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Rosenthal and the Power of Expectation

If there's one thing that is certain, it is that as you go through the world, the expectations of other people are acting on you, regardless of whether you acknowledge them. For instance, advertising is often a common reflection of the expectations we create and endorse. One social construct I believe influences people the most is the Pygmalion Effect. If there is anything that you should keep in mind, it is that the Pygmalion effect is a "psychological phenomenon wherein high expectations lead to improved performance in a given area" (The Pygmalion Effect). I see the Pygmalion Effect as a social construct because it allows us to create archetypes that sometimes don't exist and influences us, who we think we are, and how we perceive others. The thing about the Pygmalion Effect is that it can lead us to develop mindsets and beliefs which are hard to combat. For instance, we may avoid engaging in an activity like Soccer because we believe we are bad at it and decide not to play the sport anymore (thus fulfilling our own delusional prophecy). It also has a significant effect on others as we unconsciously create stereotypes of other people.

One example of the social construct we described as the Pygmalion Effect could be our former president Donald Trump. While he has shown himself over time to be a questionable figure with an enormous lapse of integrity (especially considering the events of the White House invasion), many of his supporters placed their faith in him, often outright defending him and his behavior. Many of his supporters explain: *No one's perfect*, or also stating: *We've all made*

mistakes before. In fact, according to an International Business Times article, the reason for his popularity despite his actions, is that his supporters "perceive that he has behavioral integrity" (Kannan). Trump himself has admitted to criticizing the media so that when "negative stories are published about him, no one will believe them" (Kannan). Despite his inconsistency, honesty and authenticity are attributes used to describe him. In this example, it's often easy to be swayed by the appeal of the masses. It's also possible to be wrong on your own accord, but what is important is the ability to recognize when something you believe is true or not.

While the expectations we have on things may affect them, they aren't always going to be the entire story. The way we see situations and expect them to be is something that you could say is always in flux. For example, there could be a worker that hates his job and does poorly until a new boss shows up and gets him to enjoy what he is doing. This worker could have had a tough boss that refuses to help him and berates him. As such, he may end up a little less motivated to do his tasks and may have the desire to leave work early each day. However, this is still just a temporary situation and is subject to change. Perhaps a new boss could have come in and encouraged him to do better. This example illustrates "a theory teaching that people will act or behave in the way that others expect them to" (K. Willis). That is what the Pygmalion Effect is, and that is what it can do. It's important to keep in mind that no one is the same type of person in all situations, and this is something that varies tremendously across our world.

This phenomenon also applies to the many people that we interact with. For instance, many people believe that poverty is a character flaw (often ignoring that poverty can be systemic) and vice versa. For example, my mother believes that homeless people are parasites in our society who don't want to work. She sees them as drug addicts and often brings up the question, *Why don't they just get a job?* If you think about it, this type of behavior only teaches

us how to hate the homeless and does not help them, and neither does it encourage people to make a better world for them. In reality, “Most people below the poverty line work harder than those above it” (Wilkinson et al.). Likewise, people have a tendency to worship those who are successful excessively and label them with positive attributes that they don't have. Apparently, you would have to be wealthy, successful, and dominant to be considered a leader in our society. We often tell our children to aspire to be like an athlete or celebrity, often ignoring what kind of person they could really be like behind the curtains of public exposure.

At my high school, they considered the valedictorian to be the hardest working student there, even though there was evidence to the contrary. She actually didn't work more hours than many of the students who ranked beneath her, yet everyone saw her as the hardest working student. Interestingly enough, she has likely taken part in the most (or close to the most) proms, dances, field trips, school rallies, and school events of any student in her grade. While others have had to sacrifice their weekends and work on their schoolwork and studies for five hours every night, they credited her with being the hardest working student simply because she had the best grades. Whenever one talked about grades and assignments, it wasn't uncommon to hear someone else say, *I'm sure she got the highest score*, or *I'm sure she did it*. As much as I found it damaging to believe that my parents simply set my intelligence where it was and beyond my control, the reality is that “there is no escaping the fact that intelligence is inherited to some degree” (Geddes). I hated this dilemma, but I still had to deal with it. I understood that I would not have been seen as talented or as a leader to the same extent as some of my peers simply because I wasn't at the top. I knew I was going to face scrutiny for my abilities and scrutiny I faced.

Moving on, I have recognized the Pygmalion Effect in my behavior. For instance, when I was a senior, I gave up on taking some of my AP exams in high school because I believed I couldn't have passed them. These exams were the AP GOV and AP ELAC 12 exams. During class, I often felt this looming feeling in the back of my head that I wasn't doing good and often questioned myself. I often felt overworked and underappreciated for my efforts in my classes. While the possibility of my success in those exams had always been there, I convinced myself otherwise and made the hard decision of avoiding those exams, thus leading to my apparent and predicted "failure". I unknowingly allowed my teachers to determine who I was. This is a big deal because according to a 2010 academic article on the Pygmalion effect in the classroom, "teachers' expectations are instrumental in molding a student's self-expectations" (Rumain 317). When the teacher gives students different answers or different treatment, it is not hard to notice. I felt it myself when three of my outlines went missing in my AP U.S. History class and my teacher, Mr. Melvin didn't even care. But when another student loses one outline in the class, suddenly there's an issue. Why the double standard? Where is the justification for that?

In terms of consequences, I believe the Pygmalion Effect can lead to things like discrimination. All things considered, our expectations can come from what society tells us to expect. While we would like to believe that our views and opinions are our own, "People learn to be whatever their society and culture teaches them" (Wan and Kaplan). The consequences won't always be negative, however. Sometimes, the Pygmalion Effect can lead to good things. We could in fact motivate people by expectation alone. A great motivator that people have is faith or belief. The belief that one could get all A's would encourage that person to give it their all in a particular semester. Perhaps the belief that one could be wealthy someday would encourage an

adult to invest or learn about entrepreneurship. While it isn't always the case that one's beliefs motivate or incentivize something, it serves as a good explanation or reason.

I believe that our social construct causes us to seek certain people, simply because we perceive that they have certain qualities that are ideal to us, regardless of whether we have them ourselves. Perhaps maybe we believe that certain people have something to teach us while others may ruin us. In fact, according to an article written by Seidman, one benefit of relationships is that we can gain new knowledge and experiences by spending time with someone else. The people we choose to engage with depends on what we expect from them and how they relate to our interests. One thing that is important to keep in mind is the way we see things and the way we see others. What if we couldn't change the way we view or feel about others? What would that make us? While we can't help the way we feel about others, what is important is to watch ourselves and to try to keep in touch with reality. Whatever you do, don't let expectations bring you down.

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