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 repair social connection and possess an arsenal of affiliation-driven cognitions and behaviors (e.g., Gardner, Pickett, & Brewer, 2006; 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 motivation-motivated self-concept change predicts corresponding changes in behavior (Study 5).

Studies 1 and 2

Participants were 73 people (73% female; M_age = 38.93, SD = 13.30) 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 same sex other who they would do a get to know you task with. They were then showed a picture of a same sex other who would do a get to know you task with.

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

Study 3

Participants were 68 undergraduates (74% female; M_age = 14.43, SD = 1.74) who completed this study online. They were exposed to a profile of a same sex other who they would do a get to know you task with. They were then showed a picture of a same sex other who would do a get to know you task with.

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

Study 4

Participants were 83 people (63% female; M_age = 34.67, SD = 11.74) who completed this study online. They were exposed to a profile of a same sex other who they would do a get to know you task with. They were then showed a picture of a same sex other who would do a get to know you task with.

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

Study 5

Participants were 146 people (65% female; M_age = 35.86, SD = 12.26) who completed this study online. They were exposed to a profile of a same sex other who they would do a get to know you task with. They were then showed a picture of a same sex other who would do a get to know you task with.

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

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

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

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.