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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to test the effect of a director's expectation of a good or bad performance by his actors on the judged effectiveness of their performances. Thirty-two actors were randomly chosen from volunteers in an introductory course in communication theory at the University of Wyoming. The eight directors were students in an upper level directing class. Each student directed two scenes: one in which he was led to believe his actors would perform well and one in which he was led to believe his actors would perform poorly. With dialogue, rehearsal time, properties, and talent held constant throughout the study, each scene was videotaped and judged by a panel composed of theatre faculty and graduate students. The results indicate that the director's expectancies affected the performances given by the actors in the direction of those expectancies. It may be possible, therefore, that a director's expectations of an actor's potential talent may itself be, in part, a determinant of that talent. (TS)

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DIRECTOR EXPECTANCY AND ACTOR EFFECTIVENESS

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## INTRODUCTION

The effects of one's expectation of another's behavior is not a new concept to those working in the social sciences and should not be an alien concept to those working in theatre. Simply stated, the concept says that one's actions and behaviors are in some degree affected by another's expectations of one's behavior. Expanding this line of thought, this experiment was designed to determine whether a director's preconceived expectation of an actor's potential acting ability could affect the ultimate performance given by that actor. Specifically, this study tested the effect of a director's expectation of good or poor performance by his actors in a short scene on the judged effectiveness of those actors.

Related Research. The primary researcher in the area of the expectancy phenomenon has been Robert Rosenthal. Over a decade ago, Rosenthal and Fode (1963b) gave photographs previously judged "neutral" to a group of experimenters to administer to their subjects. The experimenters showed each of their subjects a series of faces which the subject rated on "degree of success or failure" on a scale of +10 to -10. The experimenters were given identical instructions on how to administer the test with one exception. Half the experimenters were told that the "well established" finding was that the subjects would rate the photos positively while the other half were told the subjects would rate them negatively. In spite of the fact that all experimenters read the same instructions to their subjects, it was found that they still managed to convey their

expectancies. Experimenters who anticipated positive photo ratings received them while those expecting negative ratings received negative ratings.

Such results sparked a great many studies relating to varied effects of this expectancy phenomenon. By 1969, well over 100 studies relating to expectancy effects were known to have been conducted (Rosenthal, 1969) and by now a great many more have undoubtedly been run. To be sure, not all the studies conducted have shown conclusively the existence of the effect, but enough have done so to tantalize one's experimental imagination. Among those studies revealing positive results have been studies showing that tone of voice alone was enough to convey the experimenter's expectations of results. Subjects exposed to tape-recorded instructions were just as much influenced as those exposed to live experimenters (Adair and Epstein, 1967). Children's IQ scores have been shown to be influenced by experimenters' expectations (Larrabee and Kleinsasser, 1967) and by teachers' expectations of pupils' performances (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). Marwit and Marcia (1967) found subjects interpreting Rorschach ink blots either as animals or human beings depending upon what the examiner had been let to expect. Johnson (1967) even found that subjects could be led to drop more marbles through a particular hole in a table by expecting them to do well. Miller (1970) found that the expectancy effect extended to typical attitude change settings as well. After exposure to the same tape-recorded message, subjects responded either positively or negatively depending on the experimenter's expectation of results.

The list of studies goes on and on and this is but a brief sampling.

The point is that both humans and animals apparently respond to the non-verbal cues given them by persons who expect them to respond certain ways in at least some situations. It was from this foundation that the present study was constructed.

Statement of Purpose. Postulating that the expectancy effect may obtain in other than purely experimental settings, we tested the notion that a director's expectation of either a good or poor acting performance would result in either a good or poor acting job by naive actors. That is, if a director, prior to working with actors, expected them to do well they would give a better performance than if he expected them to do poorly. This expectancy effect, if found to operate in such a situation, could have obviously important implications for those working as directors in a theatre setting.

Hypothesis. The research hypothesis for this study, then, was that actors whose directors expected them to perform well in a short scene would be judged as having performed better than actors whose directors expected them to do poorly.

#### EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Ss. The actors (N=32) for the experiment were selected from an introductory course in communication theory at the University of Wyoming. Since this course serves to satisfy a humanities requirement at the University, a reasonably good cross-section of students from various majors around the University was assured. All Ss were volunteers. Since acting ability was

most difficult to control, we hoped that a rigid randomization of Ss would at least help in holding native acting ability fairly constant for this experiment. Sex of volunteer Ss was split evenly: 47% male and 53% female. Ss chosen for the scenes were randomly selected from the volunteer population.

Directors. Directors (N=8) of the scenes for this experiment were students in an advanced directing class at the University. They also were volunteers.

Experimental Variables. The independent variables used in this study included the dialogue of a short scene (constant for all scenes), sex of actor (one male and one female in each scene), rehearsal time (25 minutes for each scene), and director expectancy (each director directed one "positive" and one "negative" scene).

Criterion Variable. The dependent variable was the judged effectiveness of the actors and an assessment of the overall effectiveness of the scene by a panel of theatre judges. The judges (N=10) were members of the Theatre faculty and advanced graduate students in Theatre at the University of Wyoming. The judges were asked to rate the scenes in two ways: first, after having seen on video-tape two scenes, they were asked to rank order the two scenes as to which was the better scene; second, they rated each individual scene on a 6-point scale ranging from "highly acceptable" to "highly unacceptable". They also rated each actor in each scene on the same 6-point scale on four specific criteria: Overall Actor Impression, Memory, Voice, and Body Movement.

Instruments and Procedures. Prior to the experiment, the directors were given a brief scene consisting of ambiguous dialogue. The dialogue consisted of such lines as "How long have you had it?" "Quite awhile." "Have you adjusted to it?" and so on. The directors were also given a list of things any one of which could serve as the "it" of the dialogue. The list included "vasectomy; Phi Beta Kappa key; new house; new child; job promotion; claustrophobia; dry oil well; divorce; and sexual relationship." The director was free to choose any one of the listed items to portray the "it" of the dialogue. The only restriction here was that the actors were not allowed to actually name the "it" during the scene. (We originally intended to use the "it" as an index of effectiveness of the scene. That is, we thought if the judges could accurately name the "it" of a given scene, then that scene should have accomplished its goal of conveying the meaning to the judges. However, in almost all cases the "its" were guessed incorrectly and the index was meaningless.) The directors were then told they would shortly meet their actors (one male and one female for each scene) and that they were to begin rehearsing the scene. (All directors used the same properties and rehearsal rooms.) Each director was given 25 minutes in which to work with his actors. In that time they were expected to interpret the scene, get the actors to memorize the lines, block the scene, and polish the scene for performance. At the end of that time, the scenes were video-taped.

Prior to working with the actors, each director was told we had run an "acting profile" on all of these Ss to determine how well they could

act. We told them that we had administered a paper and pencil test to all Ss earlier in the year and that the purpose of the present study was to determine the validity of the "acting Test" we had developed. If the test were valid, we told them, then those persons who scored highly on the test could be expected to act well and those who scored poorly would be expected to act poorly. Further, to counterbalance the research design, each director was to direct two scenes: one with two actors who had supposedly scored highly, thus exhibiting a great deal of "acting potential" and a second with two who had supposedly scored low, thus exhibiting very little "acting potential". Directors were led to believe that the test the Ss were supposed to have taken tested them in terms of their potential ability to memorize, to use their bodies and voices as communicative instruments, and to analyze material. Thus each director directed one "positive" scene using actors whom he expected to act well and one "negative" scene using actors whom he expected to act poorly. The directors were instructed not to discuss or in any way allude to the bogus "acting profile scores" of their actors.

The question then became whether a director's prior expectations about his actors' competency could affect the performance given by the actors as judged by a panel of 10 faculty and graduate students.

There were 16 scenes in all: 8 positive and 8 negative scenes. Each director directed two scenes: one positive and one negative. Since it was not feasible to ask the judges to rank order all 16 scenes from "best" to "worst", we asked them to rank order the two scenes directed by the same director. Presumably, then, the "positive" scene of each director would



receive significantly more "better" votes than the director's "negative" scene if the expectancy effect were to operate. Each director's pair of scenes was judged in this manner to test the major hypothesis in the study. Additionally, each scene and each actor was rated on the 6-point scale described above (see "Criterion Variable"). Individual pairs of scenes were randomly and blindly presented to the judges, thus they were unaware of the study's purpose. There was no set pattern in the presentation of the pairs of scenes. Sometimes the negative scene of a pair was presented first and other times the positive scene was first.

#### RESULTS

The data received from the ranking and rating scales were submitted to the following statistical tests: significance of the difference between percentages, chi-square, t-tests, and multiple regression analyses.

Percentage of Judges Choosing the "Better" Scene. The first test used revealed which of the paired scenes (one positive and one negative; both by same director) was chosen most often as the better scene. Table 1 gives the results of this test.

TABLE 1  
 PERCENTAGES OF JUDGES CHOOSING "BETTER" SCENES  
 WITHIN PAIRED EXPECTANCIES

Director	Scene	Expectancy	% of Judges choosing scene as "better"	z value	p
1.	A	+	90%	3.64	<.01
	B	-	10%		
2.	A	+	80%	2.27	<.01
	B	-	20%		
3.	A	+	50%	0	N.S.
	B	-	50%		
4.	A	+	90%	3.64	<.01
	B	-	10%		
5.	A	+	80%	2.72	<.01
	B	-	20%		
6.	A	+	100%	4.55	<.01
	B	-	0		
7.	A	+	60%	.91	N.S.
	B	-	40%		
8.	A	+	80%	2.72	<.01
	B	-	20%		

As can be seen in Table 1, six of the eight paired scenes were correctly predicted by the expectancy hypothesis. That is, in six of the eight scenes, the judges chose as the better scene the one in which the director expected his actors to act well. A chi-square analysis of these data revealed that the "positive" scenes were chosen significantly more often as the better of the paired scenes ( $\chi^2 = 4.00, df=1, p < .05$ ). Worthy of special note is the fact that not one "negative" scene was chosen as the better scene.

t-Tests. Individual criteria rated by the judges were tested with t-tests to determine if the difference found above in the comparison of percentages could be isolated more specifically. The individual criteria so tested included "Overall Scene Effectiveness" (collapsed over sex); "Overall Actor Impression" (male actor only); "Overall Actor Impression" (female actor only); "Memory/Voice/Body-collapsed" (collapsed over sex); "Memory/Voice/Body-collapsed" (male actor only); and "Memory/Voice/Body-collapsed" (female actor only). Table 2 gives the results of these analyses.

(((INSERT TABLE 2)))

Multiple Regression Tests. Multiple regressions tests were run to determine which of the specific judging categories best predicted the eventual rating of "goodness" or "badness" by the judges. While these tests were a bit peripheral to the major hypothesis of the study, it was thought that perhaps some pattern might emerge which would tell us which of the judging categories the judges relied upon the most in making their decisions as to the better scenes. Five Multiple regression analyses were performed. The first dealt with male actors only, where the criterion variable was the "overall scene effectiveness" rating and the predictor variables were "overall actor impression", "memory", "voice", and "body" ratings. The second dealt with female actors only, where the criterion variable and predictor variables were the same as the above categories. The third used the same categories as above except they were collapsed over sex. The fourth regression analysis dealt with male actors only, where the criterion variable was the "Overall Actor Impression" and the predictor variables

TABLE 2  
t-TESTS OF INDIVIDUAL CRITERIA

Director	Scene #	Expectancy	Overall Scene Impression (Collapsed over sex)		Overall Impression (male actor only)		Overall Impression (female actor only)		Memory/Voice/Body-collapsed (collapsed over sex)		Memory/Voice/Body-collapsed (male actor only)		Memory/Voice/Body-collapsed (female actor only)	
			$\bar{X}$	t	$\bar{X}$	t	$\bar{X}$	t	$\bar{X}$	t	$\bar{X}$	t	$\bar{X}$	t
1.	A	+	4.90	1.80	4.80	.85	4.80	1.28	5.08	2.71	5.03	1.42	5.13	3.10
	B	-	4.10	N.S. ( $<.09$ )	4.40	N.S.	4.30	N.S.	4.32	$<.01$	4.57	N.S.	4.07	$<.006$
2.	A	+	4.40	1.00	4.70	1.96	4.30	.61	4.57	.87	4.70	1.30	4.43	.32
	B	-	4.00	N.S.	3.90	$<.07$	4.00	N.S.	4.22	N.S.	4.13	N.S.	4.30	N.S.
3.	A	+	4.40	.73	4.20	1.37	4.70	1.72	4.67	.13	4.63	.45	4.70	.88
	B	-	4.60	N.S.	4.80	N.S.	4.10	$<.10$	4.63	N.S.	4.80	N.S.	4.47	N.S.
4.	A	+	4.60	2.41	3.50	0	4.90	3.43	4.28	1.89	3.60	0	4.97	4.30
	B	-	3.70	$<.03$	3.50	N.S.	3.70	$<.003$	3.68	$<.08$	3.60	N.S.	3.77	$<.001$
5.	A	+	4.20	2.00	3.70	3.21	4.40	.20	4.32	2.33	4.03	4.28	4.60	.36
	B	-	3.30	N.S. ( $<.06$ )	2.50	$<.005$	4.30	N.S.	3.48	$<.03$	2.53	$<.001$	4.43	N.S.
6.	A	+	2.50	2.70	2.50	1.67	2.80	2.43	2.77	2.13	2.77	1.59	2.77	2.49
	B	-	1.40	$<.02$	1.70	N.S.	1.80	$<.03$	1.88	$<.05$	2.00	N.S.	1.77	$<.02$
7.	A	+	4.50	.29	4.70	0	3.90	.75	4.27	1.67	4.57	1.32	3.97	1.19
	B	-	4.60	N.S.	4.70	N.S.	4.20	N.S.	4.67	N.S.	5.03	N.S.	4.30	N.S.
8.	A	+	4.30	2.42	4.60	2.87	5.10	.79	5.03	2.81	4.97	4.44	5.10	1.28
	B	-	4.10	$<.03$	3.30	$<.01$	4.90	N.S.	3.92	$<.001$	3.03	$<.001$	4.80	N.S.

were "Memory", "Voice," and "Body". The fifth analysis was the same as for the fourth except for females only. Tables 3 through 7 present these data.

TABLE 3

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS: MALE ACTORS ONLY  
(CRITERION VARIABLE = "OVERALL SCENE EFFECTIVENESS")

Predictor Variable	R	Multiple R	2*
Overall Actor Impression	.78		.61
Body Movement	.81		.65
Memory	.81		.66
Voice	.81		.66

The data in Table 3 may be interpreted to mean that the judging category of "Overall Actor Impression" (males, only) accounted for 61% of the variance in judging the "Overall Scene Effectiveness." Adding the "Body Movement" category increased the accuracy of prediction of "Overall Scene" by 4% while the addition of both "Memory" and "Voice" added only 1% more.

2

\*Slight discrepancy in R values results from rounding error.

TABLE 4

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS: FEMALE ACTORS ONLY  
(CRITERION VARIABLE = "OVERALL SCENE EFFECTIVENESS")

Predictor Variable	R	Multiple 2 R
Overall Actor Impression	.75	.56
Memory	.79	.62
Voice	.82	.67
Body Movement	.82	.67

The data in Table 4 mean that "Overall Actor Impression" was the single most important contributor (for females) in predicting the judges' ratings of "Overall Scene Effectiveness." The addition of the "Memory" category increased the precision of prediction by 6%. The category of "Voice" added another 5% while "Body Movement" did not add any significant prediction power.

TABLE 5

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS: COLLAPSED OVER SEX  
(CRITERION VARIABLE = "OVERALL SCENE EFFECTIVENESS")

Predictor Variable	R	Multiple 2 R
Overall Actor Impression	.89	.79
Voice	.90	.80
Memory	.90	.81
Body Movement	.90	.81

By combining the data from Tables 3 and 4 and collapsing over sex, we find that "Overall Actor Impression" ratings given to both actors in a given scene accounted for 79% of the variance in judges' ratings of "Overall Scene Effectiveness." The addition of the other three categories added only 2% more predictive power than the one category of "Actor Impression" alone.

TABLE 6

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS: MALE ACTORS ONLY  
(CRITERION VARIABLE = "OVERALL ACTOR IMPRESSION")

Predictor Variable	Multiple	
	R	R <sup>2</sup>
Body Movement	.73	.54
Memory	.80	.63
Voice	.80	.65

The data in Table 6 indicate that "Body Movement" was the most important category in determining "Overall Actor Impression" for male actors. "Memory" added another 9% predictive power while "Voice" contributed only 2%.

TABLE 7

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS: FEMALE ACTORS ONLY  
(CRITERION VARIABLE = "OVERALL ACTOR IMPRESSION")

Predictor Variable	Multiple	
	R	R <sup>2</sup>
Body Movement	.85	.73
Memory	.87	.75
Voice	.87	.75

The data of Table 7 show that "Body Movement" was the most important category in determining "Overall Actor Impression" for female actors. This category was somewhat more important in judging females (73% of the variance) than for male actors (Table 6, 54%). "Memory" and "Voice" added only 2% to the predictive power.

#### INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results from the above analyses, although not entirely conclusive, support the hypothesis. The research hypothesis that the scenes in which the actors were expected to turn in better performances by their directors would be chosen as the "better" scene significantly more often than those in which the actors were expected to perform poorly was supported by the percentage and chi-square analysis. That, of course, was the major test of the hypothesis and thus we are justified in concluding it was upheld. However, the t-tests were disappointing. Theoretically, of the 48 t-tests made (see table 2) all or nearly all of them should have shown significant differences between the means with the positive cells (in which the actors were expected to do a better job) having the larger means. In fact, only 16 of the 48 mean comparisons were statistically significant at the .05 level. If one were to lower the acceptable level of significance to .10, another 5 comparisons would emerge as significant. Even then, the total significant mean comparisons would be only 21 out of 48 possible comparisons. This, in and of itself, would hardly force one to the conclusion that an expectancy bias was operating in the data. However, one may speak of trends



when one notices that in all 21 cases, the significant and "near-significant" comparisons are in the direction of the expectancy hypothesis. In not one case was a significant comparison made in which the negative cell had a larger mean than the positive expectancy cell. If the 16 significant t's and the 5 near-significant t's had emerged solely by chance, one would expect at least a few of the significant comparisons to have favored the negative cells. Since none did, one may feel a bit more confident in looking upon the t-tests results as indicative of a trend in the predicted direction, even though they do not give conclusive evidence of expectancy operating within the specific judging categories.

Apart from the "trend" interpretation of the t-tests, one may interpret these results in a different way. It is possible that the expectancy effect, obviously demonstrated in the percentage and chi-square analysis, was too subtle to show up strongly in the t-test data. The t-test data were drawn from the specific criteria categories and, taken individually, may not have been sufficiently strong enough to reveal a systematic bias. This explanation would hold that the bias effect would reveal itself as a cumulative effect. This explanation is also consonant with the data presented in this study. However, it remains that whatever specific criteria caused the judges to choose the "positive" scenes more often than the "negative" ones as the better scene may or may not have been the ones which we tapped. That is, the judges did choose the scenes where the director's expectancy was positive significantly more often than the scenes where the director's expectancy was negative. Something caused that choice. It is possible that the "hidden" criteria used by the judges

to make their choices were items which were not tapped by our measuring instrument. That is why we ran the Multiple Regression Analysis: to see how much of the variance we were accounting for in the other tests. If a great bit of the variance were left unaccounted for, one might suspect the existence of other, unknown criteria categories.

The multiple regression analyses were of two types: the first used the "Overall Scene Effectiveness" as the criterion variable and the second used the "Overall Actor Impression" as the criterion variable. The question is how much of the variance in judging was accounted for in the first type of analysis. Of this type of analysis for male actors only, a total of 66% was accounted for using the four predictor variables used in our judging instrument. For female actors only a total of 67% was accounted for. By collapsing these data over sex, yielding an overall scene predictor, we accounted for 81%, thus leaving 19% unaccounted for variance. With just 19% unaccounted for, one may reasonably lean toward the "cumulative" explanation given above. This does not mean that other "hidden" criteria variables did not operate. It is entirely possible that the judges based their decisions of which was the better scene of each matched pair on the basis of some unknown variable(s). Nevertheless, the fact remains that with 81% of the vote in, the evidence of this study leads us to conclude that the expectancy effect may very well be cumulative in nature and may not show up on individual measures of "goodness" or "badness" of acting but will be revealed in a ranking of overall scene effectiveness.

Limitations of Study. The limitations of this study lie mainly in two directions. The first is that of sheer numbers. One would like to have seen a larger number of scenes directed by a larger number of directors and judged by a larger number of judges. The difficulty of doing this is intuitively obvious, however. The advantages of an increased N are likewise obvious. With a larger sampling, one could rest more assured that he has truly randomized the population. Also, with a larger N, it would be possible to assess the effects of director sex and actor sex on the expectancy phenomenon. (As an aside here, we did attempt to do this but because of our low director N (4 males and 4 females) we were unable to derive stable, testable data.)

The second major limitation of this study is related to the first: control for individual actor talent. While we attempted to counter this problem by randomly distributing our Ss over the scenes, it remains a thorny problem to account for innate talent even, or perhaps especially, among those who have never acted before. Ideally, with this present study design, one should have as the actors persons whose acting talents are roughly equal. This limitation is related to the first in that the larger the sample, the more likely it is that talented and untalented persons will equalize out in both the positive and negative scenes. The smaller the sample, of course, the more likely it is that a non-systematic bias may be built into the data. One possible method to use in controlling for talent would be to use only persons judged relatively equal in acting ability as determined by a screening-out process of judging. This would

have the added benefit of allowing the researcher to test whether an expectancy effect would be obtained with highly talented as well as highly untalented persons.

Suggestions for Future Research. The first suggestion is to replicate the present study with a completely different sample to determine if our results were somehow screwed as a result of the population drawn upon. This should also include an increased N as discussed above. A second suggestion, also discussed above, would be to segment the directors by sex to test whether director sex mediates the expectancy effect in an acting setting. One might also account for the interaction of judge sex by actor sex by director sex. This would have implications for extension to an audience situation in which the individual auditor is the "judge". Another suggestion would be to test for the effect of one actor's expectations of another's ability. It seems reasonable to suspect expectancy to be operating in this circumstance as well. Also, the time allowed in rehearsal should be varied. It may be that only in short scenes such as were used here will expectancy effect show up. On the other hand, it may just as logically happen that with more complex tasks (such as complex dialogue and blocking) and a longer rehearsal time (such as in a major production) that the expectancy effect may be even stronger than that demonstrated in this study. One final suggestion is to test for the effects of director experience. It is possible that the greater the experience the more pronounced the expectancy effect. It may also be the more experience,

the less pronounced. We need to know the answer to that question.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary. This study was designed to test the effect of a director's expectation of good or bad performance by his actors on the judged effectiveness of their performances. Each director directed two scenes: one in which he was led to believe his actors would perform well and one in which he was led to believe his actors would perform poorly. With dialogue, rehearsal time, properties, and talent held constant over the study design, each scene was video-taped and judged by a panel composed of theatre faculty and graduate students. The results indicated that the director's expectancies affected the performances given by the actors in the direction of those expectancies. That is, scenes in which the actors were expected to perform well were chosen significantly more often as "better" than scenes in which the actors were expected to perform poorly. It was suggested that the expectancy effect was cumulative in nature and was demonstrable only in the judgment of "Overall Scene Effectiveness" and not in individual actor judgments.

Implications. If this so-called "expectancy effect" is shown to be operating generally in professional director=actor interaction, the implications are far-reaching. Few among us there are indeed who do not enter a situation with some knowledge of the other person in the interaction and some knowledge often leads to some expectations about other's behavior. It would be strange if this did not happen generally among directors and actors. It may be possible, therefore, that a director's

expectations of an actor's potential talent may itself be, in part, a determinant of that talent. We may be retarding some of our actors and accelerating others. In either case, we ought to explore this area of research because we deserve to know, indeed need to know, what effect our expectations are having on another's acting behavior.

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