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| |  | | --- | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Jeffrey Thomas** is Associate Professor of Law, University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. He recently authored "*Legal Culture and the Practice: A Postmodern Depiction of the Rule of Law*," 48 UCLA L. Rev. 1495 (2001).     |  | | --- | | **Read other reviews:**  -[Paul Bergman](http://docs.google.com/practice_bergman.htm)  [-Taunya Lovell Banks](http://docs.google.com/practice_banks.htm)  -[Carrie Menkel-Meadow](http://docs.google.com/practice_meadow.htm)  [-](http://docs.google.com/practice_meadow.htm)[George Cardona](http://docs.google.com/practice_cardona.htm)  -[Official site](http://abc.go.com/primetime/thepractice/index.html)  -[Internet Movie Database](http://www.us.imdb.com/Title?0118437)  -[All Movie Guide](http://allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=A242083) |       What caught my attention was this episode's depiction of the role of personal expectations in the search for truth. | |  | | --- | | **Blinded by Personal Expectations**  by Jeffrey Thomas  I thoroughly enjoyed the premier episode of *The Practice*, "The Candidate" (part 1). In typical fashion, it raised a variety of interesting issues in a provocative way. As with other episodes, this one explored the uncertainty between guilt and innocence, interjected several ethical conundrums, and considered the importance of media coverage of the legal system, all in the context of a case about a popular and persuasive state senator. Although these are fascinating issues, what caught my attention was this episode's depiction of the role of personal expectations in the search for truth. It showed that people, including those who operate our legal system, can be blinded by their personal expectations of the truth.  From the outset, all of the players believe that Senator Keith Ellison shot his wife's lover. The police, prosecutors, and even the defense attorneys focus on evidence to support this belief. The prosecutors obtain a warrant to take a bodily fluid sample from his wife looking for proof of the affair. The police test only the Senator for gunshot residue. The defense team interview witnesses to assess evidence of the affair. The Senator's daughter is ordered to give a statement to the prosecution, and her testimony neatly fits everyone's expectations. The story is further solidified when the Senator publicly "confesses" that he shot the victim in the mistaken belief that he was attacking the Senator's wife.  When the daughter takes the stand at trial, however, she tells a different story. This time, she claims to have shot the victim. The prosecution immediately assumes that the daughter is lying to protect her father, as does the defense team. The prosecution, with the consent of the judge, offer to give the daughter immunity if she'll recant, and when the defense takes this offer to their client, her father, the Senator decides to plead guilty in an apparent attempt to protect his daughter.  After the court accepts the Senator's plea, and during the press conference in which the Senator explains that he changed his plea to protect his daughter, the truth finally comes out. It wasn't the Senator after all, which is no surprise to regular viewers. My point, however, is that no one-not the police, the prosecution, or the defense-considered the any possibility other than the Senator. The linked [video clip](http://docs.google.com/images/the%20practice%20clip%209-23.mpg) delivers the punch line. (Don't view it if you don't want to know who did it.)  My point is that all of us perceive reality through our own set of expectations, and tend to fit the evidence and data we collect into our expectations. Perhaps we should be more circumspect as we piece together a story.  Posted October 29, 2001 |   **Would you like to comment on this article? Please submit your comments** [**here.**](http://docs.google.com/newsnviews.htm#Submit%20your%20own%20comments) |  |  | | --- | | [Top of page](#gjdgxs) |  |  | | --- | | [Home](http://docs.google.com/index.html) | [Silver Screen](http://docs.google.com/silver_screen.htm) | [Small Screen](http://docs.google.com/smallscreen/small_screen.htm) | [News & Views](http://docs.google.com/newsnviews.htm) | | |