

Perspective Relativity of Evaluation of Performance (PREP theory): An Empirical Test

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Background

•(PREP) theory (Levinson, 1987) posits that no standard for aesthetically good music exists. Given the number of perspectives to be taken within any given performance, no single, overriding perspective could emerge to create a standard of measurement for evaluating that performance. Judgment of the quality of a musical performance is relative to three contextual factors:

- (1) Observer Perspective: Who you are will affect how you rate a performance.
- (2) Performance Context: Rating a performance as good varies depending upon the type of performance and its appropriate fit with the individual audience member.
- (3) Performance Purpose: The reason for the performance will alter the rating of the performance as good.

Research Question

- The current study tests the first two assumptions of PREP
- Observer Perspective was that of expert or non-expert:
 - **Expert** – 7 or more years of formal academic training
 - **Non-expert** <7 years of formal academic training

(Broughton & Stevens, 2009)
- Performance Context was either deadpan or projected:
 - **Deadpan:** minimal physical movement necessary to play the instrument
 - **Projected:** expressive physical movement that goes beyond the minimal but still fits naturally within the parameters of the music

(Davidson, 1993)

 - According to PREP theory, non-experts should react positively to the aesthetics of the projected performance. Experts should be less affected by the outward show.

Aesthetics

- The dependent variable of judgment of musical aesthetics was divided into the categories of overall musical performance and musical technicality. This distinction tests a corollary of PREP theory which argues that a trained listeners' judgment is altered more when evaluating the aesthetic features of a musical work than it is when judging the aesthetic features of a musical performance.

Method

- A total of 198 (83 male and 115 female, mean age: 20.47) participants were assigned to watch one of two videos: a projected performance or a deadpan performance.
- Participants were further divided into musical experts (57 participants) and non-experts (136 participants).
- Both videos were of a man standing alone on stage with a guitar. The man performed an original piece of music, and the entire length of each video was about one minute. The videos were dubbed to ensure that the participants heard the same audio clip of music.
- Participants evaluated the music by answering Likert-type questions based on musical technicality and overall performance.

RESULTS

- Performance evaluation included variables of enjoyment, interest, stage presence, and entertainment (Cronbach's alpha = .846). Musical technicality included the variables of fluid chord transitions, appropriate strum patterns, hand positions, and musical technique (Cronbach's alpha = .872).
- 2 (Observer Perspective) X 2 (Performance Context) ANOVAs were calculated on the dependent measures of aesthetics.
- Results indicated significant interactions for both performance evaluation $F(1, 189) = 9.997, p < .05$ and musical technicality $F(1, 188) = 5.549, p < .05$.
- Post-hoc comparisons for both performance evaluation and musical technicality revealed that:

Musical experts rated the deadpan performance significantly lower than the projected performance. Non-experts rated both performances the same.

FIGURE ONE

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

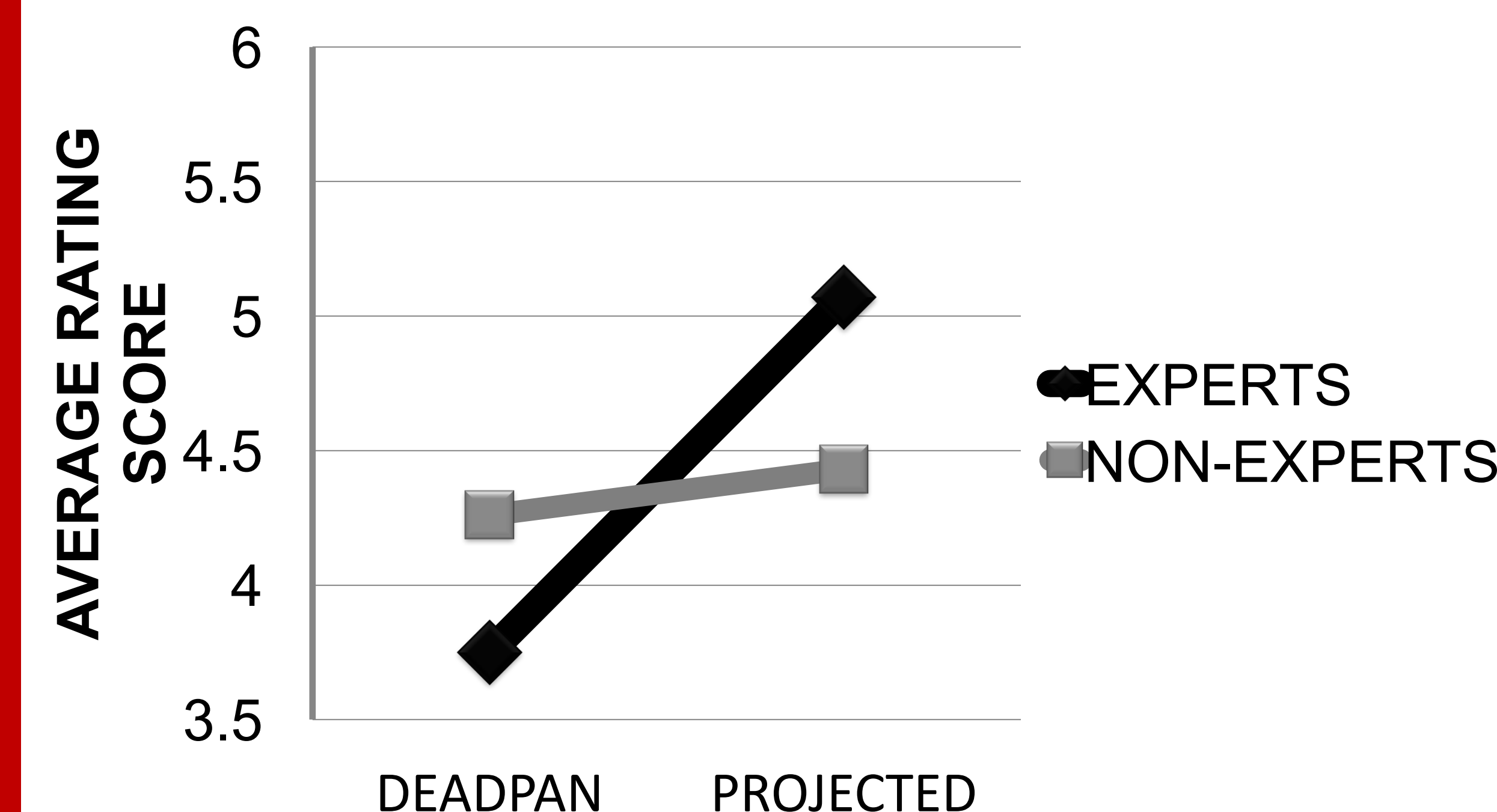
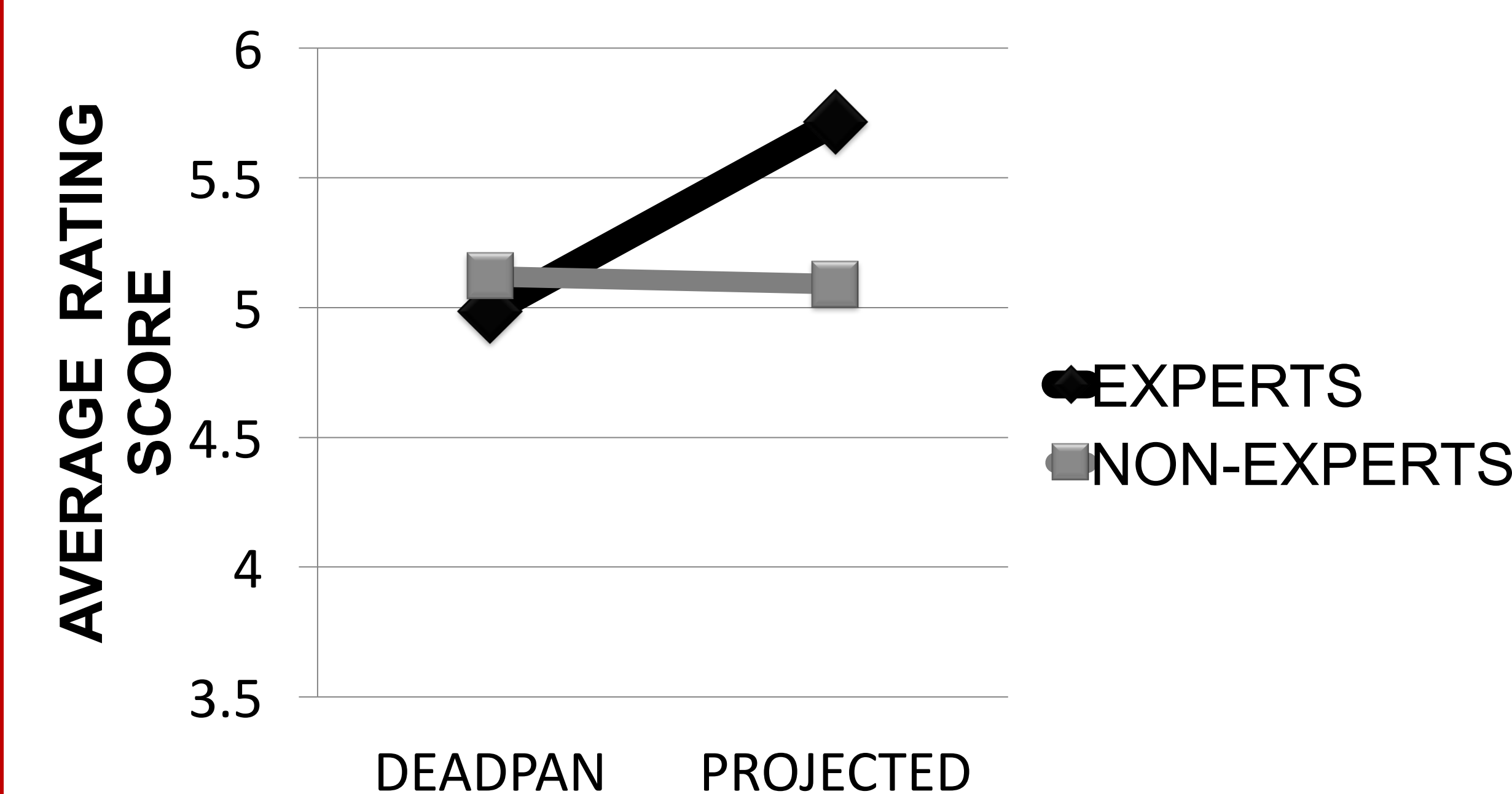


FIGURE TWO

MUSICAL TECHNICALITY



Discussion

•Our results challenge the overall premise of PREP theory that no objective standard of measurement exists for the evaluation of a musical performance as good. Although the evaluation of a performance is affected both by person and situation as posited by PREP theory, only experts differentiate aesthetics when defined as physical movement accompanying a performance.

• Person X Situation affects perception of a musical performance, but only the expert reacts differently to the situation. Contrary to PREP theory, we argue that the single, overriding perspective for assessing aesthetically good music is that of the expert observer.