evaluative others, may tax cognitive capacity. As a result, a person may only have time to focus on a small number of easily understood aspects of the tasks that he or she faces, especially aspects that seem most important.
Furthermore, the interruptions that characterize scrutiny may exacerbate such cognitive overload. Constant requests and questions from people mean that ongoing thoughts and activities are constantly stalled, and so take longer to finish. Most interruptions require time, even just to deny a request or refuse to answer a question, or to simply be added to the pile of tasks. Finally, leaders may find intruders to be interesting to interact with or watch. So both the chronic and acute distractions created by intense scrutiny encourage leaders to focus their narrowed attention on how they or their organizations, appear to others and how to best explain such appearances.

The content of almost all of these distractions make salient, and so turn attention to, how others view the scrutinized person or his or her organization; so leaders will focus their narrowed attention on symbolic rather than substantive tasks. First, following Tetlock's (1985;1991) work on accountability, people facing such demands will likely think and act like "intuitive politicians" because their attention is drawn to whether or not they or their organization is viewed favorably. Furthermore, to process information more easily and quickly, people under intense scrutiny -- like other "intuitive politicians -- may use the "acceptability heuristic" to guide the decisions they make. Tetlock (1991: 340) described this heuristic:

The acceptability heuristic allows one to avoid much unnecessary cognitive work ... All one needs to do is to adopt the salient acceptable option. Laboratory and field studies suggest that people frequently do exactly that: they choose the most clearly defensible strategy available to them.

Second, we expect that people under intense scrutiny will devote less attention to factors that they do not believe are relevant to the audiences they seek to please, even if these ignored factors include important aspects like economic efficiency, creativity, or individual well-being. That is, responses will generally mirror the spotlight shined by audiences, focusing more on symbolic and political issues. Few audiences, especially external audiences, have deep knowledge of the inner workings of an organization (e.g., complex technical and creative routines, detailed control and planning systems, and medium-to-long-term strategic plans and methods of implementation). So the spotlight will be on symbolic issues, especially on changes that threaten or bolster legitimacy (e.g., "What does your drop in the industry rankings suggest?" or "Why did you get that recent New York Times endorsement").
We propose that scrutiny will also generate negative affect, especially evaluation apprehension. As indicated above, the social facilitation literature suggests that those distractions endemic to intense scrutiny will create apprehension about how to please evaluative others and about what they are thinking. Cognitive overload creates additional negative emotion. Research on role overload suggests anxiety, frustration, and dissatisfaction will be experienced by people who can't keep pace with demands (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). Furthermore, the presence of others can cause anxiety about whether attention should be devoted to the task or to the audience, along with anxiety that the audience will interfere with the ability to perform tasks.

Interruptions are likely to provoke the strongest negative feelings. The questions asked during such interruptions are often requests to explain or predict performance or to describe the methods that the leader or organization is using to improve or maintain performance levels, so the chronic evaluation apprehension is likely to be accentuated by such interruptions. More generally, interruptions can generate negative affect because arousal is mobilized in response to obstruction or interference with organized response sequences (Mandler, 1984). For example, when interruptions (or other distractions) introduce information that clashes with one's life view or slows or impedes progress toward goals, the resulting arousal is likely to intensify or be part of negative emotions like anxiety, frustration, and anger.

The interruptions associated with scrutiny do not always trigger unpleasant feelings; the president of the construction company described above found many of the phone calls he received to be pleasant distractions. And some interruptions carry good news. When interruptions include information that a person is advancing faster than anticipated toward goals, the resulting arousal is likely to intensify or be part of positive emotions like elation and happiness. Nonetheless, as Fiske and Taylor (1991) suggest, many interruptions and distractions are experienced as negative because they interfere with goal accomplishment and overload an individual or system.³

The evaluation apprehension, the anxiety from overload, the frustration caused by distractions and interruptions in pleasant and important actions and thoughts, and the anger generated by interruptions are not always easily contained. Many top managers and other figures
in the public spotlight learn to conceal their negative emotions. But the pressures of public scrutiny can cause leaders to lash out at others. Such antics are well-publicized in sports. Bobby Knight, Indiana University Basketball Coach, is infamous for shouting at and swearing at his players and members of the press (Feinstein, 1986). And such flashes of temper are also evident from managers of more traditional organizations. Steve Jobs, co-founder and former CEO of Apple Computer, had numerous well-documented temper tantrums in the presence of employees, often crying and screaming (Young, 1988).

Reporters are infamous for creating distractions and interruptions that provoke negative feelings. A science reporter that we interviewed told us that researchers were sometimes irritated by her request for an interview because it distracted them from their research. Aggressive action by the press can provoke especially strong negative emotions. Procter & Gamble CEO Ed Artzt reacted with pronounced irritation and hostility toward scrutiny from Wall Street Journal reporter Swasy (1993:298), who reported that Artzt sometimes called "just to yell at me" and that "During one call in February of 1991 he cursed and screamed about a story on P&G's spending cuts."

Charles Lindbergh, the famous aviator, complained bitterly about the constant, rude interruptions that he received from the press. He was especially upset by the way that reporters hounded him during his honeymoon. Seledes (1989:38) quotes a well-known interview in which reporter Marlen Pew interviewed Lindbergh about his honeymoon:

He felt outraged when some reporters followed him and Mrs. Lindbergh on their honeymoon and "for eight straight hours circled about our boat, at anchor in a New England harbor, in a noisy motorboat and occasionally called across the water to us that if we would pose for one picture they would go away."

CONSEQUENCES OF UNCHECKED SCRUTINITY FOR LEADERS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

Figure 1 proposes that these psychological responses lead to five consequences for leaders and organizations: (1) frequent delays in ongoing tasks; (2) attention and effort devoted toward symbolic activities, away from other kinds of activities; (3) greater adherence to injunctive norms, less adherence to descriptive norms; (4) attention and effort focused on well-rehearsed acts, away from acts that require learning or creativity; and (5) greater perseverance at ongoing and planned
activities. The remainder of this section explicates how these psychological processes may bring about these consequences and illustrates how these consequences may be reflected in actions by leaders and their organizations.

**Frequent Delays in Ongoing Tasks**

We asserted above that interruptions mean that ongoing thoughts and activities are stalled. The first outcome of unchecked scrutiny, then, is that regardless of what task a leader is doing, it will take longer to finish. There is controversy about whether the interruptions faced by most executives are functional (Mintzberg 1973) or dysfunctional (Bennis, 1979). But there is little disagreement that top managers face many interruptions, that unwanted and uncontrolled interruptions can be dysfunctional, and that leaders can be interrupted by others -- and themselves -- so much that it hampers performance. Mintzberg emphasizes that interruptions are crucial for leaders because they contain current information. He also emphasizes, however, that executives who cannot stop excessive interruptions end-up doing many things, but none well.

This dysfunction of unchecked scrutiny was summarized by the owner of the construction company, who was so distracted by, first, the media, and then, the resulting barrage of interruptions from people who had heard media reports, that "Some days, progress on the house just stops because of all the attention we are getting." A related problem was identified by Bennis during his tenure as a university president. He reported that his efforts to develop and implement strategic plans were stalled because he was mired in a constant flow of interruptions about pressing, but less important matters. These interruptions caused Bennis to propose his "Second Law of Academic Pseudodynamics": "Make whatever grand plans you will, you may be sure the unexpected or trivial will disturb or disrupt them" (Bennis, 1979:39). His writings on why leaders can't lead portray top managers as facing a constant stream of unwanted and irritating distractions and interruptions that make it impossible to engage in long term planning. Bennis' (1979:38) frustration in this regard was evident when he complained: "Here's a note from a professor, complaining that his classroom temperature is down to 65 degrees. I suppose he wants me to grab a wrench and fix it."
Attention and Effort Devoted toward Symbolic Activities, Away from Other Kinds of Activities.

We argued earlier that the narrow focus on how the leader or his or her organization appears to others and how to explain such appearances means that more attention will be devoted to symbolic tasks and less to other tasks. If a leader holds a purely symbolic role, he or she might act solely on the basis of the acceptability heuristic (Tetlock, 1991) and there will be no variance to explain on this dimension. Our perspective suggests, however, that leaders under heavy scrutiny (or who head organizations under scrutiny) and who have both symbolic and substantive responsibilities, will tend to neglect substantive responsibilities.

A newspaper story about Gerhard Casper, Stanford University's president, indicated he was spending so much time on ceremonial and political duties that he had too little time to "worry about academic affairs -- the area that I think is most important for the long-term future of Stanford" (Bartholomew, 1993:1). Casper worried "that in trying to perform a full round of both 'Queen Elizabeth' ceremonial duties and 'Margaret Thatcher' governing duties, he might do full justice to neither" (Bartholomew, 1993:6). Similarly, Powell (1987:130) describes how managers at a Boston public television station were often pulled away from substantive tasks because the station faced unchecked scrutiny. Powell found that, because of outside monitoring and evaluation faced by the director of strategic planning, "Not infrequently, she would find herself unable to attend to her work priorities and instead spend days responding to the disgruntled complaints of outsiders." McLaughlin and Reisman concluded that the scrutiny institutionalized by Florida's "sunshine laws" caused search committee members to adopt a decision process that appeared to be fair, careful, and inclusive rather than a process that helped them to select the best university president. McLaughlin and Reisman further asserted that, rather than addressing substantive issues, "the presentations of self in the Florida sunshine [had] the overtones of photo opportunities" (1986:479).

This focus toward symbolic activities and away from other matters was pronounced in the public agency that we attempted to study. The agency head and a consultant told us that so much attention, time, and money had been devoted to dealing with outside attention and intrusions that
the agency's ability to accomplish its core task had diminished. Scrutiny that results from favorable news can cause a similar shift. The Wallace Company was the first small manufacturing company to win the prestigious Malcolm Baldridge quality award. After the company won the award, managers from other companies visited for "benchmarking," executives gave speeches at conferences and other companies, and reporters interviewed executives. These flattering distractions helped drive the company into Chapter 11. An executive from the company that acquired Wallace told Hill (1993:79):

> When you do win the Baldridge, there is also an obligation, if not a contractual commitment, to go out and spread the gospel. It takes a lot of time from work for the key people to give talks and spread the gospel. You also have to open up your business to others who want to see your systems and your procedures. That is good, but if you are in the business of trying to survive, it can become a financial problem and defeat your original purpose of being in business.

Similarly, people who have technical roles with few symbolic responsibilities, but who then come under scrutiny, may change activities drastically. A science reporter asserted that once the media "make a professor famous" the distractions are so great that he or she rarely has another original idea. Gleick's (1992:382) biography of physicist Richard Feynman describes how the symbolic distractions that come with winning a Nobel Prize make it hard to do the intensive work that led to this accolade:

> Most scientists knew that not-so-amusing metalaw that the receipt of the Nobel Prize marks the end of one's productive career. For many recipients, of course, the end came long before. For others, the fame and distinction tend to accelerate the waning of a scientist's ability to give his [sic] creative work the time-intensive, fanatical attention that it often requires.

**Greater Adherence to Injunctive Norms, Less Adherence to Descriptive Norms**

The use of the acceptability heuristic may also lead to more emphasis on following norms about how people and organizations ought to act and less emphasis on following norms about how they typically act. Cialdini, Kallgren, and Reno's (1991) review indicates that research on norms has not taken sufficient care to distinguish between standards for behavior based on what is commonly approved (i.e., injunctive norms) versus standards for behavior based on what is commonly done (i.e., descriptive norms). They report nine studies on littering to support a "focus theory of normative conduct," which proposes that the relative power of injunctive versus
descriptive norms to shape behavior depends on which standard is more salient. Cialdini and his colleagues found that subjects who had attention focused toward possible disapproval from others for littering and away from the amount of littering by others around them were more likely to follow injunctive norms and disregard conflicting descriptive norms.

Leaders facing scrutiny are likely to field questions about whether or not they and their organizations are doing what is commonly approved. Even when they do not face such questions explicitly, leaders may ruminate about how to answer them if asked. We anticipate that such real and imagined questions, along with other pressures to focus on symbolic acts, will encourage leaders to turn attention toward conforming to injunctive norms and away from conforming to descriptive norms. For example, administrators in the public agency we attempted to study asserted that their hiring practices and promotion standards for minorities were similar to comparable agencies in and outside their city. Administrators contended that, as scrutiny increased, they were asked more questions about why they were not meeting idealized and stringent standards about what ought to be done to help minorities versus lower standards about what was actually being done in most other agencies. McLaughlin and Reisman (1986) indicated that an effect of Florida's sunshine laws on the search committee they studied was that -- compared to searches in the past and at places without sunshine laws -- many meetings were scheduled and procedures were adopted that had no purpose other than satisfying idealized norms for fairness and inclusion. Forums were held with interest groups where few people other than the candidate, search committee, and press attended each time. Committee members felt they had no choice but to continue scheduling such sparsely attended gatherings to avoid questions about why they had not conformed to idealized norms about broad-based inclusion in the decision process.

Attention and Effort Focused toward Well-Rehearsed Acts, Away from Acts that Require Learning and Creativity.

The cognitive overload associated with scrutiny may not only cause people to rely on the acceptability heuristic (Tetlock, 1991). The vast literature on social facilitation published since
Zajonc's (1965) classic paper suggests that the cognitive load and distraction created by the presence of an evaluative audience will facilitate dominant, well-learned responses and inhibit subordinate, less-well rehearsed behaviors (Baron, 1986; Geen, 1991). These robust findings suggest that public scrutiny will be associated with three interrelated outcomes reflecting that, as with the reliance on the acceptability heuristic, people will try to avoid cognitive effort and perhaps do what seems immediately functional. First, when scrutiny is intense and unchecked, attention and effort will be focused on carrying out well-rehearsed acts. Second, when scrutiny is intense and unchecked, new approaches and practices should be learned less often and more slowly. Third, when scrutiny is intense and unchecked, the cognitive overload (and associated narrow focus) should mean that leaders and others in symbolic roles will be less creative (Amabile, 1983).

An emerging body of experimental research also suggests that the negative affect produced by scrutiny will further fuel this tendency to be less creative (Isen & Baron, 1991).

Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton's (1981) conceptual work and review suggests that these three effects -- which are all signs of rigidity -- will occur in response to a wide variety of external threats to organizations and leaders. The substantial literature on organizational decline indicates that organizations often respond in this way, at least at first, to decreasing levels of financial resources and to downsizing (Sutton & D'Aunno, 1989). Threat-rigidity effects are also supported by Weick's (1990) analysis of a deadly airplane crash. There is, however, limited evidence that the threat posed by public scrutiny brings about these rigid outcomes in leaders and organizations. Informants in Galunic's (1994) study of a high technology firm indicated that evaluation apprehension and distraction associated with a visible and widely discussed computer product led members of the design team to rely heavily on technologies they had used in the past and to limit their efforts to discover and understand technologies used elsewhere. Although these existing technologies were blended together in imaginative ways, the creative leaps were smaller than if new technologies had been used as well. McLaughlin and Resiman's (1986) study of sunshine laws in Florida suggests that the evaluation apprehension experienced by committee members encouraged them to be less imaginative about the range of candidates that were interviewed. These
cases, combined with the substantial literature suggesting that such rigidities occur in response to
organizational decline, imply that learning and creativity will be hampered in organizations
regardless of whether, for example, they face unchecked scrutiny because they have been
dramatically successful or unsuccessful. But more systematic research is needed.

**Greater Perseverance at Ongoing and Planned Activities**

Staw and Ross' (1987) conceptual perspective suggests that answering questions about what
is occurring, what will occur, and why can create commitments that bind organizations and their
members to planned and ongoing courses of actions. Their case studies of British Columbia's
decision to host the Expo 86 world's fair (Ross & Staw, 1986) and the Long Island Lighting
Company's (LILCO) decision to build the Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant (Ross & Staw, 1993)
suggest that the public attention to and questions answered by leaders under scrutiny will trigger
social binding and norms for consistency, social psychological forces that enhance perseverance at
ongoing and planned activities.

First, Staw and Ross' perspective, combined with Salancik's (1977) commitment theory,
suggest that scrutiny can create social-psychological binds that are difficult to break. Their case
studies support our assertion that, as part of their symbolic roles, leaders and other spokespersons
under intense scrutiny are asked to offer a constant stream of justifications for current and planned
actions. The need to justify a course of action, despite its possible failing, may result in the leader
persevering in the chosen course of action. In the case of the Shoreham plant, as the cost soared
from 65 million in 1966 to 5.5 billion in 1989, LILCO leaders repeatedly assured external
constituencies that the investment was wise. Ross and Staw (1993) indicate that LILCO's CEO
was personally identified with these expressed commitments because he repeatedly spoke in favor
of the project when answering questions from the press, shareholders, community groups, and the
public utilities commission. So it was difficult to make claims that the CEO was not responsible
for his company's commitments unless, as was done before the project was abandoned, a new
CEO was hired. Also, the commitment was described by LILCO's top management as their
strategic decision, indicating it was voluntary. So the CEO could not make credible claims that he
had been forced to make the commitment. Finally, repeated public proclamations of commitment to the project made it difficult to halt because such statements conveyed that these were strongly rather than weakly held beliefs. Thus, as the project's failure became more pronounced, the CEO sought to justify his course of action by increasing commitment to it.

Social norms for consistency reinforced these social-psychological binds. Staw and Ross' (1980) experimental research found that leaders who maintain consistent commitment to a course of action are evaluated more positively than leaders who withdraw from or change their course of action. They point out that our society praises people, especially leaders, who stay the course during difficult times, but win out in the end. In the Shoreham case, commitments were also binding because they were made publicly, so they could not be revoked without leaders being construed as being wrong in the first place, and thus "losing-face." Top management's commitment to the plant was unambiguous. So it could not be revoked by claiming that the audience did not properly interpret it as a tentative or experimental commitment. Ross and Staw report that these presumed virtues of consistent leadership were often mentioned by LILCO leaders. Even after 4 billion dollars had been spent, a LILCO official said "if people just wait until the end, they are going to realize that this is a hell of an investment" (Ross & Staw, 1993:718). Brockner, Rubin, and Lang's (1981) experimental findings provide additional support for our assertion that anxious leaders who face evaluative audiences will persevere at ongoing and planned courses of actions. Brockner and his colleagues found that commitment of resources to a course of action was highest when subjects faced larger audiences and had feelings of higher social anxiety.

The heightened pressures for consistency encountered by leaders do not just lead to escalation of commitment to failing courses of action. These forces can also lead to positive outcomes because perseverance may eventually turn failing projects around, even against long odds. Staw and Ross (1980) suggest that such forces may have led famous leaders including Lincoln, Churchill, and Gandhi to persist and succeed against long odds. The point is that, regardless of whether a course of action will fail or succeed, when a leader makes public, personal, frequently repeated, unambiguous, and voluntary commitment to a course of action, it will be
difficult to revoke, both for reasons of self-justification and face-saving. As the owner of the construction firm who built the widely publicized "Dream House" put it, "Once it was in the paper and on TV, I knew I had to go through with it."

In conclusion, these five consequences are proposed to be evident (at least initially) at the individual level because each results from the psychological process portrayed in Figure 1. These processes are psychological because they reflect cognitions and emotions within persons. None of these processes concern structural aspects of relationships between persons or institutions, and so are largely outside of the domain of sociological theory. But scrutiny has important consequences at the organizational level. Staw and Sutton's (1992) writings on "macro organizational psychology" indicate that such effects can occur in two ways. First, scrutiny sometimes focuses largely on an individual leader, or a small set of leaders. Leaders' thoughts and feelings may then influence their substantive and symbolic actions, which in turn may sway much or all of the organization. Second, scrutiny is sometimes devoted to the actions of an organization as a whole such as when an investigative reporter tracks down industrial waste that has been dumped unlawfully, or when a reviewer for a computer magazine asserts that a product is one of the year's "ten best" or "ten worst." All or most members may then feel like they are under scrutiny, so their aggregate feelings, thoughts, and behaviors may influence the organization as a whole.

**DEFENSES AGAINST SCRUTINY**

The five proposed consequences of unchecked scrutiny, on balance, strike us as more negative than positive. These consequences may be positive under some conditions. Interruptions can be advantageous when a leader or follower abandons a less important task and shifts attention to a more important matter. To the extent that a leader has symbolic rather than substantive responsibilities, it may be wise to narrow attention on symbolic acts. Adhering to the (often) higher standards associated with injunctive rather than descriptive norms may lead to more effective or ethical actions. If an organization is in a mature industry with little competition, then it may be most profitable to focus attention and effort on well-rehearsed tasks and, along related lines, to persevere at ongoing and planned activities.
Despite these virtues, there are many times where unchecked scrutiny can harm the reputation and objective performance of leaders and organizations. Unwanted interruptions from people who are not crucial exchange partners or who raise trivial issues can waste attention, time, and money. Leaders, and other visible members, may make poor decisions when they only consider symbolic implications of decisions and ignore technical, financial, or ethical implications. Organizations may waste resources by trying to conform to impractical -- and perhaps unattainable -- ideals about how they ought to behave. Impaired learning and creativity may hamper the ability to make crucial changes. And perseverance is not wise when it is devoted to a failing course of action.

Leaders and organizations are not helpless victims of unchecked scrutiny. They can and do take steps to defend against scrutiny and its negative consequences. And leaders understand that even the benefits of scrutiny cannot be enjoyed unless efforts are made to defend against certain kinds of scrutiny by some people on some occasions. Our review of scholarly writings, case descriptions, and our own bits of data led us to identify 12 defenses that leaders and organizations use to defend against the negative consequences of scrutiny. These 12 strategies are listed in Table 1, where they are grouped into rough categories as rhetorical, procedural, and structural defenses. We discuss how and why defenses may be effective in this section; the drawbacks of using defenses are discussed in the next section.

I. Rhetorical Defenses

Using ambiguous language. Eisenberg (1984) asserts that clarity in organizational communication is overrated. He contends that ambiguity often serves as a useful compromise between total silence, which is often interpreted as sign that one has something to hide, and complete clarity, which can lead some organizational participants to feel excluded and can create obstacles to flexibility and change. Eisenberg proposes that strategic ambiguity promotes unified diversity because, when an organization’s goals and values are vague, fewer people will feel excluded. Eisenberg also points out that strategic ambiguity facilitates organizational change.
because, since it is unclear to others what paths the organization has taken, is taking, and will take, the escalation of commitment that occurs when observers know of such courses of action cannot happen. Political leaders in particular are noted for their (often excruciatingly obvious) vagueness. Although lambasted in the press for their inability to take a clear stand on many issues, this vagueness can actually serve the public (and themselves) well when it becomes necessary to alter a failing course of action. In contrast, when there is a lack of vagueness, change becomes more difficult and potentially damaging when attempted. Consider former President Bush's tax increases leading up to the 1992 presidential elections. These measures were necessitated by falling government revenues in the wake of the '89-'93 recession plus the desire to stem the growth in government debt. Although tax increases seemed prudent, Bush's prior lack of vagueness (i.e., "read my lips, no new taxes") made this decision not only more difficult to make and implement than it might have been but also damaging to the President's credibility as he entered the 1992 race.

Strategic ambiguity may also reduce social facilitation effects because, if purveyors of scrutiny do not know what organization members are thinking, planning, and doing, they cannot serve as evaluative audiences. Using ambiguous language helps maintain "plausible deniability" that an event occurred or was linked to specific organizations or members (Bogen & Lynch, 1989). Such vagueness may protect leaders or organizations from future evaluation for an act or its effects. When little or no information is available about what was done in the past, or a record that contains many vague descriptions is (perhaps intentionally) maintained, it is easier to plausibly deny that the action was taken or linked to a given person or organization (Garfinkel, 1967).

The language used by leaders of financially troubled organizations is often left intentionally vague to obscure what they have done and will do. Terms like "rightsizing," "reorganizing," and "repositioning" provide almost no information about how -- or even if -- the organization will cut costs. The popular term "downsizing" has been criticized as too vague to facilitate scholarly research on how costs will be cut (Cameron, Sutton, & Whetten, 1988). These vague terms also make it difficult for employees to understand and plan for changes in their jobs and organizations.
From management's perspective, however, vague terms can be useful because saying "the organization will experience significant downsizing during the next year" leaves them flexibility. The term downsizing does not convey whether or not, and what mix, of natural attrition, job sharing, pay cuts, reduction in benefits, layoffs, and early retirement incentives will be used. It is so vague that it does not even convey whether labor costs or other kinds of costs will be reduced, let alone how they will be reduced.

Similarly, McLaughlin and Resiman (1986:476) report how members of the search committee for the University of Florida president responded to sunshine laws:

"Everything said in meetings had to be couched in vague language," one committee member recalled. Several people described the instance when a member of the committee was aware that a certain candidate had alienated a number of people. Rather than risk being quoted in the press as having said this directly, the committee member said simply, "You might want to look into this man's background. I understand that several people left after he was appointed to his present position." ... More commonly, nothing at all was said, and candidates lost their place on the list due to silence.

Sports figures and their coaches are infamous for using strategic ambiguity to help protect themselves from questions about what they are thinking and what new methods they are trying to learn. Professional athletes play in the public spotlight; social facilitation research suggests that such attention will improve performance when appropriate methods are already well-learned. But when they need to change how they are playing, external attention should hamper learning. In order to maintain flexibility to change in future, and to avoid evaluative attention toward current efforts to change how the game is played, using vague language allows coaches and players to meet expectations that they should talk with reporters and fans about what they are doing, but to avoid some of the harm that these encounters can do to performance.

**Being boring.** Leaders and other top managers often are scrutinized because observers find that their actions -- or their organization's-- to be interesting. It follows that leaders can dim the spotlight of scrutiny by becoming less interesting to others. If done effectively, others will pay less attention to a boring leader or organization, and then devote less energy to monitoring performance, interrupting the leader and other visible members of the organization, and asking questions. Speaking in vague terms can help a person to be construed as boring. Talking about
minute details, using colorless language, and talking about dull topics can also make a leader -- and by extension the organization -- seem boring.

A former CEO of a Fortune 500 company that we interviewed was invited to address a prestigious gathering of the national press. He and a member of his public relations department decided this was a good opportunity to reduce the intense interest that the press had in this organization and its new CEO. They believed that past top managers had been scrutinized too closely by the press and they wanted the organization to be out of the limelight for another year or so until it starting selling some exciting new products that were under development. They decided that the best strategy was -- rather than refusing the chance to speak -- to give a talk on a boring topic and in a boring manner (with a dry delivery, filled with facts and figures, and sentences written in the passive voice). The CEO told us that the national press seemed to lose interest in him and his company for awhile after giving this boring speech.

**Being nasty.** The expression of negative affect to those who shine the spotlight may reduce subsequent scrutiny because those watching or interrupting may not want to repeat such unpleasant interactions. Staw, Sutton, and Pelled (1994:65) contend:

> There also may be costs to conveying positive emotion in interactions with subordinates, peers, and superiors. Employees who respond to interruptions from others by being positive or friendly may reinforce such behavior, and thus be interrupted with increasing frequency. As a result, warm and friendly employees may be unable to get their work done, while negative or hostile employees -- whom others may dread interrupting -- may be more productive because they work with fewer diversions.

The first author of this essay called a soon-to-be defunct Japanese car dealership to find out if they would like to participate in a study of organizational death (Sutton, 1989). The service manager reacted with anger to this request, telling Sutton that he considered it to be a rude intrusion during a trying time. Sutton was sufficiently discouraged by this hostility that he never called the owner to find out if, despite this employee's angry response, he might be interested in participating. Richard's (1986:327) participant-observation research indicates that administrators at a nursing home tried to reduce her scrutiny of their patient care practices by ridiculing her. Richard reports that administrators responded to a request that her mother get more exercise by sarcastically...
accusing her of wanting Yoga classes and a swimming pool installed. An administrator also
snidely told her that she was known as "the one" who wanted nurses to "roll [disabled] patients
around the grass" as a means of exercise. Richard suggests that such nastiness was meant to
discourage her from complaining about the facility and to encourage her to move her mother
elsewhere.

Raising interesting distractions. The final rhetorical strategy entails raising interesting
subjects that distract purveyors of scrutiny to avoid intrusion or to avoid subjects that will be time
consuming or difficult to address. President Reagan sometimes told jokes and interesting stories
about when he worked as an actor or a sports announcer in an apparent effort to distract reporters
from asking, or following-up on, tough or intrusive questions (Hertsgaard, 1989). Galunic's
(1994) study of business unit strategy included an interview with an R&D manager who was
concerned that attention and questions from top managers would distract and constrain a team that
was designing a computer peripheral. The R&D manager believed that such scrutiny would
hamper the speed, creativity, and quality of the design process. He defended the team by
distracting upper management with more visible but -- he believed -- less important projects. To
reduce "hype" about the key project, he always began presentations to top management by talking
about other projects and didn't leave much time to talk about the one he believed was most crucial.
He indicated that, by the time discussion turned to this less visible product, top managers didn't
have much time left to talk about it and were too distracted and tired to offer strong evaluations.
Top managers usually just conveyed a bit of tepid pessimism about the (eventually very successful)
product before turning to other matters.

II. Procedural Defenses

Hiding. A leader or other organization member can avoid scrutiny by being impossible to
find or by hiding out temporarily to avoid distraction or interference. These "disappearing acts" can
be accomplished through physical means, such as when top managers hold secret meetings away
from corporate headquarters, under false personal and corporate names, to decide if organizational
units should be closed and which employees should lose jobs (Sutton, 1984). Horton (1992:39)
describes how one CEO attempted to construct a physical setting that would preclude intrusion: "a CEO of a Fortune 500 company, exhausted by constant questions from those around him, had his office walled off and a separate building entrance constructed for his private use."

Hiding can also be accomplished by donning physical disguises, as celebrities sometimes do to avoid being recognized. It can also be accomplished by not revealing one’s identity. A university provost reported that he needed to get some important papers out of his desk late one evening. He anticipated that doing so would be challenging because his office building was occupied by demonstrators. He was confronted by demonstrators, who asked him if he was an administrator. This (casually dressed) provost said "Sorry, I'm just the janitor." Rather than being explicitly deceptive, people in visible roles can also protect their identities by being vague. Horton (1992:39) reports that AT&T's former CEO responded to a question about what he did for a living by saying "I work for the phone company." There are also some forms of explicit and legitimized hiding. For example, presidential retreats to Camp David are respected by the press as a time for the president, advisors, and sometimes foreign officials to contemplate various policy issues without interruption.

**Stalling.** Tetlock (1991) suggests that a strategy for avoiding the consequences of accountability is to procrastinate about a decision or action. Similarly, scrutiny might be attenuated through stalling. Decisions or actions that are likely to attract interest and be evaluated, and lead to interruptions and questions, might be delayed. A leader may wait to delay action until a time or place where scrutiny will be more difficult to accomplish or be accomplished by a less strident people. To avoid the scrutiny required by Florida’s sunshine laws, selection committee members often waited for private conversations to voice their opinions about candidates. Private conversations between members were not required to be open (McCloughlin & Reisman, 1986).

Electronic or human gatekeepers may be used to delay encounters with purveyors of scrutiny. Such foot dragging can reduce the number of encounters between leaders and purveyors of scrutiny and may discourage future intrusions. A secretary or receptionist may agree, in theory, to set a meeting between a leader and a person who is a source of scrutiny, but it may "need" to be
delayed for months because of the leaders' allegedly busy schedule. Or, when electronic or voice mail is used to contact the leader directly, he or she may take a long time to respond. We found that both these forms of stalling were used by administrators in the public agency that we attempted to study. Richard (1986) reports that nursing home administrators used similar delay tactics to reduce scrutiny by family members who complain about the care given to relatives.

Establishing rules about when, where, and how interactions occur. These tactics limit the amount of time that leaders, spokespersons, or other organization members face scrutiny. These limits on when and in what way scrutiny will occur gives them time to do substantive tasks and to marshal resources so that they can develop ideas about putting their organization -- and themselves -- in the best light. As Havelock Ellis put it, "To be a leader of men, one must turn one's back on men" (Columbia Dictionary of Quotations, 1993). Leaders may simply refuse to talk with members of the press or to representatives of other groups who they find to be distracting or irrelevant. John Mars, the reclusive CEO of Mars Inc., routinely refuses -- or ignores -- requests for interviews (Brenner, 1992). Similarly, the CEO of a Fortune 50 company told us that he refers all requests for interviews to his public relations staff and refuses to hold a conversation of any kind with reporters. As noted above, Nobel Prize winners often find that, after working in relative obscurity, pressures to engage in symbolic activities after winning the prize distract them from intellectual efforts. Some winners fight against these distractions and interruptions. Gleick (1992:382) reports that Francis Crick used this form letter:

Dr. Crick thanks you for your letter but regrets that he is unable to accept your kind invitation to:

Send an autograph
provide a photograph
cure your disease
be interviewed
talk on the radio
appear on TV
speak after dinner
give a testimonial
help you in your project
read your manuscript
deliver a lecture
attend a conference
Athletes like baseball player Ricky Henderson of the Oakland Athletics have a policy of refusing to talk to reporters when injured or in a slump. Henderson said he does so because these intrusions make it difficult to muster the psychological strength needed to recover from such setbacks (Henderson & Shea, 1992). Similarly, San Francisco Giants star Barry Bonds restricts contact with the press during times when, whether he is in a slump or in a hitting streak, he does not want to be distracted from his thoughts about how to play baseball.

A related, but less extreme, set of tactics entails enforcing firm rules about who can interact with or watch the scrutinized person, what questions can be asked, and -- in the case of reporters -- which topics they can write about. Celebrities often employ publicists to negotiate such arrangements with the press. Natale (1993:18) reports that "Not long ago ,when Vanessa Redgrave was in Hollywood promoting a TV movie remake of Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?, journalists were required to sign a release agreeing that they wouldn't ask questions about her controversial political beliefs." Similarly, limits can be set on when aspects of scrutiny occur in order to avoid intrusions that may detract from the quality of decisions made or may waste time. McLaughlin and Reisman (1986:473), report that, although the search committee for the president of the University of Florida held open meetings in accordance with sunshine laws, "committee members decided that noncommittee members would be allowed to address the chair only at the end of each session and that their remarks would be limited in length."

Doing favors for others in exchange for less scrutiny. When an organization member, or his or her organization, seeks to avoid or reduce scrutiny, he or she may use the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) or what Cialdini called "the old give and take." (1984:29) to eliminate or soften scrutiny. Favors done for purveyors of scrutiny can place explicit or implicit pressure on them to look the other way, to engage in little performance evaluation (or excessively positive evaluation), to interrupt less frequently, or to ask fewer and less difficult questions.
Hertsgaard's (1989) book about the relationship between the press and the administration during Ronald Reagan's presidency contains numerous examples of how small favors were done for reporters as way to gain more favorable and less intrusive media coverage. When Walter Robinson, a Boston Globe reporter, broke his thumb while covering a whistle-stop campaign, he discovered that Reagan's aides helped reporters in so many ways that he didn't need to take notes because "They gave you, within twenty minutes [Reagan's] remarks, as delivered, with punctuation, pauses, etc. And within in thirty minutes of each train stop, they had sixty phones set up for reporters" (Hertsgaard, 1989:42). A Reagan administration official suggested that such amenities had the desired effect:

If you give somebody a comfortable place to work, good facilitates, provide food because you know that they can't take time to go to restaurant ten miles away to eat, and in general provide the creature comforts, how then can someone turn around and bite the hand that feeds him? ... I had reporters...tell me. "Jesus Christ, how can I write a nasty story? Every time I need something, somebody is there to provide it for me. I've got two phones right in front of me, food over there, it's really hard to write nasty story." (Hertsgaard, 1989:41-42).

Refusing access to purveyors of "excessive" or "unfair" scrutiny. Leaders or gatekeepers who feel that reporters, "watchdog" groups, clients, or fellow organization members are engaging in excessive or unfair scrutiny may try to avert future scrutiny by ignoring them, ostracizing them, or physically barring or removing them from the premises. Swasy (1992) reports that, in response to her critical stories about Procter & Gamble and her aggressive intrusions in gathering information for these stories, Procter & Gamble's public relations staff ignored her requests for information. When she asked a company spokesperson for "basic information about a Russian venture," his response was "Surely a snooping reporter like you can find out that information," followed by "Why don't call some of your famous sources" (Swasy, 1992:296). Similarly, Natale (1993:14) reported that he wasn't sure whether to be flattered or insulted when an editor pressured him to interview a movie star because "We're having more and more trouble with these damn publicists wanting to approve our writers, and she has already rejected two of our suggestions. But when I brought up your name she was quite pleased." If successful, efforts to refuse access to the leader or organization not only halt or reduce scrutiny,
doing so serves as a warning to others that they may be removed or ostracized if they are too critical, intrusive, or zealous.

III. Structural Defenses

Establishing roles to block and absorb scrutiny. Thompson's (1967) classic Organizations in Action describes strategies that organizations use to buffer or seal-off their core technical activities from environmental influences. As Scott (1992:194) put it, such strategies "close the system artificially to enhance the possibilities of rational action." For example, "coding" of inputs is used to screen-out inappropriate clients and defective materials to avoid introducing unnecessary delays and confusion into the performance of technical activities. Similarly, leaders and other members may try to buffer or screen out unwanted intrusions from people within and outside their organizations.

Gatekeepers screen-out unwanted encounters and schedule and set priorities among desired encounters and so are a primary structural means that leaders use to buffer themselves from unwanted intrusion. Gatekeepers accomplish such "blocking" by using many of the rhetorical and procedural defenses described above. They may, for example, use vague language or be nasty to unwanted intruders, help leaders hide by refusing to connect calls, or lie that the boss is "out of the office." They may also enforce restrictions on interactions with a leader or tell purveyors of "excessive" scrutiny that access to a leader has been revoked. Secretaries and receptionists often hold such buffering roles. Sutton (1989) found that people in these roles often blocked his attempts to talk to leaders of dying organizations. They sometimes refused to transfer calls to a leader because he or she was "too busy" or "too upset." They also often deflected Sutton's calls to public relations personnel rather than top managers. Sutton found, for example, that his request to interview leaders who were closing a department store was foiled when the receptionist (without warning) transferred his phone call to a public relations manager. This manager was enthusiastic when being interviewed, but told Sutton he could not interview other managers.

Tom Wolfe's (1970) essay "Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers" presents a stylized example of buffering by bureaucrats at the San Francisco's Office of Economic Opportunity in the late 1960s.
When representatives of minority groups came in the office to lobby decision-makers for funds, Wolfe tells how they were blocked, at least at first, by career, lower-level, gatekeepers they called "flak-catchers." Wolfe described how a flak-catcher responded to a request to see the "The man:"

"I'm sorry that Mr. Johnson isn't here today," he says, "but he is not in the city. He's back in Washington meeting some project deadlines. He's very concerned and would want to meet with you people right now if he were here, but right now I know that you'll understand that the most important thing that he can do for you is to push these projects through in Washington"...."Now I'm here to answer any questions I can," he says, "but you have to understand that I'm only speaking as an individual, and so naturally none of my comments are binding." (1970: 109-110).

People in gatekeeper roles do more than just block scrutiny, they also absorb it. By doing so they, they further buffer leaders from intrusion and distraction. These bureaucrats were called "flak-catchers" because they absorbed angry questions and demands so that decision-makers did not have to face such intrusions. Wolfe describes how representatives of minority groups that were seeking funds construed encounters with these bureaucrats:

And then it dawns on you, you wonder why it took so long to realize it. The man is the flak catcher. His job is to catch flak for the No. 1 man. He's like the professional mourners you can hire in Chinatown. They have certified wailers, professional mourners, in Chinatown, and when your loved one dies, you can hire the professional mourners to wail at the funeral and show what a great loss to the community the departed is. In the same way this lifer is ready to catch whatever flak you are sending up. It doesn't matter what bureau they put him in. It's all the same. Poverty, Japanese imports, valley fever tomato-crop parity, partial disability... whatever you're angry about, it doesn't matter, he's there to catch the flak.

Decoupling symbolic and substantive leadership roles. Meyer and Rowan (1977) proposed that organizations separate -- or decouple -- symbolic structures and practices from substantive ones, in part, to reduce inspection and evaluation from external and internal audiences. Scott (1993) describes this as a strategy for buffering the technical core because it diverts attention toward ceremonial and presumably more normatively acceptable symbolic structures and actions. By doing so, technical structures and actions are constrained less by external intrusions. One way to reduce inspection, evaluation, and interruption is to establish distinct symbolic and substantive leaders so that scrutiny will be directed toward the symbolic leader, while the substantive leader will be left unfettered. This way, the substantive leader can deal with technical matters like resource allocation, planning, and decision-making more efficiently. The English government,
with the king and queen versus the prime minister and parliament illustrates such decoupling. It is an imperfect example because, although English royalty have no substantive responsibilities, the prime minister and parliament have much symbolic work because they are elected politicians.

Many corporations split symbolic and substantive leadership, at least to some degree. In the early years of Apple Computer, Steve Jobs played a large symbolic role, marketing the product, making speeches, talking to reporters, and securing venture capital funds, while co-founder Steven Wozniak developed Apple's early products, especially the wildly successful Apple II (Young, 1988). Similarly, while Hewlett-Packard CEO John Young was the official head of this Palo Alto-based corporation during most of the 1980's, Richard Hackborn, an executive who worked much of the time in relative obscurity in an office tucked in a modest shopping center in Boise, Idaho, was the firm's most influential technology and marketing strategist. Hackborn was largely responsible for imagining and then implementing the corporation's current dominance of the laser printing industry. Young played important roles in strategic decisions about the printer business. But our conversations with Hewlett-Packard executives suggest the most important role that Young played was taking heat from internal and external constituencies so that Hackborn could develop and implement his ideas relatively free from evaluation and interruption.

Using symbolic practices to divert attention from substantive actions. Meyer and Rowan (1977) propose that, beyond enhancing their technical performance, organizations adopt structures and practices for symbolic or ceremonial reasons. Organizations may help buffer their activities -- including managerial action -- by adopting widely used, endorsed, and visible structures and practices. Such structures and practices can reduce the scrutiny that leaders and organizations face because, when present, these ceremonial responses distract observers from -- and may help mask -- less visible and more controversial structures and practices.

Scott and Meyer (1991) propose that employee training, beyond helping organizations control employees and as a means of conveying knowledge, is often adopted for such institutional reasons. Training programs can be used as symbolic responses that are decoupled from the other organizational activities. Organizations that are criticized for racial and gender discrimination,
sexual harassment, or ethical violations sometimes try to please (and distract) critics by "training" employees to "learn" to avoid these unsavory behaviors. Training can be used -- and is used -- without changing policies for hiring, disciplining, firing, compensating, or promoting employees. A history of racial discrimination and tension between black and white employees plagued the public agency that we attempted to study. Some changes were made in hiring and promotion practices. But much time and money were also devoted to "diversity training." Leaders appeared to speak with great sincerity about the importance of such training during public appearances. Nonetheless, leaders, other employees, and even some of those who did the training privately described it as a waste of time and money and as having no impact on day-to-day race relations. But leaders believed that diversity training was needed to convince external and internal constituencies to leave them alone so they could do their work.

LIMITATIONS AND DRAWBACKS OF DEFENSES

Leaders and organizations that use these defenses may enjoy benefits including fewer delays in crucial tasks, not wasting time and attention on symbolic tasks, not being bound by unrealistic injunctive norms, learning more easily, being creative, and avoiding perseverance at failing courses of action. These virtues are reflected in "shy billionaire" and executive vice-president Forest Mars' assertion that much of his company's success is due to the privacy that they work so hard to maintain, which he contended "allows us to do the very best we can, the best we know how, without being concerned about self-aggrandizement" (Brenner, 1992).

Nonetheless, it is difficult to protect leaders and organizations from scrutiny if they are pursued by sufficiently large numbers of persistent and imaginative people. No matter which defenses are used or how vigorously implemented, intruders may be able to circumvent these impediments. Teel and Taylor's (1988:120) text teaches aspiring journalists techniques for obtaining interviews with recalcitrant subjects, including "the face-off" ( barging in his or her hideout), "the sit-in" (camping-out until the subject consents to the interview), "the assault" (running along side the subject and making "your appeal as quickly and strongly as possible"), and "beg." Bok (1983) describes reporters who lie about their identities and motives to get around
defenses. She describes how a German reporter, Gunter Wallraff, disguised himself as a guard to learn about an insurance company, as a right-wing emissary to learn about a planned coup in Portugal, and as a reporter to learn about the sleazy practices used by a German tabloid.4

Beyond the fact that even the most carefully designed defenses can be overcome by people who are sufficiently curious and persistent, we identified four other ways in that defenses can be ineffective, backfire, or have unintended negative consequences.

1. Defenses Consume Valuable Resources

Implementing many of the defenses listed in Table 1 can be expensive. Writing well-crafted ambiguous and boring language takes time for executives, public relations staff, and other gatekeepers. Establishing procedures and paying gatekeepers to block and absorb scrutiny is expensive, as are symbolic structures and programs like training. Managing an organization's image is something that can and should occupy the time of skilled people; all organizations need to obtain and protect legitimacy. As Tetlock's (1991) work on accountability suggests, however, such defenses may be used so much that not enough resources are devoted to substantive tasks. This drawback was especially apparent in the public agency that we attempted to study. Vast amounts of time and money were spent on defenses like limiting interaction with purveyors of scrutiny, hiring gatekeepers to reduce scrutiny, hiring lawyers and other outsiders to help respond to scrutiny, and conducting symbolic training programs. Leaders, employees, and consultants all expressed concerns that the organization's ability to carry out its core mission, which involved protecting the public, had suffered. Similarly, Stanford University hired Hill & Knowlton, the largest public relations firm in the country, to help leaders answer charges of misuse of federal funds (Gottlieb, 1991). Stanford paid for hundreds of hours of such consulting -- at a rate of $200 to $300 per hour -- during a period when substantial cost cutting, including layoffs, was occurring throughout the university.

2. Defenses May Make the Leader or Organization More Interesting to Observers

The defenses listed in Table 1 are used in efforts to reduce scrutiny. As the reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes discovered, however, when people or organizations go through great
trouble to defend against intrusions from outsiders, it may lead to even greater scrutiny because outsiders may construe that there is something interesting, and perhaps unsavory, to hide (Bok, 1983; Eisenberg, 1984). Brenner (1992) wrote two long stories in the Washington Post Magazine about Mars Candy largely because the members of the Mars family were so secretive. Swasy (1993) became increasingly interested in covering Procter & Gamble, in part, because they used defenses like hiding, stalling, establishing rules about interactions with the press, doing favors for local journalists, and ostracizing "biased" reporters. She found these defenses interesting to write about and wondered what the company had to hide. Swasy reported that Procter & Gamble did such a severe "Ivory Snow Job" that its public relations department sometimes refused to confirm that products were on the market even when they could be found on store shelves. She also reported that a former chief financial officer was proud of being told by a financial analyst that he gave a new meaning to the word "stonewall." These and other defenses helped protect Procter & Gamble executives and their company in the short term. Ultimately, however, the defenses themselves attracted scrutiny from publications like the New York Times and Wall Street Journal.

Similarly, Paul Biddle, an auditor from the Office of Naval Research who asserted that Stanford University overcharged taxpayers million of dollars, contended he became suspicious partly because Stanford officials avoided meeting with him, gave him incomplete information, did favors for his superiors in exchange for softer scrutiny, and tried to get him removed as an auditor because he was overzealous and biased. He asserted that these and other defensive actions led him to examine Stanford's accounting practices more closely, actions which resulted in a costly and embarrassing episode for Stanford (Cooper, 1991).

3. Defenses May Be Poor Impression Management

It is ironic that leaders and organizations use many of the defenses in Table 1 to protect their reputations, but using some defenses can harm such reputations. Use of these tactics may be interpreted as a sign that a leader or organization has something to hide, is directing his or her attention toward how actions look instead of toward more substantive actions, or that funds are being wasted. Any or all of these impressions can undermine the legitimacy of a leader or
organization. For example, Stanford's use of a public relations firm to help defend against charges of federal funds misuse was criticized as wasteful and an attempt to refuse blame (Wetzel, 1991).

When Procter & Gamble used defenses like hiding, stalling, and ignoring and ostracizing reporters to reduce scrutiny, these defenses did harm to Procter & Gamble's reputation beyond the information that was uncovered about unsafe products and environmental pollution. Swasy (1992:300) reports:

> The *Washington Post* editorial read: "In this affair P&G has suffered a certain loss of dignity as well as abrasions to its reputation for common sense." Even the usually friendly *Cincinnati Post* editorial page blasted P&G: "After years of working to improve its reputation as a corporate bully and impenetrable fortress, this incident paints that picture all over again." .... For *The Dayton Daily News*, [cartoonist] Mike Peters drew a lone cleaning woman in a KGB office telling a caller "Sorry Comrade... the agents are gone. They all went to work for Procter and Gamble."

Defenses that enhance a leader or organizations reputation under some conditions can damage reputations under other conditions. For example, being boring can fuel negative scrutiny if the leader is expected to be charismatic. French prime minister Edouard Balladur was applauded in the past for his no nonsense and pragmatic approach to, and conduct in, government. As the candidate for the much more powerful and visible role of French president, however, being boring drew him more criticism and attention than any of his past failures as prime minister. The *Economist* wrote (1995:29):

> Although content with the phlegmatic and pragmatic Mr. Balladur as prime minister, the French want something more from a president. Mr. Balladur's manifesto, trumpeted on February 13, was a disappointment. It read more like a government programme for the coming year than a future president's vision for the next seven. It was competent, moderate, boring- like the man himself.

4. Defenses May Seal-Off Leaders and Organizations from Key People and Data

Many of the defenses listed in Table 1 seal-off leaders and other people in symbolic roles from important information that is needed to take sound substantive and symbolic action. Leaders who are boring and nasty may drive away exchange partners who can provide valuable information. Procedural defenses like hiding and limiting interaction with outsiders limits the flow of such information into top management's purview. Gatekeepers block and absorb incoming
information; in particular, they are likely to screen-out unpleasant visitors with "unpleasant" information who will upset their superiors. Moreover, Crozier (1964:45) describes how, in interactions with their superiors, subunit heads are likely to "bias the information they give in order get the maximum of material resources and personal favors."

The blend of defenses against scrutiny and incentives mean that, especially for top managers of large organizations, information that they need -- especially negative information -- often never gets to them. Brock Yates (1983) asserted that this blend helped insulate General Motors executives from warning signs that they needed to build smaller and higher quality cars in the late 1970's and early 1980s. As John De Lorean, a General Motors executive at the time, put it: "The system quickly shut top management off from the real world because it surrounded itself in many cases with 'yes' men. There soon became no real vehicle for input." (Wright, 1979:47). Swasy (1992:305) quotes a stockholder who described the long-term effects of such screening on Proctor & Gamble executives:

"People at the top of big companies get out of touch sometimes. They have so many people kissing their ass, they don't know right from wrong."

The defenses that organizations use against scrutiny may create arrogant leaders because negative information and people who have negative views of the organization or the leader are kept away from leaders. This is a role theory view of arrogance (Hallmark & Curtis, 1994) because it suggests that, while arrogance may be fueled by personality characteristics like high self-esteem, leaders often claim excessive status because of the information they do and do not receive about personal and organizational performance. Regardless of whether evaluations of the leader or organization are generally positive or negative, the defenses used when scrutiny is high may screen out a disproportionately large amount of negative information and let in a disproportionately large amount of positive information. The long run effect may be that leaders begin to develop self-aggrandized views of their importance and how well they and their organizations are performing and will perform. In turn, they may make excessive claims about their own virtues and those of their organizations. Schwartz (1990) provides a compelling example of such an excessive claim by a NASA administrator. Nobel-Prize winner Richard Feynman served on the Rogers Commission,
which investigated the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. Feynman asked a group of engineers to estimate the chances that the shuttle's main engine would fail. Their estimates ranged from 1 in 200 to 1 in 300. When Feynman asked their boss for the same estimate, he proposed a failure rate of 1 in 100,000. Feynman asserted that this was just one of many illustrations that managerial isolation from reality was rampant throughout NASA (Schwartz, 1990:89).

DISCUSSION

This essay proposed that, in carrying out their symbolic roles, leaders and other visible organization members must operate in the bright and often harsh spotlight of public scrutiny. Our perspective was grounded in a combination of scholarly theory and research and less systematic data from the popular media, failed efforts to study a public agency, and informal interviews with leaders who had faced and conveyed public scrutiny. We anticipate that future work in this area will refine, expand, refute, and replace our preliminary ideas about the definition of intense scrutiny, its consequences for leaders and their organizations, defenses against scrutiny, and the drawbacks of defenses. Our efforts to review pertinent literature and to write this essay suggested several fundamental issues that might be developed in subsequent work.

We portrayed scrutiny as an unavoidable experience for people in symbolic roles in organizations, especially for leaders. Our preliminary hunch, after examining the psychological literature, the organizational studies literature, and case examples is that the consequences of scrutiny (and the unintended side effects of defending against it) are, on balance, more negative than positive. We acknowledged that delays in ongoing tasks, devoting attention and effort to symbolic rather than substantive acts, following injunctive rather than descriptive norms, reduced learning and creativity, and perseverance at ongoing and planned action can be sometimes desirable. More often, however, we portrayed these consequences as costs that leaders and their organizations had to pay if they wished to promote images that would bring legitimacy, resources, and power. This view that scrutiny is often a necessary evil for people who hold symbolic roles needs to be tested. Boundary conditions under which scrutiny has negative versus positive effects also need to be identified. For example, we proposed that scrutiny causes people to work harder at
what they know how to do well. Perhaps, despite the setbacks caused by interruptions, scrutiny may have a positive impact as long as creativity and learning are not crucial.

We do not mean to imply that public scrutiny is always harmful and should be avoided. We believe that business, political, religious and academic leaders should all be held responsible for performing in a competent and ethical fashion. This essay recognizes, however, that in our frenzy to place these people and their organizations under the spotlight of public attention, we may be creating dysfunctional consequences, including driving talented people out important positions or discouraging them from ever seeking such positions. As Sabato writes of US political leaders and the price of power (1993:206):

> Simply put, the price of power has been raised dramatically, far too high for many outstanding potential officeholders. An individual contemplating a run for office must now accept the possibility of almost unlimited intrusion into his or her financial and personal life. Every investment made, every affair conducted, every private sin committed from college years to the present may one day wind up in a headline or on television...American society today is losing the services of many exceptionally talented individuals who could make outstanding contributions to the commonweal, but who understandably will not subject themselves and their loved ones to abusive, intrusive press coverage.

We devoted little attention to the differences between positive and negative scrutiny. We proposed that attention, performance monitoring, interruptions, and questions can be provoked by successes or failures or can come from friends or enemies. There may, however, be systematic differences between the mechanisms of positive versus negative scrutiny. Persistent and unchecked positive scrutiny may lead to arrogance by leaders. We already proposed that arrogance may result when defenses screen out disproportionate amounts of negative information. There are also times when leaders face unchecked scrutiny that is largely or wholly positive. Leaders of wildly successful organizations, for example, may encounter praise at every turn. The combination of great success and constant praise may cause leaders to believe that they can do little or no wrong, even in spheres where they have little or no competence. John Scully followed Steve Jobs as Apple Computer's CEO and, eventually, played a central role in firing Jobs. Scully contended that the press and many Apple employees treated Jobs like he was a "Messiah." Scully asserted that such praise, in combination with Apple's early financial success, caused Jobs to
believe that he was free from adhering to binding legal obligations, to overestimate how strongly members of the Apples board of directors supported him, and to overestimate his technical ability (Scully & Byrne, 1987).

In contrast, Kramer's (1994; 1995) work on paranoia suggests that relentless hostile scrutiny threatens a person's self-esteem, security, and identity. When a person faces criticism at every turn, has no other meaningful positive identity to turn to, and efforts to reduce hostile scrutiny seem to have further alienated others, Kramer shows that exaggerated distrust or suspicion of others' intentions and motives occurs. Kramer's (1995) case study of U.S. President Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam War shows that the relentless criticism he faced (and his failure to halt it) meant "every expression of doubt and criticism, even from close friends and even when clearly intended as constructive, was transformed into a personal assault on his claim on the nation's leadership." Arrogance and paranoia are extreme responses to extreme scrutiny. The day-to-day praise and criticism that all visible leaders receive may lead to milder episodes of overconfidence and unwarranted suspicion. Extreme responses to extreme scrutiny make interesting reading. But it might be more useful to focus research attention on the more moderate levels of scrutiny and associated responses that are typical of larger numbers of settings.

Subsequent work on scrutiny might also consider the potential negative effects of "explaining why" on leaders' information processing and decision-making. A defining feature of scrutiny is that leaders face, and routinely answer, an onslaught of questions about what has happened, is happening, is planned to happen, and why. Theory and research by Wilson and his colleagues suggests that answering such questions may reduce the quality of subsequent decision-making. Wilson and Schooler's (1991) overview of the vast normative theory and research on decision making and decision analysis indicates that--beginning with assertions by Benjamin Franklin--many scholars have argued that developing a set of prior justifications will lead to superior decision-making. This work suggests there are benefits to developing a systematic "balance sheet" of reasons why past successes or failures occurred or of the pros and cons associated with making
a current decision (e.g. Janis and Mann, 1977; Raiffa, 1968). It suggests that, by decomposing a complex problem into simpler elements, the problem as a whole can be better understood.

Despite the intuitive appeal of these rational perspectives, research by Wilson and his colleagues suggests that people who first develop a list of careful justifications may subsequently make worse rather than better decisions. A study reported by Wilson and Schooler (1991), for example, describes the preferences subjects had for different brands of strawberry jams. It compared the preferences of subjects who provided detailed justifications before ranking brands of strawberry jam to subjects who simply tasted and then immediately ranked brands. Preferences of subjects who first developed detailed justifications were not significantly correlated with experts’ rankings (r = .11); but preferences of students who weren’t asked to first develop reasons for their rankings were significantly and highly correlated (r = .55) with experts’ rankings. Wilson and Schooler report similar findings for course evaluations by college students.

Wilson and Schooler explain these findings as a dysfunction of "thinking too much." They argue that much experimental research suggests that people often have limited information about the forces that determine their attitudes and behaviors (See Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wilson, Dunn, Kraft, & Lisle, 1989). When people are asked to reflect on what causes their preferences and actions, they typically report plausible and salient causes rather than actual causes. As Nisbett and Wilson (1977) put it, people tell more than they know. Wilson and Schooler propose that making such inaccurate reports can shape subsequent preferences or actions, specifically that doing so can reduce the quality of subsequent judgments because people come to believe their espoused criteria and then try to apply those (typically) flawed and incomplete criteria to subsequent decisions.

This theory and the associated findings have intriguing, and unexamined, implications for future research on the effects of public scrutiny and symbolic leadership. They imply that when a leader faces and answers an unchecked flow of requests to justify past, current, and planned actions, he or she is espousing a constant stream of plausible (but likely inaccurate) explanations for individual and organizational decisions. These criteria are likely to be inaccurate partly because all humans have trouble discovering the real criteria guiding their actions (and, we would add,
partly because leaders tend to only report criteria that put them or their organizations in a positive light). Leaders may use these inaccurate criteria to guide their own decisions and to impose decision-making criteria on subordinates. Or subordinates may imitate the criteria espoused (rather than used) by their superiors as a way of garnering praise or to put themselves in a more defensible position should a poor outcome occur. As a result, a first hypothesis might be to the degree a leader provides detailed justifications and explanations for personal or organizational actions, the quality of subsequent decisions will decay. A second hypothesis might be that the quality of the decisions made by his or her subordinates will decay as well. These hypotheses could be motivated and refined in inductive field research and then, building on the methods developed by Wilson and his colleagues, could be tested with experimental methods.

We also encourage researchers to devote less attention to how scrutiny is conveyed and described by the popular media than we did in this essay. We did not intend to give intrusions by the press or reactions to the press any special status in our conceptual perspective. And we were careful to provide examples of how unchecked scrutiny can be conveyed by other "audiences" or "publics" like stockholders, clients, subordinates, and suppliers. Nonetheless, a substantial proportion of the examples presented here concern intrusions by the press or were derived from reports in the popular media. We used reports by and about the press so much because they were often available when evidence about scrutiny from other sources -- especially scholarly publications -- was not available. The performance criteria imposed, intrusions made, and questions asked by the press do, to some extent, serve as an avenue through which other internal and external constituencies scrutinize leaders and their organizations. But leaders are often scrutinized directly by such constituencies rather than indirectly through observation by and interactions with the press. The way in which scrutiny is conveyed by the press may differ in important ways from how it is conveyed by other groups and individuals. And mass media reports of how scrutiny is conveyed by other groups may omit key consequences and defenses that should have been included in our perspective. As a result, our perspective may have been shaped
excessively by how leaders respond to and defend against scrutiny by the press and the way that the press reports about scrutiny.

Finally, future work might also examine why blatant misrepresentations appear to be used so much when scrutiny is present, along with and the effects of such misrepresentations on the targets and purveyors of scrutiny. We were surprised by how much dishonesty we encountered in writings about scrutiny, especially in writings about defenses against scrutiny. Leaders seem to routinely provide vague and inaccurate information to avoid intrusion. The apparent purpose of maintaining plausible deniability, for example, is so that a person can lie without getting caught later. It seems that gatekeepers routinely lie about the whereabouts of leaders and that organizations will sometimes establish symbolic programs like diversity training and mislead external constituencies about the impact that leaders believe it will have on life within their organization. We even encountered an example of high ranking government officials who bragged about a deceitful trick that they used. Frost, Mitchell, and Nord (1986:421) reprinted an Associated Press story about a prank that White House officials used to distract and punish a reporter who routinely read and reported about documents from officials' desks without their permission:

Tired of reporters stealing glances at White House memos, presidential spokesman Larry Speakes got his revenge when two reporters "bit like snakes" at fake memos planted on a press aide's desk. One of the fake documents contained a proposal to move the press corps from the White House next door to the Old Executive Office Building. .... "They both made calls all over this White House about relocating the press," Speakes said. "We held the line on it for two days here, and we wouldn't tell them anything."

Perhaps this deceit was justified given the reporter's unauthorized scrutiny. More generally, perhaps as Nyberg (1993) asserts, lying to others is sometimes a more moral act than telling the truth. He argues that lying may be necessary to protect the mental health of others because telling them the truth will lead to unnecessary and destructive pain and suffering. And lying to protect a leader might be morally justifiable if it is necessary to help him or her do important work without intrusion. Nonetheless, we are not convinced that misrepresenting the facts to avoid scrutiny is a means that always justifies the end.
People who misrepresent facts about themselves or their organizations may not always be engaging in conscious deceit. Leaders and their gatekeepers may, like other human beings, make false statements because they are engaging in wishful thinking or deceiving themselves (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Snyder & Higgins, 1988). Lazarus (1985) suggests that there are times when denial of reality facilitates well-being and decision-making. Denial of facts is sometimes destructive, as when a cancer victim delays treatment. But Lazarus proposes that denial can be healthy when it helps a person divert attention away from a source of distress that he or she cannot change; in such cases, focusing attention on and worrying only saps the person's ability to cope with other matters that he or she has the power to change. In the case of public scrutiny, Lazarus' perspective suggests that, when rhetorical, procedural, and structural defenses against scrutiny fail or aren't feasible, it may be in the best interest of leaders to try some denial of these elements. The term "denial" implies that the leader does not believe that such scrutiny has occurred. But Lazarus suggests that people may benefit from using some milder, denial-like processes, to avoid attending to irrelevant or uncontrollable threats. The CEO of one Fortune 50 company that we spoke to indicated that he never read, listened to, or viewed media reports about him or his corporation. He asserted that it was easier to please key constituencies directly rather than through the mass media and that he couldn't learn useful new information about his corporation from the media, in part because such reports usually contained so many errors. As a result, he said that such reports -- whether they were positive or negative -- were a useless distraction from his duties as CEO.

CONCLUSION

We began this essay by asserting that a broad range of research in psychology, sociology, economics, and organizational behavior emphasizes that people and organizations that are noticed by and please others will be rewarded with power, legitimacy, and resources. We asserted that although this literature implies that leaders, and others in symbolic roles, must work under close scrutiny if they wish to garner such rewards for themselves and their organizations, little theory or research considers other consequences of such scrutiny. Our perspective suggests that occupying a role that has a mix of symbolic and substantive responsibilities creates difficulties because,
beyond the problem of allocating limited resources to two sets of responsibilities, doing symbolic tasks may make it difficult to do substantive tasks at all, and when they are done, to do them well. These conclusions are based on thin data and tentative theory. Future research may refute them or show that these drawbacks occur under rare conditions.

Suppose, however, that these troublesome conclusions do prove to be true, at least when scrutiny is greatest. Suppose that when we devote more attention to leaders and others who make crucial decisions, they work more slowly, learn more slowly, are less creative, focus on doing what looks best rather than doing their best, and persist even when it is almost certain they will fail. And suppose, to the extent that leaders try to defend against scrutiny, these problems are accentuated and new problems are created as well. If so, this admittedly pessimistic interpretation suggests we can't always rely on the leaders and organizations we care about to defend against scrutiny. And we shouldn't always blame them when they fail to defend against or are distracted by scrutiny. It might be better to stop scrutiny from occurring in the first place or to halt scrutiny quickly once it begins. In order to understand how to stop it from occurring, future work might devote as much attention to the purveyors of scrutiny as to the targets of scrutiny. A promising place to start such research might be to focus on settings where averting scrutiny of a leader or organization is in the audience's best interest. A challenging but important question for such work will be how -- and if -- audiences can learn to ignore the leaders and organizations they are most interested in and care about most.
FOOTNOTES

1. The two authors of this essay attempted to study how the transition to a more diverse workforce affected a large public agency. This organization was characterized by 20 years of often severe legal and interpersonal conflicts between white and black employees, and had been subject to severe criticism from a wide variety of sources. We devoted considerable effort to starting a study of this organization because an initial meeting between the top manager and the third member of our research team (who had a long-term consulting relationship with top management) indicated that they were willing to participate despite its controversial nature. Our efforts to begin this study included over 50 (often unreturned) phone calls to members of the organization, approximately 20 phone conversations and meetings between the authors and the consultant in which we discussed the public agency, three meetings with head of the agency in which the study was discussed, two meetings (including a lengthy interview) with the former head of the black employees union who had become a member of top management, an attempted interview with the second-highest ranking manager in which he declined to participate because he feared that we would leak our findings to the media, and gathering hundreds of pages of documents about the organization including newspaper stories, consultant reports, and court records. As it became clear that our efforts to study this organization would fail, we began to realize that we were not learning much about race relations and what we were learning was already well-documented in psychology, sociology, and political science. But we also realized that we were learning a great deal about the impact of public scrutiny on people and organizations, and that there was much less scholarly literature on this subject.

2. We spoke with three members of the media and six leaders of large organizations about scrutiny. The reporters included a business writer, an editor who specialized in stories about Washington D.C. politics, and a science reporter. The leaders we spoke to were the president of a real estate firm, a former CEO of a Fortune 50 company, a current CEO of a Fortune 50 company, two former university administrators, and a current university administrator. Furthermore, about a year after our efforts to study the public agency failed, we spoke with the (recently fired) head of the agency. These conversations focused on how scrutiny is presented to and experienced by people in the public eye, how such people defend against and take the best advantage of scrutiny, and the costs and benefits of scrutiny for leaders and their organizations.

3. Carver and Scheier (1990) make a similar argument, suggesting that emotions are part of a process of feedback and self-regulation in which positive emotion is felt to the extent that one exceeds goals and negative emotion is felt to the extent that one falls short of goals.

4. Reporters can be imaginative at getting past animal as well human defenses. Oliver North reports in "Under Fire" (1991), that his dog "Max" responded to reporters camping outside his house by barking furiously, which sent them scurrying away. North goes on to say, however, that the reporters soon learned that they could calm Max by giving him "a 7-Eleven doughnut" and that "over the next few months that dog must have gained 20 pounds" (North, 1991:394).
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TABLE 1: DEFENSES AGAINST INTENSE PUBLIC SCRUTINY

I. Rhetorical Defenses

Using ambiguous language
Being boring
Being nasty
Raising interesting distractions

II. Procedural Defenses

Hiding
Stalling
Establishing rules about when, where, and how interactions occur
Doing favors for others in exchange for less scrutiny
Refusing access to purveyors of "excessive" or "unfair" scrutiny

III. Structural Defenses

Establishing roles to block and absorb scrutiny
Decoupling symbolic and substantive leadership roles
Using symbolic practices to divert attention from substantive actions
Elements of intense public scrutiny

Content: Positive or negative

Form: Intense & obtrusive attention, specifically:

1. Persistent attention devoted to the leader or his or her organization
2. Close and persistent performance monitoring and evaluation
3. Frequent interruptions
4. Questions about what has happened, is happening, will happen, and why

Experienced scrutiny

Constant distraction, punctuated by more pronounced interference with thought and action

Psychological responses triggered

Cognitive responses

- Cognitive overload
- Attention focused on how the leader or organization appears to others and how to explain such appearances

Emotional responses

- Negative affect (especially evaluation apprehension), which is heightened during interruptions

Consequences for leaders and their organizations

- Frequent delays in ongoing tasks
- Attention and effort devoted toward symbolic activities, away from other kinds of activities
- Greater adherence to injunctive norms, less adherence to descriptive norms
- Attention and effort focused toward well-rehearsed acts, away from acts that require learning or creativity
- Greater perseverance at ongoing and planned activities

Figure 1

Consequences of Unchecked Public Scrutiny for Leaders and Their Organizations