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### The Contingency Of Expectation And Reality

“You get what you expect.” A very old and coined term, but how realistic is it really? Throughout one’s life, the experiences that scar their subconscious have an unrelenting effect on their expectations, which in turn deteriorates their success rate for generally everything in their life. Through psychological and scientific evidence found through experimentation, it has been found that there is a clear relationship between one’s expectations and things like their success rates, happiness, emotional stability, and more. This is a common theme that is played out many times in Sherman Alexie’s novel, as the main character, Arnold “Junior” Spirit, navigates the twisting roads of his life that are plagued with self-depreciation and a massive lack of confidence. Through the experience of Junior, recorded experimentation, and scientific explanations, we can see that expectations ultimately control one’s reality.

The word control can be found in the oxford dictionary stating such; con·trol: the power to influence or direct people's behavior or the course of events. There is no better way to describe the hold expectations have over one’s life than that. Such a statement might come off as harsh or intense, but there is solid reasoning behind the thought process. When a person expects little to nothing of themselves, that is exactly what they will get. Motivation stems from self-confidence and the belief that something is achievable (or in other words, the expectation of capability).

Without the latter two aspects, there is no motivation, thus nothing done. When you expect poor performance from another person and continuously allow disappointing or hurtful behavior from them, they will never change. When a negative experience has continuously been negative for so long, we start to expect such out of it, and fall into this pattern of behavior which allows said negativity to flourish. If all three of these theoretical situations happen to manifest themselves into existence at the same time, one could fall into a mental pit of no expectations for anything at all, and that is what we see happen to Arnold Spirit about a third of the way into the book.

With the constant fear of harassment from his peers always looming over him, he often found himself in hard positions socially. Even with his best friend, Rowdy, he had this expectation of constantly getting made fun of or bullied by him, and just accepted it. These aspects of his life mixed with the growing alcoholism that was entangled in his community led to Junior having poor expectations for practically everything in his life, which is why it took someone else pushing an expectation upon Junior for it to really take effect in his life. In chapter 5 of Sherman Alexie's novel, Mr. P tells Junior "“But not you,” Mr. P said. ‘You can’t give up. You won’t give up. You threw that book in my face because somewhere inside you refuse to give up’” (43). Mr. P explained to him that everyone on his reservation had given up and lost hope in such an encasing environment, but he believed Junior to be bigger than that. This is the first time in the novel we see someone light that spark of confidence in Junior. It may be surrounded and repressed by other things like guilt, confusion, and anger, but it is there, and it raises his expectations of himself. We see this play out in the next chapter when he asks his parents to go to Reardan, the rich white town's highschool outside of the reservation. He believes he can do it after never before thinking of such a thing, and it is because the expectation of him was raised by

Mr. P and passed into his hands. He let Junior know that at least one person *expects* more from him, so he should too.

This is a turning point in both Junior's life and the novel itself as this very theme is what will come to prove that expectations are arguably limits to one's reality, as they directly affect it. It is said that ". . . those patients who overestimated their length of stay (left sooner than they expected) will improve more than patients who underestimated their length of stay (stay longer than expected)" (Lamb and Webb 314). This study concluded that patients staying in the psychiatric ward of a hospital had shorter stays when they expected themselves to leave sooner, compared to others who had much longer stays when they expected such. Because psychiatric wards deal with helping mental states of patients, it is a completely mental game of expectation. The expectations we have for ourselves evidently play out in the results of our lives, meaning we are fully in control of our perceptions of reality through our expectations, and Junior is coming to realize that too.

The ideology of one being able to rise to expectations as long as they have been firmly set heavily flows through the entirety of Junior's basketball season, especially in the last game against Wellpinit. Right before the match in chapter 25, Arnold realizes "They (his teammates and coach) expected me to be good. And so I became good. I wanted to live up to expectations. I guess that's what it comes down to. The power of expectations. And as they expected more from me, I expected more from myself. . ." (Alexie 180). Lost in a cascade of troubling emotions, right before he left the locker room to play, Junior came to a realization; his aptitude of winning is completely controlled by the expectations set for him. He realizes that events such as this one have occurred throughout his entire experience at Reardan and everything that has followed, how

the expectations have largely controlled his perception, thus reality. Expectations lead to better performance, causing a better rate of success and happiness, thus a better quality of life.

Although it might act as a placebo, it is the driving factor in the makeup of one's reality.

Expectations act in the same way that caffeine does. Caffeine can't *literally* make you get more work done, but it being in your system can have a large part in such. You just have to make the decision to spend that extra energy on the work, and expectations are the same. An article on expected success rates resulting in success states “. . . people who **expected** hypnosis to be effective were more susceptible to hypnosis (Kirsch, [12]). Similarly, some of the placebo effects may be driven by response expectancies (Stewart-Williams & Podd, [23])” (Bigman, Mauss, et al.). This quote basically states that even though expectations may act as a placebo, they still enhance performance and abilities by simply being there in the first place. Meaning that, the mere existence of high expectations can lead to people being more successful in what they have those expectations in. This is important to the argument of expectation as it proves that just their presence alone can have a definite effect on a person's life.

Some might think that by saying one's reality is contingent upon their expectations is an illegitimate claim, as there are some things in life that nothing can change. Well, while one might not be able to change their living situation or physical issues, aspects surrounding such can definitely be altered to make one's perception better depending on the expectations around it, thus making them easier or harder to deal with. One study states “Furthermore, **perceptions** of inequality affect people's well-being.[12] If people perceive processes affecting their own situation as 'fair', they are not only likely to directly derive utility from that fact, but also tend to evaluate the outcomes of these processes differently than if their subjective **perception** of the

process is that it is 'unfair' (Bjørnskov et al. [5])” (Mendez). This study shows that people who found their economic status “fair” through influence were less likely to change it, and more likely when they found it “unfair”. The subjects reacted this way because they had previously set expectations, and upon altering their perceptions, the way they dealt with or felt about their situation changed. While perceptions and expectations cannot change a person's life, they can change their *quality* of life (for better or for worse), therefore change their lives in general. We see this fact take a heavy toll on Junior's life upon the multiple deaths in his family.

When he hears of his sister's death, his assumption was that it was a painful one, because that is what would hurt him the most. This led to the actual pain he dealt with to hit him ten times harder. In chapter 24 Junior says “I was so depressed I thought about dropping out of Reardan. I thought about going back to Wellpinit. I blamed myself for all of the deaths” (Alexie 173). His pain had almost commanded him to leave the only thing in his life that has driven it to become better. This is because of how genuinely painful it felt having expected the very worst from his life and their deaths. For better or worse, expectations control our perceptions, which often detrimentally affect our physical reality.

Evidence to support this argument can be found in a study done on the electrophysiological study on expectations of pain. The experiment conducted showed that when someone observes pain that happens previously to experiencing their own, the level of how painful it is for them increases. The authors of the paper write “These data show how expectations, perceptions as well as reactions related to pain are crucially affected not only by observation but by personal attitudes toward others and all these changes can be clearly described through CNV” (Benedetti, Carlino, et al.). This evidence is saying that what one sees,

thinks, and believes largely affects their perception of pain and how they react. This proves that someone's perception of pain is controlled by their expectation of how much it will hurt them. Thus further proving the argument that expectation can have a literal effect on reality.

To restate, our expectations have a direct relationship with our physical reality and actions. This occurs in many ways, from our emotional reactions to events to our bodies reactions to expectation, and we can see evidence of this in a study done on the relation between tactile facilitation and expectation. It states "Thus, the current results suggest that the mere **expectation** of object contact and the utilization of tactile feedback played a crucial role for tactile facilitation during this reception task. . ." (Chua, Tremblay, et. al.). This quote tells us that if the subject expected physical touch and feedback from it, their subconscious enabled them to physically touch an object. This supports the idea that the presence of an expectation can have the ability to physically control our actions and reactions, even when we don't think it will. Further supporting the argument that the results of expectations physically show up in one's life.

Expectations are always something that is worth putting effort into fixing, but many do not realize how large of an effect they have on their lives. Expectations have the ability to change one's life in multiple ways, including their perceptions of themselves, others, painful situations, and success rates. This ideology is very prominent in the novel *The Absolutely True Diary of A Part-Time Indian*, as the main character goes through the trials of highschool, realizing along the way how much of an effect expectations have on his life. Reality is ultimately contingent upon the expectations carried along with it, for better or for worse.

## Works Cited

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