Interpersonal Expectancy Effects: A 30-Year Perspective

Robert Rosenthal

In the mid 1950s, the results of my doctoral dissertation were nearly ruined; it appeared that I might have treated my experimental subjects in such a way as to lead them to respond in accordance with my experimental hypothesis, or expectancy. All of this was quite unwitting, of course, but it did raise a sobering question about the possibility of interpersonal expectancy effects in the psychological laboratory. If it was my unintentional interpersonal expectancy effect or my “unconscious experimenters” that had led to higher ratings than did experimenters expecting low ratings.

To investigate the generality of these interpersonal expectancy effects in the laboratory, my colleagues and I conducted two studies employing animal subjects. Half the experimenters were told their rats had been specially bred for good maze (or Skinner box) performance, and half were told their rats had been specially bred for poor maze (or Skinner box) performance. In both experiments, when experimenters had been led to expect better learning, more of their rats obtained substantially higher ratings than did experimenters expecting low ratings.

To determine the generality of these interpersonal expectancy effects, we conducted eight more studies employing various settings and types of subjects, including verbal communication, and data analysis procedures. Address correspondence to Robert Rosenthal, Department of Psychology, Harvard University, 16 Kirkland St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

EARLY LABORATORY EXPERIMENTS

The earliest studies were conducted with human subjects. In the first, an experimenter in a psychology laboratory, and with verbal communication, told part of his students and I could produce the phenomenon in our psychological laboratory. If it was my unintentional interpersonal expectancy effect or my “unconscious experimenters,” then, was in the minds of the teachers.

At the end of the school year, 8 months later, all the children were retested with the same test of intelligence. Overall, the children from whom the teachers had been led to expect greater intellectual gain showed a significantly greater gain than did the children of the control group, thereby supporting the “Pygmalion” hypothesis.
attributable to the independent variable. To employ the BESD, one calculates the success rates for the treatment and control groups by adding $\sqrt{r}$ to .50 (treatment group) and subtracting $\sqrt{r}$ from .50 (control group). Table 2 illustrates the BESD for the overall mean effect size ($r = .30$) of the 464 studies of interpersonal expectancy effects and, for comparison, for the results of a recent study of the effects of aspirin in the prevention of heart attacks ($r = .04$).

### THE 10-ARROW MODEL

For many years, the central question in the study of interpersonal expectancy effects was whether they existed. The meta-analytic evidence has answered that question sufficiently so that simple replications will add little new knowledge. Today, the central focus in the study of interpersonal expectancy effects has changed to include the isolation of the variables that (a) moderate expectancy effects and (b) mediate expectancy effects. Moderator variables are preexisting variables, such as sex, age, and personality, that influence the magnitude of interpersonal expectancy effects; mediating variables are the behaviors by which expectations are communicated.

The 10-arrow model, designed to clarify the study of interpersonal expectancy effects, posits 10 links between five groups of variables: (a) distal independent (moderator) variables (e.g., stable attributes of the expecter and expectee), (b) proximal independent variables (the expectancies), (c) mediating variables, (d) proximal dependent variables (e.g., short-term outcome measures such as achievement on tests), and (e) distal dependent variables (long-term outcome variables). A useful feature of this model is that its 10 arrows represent the types of relationships that can be examined in research on expectancy effects (see Fig. 1).

The arrows in the model are described in detail elsewhere, so I discuss here only the two links relevant to the topic of mediation: the B-C and C-D arrows. B-C relationships describe the effect of the expectancy on the expecter’s behavior. Equally important to understanding mediation, however, are the C-D relationships between the expecter’s behavior and outcome variables. Research bearing on the B-C link tells which behaviors are induced by a given expectancy, but research bearing on the C-D link shows that these behaviors affect the expectee so as to create a self-fulfilling prophecy. As is evident, the two types of relationships address different questions, making the dis-

### Table 1. Interpersonal expectancy effects in eight research domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Mean effect size</th>
<th>Example of type of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Laboratory interviews       | $d = 0.14$  
  $r = 0.07$ | Effects of sensory restriction on reports of hallucinatory experiences |
| Reaction time               | $d = 0.17$  
  $r = 0.08$ | Latency of word associations to certain stimulus words |
| Learning and ability        | $d = 0.54$  
  $r = 0.26$ | IQ test scores, verbal conditioning (learning) |
| Person perception           | $d = 0.55$  
  $r = 0.27$ | Perception of other people’s success |
| Inkblot tests               | $d = 0.84$  
  $r = 0.39$ | Ratio of animal to human Rorschach responses |
| Everyday situations         | $d = 0.88$  
  $r = 0.40$ | Symbol learning, athletic performance |
| Psychophysical judgments    | $d = 1.05$  
  $r = 0.46$ | Ability to discriminate tones |
| Animal learning             | $d = 1.73$  
  $r = 0.65$ | Learning in mazes and Skinner boxes |

Note. The effect sizes shown are based on Rosenthal and Rubin. Weighting is by number of studies in each domain.

### Table 2. Two binomial-effect-size displays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Favorable</th>
<th>Unfavorable</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Treatment | 52        | 48          | 100   |
| Control   | 48        | 52          | 100   |
| Total     | 100       | 100         | 200   |

Note. The Pygmalion effects are based on 464 studies. The aspirin effects are based on 22,000 participants.
THE FOUR-FACTOR “THEORY”

On the basis of the first 30 or so published studies relevant to mediation, a four-factor "theory" of the mediation of teacher expectancy effects was proposed. Table 3 summarizes these four factors, and Table 4 gives the average magnitude of the role of each factor separately for the B–C and C–D links. Although all four factors had significant effects, the magnitudes of the effects for the climate and input factors were especially impressive. Teachers appear to teach more and to teach it more warmly to students for whom they have more favorable expectations.

From these results, one cannot infer that selecting warmer teachers who present more material will result in children learning more. One also cannot infer from these results that training teachers to be warmer and to present more material will lead to improved learning. The results do suggest, however, that conducting the research required to determine the benefits of selection and training for climate (or affect) and input (or effort) may well yield substantial benefits both for science and for society.

Table 3. Four factors in the mediation of teacher expectancy effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Summary of the evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central factors:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Climate (affect)</td>
<td>Teachers appear to create a warmer socio-emotional climate for their &quot;special&quot; students. This warmth appears to be at least partially communicated by nonverbal cues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Input (effort)</td>
<td>Teachers appear to teach more material and more difficult material to their &quot;special&quot; students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional factors:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Output</td>
<td>Teachers appear to give their &quot;special&quot; students greater opportunities for responding. These opportunities are offered both verbally and nonverbally (e.g., giving a student more time to answer a question).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Feedback</td>
<td>Teachers appear to give their &quot;special&quot; students more informative feedback, both verbal and nonverbal, as to how these students have been performing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Meta-analytically derived average correlations representing the importance (effect sizes) of the four factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Correlation between expectation and expecter's behavior (B–C link)</th>
<th>Correlation between behavior of expecter and response of expectee (C–D link)</th>
<th>Geometric mean correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Climate (affect)</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Input (effort)</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Output</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Feedback</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. These data are from Harris and Rosenthal (1986). All correlations are significantly greater than zero at p < .002. The correlation between the magnitudes of the average B–C and C–D links is .88.
by judges who believe the defendants to be guilty, that depression among nursing home residents can be reduced by raising the expectations of caretakers, and that teachers' expectations can serve as self-fulfilling prophecies in other countries and for more than simply fulfilling prophecies in other countries and for more than simply intellectual tasks. In all these cases, the mediating variables are receiving special attention, with the growing evidence indicating that much of the mediation is occurring by means of unintended nonverbal behavior.17

Acknowledgments—I thank the many students, colleagues, collaborators, and tutors who have been educating me for more than 40 years. Much of the research reviewed here was supported in part by the National Science Foundation, and preparation of this review was supported in part by the Spencer Foundation, though the contents are solely the responsibility of the author.

Notes

2. R. Rosenthal and K.L. Fode, The problem of experimenter outcome-bias, in Series Research in Social Psychology, D.P. Ray, Ed. (National Institute of Social and Behavioral Science, Washington, DC, 1961). That this research was received with ambivalence is illustrated by the receipt of two letters on the same day: the first letter rejected the paper for publication in a prestigious journal, and the second letter announced that the paper had received the Socio-Psychological Prize for 1960 from the American Association for the Advancement of Science.
4. R. Rosenthal and L. Jacobson, Pygmalion in the Classroom (Eribaum, Hillsdale, NJ, 1985). A surprising finding was that the more children in the control group gained in IQ, the more unfavorably they were judged by their teachers. Apparently there were hazards to unpredicted intellectual growth. Also surprising was the strength of both the favorable and the unfavorable reactions to our research. For a summary of the criticisms and replies to them, see R. Rosenthal, Pygmalion effects: Existence, magnitude, and social importance, Educational Researcher, 16, 37-41 (1987).
5. Effect sizes are expressed in terms of both d and r. The former is the difference between the experimental and control groups divided by the standard deviation of both groups combined. The latter is the point-biserial correlation between experimental versus control group status (e.g., coding 1 for experimental and 0 for control) and the outcome score (e.g., gain in performance). The effect sizes in Table 1 are based on R. Rosenthal and D.B. Rubin, Interpersonal expectancy effects: The first 345 studies, The Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 3, 377-386 (1978).
7. More specialized meta-analyses for the effects on pupils' IQ test performance are also available: S.W. Raudenbush, Magnitude of teacher expectancy effects on pupil IQ as a function of the credibility of expectancy induction: A synthesis of findings from 18 experiments, Journal of Educational Psychology, 76, 85-97 (1984); M.L. Smith, Teacher expectation revaluation in Education, 4, 53-55 (1980). Both Raudenbush and Smith found significant overall effects of interpersonal expectancies on students' IQ. Smith reported a d of 0.16 and r of 0.08. Raudenbush found very strong evidence (r = .67) that substantial effects of teachers' expectancies could be demonstrated only when the induction of the expectancy was credible (i.e., when teachers had known pupils only 2 weeks or less at the time they were given the expectation). For the seven studies in which teachers had known pupils 1 week or less, as was the case for the Pygmalion study, the mean effect-size d was 0.25, and r was 14.
10. For meta-analyses making this distinction, see M.J. Harris and R. Rosenthal, Mediational interpersonality effects: 31 meta-analyses, Psychological Bulletin, 97, 363-386 (1985); M.J. Harris and R. Rosenthal, Four factors in the mediation of teacher expectancy effects, in The Social Psychology of Education, R.S. Feldman, Ed. (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1986). Although all the arrows in the model point to the right (or to the future), they may usefully be viewed as often going in both directions. Thus, improved student performance (D) can affect subsequent teacher expectations (B) and behavior toward the student (C). With this perspective, the mediation of Pygmalion effects: A four factor "theory," Papua New Guinea Journal of Education, 9, 1-12 (1973); R. Rosenthal, On the Social Psychology of the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: Further Evidence for Pygmalion Effects and Their Mediating Mechanisms (MSS Modular Publications, New York, 1974).

Recommended Reading

This document is a scanned copy of a printed document. No warranty is given about the accuracy of the copy. Users should refer to the original published version of the material.