

The Effects of Hair Color on Expectancies  
in Getting Acquainted Situations

An Honors Thesis

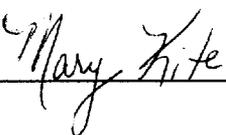
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## Abstract

This study was designed to determine if males treat blondes differently from brunettes in getting acquainted situations. Because previous research has shown that hair color is an important factor in the perception of an individual (Clayson & Maughan, 1986), it was expected that blondes would be asked questions pertaining to social situations whereas brunettes would be asked questions pertaining to school. Male subjects were given photographs of the same female wearing different wigs. They were given limited information and then asked to list their own questions and also to choose questions from a list that they might ask in order to get acquainted with the model. No significant differences were found between the two groups. Limitations of the study and areas of further research are discussed.

stereotype about another person, and they interpret that person's behavior as conforming to the stereotype regardless of whether or not it actually does. These expectancies do not serve as definite truths about the target, rather they function as probable hypotheses concerning the likelihood of the target's disposition or behavior (Darley & Gross, 1983). Two models have been developed that describe the expectancy confirmation process. I describe them first and then discuss specific research suggesting these models.

#### Darley and Fazio Model

According to Darley and Fazio (1980), expectancy confirmation follows a six-step general social interaction sequence; these steps delineate the development and implementation of expectancies. The sequence begins with the initial formation of an expectancy, which can occur through various channels. One possible channel is direct observation of another individual which may or may not represent the true behavior of the individual. Expectancies based on these observations are often unwarranted and may be formed despite evidence for alternate explanations for the behavior. The perceiver may or may not be involved

directly in the formation of this type of expectancy. Another possible channel through which expectancies are formed is from stereotypes held about the groups in which the individual is perceived to belong. A final possible source of expectancy confirmation is through information from others regarding the individual's reputation.

Once formed, the expectancies influence the perceiver's behavior toward the target; this is stage two of the model and these expectancies determine the direction the interaction takes. Negative expectancies are likely to lead to behaviors designed to avoid or terminate the interaction whereas positive expectancies tend to invite or prolong the interaction.

Next, at stage three, the perceiver's actions are interpreted by the target. This process influences the target's behavior toward the perceiver in future social situations. The target can attribute the perceiver's behavior to four possible causes: disposition of the perceiver, attributions to the situation, his/her own self-attributions, or complex attributions. Complex attributions are a combination of any of the other three sources.

After the behavior of the perceiver is interpreted, at stage four, the target then reacts to the behavior, usually via one of the two types of reciprocation. These include similar responses, such as a returned smile, or opposite responses, such as flight responses from an aggressive action. The target's response is not based solely on interpretation of the behavior, but is also influenced by the impact the actions have on his/her goals and motives for the interaction.

Once the target has responded, stage five occurs wherein the perceiver interprets the behavior as consistent or inconsistent with the perceiver's initial expectancy. Some behaviors are ambiguous and therefore cannot be objectively interpreted as confirming or disconfirming the expectancy; these ambiguous behaviors lead to a biased interpretation of the behavior that confirms the expectancy. This interpretation may occur because the perceiver wants his initial expectancy to be correct and it is easier to confirm the expectancy than to disconfirm it.

The sixth step in this general social interaction

sequence is the target's perception of his/her actions. This may lead to a change in attitude toward similar situations, the perceiver, or themselves. Much of the research reviewed by Darley and Fazio (1980) suggests that the behavioral response of the target is, at least to some extent, forced by the initial actions of the perceiver.

#### Deaux and Major Model

A model of gender-related behavior proposed by Deaux and Major (1987) focuses on the display of gender differences in social interactions rather than explanation for their causes. The model describes the situations in which gender differences occur and focuses on social interactions in which the person has the chance to choose how to behave. They assume that women and men have equal ability in social interactions and that the differences occur because of personal choice, other's behavior, or the context of the situation.

The Deaux and Major model differs from that of Darley and Fazio in that the former is concerned with how gender differences are displayed. Darley and Fazio are concerned with how these expectancies are formed,

whereas Deaux and Major look only at how they influence the interaction, not what has led to the expectancy. Similarities in some aspects of gender related behavior patterns and other social patterns are noted, but Deaux and Major emphasize the differences between the two genders. Gender differences, for example, are more accepted than other dimensions of social behavior. Also, they argue that an individual's sex is more salient than many other social dimensions.

Deaux and Major's model first assumes that the perceiver has expectancies toward the target and his/her behavior, usually based on one's gender-belief system (Deaux & Kite, 1987). This system is a set of beliefs about men and women that includes both descriptive and prescriptive elements. The descriptive element tries to describe the expectancies and the prescriptive element attempts to predict how the individual will behave based on the expectancy. There are global beliefs about how men and women act and there are more specific beliefs about certain groups of men and women and their behavior. According to Deaux and Major, the more information the perceiver has about the target, the less likely the global stereotype will

be used. Moreover, perceivers vary in their willingness to rely on their gender belief system. However, it is difficult to predict the degree to which the system is used because of the complexity of individual differences.

Activation of a schema is the second step in this model. The perceiver has many schemata from which to choose in any situation and choice may be influenced by the self, the target, or the situation. Also, schemata that are high on the perceiver's hierarchy, schemata that have been primed by preceding thoughts and events, schemata that can be triggered by observable acts from the target, or schemata that are brought out in sex-linked situations are more likely to be evoked.

The third step in the model deals with the behavior of the perceiver which is determined by the schemata that have been activated. Some schemata may lead to an avoidance of the interaction. However, if the interaction does continue, the expectancies of the perceiver can affect the way the target is treated. The activated schemata will determine the course of the entire interaction.

This is followed by step four, the first

interaction with the target. This involves the target entering the interaction with his/her own goals and self-conceptions. In this model, gender is a universal self-schema and, because every person has a different gender self-schema, it is nearly impossible to predict how individuals will react in the interactions.

The fifth step is the activation of self-schemata of the target. Deaux and Major propose four instances in which gender schemata has a greater chance of being activated. They are that gender is central in the self-schemata, that the target's self-concept related to gender has been activated recently or frequently activated in the past, that cues from the perceiver make gender salient, or that situational cues make gender salient. The saliency of gender is important because gender associated stereotypes will be activated when gender is salient and, accordingly, will affect the interaction.

After the schemata is activated, step six, or an interpretation of the perceiver's action takes place. Although targets are more likely to pay attention to self-consistent behaviors, they do not ignore those that contradict them. Another factor that influences

the interpretation of the action is activation of the target's gender schemata. People are more likely to interpret the behavior as sex-linked if this occurs.

When the behavior of the perceiver has been interpreted, the target acts either to confirm or dispel the expectancies (Step 7). This action is seen as the primary focus of the model. The authors feel that the response is multiply-determined. Moreover, they believe that some expectancy confirmation models do not allow for the additive affect of the many factors that influence the response.

After the target reacts, the perceiver may interpret that action in some way. Many factors influence the interpretation, including the perceiver's initial expectancy. Activation of gender schemata is another factor that helps determine this interpretation. The final step in this model is the target's interpretation of his/her behavior. Here, specific beliefs about gender based behavior may be modified if the target is repeatedly exposed to certain behaviors. Accordingly, this can be a powerful tool in developing the target's self-conception, especially for young children.

Research on Expectancy Confirmation

There is a large body of evidence, covering many different situations, supporting expectancy confirmation. The Oak Hill School experiment (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) was an early demonstration of the power of expectancy confirmation. In that study elementary school students were given a "Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition" that supposedly measured the students potential for academic progress. In reality, the test was Flanagan's Test of General Ability. A random 20% of the children were designated as "academic spurters." The teachers learned which children were in this category before they met their classrooms in the fall. Teachers were told only of the 20% who were deemed "academic spurters;" no information was given about the remaining students. It was expected that the teachers would give special attention to the students who were deemed "academic spurters," an advantage that could be measured by comparing the gains of the "special" children to those of the control group on Flanagan's test. The students were retested on this measure after on semester, one year, and two years. The students who had the expectancy advantage gained

more IQ points than did the control group. The teachers may have communicated to the special children that they expected more from them through the tone of voice, facial expressions, postures, or touch suggesting the potential importance of expectancy and its influence on other's behavior.

Expectancy confirmation can also result from information about physical attractiveness (Snyder et al., 1980). In one study, for example, men were given a picture previously rated as either attractive or unattractive along with accurate information about a woman's biographical background. After receiving this, they rated their initial impression of her. Then, they had a ten minute telephone conversation with the target, after which they again rated their overall impression of her. It was found that perceived physical attractiveness influenced initial impressions of the women, with the attractive women as being seen as more sociable and likeable than unattractive women. Impartial judges, reviewing only the female half of the conversation, then assessed the amount of behavior confirmation. Differences in the judge's ratings emerged only in the areas that had shown differences in

the initial ratings given by the men. For example, the initial ratings showed that men view attractive women as more sociable. When the judges rated the female half of the conversation, they "heard" more sociability in the attractive group. Apparently, the male's expectancies had a significant effect on the female's behavior.

This phenomenon was also exhibited in an experiment on perceived high/low task ability (Swann & Snyder, 1980). Participants were assigned to take either the role of instructor or the role of pupil. Next the instructors were given bogus information about the abilities of the pupil. In each group there was one high and one low ability pupil. The instructors were given three teaching methods from which to choose a way to teach the pupils a card trick. After teaching the pupils the trick, the instructors rated how well they believed each pupil had learned the trick. Results showed that instructors believed the high ability pupils had learned the trick better than the low group, regardless of the teaching method employed. Moreover, when the pupils rated how confident the instructors were in them, high ability pupils reported

that the instructors had more confidence in them than did the low ability pupils. Apparently the instructor conveyed the confidence he felt based on the bogus information. Although the expectancy may not have been confirmed, this experiment shows that the expectancy can be detected even when the perceiver is unaware of it.

This body of research supports expectancy confirmation; however even though there is much support for expectancy confirmation, there is also evidence that expectancies can be dispelled if given the right set of circumstances and knowledge of the expectancies.

#### Research on the Disconfirmation of Expectancies

Expectancies are not always confirmed. Targets, for example, appear to be motivated to dispel the expectancy if the behavior has a negative social connotation (Swann & Ely, 1984), suggesting that the attempt to discredit negative expectancies is often an ego-defensive mechanism or a self-enhancement processes. These authors also found that when a target's certainty about his/her self perception is high their behavior rarely reflects the erroneous expectancy of the perceiver. There was only a small,

unreliable chance that the target would confirm the behavior if the perceiver was sure of his/her expectancy and the target was unsure of his/her self-perception. Apparently, expectancies are confirmed only when the target has a low certainty about his/her self-perception and when the perceiver has a low certainty of the expectancy.

Research also indicates that expectancies are not confirmed when the targets know of the perceiver's negative expectancy (Hilton & Darley, 1985). The knowledge of the negative expectancy seems to motivate the target to dispel it. In this research, when targets were told that the perceivers viewed them as interpersonally cold, they acted in a way that disconfirmed the expectancy. Perceivers who viewed the targets as cold behaved in a more friendly manner than those with no expectancies toward the target. In this case, it seems that the perceivers are also motivated to dispel the expectancies. The authors feel that this may be because the perceiver has no goal from the interaction other than it be pleasant; therefore, the perceivers may have tried to be friendly to make up for the expected coldness of the target.

Research has also shown that targets do not necessarily work to overcome inconsistent expectancies from a perceiver (Testa & Major, 1988). One study was designed to look at expectancy confirmation and self-verification and to determine the relationship, if any, between the two. In expectancy confirmation literature, the targets tend to be viewed as passive participants in the process. However, evidence also supports that self-verification, or the process by which the targets actively work to maintain their self image, occurs. Testa and Major (1988) examined situations where the views of the perceiver were congruent and incongruent with the target's self-perception when the perceiver had no prior belief about the target's sociability. Results showed that expectancy confirmation and self-verification processes are present in social interactions, but that the two processes do not interact. Accordingly self-verification processes seem to be stronger than expectancy confirmation, perhaps because self-verification processes have evolved over the lifetime of the individual whereas the behavioral confirmation processes began only minutes before.

Research has also shown both instances when expectancies are confirmed and when they are dispelled. The proposed research focuses on whether males have expectancies, based on hair color, that they rely on in getting acquainted situations. It is expected that males will have expectancies about blondes that are based on sociability whereas they will have expectancies about brunettes based on intellectual ability.

#### Subjects

Thirty undergraduate males at a midsize Midwestern university participated in the experiment. Participation in the experiment was for credit in an introductory psychology class.

#### Procedure

Subjects learned that the study concerned how people interact in a getting acquainted situation. They were told that they were free to discontinue participation in the experiment at any time. Next, subjects were randomly assigned to one of two groups differing only in the hair color of the individual in the photo. Participants in each group received a questionnaire and a photograph (see Appendix A). In

one photo, the model was wearing a blonde wig, and in the other photo she was wearing a brunette wig. Subjects imagined that they were at the airport late one evening waiting for a flight that had been delayed due to bad weather. They were told that the woman in the photograph was sitting at their departure gate wearing a sweatshirt from their college. Subjects imagined initiating a conversation with her and listed ten questions that they would ask in order to get to know her better. Before making their selection, they were given a list of possible topics from which to select the ten questions, but were encouraged to ask any question they wanted. Next, subjects read a list of 18 possible questions and chose the five that they would be willing to ask the woman in order to get to know her better. After the questionnaire was completed, the subjects were debriefed and released.

#### Results

It was expected that blonde targets would be asked questions that pertained to social situations whereas the brunette target would be asked questions pertaining to school or career goals. To test this hypothesis the

experimenter categorized all subjects' questions into one of twelve groups (see Table 1.) Chi Square

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Insert Table 1 About Here  
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tests were conducted to compare group responses to each category; however no significant differences were found for any of the twelve categories. These data are summarized in Table 1.

Chi Square tests were also conducted on the 18 questions, provided by the experimenter, from which the subjects could chose (See Table 2.) These results also

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Insert Table 2 About Here  
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yielded no significant differences between the blonde and brunette targets. These results provided no support for the hypothesis that there are differences in the types of questions asked of blondes and brunettes in getting acquainted situations.

Table 1

Percentage of Subjects Asking Questions in Each  
Category by Hair Color

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency for Blonde Targets</u>	<u>Frequency for Brunette Targets</u>	$\chi^2$
School-Academic	21.3%	28.7%	2.15
School-Social	18.7	19.3	0.02
Hometown/Family	11.3	11.3	0.00
Housing at School	7.3	4.7	0.95
Hobbies	4.7	4.0	0.80
Future Contact	2.7	3.3	0.12
Future Plans	4.7	3.3	0.35
Travel Plans	6.7	9.3	0.73
Weather	0.0	0.7	1.03
Personal	14.5	13.3	0.30
Current Events	2.7	0.0	4.05
Employment	3.3	2.7	0.12

Table 2

Percentage of Subjects Selecting Each Question by Hair Color and Chi Square

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<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	$\chi^2$
	<u>For</u>	<u>For</u>	
	<u>Blondes</u>	<u>Brunettes</u>	
Seriousness	40.0%	40.0	0.00
Career Goals	20.0	6.7	1.15
Dating	46.7	27.0	1.29
Shopping	27.0	20.0	0.18
Marriage	00.0	6.7	1.03
Approval	20.0	40.0	1.43
Modeling	6.7	20.0	1.15
Emergencies	20.0	6.7	1.15
Decisions	13.3	20.0	0.24
Appearance	26.7	26.7	0.00
Intelligence	33.3	26.7	0.16
Fashion	00.0	13.3	2.14
Reading	53.3	53.3	0.00
Sorority	66.7	53.3	0.56
Party	60.0	66.7	0.14
Marriage/Control	6.7	00.0	1.30
Fun Loving	26.7	53.3	1.30
Dependability	26.7	20.0	0.19

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### Discussion

The results of this study failed to confirm the hypothesis that blondes are treated differently from brunettes in getting acquainted situations. Because the men had no prior information about the models, differential treatment of blondes and brunettes was expected. If expectancies based on hair color do exist, it was expected that this study would detect these differences.

One possible reason no differences emerged is that men do not have expectancies based on hair color. If so, there would be no difference in the types of questions men ask of blondes and brunettes in getting acquainted situations. This explanation is unlikely, however, because previous research has shown that when compared to redheads, blondes are viewed as more pleasant, beautiful, and feminine (Clayson & Maughan, 1986). Redheads, on the other hand, are seen as more powerful and professional. The adjectives describing the blondes could be seen as more sociable whereas the adjectives describing redheads could be viewed as more business like. Based on this research it was believed that these differences would also appear when comparing blondes to brunettes.

The study does have limitations that may help account for the failure to find the expected differences. One limitation is the sample size and population. Because only 30 males were used, the power needed to detect a subtle effect may have been lacking. Perhaps if more subjects had been utilized, significant effects would have emerged. This is particularly a problem because analyses were based on categorical data, making subtle differences more difficult to detect.

Another limitation is that the participants were not allowed to actually interact with targets. The pencil and paper technique used probably was not as sensitive to expectancies as an interview or phone conversation would have been. Interaction with the target may be necessary in order for any expectancies to emerge. In addition, this study did not provide any information that the men could interpret, instead only a photo and the information that the woman was waiting at the airport was given. This type of presentation may have failed to make hair color salient. Hence, effect due to this variable may have not been elicited. This limited information may have failed to elicit expectancies based on hair color.

Still another limitation of the study is that the photographs were not previously rated as either attractive or unattractive. If the males found the female in the photos as unattractive, both groups would be less likely to ask sociability questions. In the Snyder et al. (1977) study, the photographs were previously rated as either attractive or unattractive. It was found that there are expectancies based on physical appearance. Physically attractive females are seen as more sociable and likeable. It may be that the female in the photograph was viewed as unattractive and therefore neither group would be likely to ask questions pertaining to sociability.

The first step in Darley and Fazio (1980) expectancy confirmation model is the formation of an expectancy. This study fails to confirm the formation of a global expectancy about blondes. If an expectancy existed in this setting, differences in the type of questions asked in the two conditions should have emerged. According to the Deaux and Major (1987) model of gender related behavior, it is believed that the more information available to a person, the less likely a global stereotype will be used. Because all questions generally focused on the target's role as a college student, the global stereotype of blondes being

"dizzy" or less intelligent was not evoked. Instead, the stereotype of a college student may have been activated by the sight of the college sweatshirt in the photograph, leading to questions based on school related topics. Such topics are inconsistent with the stereotype of a "dizzy" blondes. Again, then, the experimental procedure employed may have masked differences based on hair color.

This study was an attempt to show the differences in expectancies of blondes and brunettes so that further research could be done on the confirmation/disconfirmation of these expectancies. Assuming hair color does evoke expectancies, future research in this area could duplicate the procedure of the Snyder et al. (1977) study but could vary the hair color of the individual instead of their perceived attractiveness. This type of study would be more sensitive to differences and would also allow the confirmation/disconfirmation of these expectancies to be studied.

Another variation to this study would be to inform the females that the males had negative expectancies based on her hair color in order to determine if the expectancy is confirmed when the target is aware of the expectancy. Research by Darley and Hilton (1985) suggests that a

knowledge of expectancies leads to their rejection. If the expectancy is known, then, the blondes may work harder in order to prove their intelligence to the perceiver. Moreover, if targets know there is a negative social connotation they may try especially hard to dispel the expectancy (e.g. Swann & Ely, 1984). Because being a "dizzy" blonde has many negative connotations, it is unlikely that blondes want to be stereotyped in this group. Extra effort may be used by the blonde in order to show that she does not fit into this stereotype.

The suggested areas of research can only lead to a better understanding of the role hair color plays in social interaction. More research is needed to determine the exact expectancies associated with the different hair colors and how these expectancies can be dispelled.

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Appendix A

Imagine that you are at the airport late one evening, waiting on your flight that has been delayed due to bad weather. You notice the young woman in the picture sitting at your departure gate. She is wearing a Ball State sweatshirt and you decide to ask if she's a student. You sit down a couple of seats away from her and the two of you begin a conversation.

List ten questions you are likely to ask her in order to get to know her. On the second page is a list of possible topics to ask her about, but feel free to ask any question you would like.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Below are some possible topics for questions to ask the student.

Classes

Major(s)/ Minor (s)

Part time jobs

Summer Employment

Career Goals

Plans for after Graduation

Extra-Curricular Activities such as:

    Sorority Activities

    Religious Activities

    Volunteer Activities

Personal Attitudes

Personal Opinions

Hobbies

Hometown

Favorite Groups

Dating Status

Campus Housing

Now imagine you have five minutes to ask her questions from the list below. Circle the five questions that you would like to ask her in order to get to know her better.

1. Are you a serious student?
2. Are you interested in a career that is usually associated with men (i.e. industrial technology)?
3. Do you usually date more than one person at a time?
4. Do you like to shop?
5. When you get married, do you plan to work outside the home?
6. Do you change your behavior to gain social approval?
7. Have you ever considered being a model?
8. Are you calm and in control in emergencies?
9. In romantic relationships, do you prefer to let the man make most of the decisions.
10. Is physical appearance the most important trait in a dating partner?
11. Is being intelligent important to you?
12. How much does current fashion affect how you dress?
13. What (if any) type of books do you read in your leisure time?
14. Are you a member of a sorority?
15. Do you like to party?
16. Do you believe that once you are married, your spouse will take care of you and make the major decisions?
17. Are you fun loving?
18. Would you describe yourself as dependable?