



Reaching Out by Changing What's Within: Social Exclusion Predicts Self-Concept Malleability

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Introduction

- People possess a basic need for social connection (e.g. Baumeister & Leary, 1995)
- After exclusion, people are motivated to regain social connection and possess an arsenal of affiliation-driven cognitions and behaviors (e.g. Gardner, Pickett, & Brewer, 2000; Maner et al., 2007)
- The current research examines a previously unexplored strategy in pursuit of acceptance, one that focuses inward upon changes within the self-concept rather than outward toward perceptions of others.

Hypotheses

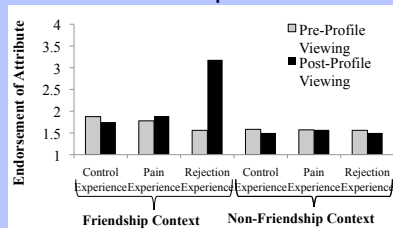
- Rejection motivates affiliation, such that people self-expand to take on new attributes of a potential friend (Study 1)
- This motivation applies only to people with whom there is a potential for friendship (Study 2)
- This self-concept malleability extends to visual information, diminishing people's preference for their own versus others' morphed faces (Study 3)
- Rejected people's existing self-views will change to be more similar to a potential friend (Study 4)
- This affiliation-motivated self-concept change predicts corresponding changes in behavior (Study 5)

Studies 1 and 2

Participants were 73 people (73% female; $M_{age}=35.86$, $SD=12.26$) in Study 1 and 66 people (79% female; $M_{age}=38.93$, $SD=13.30$) who completed this study online

Participants rated themselves on several attributes (Slotter & Gardner, 2009; Slotter & Gardner, 2011) and then wrote about a time they were rejected or not. They next rated a profile from a fake social networking site (friendship context) or political candidate site (non-friendship context). On this profile was one of the attributes they had previously rated as not very characteristic of them. Following the profile rating, participants rated the attributes again.

Figure 1. Changes in "Not Me" attribute as a function of recalled experience and context



$F(2, 60) = 7.12$, $p < .01$

Study 3

Participants were 68 undergraduates (74% female)

Participants were rejected or not in Cyberball (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). They were then showed a picture of a same sex other who they would do a get to know you task with at the end of the study. Finally, they viewed pictures of themselves morphed with this person in 10% increments up to 50% and rated how much they liked them.

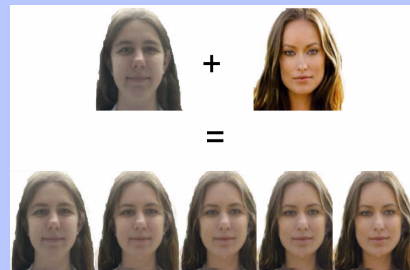
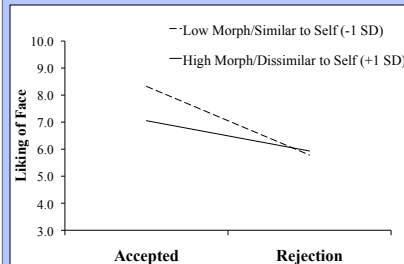


Figure 2. Liking of faces as a function of percentage morph and rejection status



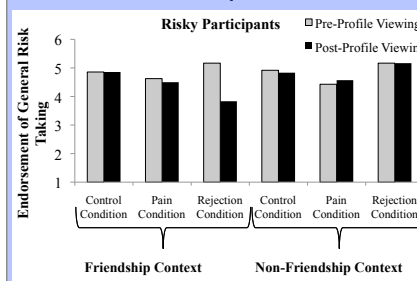
$B = -.35$, $t(65) = 2.57$, $p = .01$

Study 4

Participants were 83 people (63% female; $M_{age}=34.67$, $SD=11.74$) who completed this study online

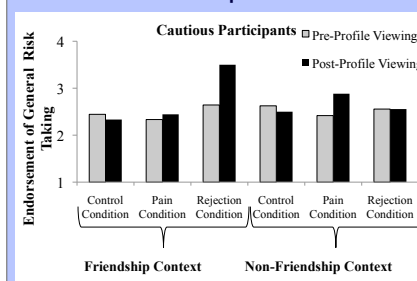
This study was conceptually identical to Study 2, with the exception of the target attribute that was used. In this study the target attribute was always risk-taking (i.e. risky or cautious)

Figure 3. Changes in "Risky" attribute as a function of recalled experience and context



$F(2, 30) = 3.46$, $p < .05$

Figure 4. Changes in "Cautious" attribute as a function of recalled experience and context



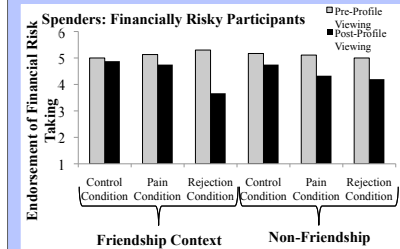
$F(2, 41) = 2.51$, $p = .09$

Study 5

Participants were 146 people (65% female; $M_{age}=36.29$, $SD=14.43$) who completed this study online

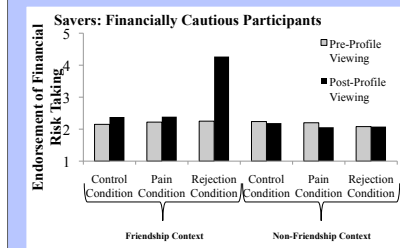
This study was conceptually identical to Study 4, with the exception of the target attribute that was used. In this study the target attribute was financial risk-taking (i.e. "spenders" and "savers"). Additionally, at the end of the study participants also completed the Monetary Choice Questionnaire (MCQ; Kirby & Maraković, 1996), in which they made 27 choices between receiving a small reward immediately (e.g., \$50 today) or a larger reward in the future (e.g., \$100 six months from now).

Figure 5. Changes in "Spender" attribute as a function of recalled experience and context



$F(2, 45) = 4.42$, $p = .01$

Figure 6. Changes in "Saver" attribute as a function of recalled experience and context



$F(2, 89) = 10.38$, $p < .01$

Participants who perceived themselves as more financially risky made more financially impulsive and risky choices on the MCQ, $B = .18$, $t(145) = 2.17$, $p < .05$

Conclusions

- One implication of the need to belong as a motivating factor is that people's self-concepts become more malleable following social rejection.

- Excluded people open themselves to take on novel aspects of potential friends' personalities, are willing to modify existing views of their self-concepts to be more similar to potential friends, and ultimately reflect and display these changes in their behavior. In order to reach out, it seems, socially excluded people are open to changing what's within.