The Effect of Excuses on Customers' Perceptions of Service Agents Following Service Delays

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The Effect of Excuses on Customers’ Perceptions of Service Agents Following Service Delays

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Psychology
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by
Nicholas Mills
THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Abstract

A laboratory experiment was conducted examining the effects of violation of expectations regarding the length of delays in service encounters, and the effects of the service agent's excuse for the delay. The variables of interest were the customers' moods, perceptions of the service agent, attributions the customers make for the cause of the delay, and customers willingness to do a favor for the service agent. The effects of mindless behavior (Langer, Blank & Chanowitz, 1978) were also investigated in the context of the type of excuse offered for the delay. It was hypothesized that provision of a "placebic" excuse when expectations had not been violated, or the provision of a valid excuse when either expectations had been violated or when they had not been violated would produce favorable reactions. It was also hypothesized that the provision of a "placebic" excuse when expectations had been violated, or the provision of no excuse when either expectations had been violated or had not been violated would produce unfavorable reactions. The concept of mindless behavior was supported by the measure of the willingness to perform a favor. The dependent measures were effected mainly by whether or not expectations for the length of the delay had been violated.
The experience of waiting is one of the most common frustrating occurrences in modern life, yet it is also one of the least researched topics in psychology. Little research has been conducted in an attempt to alleviate this problem, even though it is present in nearly every aspect of life, particularly in fast-paced Western society. The problem of waiting is particularly prevalent in the area of service encounters. Although there are probably individual differences in waiting thresholds and reactions to waits, there may be certain methods a service agent can use to make a wait less frustrating to the customer. One such method involves the use of impression management techniques on the part of the service agent to change the customer's attribution of blame for the wait. It is the purpose of this study to investigate the usefulness of one such impression management technique.

From the sparse literature on service encounter delays, several propositions have been gathered. Bateson (1985, p. 67) defines a service encounter as "...the face to face interaction between customer and service personnel. "The elements that make up the perceived character of the service are: "...the client's perceptions of the purpose of the service along a pleasure-function continuum; the motivation of consumption along an elective-necessity continuum; the result of the service along a positive contribution-negative reduction continuum; and the salience of the service along an important-unimportant continuum" (Czepiel, Solomon, Surprenant & Gutman, 1985, p. 8).

Czepiel et al. (1985) also suggest that services can be divided into two parts; the actual service and the way in which it is delivered, satisfaction being a function of both parts. Similarly, Tansik (1985) views the customer-service agent interaction to be as important or even more important than the actual product or service rendered. Further,
Maister (1985) states that once the service encounter begins things may run smoothly but "...the bitter taste of how long it took to get attention pollutes the overall judgment that we make about the quality of the service." (p. 113). Finally, Maister (1985) states that in attempting to improve the service encounter the largest dividend may be paid in improving the early stages of the service encounter, including the waiting experience. Thus, past literature suggests the need to improve the subjective experience of waiting in a service encounter.

Maister (1985) also proposed that several factors affect the perception of waiting via the proposition that anxiety causes waits to seem longer. These factors are: the fear of being forgotten experienced when a wait occurs prior to the actual consumer-service agent interaction; not knowing how long a wait will be; and the feeling of powerlessness experienced when a wait is unexplained.

Harrison, Choi, and Mills (1987), using a multidimensional scaling technique, attempted to map out the dimensions of waiting that make it frustrating or not frustrating. Subjects recalled actual service encounters in which they had to wait. These encounters were then sorted according to similarity on self selected attributes by a second group of subjects. These data were analyzed using multidimensional scaling. A three-dimensional solution was chosen because of its interpretability and because it accounted for nearly all of the variance in the similarity judgments (R square = .932). Finally, a third group of subjects rated a subset of 18 service encounters on 14 attributes chosen by the experimenters based on inspection of the categories and theoretical considerations.

This research yielded three dimensions that map out the waiting experience. Dimension I was interpreted as an Anger and Frustration
dimension, this was expected since the subjects were asked to recall both frustrating and non-frustrating delays. Blaming the service agent for the delay, perception of unfair treatment, lack of an apology from the organization, and lack of empathy for the service agent were attributes associated with this dimension. Dimension II was interpreted as, "The extent to which the service was of value and whether the organization apologized for the delay..." (p. 2). Dimension III was uninterpretable from the regression equations.

A more speculative interpretation of the data was also made, based on inspection of the descriptions. Dimension I was speculatively interpreted as a violation of a script-based expectation. Dimension II concerned situations in which a delay did not frustrate the customer. One end of the continuum for dimension II was characterized by a customer who did not blame the agent, empathized with the agent or knew the agent personally; the other end of the continuum was characterized by an organization which apologized or compensated the customer for the wait. Dimension III concerned situations in which a delay did frustrate the customer. At one end of the continuum for dimension III customers felt trapped, while at the other end of the continuum the customer was able to, and often did, leave the service encounter without completing the transaction.

From the perspective of the service agent, dimension II suggests that when a wait does occur, an apology or some form of compensation from the organization may affect the customer's reaction to the wait.

Thus, Harrison et al. (1987) concluded that service delays present impression management opportunities, suggesting that "...if the service provider acknowledges the problem, keeps the consumer informed, and handles the delay equitably, there is potential to not only neutralize a
negative experience but to create a favorable impression as a consequence of the organization's treatment of the consumer under adverse circumstances" (p. 4).

It should be apparent from the discussion above that there has been very little actual research in the area of waiting. However, there have been some attempts at describing the service encounter, the factors that constitute it, and how waiting fits into the perception of the service encounter. Within the context of the present research, which involves the use of impression management techniques to change the customer's reaction to the delay, several psychological concepts shall be utilized. These concepts are expectations, impression management, attribution, emotion and attribution, aggression, mindless behavior, and request phraseology. Each of these concepts will be discussed briefly.

**Expectations**

According to Maister (1985), there are two ways of changing a customer's satisfaction with a service encounter: changing what the customer perceives or changing what the customer expects. Similarly, Czepiel et al. (1985) state that satisfaction with a service encounter depends on whether or not expectations exceed the perceptions of actual service quality. This expectation, according to McCallum and Harrison (1985), consists of an anticipation of the service agent's role, the probable sequence of behaviors, and a comparison level against which the present encounter will be judged. This comparison level is also known as a script.

Scripts are a "coherent sequence of events expected by the individual, involving him either as a participant or as an observer" (Abelson, 1976, p. 33). Scripts determine which of our previous experiences we will use to judge the present encounter. Bateson (1985,
p. 75) states that "any repetitive social encounter will become stereotyped in the form of a script." Since service encounters are repetitive social encounters, it seems logical to assume that they will become scripted. In the realm of service encounters, scripts provide the customer with information concerning his role, the service provider's role, and the probable sequence of events at the encounter.

In their work on the causes of social protest, Ross, Thibaut, and Evenbeck (1971) conclude that when the difference between a person's expectations and obtained outcomes is large enough "...his acute discontent may make him willing to participate in violent protest" (p. 402). If this statement holds true in the realm of service encounters, it would behoove the service agent to be cognizant of waiting customers and to be mindful of strategies that may be used to divert responsibility for the wait away from the service agent himself and onto external or situational constraints; such strategies are known as forms of impression management.

In sum, expectations provide the customer with information concerning roles and probable sequences of behavior that will occur in a service encounter. It seems logical to assume that the length of time a customer can reasonably expect to wait and acceptable responses to the wait may be included in these expectations.

**Impression Management**

As previously discussed, Harrison et al. (1987) view service delays as impression management opportunities. In the case of a delay, service agents may seek to change the perceived responsibility for the wait to factors beyond their control. This can be accomplished through the use of impression management techniques. The theory of impression
management was developed by Goffman (1953) and assumes that both actors and observers can imagine interpretations of an act that "...maximize either its offensiveness to others or its defaming implications for the actor himself..." (Goffman 1971, p. 108-9). Actors are then motivated to change this negative interpretation. An actor may do this using three main devices: apologies, requests, and accounts.

Goffman characterizes apologies as remedial work in which the "...individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that dissociates itself from the delict [a wrong or improper act] and affirms a belief in the offended rule" (1971, p. 113). Goffman proposes that there are several elements to an apology: embarrassment, a demonstration that the actor knows what behavior was expected, acceptance and understanding of any punishment received, verbal rejection of the wrong act, embracing the right way of doing things and a promise to behave correctly in the future, volunteering restitution and performing penance. This performance of penance may also be seen as a form of self punishment. As Wood and Mitchell (1981) state "Self castigation by an actor may restore an observer's sense of equity following an incident of performance failure and mitigate any punitive actions that might otherwise be taken by the observer" (p. 360). In fact, if the actor exaggerates the self-punishment he is assigning himself the observer may feel it necessary to stop the self derogation (Goffman, 1971).

Goffman describes a request as asking the permission of the potentially offended person to violate his rights. The actor makes it clear that he understands that his actions may violate the rights of another and asks for the other's forbearance.

Finally, Goffman describes accounts as statements that stress the
role of particular internal (personal) or external (situational) forces in an attempt to influence the observer's attribution for the cause of an event. Accounts can be divided into three categories: explanations, excuses, and pretexts. Explanations are accounts characterized by attempts by the actor to fully exonerate himself by "...providing details concerning what he was actually about" (Goffman 1971, p. 112-113). In the realm of waiting, Maister (1985) proposed that justifiable explanations may be more soothing to a waiting customer than unjustifiable explanations.

Excuses are accounts "...provided in response to an overt or implied accusation but presented as only partially diminishing blame" (Goffman 1971, p. 113). Through excuses actors attempt to shift most of the responsibility for a performance failure to external or situational constraints over which the actor has little or no control, while also admitting that the act was inappropriate. Lastly, a pretext is "an excuse provided before or during the questionable act." (Goffman 1971, p. 113).

In sum, impression management techniques provide the actor with opportunities to shift responsibility for negative events away from himself and onto situational constraints, thus presenting himself in a more positive light. In the realm of service delays, two forms of impression management are particularly relevant: apologies and accounts. Requests will not, in general, be relevant since they involve asking permission to perform some future act and most service encounters do not allow for this form of impression management. Apologies and accounts, however, will function to alter responsibility for a delay after the delay has already occurred. This is in line with the normal form of service delays in which the first customer-agent contact ends the service delay.
Attribution

As stated above, when a service delay occurs the agent may attempt to shift perceived responsibility for the delay from himself to situational constraints. Similarly, it is logical to assume that the customer will attempt to weigh the information available to him and determine who or what was responsible for the delay. This process of assigning responsibility or causality for behaviors is known as attribution.

Jones and Davis (1965) suggest that observers seek to ascribe causes to actors' behaviors. Kelley (1973) suggests two processes by which such causal attribution takes place. For the case in which the observer has more than one opportunity to observe the actor over time, Kelley proposes three components which the observer takes into account when assigning causality. The three components are distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency. Distinctiveness refers to whether or not the actor behaves the same way across situations. Consensus refers to whether or not others in the same situation would behave the same way the actor did. Consistency refers to whether or not the actor behaves the same way across time. Whether the attribution made is internal, external, or a combination of the two depends on the degree of consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness the observer assigns to the situation. For the case of a single observation Kelley (1972) proposed that we utilize four principles: multiple sufficient causation, multiple necessary causation, discounting and augmentation. Multiple sufficient causation refers to a situation in which more than one possible cause is present, any one of which could account for the effect. Multiple necessary causation refers to a situation in which more than one possible cause is present and more than one of these possible causes is necessary to produce the effect.
The discounting principle states that the larger the number of possible causes for an event, the smaller the role of any particular cause. Lastly, the augmentation principle states that the role of any particular cause is strengthened or augmented if the event occurs in the presence of an inhibitory force. The type of attribution made depends on the application of these principles.

Whether the single observation or multiple observation procedure is applied, the end result is the assignment of causation for a particular event or behavior.

According to Kelley (1972), causes have three common properties: locus, stability, and controllability. Locus refers to where the cause or responsibility for an outcome lies. If an observer attributes a particular outcome to the actor’s ability or effort the observer is attributing causality to internal factors. If causality is attributed to factors beyond the actor’s volition, such as luck or task difficulty, then an external attribution is being made.

The second factor, stability, refers to whether or not the cause of an outcome will generalize or recur across time. Stable factors include task difficulty and ability, while unstable factors include effort and luck. The stability factor influences the expectancy of future success. If an outcome is attributed to a stable cause, that outcome has a greater expectancy of occurring in the future (Weiner, 1985).

The third factor is controllability. Although controllability has been researched only in the context of achievement attribution, service encounters can be viewed as achievement opportunities (i.e. achieving a successful service encounter) for both the customer and the service agent. Controllability refers to whether or not the actor is perceived to have control over the causes of an outcome. When failure or another
negative outcome is attributed to a controllable cause, such as level of effort, the actor is held responsible, no help is offered to the actor, and the observer may experience anger toward the actor. When the same negative outcome is attributed to uncontrollable causes, such as fatigue, pity will usually be felt toward the actor and help offered (Weiner, 1985).

Several other findings regarding attribution also have relevance to waiting. Ross (1977) found that observers tend to make internal causal attributions for actors' behaviors rather than external causal attributions, he called this phenomenon the "fundamental attribution error". Mitchell and Wood (1980) found that the more severe the consequences of a particular behavior the more likely it is that an observer (a supervisor) will make an internal attribution and respond in a punitive manner. Wood and Mitchell (1981) found that observers (supervisors) were less likely to attribute poor performance internally and also responded less punitively if the actor (a subordinate) offered a plausible account for the poor performance. Gioia and Sims (1986) found that observers (managers) did not normally make overt attributions; rather, they asked questions of the subordinates and allowed them to make the attributions. Wood and Mitchell (1981) also found that the causal role is of the actor diminished when the observer (manager) is dependent on the subordinate for knowledge of the situational forces impinging on the actor (subordinate) that may have played a role in causing a performance failure. In a related vein, Prus (1975) states that "As designating agents perceive themselves to be more dependent on given [designation] resistors, they will tend to modify their target designations to comply with the desires of these resistors" (p. 10). Further, Carroll and Scheier (1982) and Cascio (1982) found a leniency
effect occurring when a face-to-face interaction between a manager and a subordinate occurs or is expected to occur.

Actors themselves are sometimes able to exert attributional influence upon observers. Attributional influence occurs when "...one or more parties attempt to restructure the causal explanations of others..." (Horai, 1977, p. 89). This attributional influence is a form of impression management. However, when actors use this attributional influence to ascribe performance failure to external causes, they risk being perceived as less modest and honest (Horai, 1977).

Thus, in the case of a service delay, we can view the interaction following a delay as a "game" in which the service agent, using impression management techniques, attempts to alter the customer's attribution so as to be seen in a favorable light. Meanwhile, the customer attempts to make an attribution regarding the locus, controllability and stability of the cause of the wait, taking into account the possibility that the service agent may not only utilize impression management techniques but may, in some cases, attempt to deceive the customer. Thus, the service agent must walk a very fine line between appearing responsible for the delay and appearing dishonest.

**Emotion and Attribution**

Some mention was made in the previous section of the emotions experienced as a result of the attributions made. However, the process by which these emotions are produced (i.e. Weiner’s theory of attribution and emotion) was not discussed.

Weiner’s (1985) theory of attribution and emotion posits that causal attributions influence emotions, and that emotions affect motivated behavior. According to this theory, there is a general positive or
negative reaction (what Weiner terms a "primitive emotion") based on the perceived successful or unsuccessful outcome of some event (what Weiner terms the "primary appraisal"). These primitive emotions are caused merely by the attainment or nonattainment of some goal and are not influenced by causal ascriptions. Following this, if the outcome is unexpected, negative, or important causal attribution occurs, in which the observer determines why goal attainment or non-attainment occurred. Possible determinants of goal attainment or non-attainment are environmental constraints, the observer's own behaviors, or the behaviors of others. Based on this causal search a second set of emotions is experienced. If the outcome is attributed to the observer's own behaviors, the secondary emotions experienced may be pride or self-esteem. If the outcome is attributed to environmental constraints, the secondary emotion experienced may be feelings of luckiness or unluckiness. If the outcome is attributed to the behavior of others, the secondary emotion experienced depends upon whether or not the observer perceives the other's behavior as justified or not. If a behavior, which leads to goal non-attainment, is seen as unjustified and voluntary, or as an avoidable accident, anger toward the actor is experienced (Averill, 1983). Further, if such a behavior is seen as controllable, that is, due to effort, or more accurately lack of effort, anger toward the actor will also be experienced (Weiner 1985). However, as stated above, it may be possible for the offending party to change the observer's attribution by utilizing impression management techniques thereby changing the "secondary" emotion experienced by the offended party from anger to some less negative or perhaps even positive emotion.

In the area of waiting at a service encounter, Weiner's theory is applicable to who (if anyone) the customer blames for the delay and the
emotions, both primary and secondary, experienced due to the delay. Research by Harrison et al. (1987) provides some support for Weiner’s theory in this area since it was found that customers experienced frustration and anger when the delay was perceived as preventable and the service agent was blamed.

**Aggression**

When an observer is blocked from attaining a goal the attribution made for the cause of this frustration is one of the factors determining whether the observer will exhibit aggression and where the aggression will be directed. Thus in the case of a customer waiting at a service encounter, the locus of causality for the wait determines whether aggression will be exhibited and whether it will be directed at the service agent or elsewhere.

According to Doob and Sears (1939) aggression is a response to frustration and "Whether the aggression is expressed depends on the relative strength of two main factors: the strength of the goal responses and the strength of anticipatory responses for being punished." (Pastore 1952, p. 728).

Authors such as Pastore (1952) and Kulik and Brown (1979) divide frustrations into three types, depending on the causal attribution the observer makes. These three types are: illegitimate (also known as unjustifiable or arbitrary), legitimate (also known as justifiable or nonarbitrary), and neither legitimate nor illegitimate.

According to attribution theory, illegitimate or unjustified frustrations are attributed primarily to the disposition of the actor because the frustrating behavior cannot be attributed to any other cause (i.e. situational constraints) (Kulik & Brown, 1979). Thus, this type of
frustration causes the most anger and aggression to be directed at the actor (Cohen, 1955; Fishman, 1965; Kulik & Brown, 1979; Pastore, 1952).

Legitimate frustrations are attributed primarily to the situational constraints placed on the actor. Thus, this type of frustration causes lower levels of anger and aggression than illegitimate frustrations (Cohen, 1955; Fishman, 1965; Kulik & Brown, 1979; Pastore, 1952).

Finally, frustrations that can be considered neither legitimate nor illegitimate, in other words, frustrations that are primarily caused neither by the actor nor the situation, produced the lowest levels of anger and aggression toward the actor; rather, this situation produced the highest levels of self blame and self aggression (Kulik & Brown, 1979).

Pastore (1952) has suggested two related mechanisms to explain why legitimate frustrations produce less frustration than illegitimate frustrations. First, as was stated above, Doob and Sears (1939) suggest that whether aggression is expressed depends on the strength of the goal response and the strength of the anticipatory response for being punished. Pastore suggests that society punishes the expression of aggression in legitimate frustration situations, so we learn to inhibit its expression; however, in illegitimate frustration situations society does not punish the expression of aggression, thus we learn that it is acceptable to express aggression in these situations. As a second mechanism Pastore suggests that legitimate frustrations allow for a change of goal responses while illegitimate frustrations do not. An example used by Pastore (1952, p. 730) may serve to highlight this phenomenon. In an illegitimate situation, a person waiting for a bus is not allowed access to the bus if the bus does not stop; the goal responses in this case may be "wanting to get on the bus, expecting to
get on the bus, and not being able to get on the bus." In a legitimate situation, a person waiting for a bus is not allowed access to the bus if the bus does not stop; however, if the bus has a lighted "out of service" sign the goal responses may be "wanting to get on the bus, not expecting to get on the bus because it is out of service" which decreases the frustration. In a similar vein, Kulik and Brown (1979) reported that unexpected frustrations produced greater anger than did expected frustrations, independent of the nature of the frustration.

Thus, frustrations are categorized by the type of attribution made. In the realm of service encounters, illegitimate frustrations are those for which the customer blames the agent; and as a result the customer feels anger and may exhibit aggression. Legitimate frustrations are those for which the customer blames the situation rather than the actor; as a result, less anger and aggression toward the agent may be experienced. Finally, frustrations that are neither legitimate nor illegitimate are those the customer blames on neither the agent nor the situation; and as result the customer may express anger or aggression toward himself.

Again the importance of attributional influence for the service agent is apparent. By changing the customer’s blame the service agent (illegitimate frustration) to some external cause (legitimate frustration or neither legitimate nor illegitimate frustration), the service agent may avoid the risk of an angry or aggressive outburst by the customer.

**Mindless Behavior**

Research by Langer, Blank and Chanowitz (1978) has demonstrated that when approached for a small favor, subjects would grant the favor even when the request provided placebo or useless information concerning
the reason the favor was needed. For example, in the Langer et al. study, confederates approached subjects at a copy machine and said, "'Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine, because I have to make copies?'" This is an example of placeboic information since no information is provided as to why the favor is needed. Placeboic information is contrasted with real information, in which useful information is provided regarding the reason the favor is needed. In the Langer et al. study real information took this form: "'Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I'm in a rush?'"

Langer et al. conclude that mindlessness refers to the enactment of a script in which attention is not paid to the actual verbal information in the request but to the verbal structure of the request. Mindless behavior has all the external characteristics of normal behavior but verbal information is ignored because it is believed to be redundant. Langer et al. found that for a small favor placeboic information was as effective as real information for gaining compliance to the request, however, if the favor was large, placeboic information was ineffective (i.e. as effective as a request without any information, placeboic or real, as to the reason why the favor was needed).

Weiner's theory of emotion and attribution and Goffman's theory of impression management have some bearing on Langer et al.'s findings. It may be hypothesized that subjects asked for a small favor simply grant the request without attending to the explanation as to why the favor is needed since attending to the explanation and making the attributional analysis (i.e. is this request justified?) would require more effort than simply granting the request. When a request for a large favor is made, however, subjects attend to the explanation and make an attributional analysis since the request is large enough that compliance may require
more effort than would attending to the explanation and making an attributional analysis.

From an impression management standpoint, mindless behavior reasonably can be assumed to occur since Goffman (1971) frequently writes of ritualized, conventionalized, formalized, and patterned interchanges, and such oft repeated interactions are perfectly suited to be stereotyped into scripts (Bateson, 1985). The role of "placebic information" in impression management is somewhat less clear. By definition, accounts, requests, and apologies involve presenting the offended parties with particular information from which the offended parties infer that the offending act was not as heinous as it could be interpreted to be. Since the term placebic information implies the lack of such informational content, it is not, strictly speaking, remedial work. However, Goffman (1971, p. 112) does distinguish between good (successful) and bad (unsuccessful) accounts and between true and false accounts, so there is some latitude in what information does or does not comprise an account. Since a placebic information account has the form of an account it may indeed be considered remedial work.

Thus, it would seem possible for a service agent to utilize mindless remedial techniques under certain circumstances in order to reduce the negative effects of waiting. It is clear from research by Langer et al. (1978) that this mindless remedial work will only be effective when the delay customer's experience is relatively short.

Request Phraseology

Langer (1983) found that different phrasings of a request for a favor result in differential compliance rates depending on whether the request was for a legitimate favor (one that is a convincing or
appropriate need) or an illegitimate favor (one that is presumptuous). When victim oriented requests were used, 75% of the subjects complied with a legitimate favor, while 27.5% complied with an illegitimate favor. A victim oriented request takes the form of a statement of the reason the favor is needed followed by the request for the favor. This phrasing seems to allow the prospective respondent to focus on the victim and his state of need rather than his own personal considerations.

Model

Tying the above theories together, a model of a customer's cognitions and behaviors while waiting may be posited. To begin with, the customer enters the service encounter with a predetermined script of the way the encounter will proceed and expectations of the length of wait (if any) that is acceptable. Then, the customer/service-agent interaction occurs during which the customer either does or does not have his expectations for waiting violated. In either case, the customer experiences an outcome-dependent emotion, happiness for the successful completion of the service encounter or frustration due to the unsuccessful or delayed completion of the service encounter. In accordance with Weiner's attribution-emotion theory (1985), the customer may then make a causal search to determine the cause of the delay, or in some circumstances, the cause of the non-delay (i.e. when a customer expects to wait yet is served promptly). This causal search may include observation of the service agent and situation and/or direct questioning of the service agent. Once a causal attribution is made, an attribution-dependent emotion is experienced. This emotion may be frustration and anger directed toward the service agent for an avoidable wait that is attributed to the service agent (i.e. the service agent is chatting with
a friend on the phone); frustration and anger directed toward the organization for an avoidable wait that is attributed to the organization (i.e. the organization does not plan adequate staffing to serve customers promptly); understanding or pity directed toward the service agent for an unavoidable wait that is attributed to the situation (i.e. the service agent is helping a customer with special needs); or self blame and self aggression for a wait that can be attributed to neither the situation nor the service agent (i.e. arriving at a service encounter at what one knows is a peak time). Finally, given the opportunity, the customer may express feelings of irritation for a legitimate wait, but these feelings would not be directed at the service agent since it was not the agent’s doing. Conversely, customers may express feelings of anger and aggression for an illegitimate wait. However, by using impression management techniques such as accounts, the service agent may be able to exert attributional influence and change the attribution the customer makes for the wait from an internal cause to an external cause. Changing the attribution made from internal to external will, in turn, change the "secondary" emotion the customer experiences from anger to some less negative or even positive emotion. Further, under certain circumstances, such as a relatively short wait, the service agent may be able to exert attributional influence without providing any of the information which is normally required in accounts. This is accomplished through the use of so-called placebic information accounts which match the form or phraseology of an account but lack the informational content.
The Present Study

The purpose of this study is twofold. The first purpose is to determine whether a service agent, using impression management techniques, can change the attributions customers make and thereby reduce or even eliminate the negative emotions experienced by customers who are forced to wait longer than they had expected. The second purpose is to determine whether the subjects attend to information contained in the accounts provided by the service agent, or whether an "excuse" script is activated and verbal content ignored. In other words, are accounts offered for a delay subject to Langer et al.'s (1978) concept of mindlessness.

In order to research these two aspects of waiting, a 2 x 3 factorial design was utilized. The variables of interest are violation of expectations for waiting (violated, not violated) and the nature of the account provided by the service agent (no excuse, placebo information excuse, valid excuse). The dependent variables of the study are: 1) the subject's mood as measured by subscales of the Mood Adjective Checklist (Nowlis, 1968); 2) the subject's attributions regarding the delay, as measured by Russell's Causal Attribution Scale (1981); 3) the subject's reactions to the experimenter (service agent); specifically: a) the subject's perception of the experimenter as measured by an "experimenter professionalism scale", and; b) the subject's level of anger as measured by the subject's willingness to do the experimenter a favor. It is believed that subjects who are angry with the experimenter may purposely be less compliant with the experimenter's request in order to "even the score".
Hypotheses

1. Mood

It is hypothesized that there will be a main effect found for violation of expectations. Within the violated expectations condition, the subject’s mood will be more negative than in the unviolated expectations condition because the former group’s expectations of how a psychological study should proceed will have been violated. This result should occur regardless of the type of excuse offered.

2. Attribution

Weiner (1982) states that "...the attributional antecedent for anger is an ascription of a negative self-related outcome or event to factors controllable by others". Thus, only the locus of causality and controllability dimensions play a role in the experience of anger. If a subject attributes locus of causality to the experimenter and also makes a controllable attribution, then anger toward the experimenter will be experienced. If a subject attributes locus of causality to the experimenter, but also makes an uncontrollable attribution, then anger will either be directed at something other than the experimenter or not be experienced at all. Similarly, if the subject attributes locus of causality to someone or something other than the experimenter, anger will be directed toward that person or thing if a controllable attribution is made.

Therefore, if locus of causality is attributed to something external to the experimenter, the controllability dimension can be ignored since it will not affect whether or not the subject will feel anger toward the experimenter. However, if locus of causality is attributed to something internal to the experimenter, the controllability dimension must be considered since it will affect whether or not the subject feels anger
toward the experimenter.

When a short delay is experienced, subjects may believe that it was due to some minor detail such as not watching the clock closely enough. When no excuse is offered for such a delay, subjects will assume that the cause of the delay was internal to the experimenter and under the experimenter’s control. This prediction is based on Ross’s (1977) finding that observers are more likely to make an internal causal attribution for an actor’s behaviors than they are an external causal attribution (fundamental attribution error). It is believed that the controllable attribution may be made since no reason to believe otherwise was offered. However, this prediction is made merely on an intuitive basis. Thus, subjects will attribute locus of causality to the experimenter and may make a controllable attribution. When a placebo or valid excuse is offered for a short delay, an "excuse script" will be activated and subjects will accept the excuse as genuine based on its form rather than its content. Subjects will assume that the excuse adequately accounts for the experimenter’s lateness and, thus, the locus of causality will be attributed to something outside the experimenter.

When a long delay is experienced the subjects may believe that the delay was caused by something more serious; as a result, the excuse offered must be more powerful. When no excuse is offered for the long delay, subjects will assume that the cause of the delay was internal to the experimenter and under the experimenter’s control since no reason to believe otherwise was offered. When a placebo excuse is offered for a long delay, subjects will attend closely to the content of the excuse to determine whether it provides adequate justification for the delay. Subjects should judge the placebo excuse to be an inadequate justification for the delay and assume that the cause of the delay was
internal to the experimenter and under the experimenter's control since the account offered did not provide adequate justification. Finally, when a valid excuse is offered for a long delay, subjects should again attend closely to the content of the excuse and, in this case, determine that the excuse does provide adequate justification for the delay and thus attribute causality to some factor outside the experimenter.

In sum, it is hypothesized that subjects will make internal and controllable attributions for the 5 minute delay/no excuse, 15 minute delay/ no excuse, and 15 minute delay/placebic excuse conditions, and external attributions for the 5 minute delay/placebic excuse, 5 minute delay/valid excuse, and 15 minute delay/valid excuse conditions.

3. Subject's Reactions to the Experimenter
   a. Perceptions of the Experimenter

   It is hypothesized that overall, subject's perceptions of the experimenter will be less favorable when their expectations are violated compared to when their expectations are not violated. This prediction is based upon Kulik and Brown's (1979) finding that unexpected frustrations produced more anger than expected frustrations, and due to the nature of the attributions made, the experimenter will be held responsible for the frustration and thus be seen in a negative light.

   Within the violated expectations condition, it is hypothesized that no excuse will produce unfavorable perceptions of the experimenter as compared to the valid excuse; the placebo excuse will produce either slightly more or slightly less favorable perceptions of the experimenter than does no excuse; and the valid excuse will produce the most favorable perceptions of the experimenter. These predictions are based upon Weiner's (1985) theory of emotion and attribution and the supporting findings of Cohen (1955), Fishman (1965), Kulik and Brown (1979) and
Pastore (1952) which show that frustrations attributed primarily to the situation rather than the actor produce lower levels of anger and aggression. A valid information excuse should produce such an external attribution, the placeboic information excuse may or may not produce an external attribution, but the acknowledgement of the wait may serve to reduce the negative perception of the experimenter. On the other hand, if the subject recognizes the placeboic excuse as an attempt to manipulate him, the perceptions of the experimenter may be very negative. For the no excuse condition an internal attribution will probably be made since people tend to make internal attributions for behaviors with negative consequences (Wood & Mitchell, 1981), and very negative perceptions of the experimenter will result.

Within the unviolated expectations condition, a valid excuse and a placeboic information excuse should produce the most favorable experimenter perceptions, and no excuse should produce less favorable experimenter perceptions. These predictions are based upon the belief that offering an excuse for a negligible offense (i.e. the subject’s expectations were not violated) creates within the subject a perception of the experimenter as caring and competent. Similarly, even when no excuse is offered by the experimenter, the subject has no reason to perceive the experimenter in a negative light; however, the lack of an excuse will not raise the perceptions of the experimenter to the high level produced by providing an excuse. Thus experimenter perceptions will not be as high as in the placeboic or valid excuse condition.

b. Favor Compliance

It is hypothesized that, overall, subjects will be less willing to do the experimenter a favor when their expectations are violated compared to when their expectations are not violated. This
prediction is based on Kulik and Brown’s (1979) finding that unexpected frustrations produced more anger than expected frustrations.

Within the violated expectations condition it is expected that no excuse will produce an intermediate level of favor compliance; the placeboic excuse will produce either an intermediate level of favor compliance or the lowest level of favor compliance; and the valid excuse will produce the highest level of favor compliance. The prediction for valid information excuses is based first on Langer et al.’s (1978) finding that when a large favor was requested, subjects were more likely to comply when they were provided with real information than when provided with placeboic or no information; and second on the work of Weiner (1985), Cohen (1955), Fishman (1965), Kulik and Brown (1978) and Pastore (1952), previously discussed with regard to the experimenter perception hypotheses, which show that placing locus of causality external to the actor produces lower levels of anger and aggression. A valid excuse should produce this external attribution. The predictions for the placeboic information excuse, that such an excuse may yield either low or intermediate levels of compliance, is based on two different lines of thought. The rationale for the intermediate level of compliance is based on the belief that subjects may perceive the placeboic information excuse as an acknowledgement of the wait, which may serve to reduce the subject’s anger toward the experimenter and, in turn, produce some favor compliance. However, it is equally possible that the subject may see through the placeboic information excuse and become angry that such a ploy was used to manipulate him; thus, the subject may become less inclined to comply to the favor request. The prediction for no excuse is based on Langer et al.’s (1978) finding that providing no excuse was ineffective at gaining compliance for a favor. In order to determine which
interpretation of the placebo excuse subjects will make, the subjects will be asked to complete a questionnaire which includes questions concerning their perceptions of the excuse.

Within the unviolated expectations condition, no excuse should produce lower levels of favor compliance than either the placebo information or valid excuse; the latter two excuses should produce the same amount of favor compliance. These predictions are based upon the same reasoning as was discussed above in the unviolated expectations condition for the perceptions of the experimenter variable.

In sum, the variables of favor compliance and experimenter perceptions will all be at their highest levels when a placebo or valid excuse is offered for a delay that does not violate expectations, and when a valid excuse is offered for a wait that does violate expectations. Intermediate levels of favor compliance and experimenter perceptions will be found when no excuse is offered for a delay that does not violate expectations. The lowest levels of favor compliance and experimenter perceptions will be obtained when no excuse is offered for a delay that violates expectations. When a placebo excuse is offered for a delay that violates expectations, favor compliance and experimenter perceptions will be either at an intermediate level or at a very low level.
Method

Subjects

Subjects were 90 undergraduate psychology students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Procedure

Subjects arrived at the study believing it concerned the effects of mood on the completion of word puzzles. This belief was based on the description of the study accompanying the sign up sheet. Also included on the sign up sheet was a request that subjects please be prompt as the study would require the full 45 minutes, this was done in an attempt to make the delay more salient. Upon arrival subjects were randomly assigned to one of the six experimental groups. When each subject arrived at the designated location for the experiment, the experimenter was not present (in fact, the experimenter was observing the subject through a one-way mirror) and there was a note on the door explaining that the experimenter would be a few minutes late, but not explaining why. The note instructed the subject to enter the room and read the informed consent form that was waiting for them on the table. Each subject then waited alone for either 5 minutes (expectations not violated) or 15 minutes (expectations violated). This time period began the moment the subject arrived or when the study was scheduled to begin, whichever was later. Thus, all subjects had to wait the full time period. After this time period had elapsed, the experimenter "arrived". Fifteen minutes was chosen as the amount of time that would violate expectations using the following method. Prior to conducting this study,
53 undergraduate psychology students were administered a questionnaire asking how long they would wait before leaving or taking some other action if they signed up for a psychological study and the experimenter did not show up (see Appendix A). Based on subjects' responses, 15 minutes was chosen as a period of time that was long enough to violate most people's expectations for waiting in this situation (see Appendix B for summary data).

Upon arrival the experimenter looked at a clock on the table and either: 1) gave no excuse for the delay; 2) gave the subject a placebo information excuse: "I realize you had to wait a while, but I was delayed."; or 3) gave the subject an excuse that provided valid information and suggested an external causation for the delay: "I realize you had to wait a while, but I ran into a professor in the hall who needed to talk to me."

In all three conditions the experimenter then answered any questions the subject had about the study and had the subject sign the informed consent form. Following this, subjects filled out the mood adjective questionnaire and then, to strengthen the cover story, did a set of "practice anagrams". Next, the experimenter asked the subject if he or she would, as a favor to the experimenter, sort a spare set of anagram cards into numerical order while the experimenter scored the practice set of anagrams. The experimenter then left the room, and returned exactly two minutes later with the results of the anagram task. The favor request was made using the victim oriented request phraseology discussed above (i.e. "I'm in a terrible bind. I need this set of anagram cards arranged numerically so I can use them on my next subject. Would you do me a favor and sort a few of these stacks of notecards into numerical order for me? Don't feel compelled to though, it's not part of the..."
experiment so if you want to you can just sit and wait while I finish preparing the experimental materials.) After this, the subjects were asked to complete the aggression, anxiety, elation, social affection, sadness, skepticism and surgency subscales of the Mood Adjective Checklist (Nowlis, 1968) (see Appendix C). Next, under the pretense that the Psychology department was collecting evaluations of all psychology researchers, each subject was administered a questionnaire, concerning the subjects' perceptions of the experimenter, and Russell's Causal Dimension Scale (1981) (Appendix D). After this, a manipulation check was administered (Appendix E) to determine if the subjects' expectations had actually been violated. Finally, each subject was thoroughly debriefed.

In regard to the Mood Adjective Checklist, Borgatta (1961) found the subscales to have the following reliability coefficients: .52 for males and .66 for females on the aggression subscale; .71 for males and .78 for females on the social affection subscale; and .62 for males and .57 for females on the sadness subscale; reliabilities for the anxiety, elation skepticism and surgency subscales were not reported.

Due to the fact that there were several mood variables, two scales were formed, a negative mood scale and a positive mood scale. The scales were combined based on the positive or negative affect the scales measured, however, there is no precedent for combining the scales in this manner. The negative mood scale consists of the aggression, anxiety, skepticism, and sadness variables. The positive mood scale consists of the elation, social affection, and surgency mood variables. The scales were the average of the individual mood variable scales which consisted of four points; "this word definitely does not describe my feelings now." coded 0, "I'm not sure./I can't decide." coded 1, "this word slightly
describes my feelings now." coded 2, and "this word definitely describes my feelings now." coded 3.

In regard to Russell’s Causal Dimension scale, Russell reported validity coefficients for the three subscales of .62 for causality, .20 for stability, and .29 for controllability. Reliability coefficients for these subscales were reported as .867 for causality, .837 for stability, and .730 for controllability. The subscales were scored by averaging the scores on the three items that made up each subscale.

In regard to the experimenter professionalism questionnaire, since there were several experimenter professionalism questions, a scale was formed which consists of experimenter questionnaire items 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10. Item 3 concerns the experimenter’s fairness, item 5 concerns the experimenter’s respect for subjects’ rights, item 6 concerns the degree to which the experimenter met subjects’ expectations, item 7 concerns the degree to which the experimenter appeared to be in control of the study, item 8 concerns the experimenter’s professionalism, and item 10 concerns the subjects’ willingness to participate in another study by the same experimenter. The items were chosen for the scale by design. Each one was written to measure some aspect of the subjects’ perceptions of the experimenter’s professionalism. Items 1, 2, 4 and 9, which were included in the questionnaire, but not in the scale, were written to avert subjects’ suspicions about the true nature of the questionnaire. This scale is the average of the individual item scales which were 5 point Likert type scales with a high score indicating a high perceived degree of the attribute in question.
Results

Appendix E presents the results of a chi-square analysis performed on the subjects' expectations to determine whether the delay manipulation had the desired effect (expectations were measured by the question "Was the wait you experienced something you had expected?" Subjects answered "Yes" or "No"). This analysis revealed that a significantly larger number of subjects (p<.005) had their expectations violated when delayed 15 minutes than those who were delayed 5 minutes. A further measure of whether subjects had their expectations violated comes from whether or not they filled out the attribution questionnaire regarding a delay. The first question in the attribution questionnaire asked if subjects perceived a delay, if subjects responded that they did not, they were instructed to move on to the next section of the questionnaire. Failure to respond to this questionnaire suggests that the subject did not perceive a delay. In the five minute delay condition, only 17 of the 45 subjects responded, while in the 15 minute delay condition 39 of the 45 subjects responded. Thus, only 17 subjects in the five minute delay condition perceived a delay, while 39 subjects in the 15 minute perceived a delay. The measures yielded similar results for the 15 minute delay, but dissimilar results for the five minute delay. However, it is possible that the subjects did not respond to the attribution questionnaire because they did not understand the question, or because they were not motivated to answer the question; also, two questions were asking slightly different things. The attribution questionnaire asked whether subjects were aware of a delay while the expectations question asked whether subjects expected a delay. Thus, the disparate results were not unexpected.
Mood.

Due to the fact that there were several mood variables, two scales were formed, a negative mood scale and a positive mood scale. The negative mood scale consists of the aggression, anxiety, skepticism, and sadness variables and has an inter-item reliability of .7629. The positive mood scale consists of the elation, social affection, and surgency mood variables and has an inter-item reliability of .8227.

Appendix G presents the mean scores on the negative mood scale for each of the experimental conditions. Appendix H presents the mean scores on the positive mood scale for each of the experimental conditions. It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect for mood such that mood would be more negative for those subjects who waited 15 minutes. The mood scores for the two delay conditions were similar, as were the scores for the no excuse and good excuse conditions, while the placebic excuse caused mood scores to be more negative. None of these differences were statistically significant. The results for the positive mood scale were more promising. Subjects who waited 5 minutes were in a significantly (p<.03) better mood than those who waited 15 minutes. Thus, although scores on the negative mood score did not differ significantly, the subjects delayed 15 minutes were in significantly less positive mood states. However, the means for both the short delay and the long delay were close to one, which corresponds to the "I can’t decide/I don’t know" anchor, this could be interpreted to mean that subjects were merely unsure of their mood. Therefore, the results provide support for the hypothesis that mood was adversely affected by a 15 minute delay. There was also a main effect for the type of excuse offered. Post hoc paired contrasts revealed that offering a placebic excuse made subjects’ mood significantly less positive than the
combination of no excuse and a good excuse (p<.007). There were no significant interactions for the mood variable. Appendix I presents the mean scores for the "Angry" mood item, subjects were significantly more angry when they were given a placebo excuse than when they were given a valid excuse (p<.003), or no excuse at all (p<.001)

Attributions.

Appendices J and K present the mean scores on the causality and controllability attribution scales. The scales were 9 point Likert type scales in which high scores indicated internal causality and a high degree of controllability. It was hypothesized that subjects in the 5 minute/no excuse, 15 minute/no excuse, and the 15 minute/placebo excuse conditions (group 1) would be more likely to attribute the delay to the experimenter and consider the delay under the experimenter's control than subjects in the 5 minute/good excuse, 5 minute/placebo excuse and the 15 minute/good excuse conditions (group 2). As suggested by the hypotheses, a paired contrast was performed on the attribution variables. None of the contrasts reached statistical significance, however they did follow the hypothesized trends. Appendices J and K show that group 1 had slightly higher scores on the causality and controllability variables than did group 2.

Weiner's (1982) theory implies that the controllability variable determines whether anger will be experienced. When a goal-frustrating occurrence is considered controllable, anger is experienced toward whomever or whatever the cause of the frustration is attributed. The experimental results show that the subjects in group 1 tended to make slightly more external (external to themselves) attributions and controllable attributions. Further analysis of the data failed to uncover whether subjects in either group attributed the delay to the
experimenter or the situation, however it is clear from examination of Appendix J that they did not blame themselves, since low scores on the causality scale indicate an external (external to self) attribution. It is also clear from Appendix K that whomever or whatever they blamed for the delay, they did perceive it as somewhat controllable (the means were in the middle of the 9 point scale). Thus, although the subjects blamed either the experimenter or the situation for the delay, they did not attribute a great deal of controllability to the cause of the delay. Therefore, since the cause of the delay was considered only moderately controllable, little anger should be experienced. This proposition was supported when the mood variable aggression was analysed within the framework of the attribution contrasts. The aggression variable was examined because it is most closely associated with anger. The mean for group 1 on aggression was 0.533 the mean for group 2 was 0.333 (p<.12). Thus the hypotheses that attributions would vary as a function of length of delay and type of excuse offered was not supported.

Perceptions of the Experimenter.

Due to the fact that there were several experimenter professionalism questions a scale was formed which consists of experimenter questionnaire items 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 and which has an inter-item reliability of .8148.

Appendix L presents the mean scores on the experimenter perceptions scale for each of the experimental conditions. It was hypothesized that subjects’ perceptions of the experimenter would be more negative in the 15 minute delay condition. As Appendix L shows, subjects delayed 15 minutes had significantly less favorable perceptions of the experimenter than those who were delayed 5 minutes (4.64 vs 4.42, p>.024), thus supporting this hypothesis. Although this effect was statistically
significant, the effect size was quite small (d=.075). Also, the means for both conditions were quite high, thus, subjects' perceptions of the experimenter were positive in both conditions.

It was also hypothesized that within the 5 minute delay condition, perceptions of the experimenter would be most favorable when a placebo excuse or a good excuse was offered. Appendix L shows that, although the difference was not statistically significant, the scores did follow hypothesized trends; scores for subjects in the placebo and good excuse conditions were somewhat higher than scores for subjects in the no excuse condition, while the scores for subjects in the placebo and good excuse conditions were nearly equal.

For the 15 minute delay condition it was hypothesized that subjects' perceptions of the experimenter would be most favorable when a good excuse was provided and less favorable when no excuse was provided, it was hypothesized that perceptions for the placebo excuse condition would be less than or equal to those of the no excuse condition. The scores followed the hypothesized trends; the experimenter professionalism scores were lowest when no excuse or a placebo excuse were offered (4.34 and 4.37 respectively) and highest when a good excuse was provided (4.56), thus the results followed the hypothesized trends but did not reach statistical significance (p<.296).

Favor Compliance

Appendix M presents the mean scores for the number of cards voluntarily sorted. It was hypothesized that the number of cards sorted would be lower in the 15 minute delay condition than in the 5 minute condition. Results indicate that subjects were indeed significantly less willing to sort cards for the experimenter when they were delayed 15 minutes. Thus, the results support this hypothesis. Within the 5
minute delay condition, it was hypothesized that favor compliance would be highest when a placebic excuse or a good excuse was offered. A paired contrast comparing the placebic and good excuse conditions to the no excuse condition shows that the subjects in the no excuse condition sorted significantly (p<.049) fewer cards (40.00) than did subjects in the other two conditions (46.33). Thus the data provide support for this hypothesis.

Within the 15 minute delay condition, favor compliance was hypothesized to be highest when a good excuse was provided and less favorable when no excuse was provided, and it was hypothesized that compliance for the placebic excuse condition would produce favor compliance less than or equal to that of the no excuse condition. A paired contrast comparing a combination of the no excuse and the placebic excuse conditions to the good excuse condition shows that subjects in the good excuse condition sorted significantly (p<.013) more cards (40.67) than did the subjects in the other two conditions (30.67). Further paired contrasts revealed no significant differences between the placebic excuse and no excuse conditions. Thus the hypothesis that favor compliance would be most favorable when a good excuse was offered was supported. There was also a main effect found for the excuse variable such that subjects in the good excuse condition sorted significantly (p<.024) more cards (43.3) than did subjects in the other two conditions (37.00). This occurred regardless of the length of the delay; thus, the provision of a good excuse had a profound effect on favor compliance.
Discussion

The main purpose of the present study was to determine whether or not a service agent, using impression management techniques, could change the attributions customers make for a delay, and as a result, reduce or eliminate the negative emotions caused by the delay. The second purpose of the study was to further test Langer et al.'s (1978) concept of mindless behavior.

One of the main manipulations in this study was the length of the delay. Upon completion of the study, subjects were questioned in regard to their perceptions of the delay. An analysis of these data revealed that subjects' expectations were not violated by a five minute wait, but were violated for a 15 minute delay. Thus, the delay manipulation had the desired effect.

Although there were no significant findings for the negative mood scale, there were significant findings for the positive mood scale such that subjects who were delayed only 5 minutes were in a more positive mood than were subjects who waited 15 minutes, thus supporting the hypothesis that a long delay would produce less favorable moods. However, it is important to note that the means for both the five and 15 minute delays were close to the scale value that was anchored by I'm not sure/I can't decide, indicating that subjects may merely be unsure of what mood they were in.

There was also a main effect for type of excuse offered, offering a placebo excuse made subjects mood significantly less positive than did no excuse or a good excuse. It also made subjects angry, as measured by the "angery" item in the mood questionnaire. Although this effect was not hypothesized it is not unexpected. The subjects, when offered a placebo excuse may have seen it as an attempt by the experimenter to
manipulate them. As a result, a "boomerang effect" occurred, in which mood became very negative as a direct result of the placebic excuse.

Interestingly, no statistically significant differences were found for the attribution variables. This may be due, in part, to the fact that only 56 of the 90 subjects responded to the attribution questionnaire since the questionnaire asked subjects to answer the questions only if they had experienced a delay during the experimental session. With only 56 respondents the statistical power was not as great as it was on the other measures. Although the lack of response did weaken the power of the attribution analyses, it did provide some insight into what length of time subjects perceived to be a delay. Only 17 of 45 subjects in the five minute delay condition responded to the questionnaire, compared to 39 of 45 for the 15 minute delay. Since the attribution questionnaire concerned the wait subjects experienced, the large difference in response rates is probably due to subjects not considering five minutes as a delay.

There was a main effect found for subjects' perceptions of the experimenter such that subjects delayed 15 minutes had significantly less favorable perceptions of the experimenter than did the subjects in the 5 minute condition, thus supporting the hypothesis that a long delay would cause less favorable perceptions of the experimenter. While there were no other significant findings regarding the experimenter perceptions variable, the results for the 5 minute and 15 minute delay conditions did follow hypothesized trends. For the 5 minute delay, scores were slightly higher for the good excuse and placebic excuse than for subjects in the no excuse condition. In the 15 minute delay condition scores were lowest when no excuse or a placebic excuse was offered and highest when a good excuse was offered.
For favor compliance, subjects were significantly more willing to sort cards for the experimenter when they were delayed 5 minutes than when they were delayed 15 minutes, thus supporting the hypothesis that a long delay would cause fewer cards to be voluntarily sorted. Within the 5 minute condition, subjects in the no excuse condition sorted significantly fewer cards than did subjects in the other two conditions, thus supporting the hypothesis that no excuse would produce the smallest favor compliance within the 5 minute delay condition. Within the 15 minute delay condition, subjects in the good excuse condition sorted significantly more cards than did subjects in the other two conditions, thus supporting the hypothesis that a good excuse would produce the most favor compliance within the 15 minute delay condition.

Possible explanations for the lack of statistically significant differences for the attribution variables and, for that matter many of the other variables that failed to reach statistical significance, involve distracting stimuli and a slight difference between the normal service encounter and the experimenter-subject encounter. Since all the subjects were college students, many had books and homework with which to occupy their time until the experimenter arrived. Indeed, the majority of subjects observed through a one way mirror performed some sort of activity, such as doing homework or balancing the checkbook in order to pass the time; thus, many subjects dealt with the delay constructively. More importantly, the nature of the experimenter-subject encounter, although similar to the normal service encounter, differs in one important way. In the experimenter-subject encounter, the subject's time is the resource he or she is exchanging for extra credit points. In the normal service encounter the customer exchanges money for goods or services. Thus, in the normal service encounter time spent waiting for
the interaction to begin is an additional commodity which will not normally be considered in the exchange. In the experimenter-subject interaction, time is the sole commodity the subject has to offer; so it may be that the subject's believe that the time they spent waiting for the experiment to begin will be considered in the exchange and subjects will be rewarded, in the form of additional extra credit points, for waiting.

Given these two limiting factors, it is probable that the findings of this study would be more pronounced in a normal service encounter. Future research should attempt to eliminate these two limiting factors so that the experimenter-subject encounter more closely mimics a normal service encounter.

The findings suggest that a lengthy delay can and will unfavorably alter a customer's mood, perceptions of the experimenter, and favor compliance. Specifically, subjects delayed 5 minutes were in a significantly more positive mood, had significantly better perceptions of the experimenter, and sorted significantly more cards than the subjects delayed 15 minutes. However, the results also suggest that a short delay (five minutes) will, more often than not, go unnoticed. It would be interesting to experimentally determine what the limit of this "short delay" is such knowledge would have many practical implications.

The results also suggest that if a delay is inevitable, service agents should avoid giving placebic or mindless excuses for the delay. Examination of Appendices F through K reveals that in some cases the placebic excuse caused significantly less favorable moods and favor compliance. In two cases the placebic excuse caused significantly less favorable results than did the good excuse. Specifically, the placebic excuse caused less positive moods than did a good excuse regardless of the length of the delay (0.91 vs. 1.236, p<.031) and less favor
compliance within the 15 minute delay condition (29.33 vs. 40.67, p<.015). In one case the placebo excuse caused significantly less favorable results than even no excuse. The placebo excuse caused significantly lower positive mood scale scores than did no excuse for the 5 minute delay condition (1.04 vs. 1.453, p<.012). There were also many cases in which there was a tendency for the placebo excuse to produce less favorable results even though these results did not reach statistical significance. Specifically, the placebo excuse produced more negative moods and less favorable perceptions of the experimenter than did a good excuse for the 5 minute delay, the 15 minute delay, and across the length of delay variable. Also, the placebo excuse caused lower positive mood scale scores for the 5 minute and 15 minute delay conditions and caused fewer cards to be sorted across the length of delay condition. The placebo excuse caused higher negative mood scale scores for the 5 minute delay, the 15 minute delay, and across the length of delay condition than did no excuse. It also caused lower positive mood scale scores and fewer cards to be sorted in the 15 minute delay condition than did no excuse. Finally, the placebo excuse caused higher negative mood scale scores for the 5 minute delay condition, the 15 minute delay condition, and across the length of delay condition than did the combination of the no excuse condition and the good excuse condition. The findings that a placebo excuse was not effective at improving subjects’ mood and perceptions of the experimenter’s professionalism runs counter to Langer et al.’s (1978) findings that a placebo request and a valid request are perceived as similar. The difference in the findings may be due to the fact that requests involve asking permission to perform some unpleasant act, whereas an excuse involves moving some of the blame from the actor to some other party. Thus, with a request the subject may
believe he or she has some choice in the matter and therefore may be predisposed to react positively. However, with an excuse the subject is offered a reason why an unpleasant event has occurred, in this case the subject does not have any choice in the matter and therefore, is less likely to be predisposed to react positively.

Another factor that may explain the difference in results involves the type of variables used to measure the effectiveness of the placebo excuse. Langer et al. (1978) used a behavioral measure, compliance to a request for a favor, while in the present study the findings that did not conform to Langer et al.'s findings involved measures of internal states rather than overt behaviors. However, the present study also utilized a behavioral measure of the effectiveness of the placebo excuse, and this measure produced findings similar to those of Langer et al. (1978). Thus, it appears that a placebo communication affects overt behaviors but not internal states, such as cognitions or emotions. This difference may exist because subjects may be attempting some form of impression management. They may comply to the experimenter's favor request merely to avoid being perceived as petty for not complying to the experimenter's request just because he was late, especially since the subjects had nothing else to do while the anagrams were being scored. Thus, in the present study, subject's failure to help the experimenter was indicative of their internal states, since no situational constraints prevented them from helping. However, in the Langer et al. (1978) study, subjects were not put in a situation where their behaviors were so indicative of their internal states.

The results from the behavioral measure in the present study provide further support for Langer et al.'s (1978) concept of mindlessness. For a five minute delay, the placebo excuse was as effective as the valid
excuse at gaining favor compliance. This is because a five minute delay is a minor offense and no excuse is necessary; thus, due to lack of attention, the provision of any excuse, be it placebo or valid, will be effective. For a 15 minute delay the placebo excuse was as ineffective as no excuse at gaining favor compliance. This is because a 15 minute delay is a larger offense and, therefore, an explanation as to why it occurred was required. Thus, attention was paid to the content of the excuse, and the placebo excuse was seen for what it was, a non-excuse.

In conclusion, the present study suggests that a lengthy delay can unfavorably effect customers' moods and perceptions of the service agent. However, how these internal states affect the customers' consumption behaviors and intentions for repeat business need to be investigated.
References


Nowlis, V. (1968). Research with the mood adjective checklist. In S.S. Tomkins & C.E. Izard (Eds.), *Affect, cognition, and personality* (pp. 352-389), New York: Springer.


Appendix A

Expectations for Waiting Questionnaire

The next three questions have nothing to do with the exam, but are research questions I would appreciate you answering if time permits.

1. Have you ever participated as a research subject in a psychology experiment?
   Yes       No

2. If you showed up at a psychology experiment and the experimenter was not yet there, how long would you likely wait for the experimenter to show up before you left or took some other action?
   _____ minutes

3. What would you do if the experimenter did not show up at all?
Appendix B

Statistical Analysis of Expectations for Waiting Questionnaire

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<th>Time in Minutes</th>
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Appendix C

Mood Questionnaire

Each of the following words describes feelings or mood. Please use the list to describe your feelings at the moment you read each word. Decide whether each word describes your feeling at the moment and circle the appropriate symbol.

Use the following key for the symbols to the right of each word:

vv= this word definitely describes my feelings now. (Scored 3)
v= this word slightly describes my feelings now. (Scored 2)
?= I’m not sure./I can’t decide. (Scored 1)
= this word definitely does not describe my feelings now. (Scored 0)

Work rapidly. Your first reaction is best. Please mark all words. This should take only a few minutes.

Defiant   vv   v   ?   n
Carefree  vv   v   ?   n
Attentive  vv   v   ?   n
Elated    vv   v   ?   n
Affectionate vv   v   ?   n
Regretful vv   v   ?   n
Playful   vv   v   ?   n
Earnest   vv   v   ?   n
Dubious   vv   v   ?   n
Rebellious vv   v   ?   n
Overjoyed vv   v   ?   n
Witty     vv   v   ?   n
Serious   vv   v   ?   n
Forgiving vv   v   ?   n
Sad       vv   v   ?   n
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<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>n</td>
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<td>Angry</td>
<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lively</td>
<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>Contemplative</td>
<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>Pleased</td>
<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clutched Up</td>
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<td>Grouchy</td>
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<td>Kindly</td>
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<td>Sorry</td>
<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>Concentrating</td>
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<td>Leisurely</td>
<td>vv</td>
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<td>Fearful</td>
<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>Annoyed</td>
<td>vv</td>
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<td>?</td>
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<td>Suspicious</td>
<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fed up</td>
<td>vv</td>
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<td>n</td>
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<td>Warmhearted</td>
<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jittery</td>
<td>vv</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>?</td>
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<td>Engaged in thought</td>
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Appendix D

Professionalism Questionnaire and Causal Dimension Scale

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Somewhat Very much

Please answer the following questions using the above scale as a guide.

1) To what extent was your right to refuse to continue with the study explained to you. __

2) To what extent was the purpose of the study made clear to you. __

3) To what extent did the experimenter treat you fairly. __

4) To what extent was the experimenter honest with you. __

5) To what extent did the experimenter respect your rights. __

6) To what extent did the experimenter meet your expectations. __

7) To what extent was the experimenter in control of the study. __

8) To what extent was the experimenter professional in his conduct. __

9) To what extent do you believe the experimenter’s behavior reflected personal characteristics rather than circumstances beyond his/her control. __

10) To what extent would you be willing to volunteer for further research by this experimenter. __
The following pages concern problems commonly experienced by experimental subjects.

Please consider the study you are currently participating in, if any of these problems occurred please complete the appropriate page(s). Please respond only to questions pertaining to problems that occurred during the present study. Please answer the questions as they pertain to problems in the present situation, not as these problems occur in day to day life. Some questions may require you to make educated guesses as to the causes or motives of other people's behavior, please understand that for our purposes we prefer you make an educated guess rather than not answer the question at all. Your responses will remain confidential.
Was there any type of delay in the course of the experimental session? If no, please go on to the next page. If so, how long was the delay and what was its nature?

What do you believe the reason is for the delay?

Think about the reason or reasons you have written above. The items below concern your impressions or opinions of the cause or causes of your outcome. Circle one number for each of the following scales.

1. Is the cause(s) something that:
   Reflects an aspect of yourself
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

2. Is the cause(s):
   Controlled by you or other people
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

3. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Permanent
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

4. Is the cause(s) something:
   Intended by you or other people
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

5. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Outside of you
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

6. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Variable over time
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

7. Is the cause(s):
   Something about you
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

8. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Changeable
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

   Something about others
   9

   Unchanging
9. Is the cause something for which:
   - No one is responsible
   - Someone is responsible

How did the delay make you feel?
RUDENESS

Was the experimenter rude to you?

If no, please go on to the next page.

If so, how?

What do you believe the reason is for the experimenters rudeness?

Think about the reason or reasons you have written above. The items below concern your impressions or opinions of the cause or causes of your outcome. Circle one number for each of the following scales.

1. Is the cause(s) something that:
   Reflects an aspect of yourself

2. Is the cause(s):
   Controlled by you or other people

3. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Permanent

4. Is the cause(s) something:
   Intended by you or other people

5. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Outside of you

6. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Variable over time

7. Is the cause(s):
   Something about you

8. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Changeable
9. Is the cause something for which:
   No one is responsible 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Someone is responsible

   How did the experimenter’s rudeness make you feel?
DISORGANIZATION

Was the experimenter disorganized?

If no, please go on to the next page.

If so, how?

What do you believe the reason is for the experimenter's lack of organization?

Think about the reason or reasons you have written above. The items below concern your impressions or opinions of the cause or causes of your outcome. Circle one number for each of the following scales.

1. Is the cause(s) something that:
   Reflects an aspect of yourself 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Reflects an aspect of the situation

2. Is the cause(s):
   Controlled by you or other people 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Uncontrollable by you or other people

3. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Permanent 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Temporary

4. Is the cause(s) something:
   Intended by you or other people 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Unintended by you or other people

5. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Outside of you 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
   Inside of you

6. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Variable over time 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
   Stable over time

7. Is the cause(s):
   Something about you 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Something about others

8. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Changeable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
   Unchanging
9. Is the cause something for which:
   No one is responsible  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9 Someone is responsible

How did the experimenter’s lack of organization make you feel?
OTHER PROBLEMS

Were there any other problems during the course of the experimental session?

If no, please do not read any further.

If so, please specify the nature of the problem.

What do you believe the reason is for the occurrence of this problem?

Think about the reason or reasons you have written above. The items below concern your impressions or opinions of the cause or causes of your outcome. Circle one number for each of the following scales.

1. Is the cause(s) something that:
   Reflects an aspect of yourself
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Reflects an aspect of the situation

2. Is the cause(s):
   Controlled by you or other people
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Uncontrollable by you or other people

3. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Permanent
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Temporary

4. Is the cause(s) something:
   Intended by you or other people
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Unintended by you or other people

5. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Outside of you
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
   Inside of you

6. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Variable over time
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
   Stable over time

7. Is the cause(s):
   Something about you
   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Something about others

8. Is the cause(s) something that is:
   Changeable
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
   Unchanging
9. Is the cause something for which: 
   No one is responsible 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Someone is responsible

   How did the occurrence of this other problem make you feel?
Appendix E

Manipulation Check

Please answer the following questions carefully.

1) Have you ever participated in a psychological study at UNO before?

2) Was the wait you experienced something you had expected?

3) If the wait was expected, had you expected a wait of that length?

4) How long a delay did you experience?

5) Do you have any commitments for the hour following the study? If so, please specify.
Appendix F

Chi Square Analysis
Time By Expectations For Waiting

Was the Wait Experienced expected

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Chi Square

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Appendix G

Negative Mood Scale

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CONTRASTS

Main Effects

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Appendix H

Positive Mood Scale

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CONTRASTS

Main Effects

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<th>D.F.</th>
<th>T Prob.</th>
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Appendix I

Anger Scale

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1.07  1.60  1.10

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

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<td>6.748</td>
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<td>.078</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.822</td>
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<td>.078</td>
<td>.196</td>
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CONTRASTS

Main Effects

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Appendix J

Causality

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5 Minute/No excuse, 15 Minute/No Excuse, 15 Minute/Placebic Excuse (Group 1) Mean=2.59

5 Minute/Good Excuse, 15 Minute/Good Excuse, 5 Minute/Placebic Excuse (Group 2) Mean=2.08

### ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

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<th>Sig of F</th>
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Appendix K

Controllability

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5 Minute/No Excuse, 15 Minute/No Excuse, 15 Minute/Placebic Excuse (Group 1) Mean=5.38

5 Minute/Good Excuse, 15 Minute/Good Excuse, 5 Minute/Placebic Excuse (Group 2) Mean=4.54

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

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Appendix L

Experimenter Professionalism Scale

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CONTRASTS

Five Minute Delay

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Fifteen Minute Delay

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Appendix M

Number of Cards Voluntarily Sorted

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CONTRASTS

Five Minute Delay

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Fifteen Minute Delay

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