I Don’t Care What You Think About Me: Do Rejection Sensitivity and Performance Predict Extreme Reactions to Rejection?

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Rejection Sensitivity (RS)

A disposition that causes people to expect and readily perceive rejection in the behavior of others

(Downey & Feldman, 1996)
RS as a Defensive-Motivational System

Vigilance for rejection cues

+ Anxious expectations of rejection

+ Perceptions of rejection

Overreaction

Self-fulfilling prophecy

(Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khori, 1998)
What Happens Before Rejection?

• Not all rejections are preceded by the same behavior

• Performance during the interaction or task should predict responses to rejection

• Rejection Sensitivity (RS) should moderate the effect of performance on responses to rejection
Performance and DMS Model

Anxious expectations of rejection

Perceptions of rejection

Overreaction

Performance

- +
Questions

• Does better performance
  – Magnify the response to rejection
  – Or
  – Mitigate the response to rejection?

• Will this effect vary as a function of RS?

Look at:
• Hostility
• Willingness to try again
Paradigm

- Allowed us to measure performance
- Socially self-relevant domain that people could invest in
- Evaluative, yet still interpersonal for RS to be activated
- Involves the threat of rejection as a natural part of the process
ARE YOU THE NEXT…

Columbian Idol
Columbian Idol Study

Overview

• Created self-relevant paradigm
  – Audition competition with cash prizes
  – Selected singers as participants
  – Measured Performance

• Two audition feedback conditions
  – Rejection
  – Neutral Condition (Control)

• Measured behavioral and emotional responses to audition feedback
Columbian Idol Study Paradigm

1. Pre-audition questionnaire, including RS Questionnaire
2. Audition before panel of judges, 3 real, 3 fake
3. Post-audition questionnaire
4. “Confessional”
5. Measure of aggression against others
Participants

- 29 Columbia University and Barnard College Students
- Mean age = 20.65
- Selected only people with auditioning experience
Rejection Sensitivity (RS) Questionnaire

You ask a friend to do you a big favor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to help out?</th>
<th>Very Unconcerned</th>
<th>Very Concerned</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1    2    3    4</td>
<td>5    6</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I would expect that he or she would willingly help me out.</th>
<th>Very Likely</th>
<th>Very Unlikely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1    2    3</td>
<td>4    5    6</td>
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(Downey & Feldman, 1996)
Measure of Performance

Three musically trained judges, blind to condition:

1. How well do you think this person performed overall?
2. How talented of a singer do you think this person is?
3. How talented of a performer do you think this person is?

Mean Performance Score = The average of the combined total on all three criterion by all three judges

High Performer = at 75% percentile of scores
Poor Performer = at 25% percentile of scores
Show Time!!!
Neutral Feedback Condition

All judges smile and act warmly, and naturally respond to the performance after the participant finishes singing.

Fake Judge #1: Thank you very much for auditioning. You did a great job.

Fake Judge #2: Thanks that was very…(generic, brief, positive feedback that seems appropriate and is non-specific. For example: that song seemed like a great fit for your voice)!

Fake Judge #3: You’ll get an email if we’ve selected you to receive an additional cash prize. Thanks again!
All judges appear unmoved by the performance

Fake Judge #1: *Uhh...I'm not really sure what I thought about it.*

Fake Judge #2: *Your performance really didn’t hold my attention or stand out as memorable to me; something is missing. I’m not sure what, but overall I don’t feel “wowed.”*

Fake Judge #3: *Yeah, I agree with her. You’ll get an email from us if we’ve selected you to receive an additional cash prize, although you probably won’t be one of our winners.*
Responses to Rejection

Focusing on three responses to rejection

1. Willingness to try again
2. Indirect hostility
   1. Toward the judges (the rejectors)
   2. Towards other participants in the study
General Predictions

• In the neutral condition, RS and performance should not be predictive of emotional and behavioral responses

• Following rejection, the better the participants’ performance, the stronger the response

• For high RS (HRS) people, responses to rejection should be even stronger than for low RS (LRS) people
  - Supports previous findings that HRS people are more affected by negative evaluations
RESULTS
Manipulation Check

On a scale from 1 to 10, how well do you think your audition went overall?

Neutral Condition

Rejection Condition

Exremely well

Exremely poorly

$t (26) = 3.21, p < .005$
Key to Graphs

- Graphs with RS show predicted values from regression model
- LRS= at 25% percentile of RS scores
- HRS= at 75% percentile of RS scores

- Rejection Condition =
Specific Predictions

Following rejection

• HRS High Performers should be the most willing to try again if offered the opportunity

(Romero-Canyas, et. al, 2006)
Willingness to Try Again

If you had a chance to audition for the judges a second time, would you do it?

If you had the chance to perform a more difficult piece to show your talent would you do it?

I definitely would!

No, certainly not

Neutral Condition: $t(26) = 1.93, p = .06$
Willingness to Try Again

If you had a chance to audition for the judges a second time, would you do it?

If you had the chance to perform a more difficult piece to show your talent would you do it?

I definitely would!

No, certainly not

Interaction Condition x RS
\[ b = .28, t (22) = 1.61, p = .12 \]

Simple slope RS
Neutral \[ b = -.04, t (22) = -.32, p = .75 \]

Rejection \[ b = .23, t (22) = 2.12, p < .05 \]
Predictions

• Following rejection, HRS High Performers should derogate the judges more than any other participants
Indirect Hostility Toward Judges

How good at judging singing talent do you think the judges are? How qualified do you think the judges are to evaluate the singers auditioning?

Not at all good; Not qualified at all

Exceptionally good; Extremely qualified

t (26) = 3.01, p < .01
Indirect Hostility Toward Judges

How good at judging singing talent do you think the judges are?
How qualified do you think the judges are to evaluate the singers auditioning?

Neutral Rejection

Not at all good

Exceptionally good

LRS HRS

Interaction Condition x RS

$b = .22, t (22) = 1.11, p = .28$

Simple slope RS
Neutral $b = .02, t (22) = .15, p = .88$

Simple slope RS
Rejection $b = .24, t (22) = 1.91, p = .06$
Measure of Aggression Against Others

- Ps told that some participants were randomly assigned to drink tea before their audition and that they are responsible for adding a “random” amount of lemon to another participant’s tea.

  “Lemon concentrate is very strong and can make a participant’s throat close and pucker-up, potentially ruining their performance.”
  - Based on Warburton, Williams, & Cairns, 2006

- DV= how much lemon juice (in mL) is added to the tea
Aggression Against Others: Lemon Task

\[ t(26) = -2.07, \ p < .05 \]
Predictions

One hypotheses

• HRS, High Performers should add significantly more lemon than LRS High Performers. For Poor Performers RS won’t matter, and they won’t aggress much

Neither RS nor performance predict anything in the Neutral Condition
Aggression Against Others: Performance & RS

Interaction Performance x RS $b = .25$, $t (10) = 2.10$, $p = .06$
Derogation of the Judges in the Confessional Interview

• 3 Blind Coders
• \( \alpha = .93 \)
• How much did the participant degrade or criticize the judges?
• Scale of 1 = “Not at all” to 10 = “A lot”
• Example: “These six people, I don’t know, who were, whatever, born in the 1970s, they don’t know what hip-hop is, they don’t know where I’m from. …It’s ridiculous…let’s just say if I had younger judges…I just usually don’t perform in front of people who are getting gray hairs soon- it’s just not their cup of tea.”
  -(the oldest judge was 25 yrs old!)
Derogation of the Judges Predicted by Performance and RS

Interaction Performance x RS $b = .23$, $t (12) = 2.00$, $p = .06$
Summary

• After rejection RS predicted
  – Willingness to try again
  – Indirect hostility

• RS and performance predict responses to rejection
• All Low Performers aggress after rejection, regardless of level of RS
• HRS High Performers aggress at the level of Low Performers
• LRS High Performers aggress the least
Discussion

• LRS, High Performers potentially buffered from overreacting
• HRS more concerned with evaluations of others, compared to LRS
• LRS well-adjusted in professional domain, more auditioning experiences and interactions with rejection may teach a person to self-regulate better
Special Thanks to My Idols...

- Rainer Romero-Canyas, Ph.D
- Professor Downey
- Professor Krauss
- Professor Putnam
- Lexi Suppes
- Lauren Aguilar
- Bonita London, Ph.D

RAs
- Evelyn Jew
- Christine Wai
- Colin Kirts
- Cassie Herr
- Josh Weigensberg
- Michelle Lee
- Wesley Griffin

Fake Judges:
- Vanessa Anderson
- Jessica Roberts
- Noah Steiner
- Diana Tyson
- Ashley Mason
- Ethan Kross

Real Judges:
- Nate Franco
- Matt Lippert
- Emily Doherty
- Maggie Graham
- Kahlila Robinson