

The Social-Cognitive Experience of Transference in Rejection Sensitivity: The Phenomenology of the Relational Self

Rita Rani Talukdar* and Brinda B. Sharma**

Abstract

The construct of personality assumes that invariant distinctive qualities characterize individuals. However in contemporary social and personality psychology the focus has shifted to social-cognitive mediating processes that underlie and motivate behaviour. Research suggests that past relationships with significant individuals may have a deep impact on present day relationships (Andersen & Glassman, 1996). Features of circumstances are experienced in the environment but generated in thought and imagination. They activate a set of internal reactions-cognitive and affective, based on the individual's related prior experiences. Rejection Sensitivity (RS), defined as the disposition to defensively expect, perceive and over-react to perceived rejection is theorized to originate from early attachment. Personifications of the self and others are based on early relations with significant others. When transference occurs, a new person is experienced in terms of the significant other and the interpersonal patterns previously learned are activated (Sullivan, 1953). The current paper studied qualitatively the pervasive function that representations of significant others play in shaping interpretations and in defining emotional responses in RS. The Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire was used to select a purposive homogeneous sample of participants high in RS (N=2; F; Age=32&34 years). Specifically four areas were investigated: (1) participants' concept of self (2) participants' thoughts about their interpersonal environment (3) types of stressors and employed management strategies (4) patterns in social interaction. Content Analysis uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to elicit three master themes- Self-esteem, Refortification of Self and Quest for Meaning. The results were considered in light of the RS model. The ways in which RS and activation of relational schemas was experienced in reference to the self has implications for countering maladaptive behaviour in high RS individuals.

Keywords: Attachment, Relational Self, Rejection Sensitivity, Transference