ABSTRACT

IMAGE IS EVERYTHING: SELF-PRESENTATION FOLLOWING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

by Taylor R. Tuscherer

Research on reaffiliation after exclusion has largely focused on how victims identify affiliation candidates rather than how victims engage these candidates. To address this gap, I explored how exclusion victims present themselves to reaffiliation candidates. Following an exclusion, non-social failure, or control manipulation, participants publically rated themselves on socially relevant and irrelevant traits under the belief that they would or would not receive feedback from another participant. I expected that excluded participants would present themselves as more socially competent than would failure or control participants, regardless of whether or not they believed they would receive feedback. Contrary to predictions, participants’ social competency ratings were resistant to influence by either of the experimental manipulations. Excluded participants with chronic belongingness concerns did tend to present themselves as more socially competent than their control counterparts, however. Potential explanations for unexpected findings and contributions of this work to the social exclusion literature are discussed.
IMAGE IS EVERYTHING: SELF-PRESENTATION FOLLOWING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Psychology
by
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Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2012

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Image Is Everything: Self-Presentation Following Social Exclusion

A sense of belongingness is the keystone of the human experience. Reflecting the truth that humans are fundamentally social beings, much of human thought, feeling, and behavior are in service of fulfilling belongingness needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belongingness is distinguished from something people merely desire by the many and diverse negative consequences that are associated with a lack of belonging. It is better characterized, then, as a fundamental human need that is a powerful source of motivation. In this way, belongingness can be equated with food and water. Just as humans are motivated to seek these forms of sustenance for survival, so, too, do they seek belongingness.

Several programs of research have investigated the emotional, behavioral, and psychophysiological consequences of not belonging. This research has focused on both the long- and short-term costs of belongingness deprivation. Research on loneliness, for instance, has shown that a sustained lack of belongingness has deleterious effects on mental (e.g., Heikkinen & Kauppinen, 2004) and physical (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 2002) health and has been associated with a shorter lifespan (e.g., Penninx et al., 1997).

Whereas chronic loneliness is not something everyone will endure, everyone experiences short-term belongingness deprivation following episodes of ostracism, social exclusion, or rejection (Williams, 2001). Research on what happens when belongingness needs suffer an acute blow has revealed that social exclusion has immediate and powerful consequences. In its wake, people have depressed self-esteem, feel less in control, and see less meaning in life (Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004). These cognitive and affective consequences likely contribute to the several behavioral changes that are associated with exclusion. People who feel excluded are more given to antisocial behavior (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), less given to prosocial behavior (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007), and are less capable of self-regulation (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005) than are people who feel included. Exclusion can also cause secretion of the stress hormone cortisol (Blackhart, Eckel, & Tice, 2007) and stimulate areas of the brain responsible for the detection of physical pain (Eisenberger, Liberman, & Williams, 2003; for a review, see MacDonald & Leary, 2005).

Clearly, negative consequences are associated with a lack of social belonging. But if the need to belong is analogous to the need for food and water, then, when that need is frustrated, people should react in ways similar to how they would if their need for food or water were frustrated. When in need of food, for instance, people become hungry and seek nutritional sustenance. This is an adaptive response and, indeed, the only response that would ensure survival. Thus, when people do not feel as if they belong, they should be distressed in some way, and that negative emotional state should prompt behaviors aimed at its removal (Williams & Zadro, 2005). The most adaptive way to reduce this distress would be to identify potential reaffiliation candidates in one’s environment and engage them in a way that would replenish belongingness (e.g., Gardner, Pickett, & Brewer, 2000; Williams & Zadro, 2005).

Restoring Belongingness

Gardner and colleagues (2000; Gardner, Pickett, Jefferis, & Knowles, 2005; Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004) have argued that the restoration of belongingness needs is facilitated by what they refer to as the social monitoring system (SMS). An acute blow to one’s belongingness needs arouses the SMS, and the active SMS recruits perceptual skills and cognitive resources that make the excluded individual sensitive to cues associated with positive social interactions. The SMS further directs those resources in a way that facilitates affiliation. In an initial demonstration of the SMS’s role in reaffiliation, Gardner and colleagues (2000) found
that individuals who lack belongingness, relative to those who feel included, enjoy greater memory for social information (Gardner et al., 2000). Subsequent research has found that excluded individuals, compared to included individuals, excel more at decoding emotion from facial and vocal stimuli (Gardner et al., 2005; Pickett et al., 2004), are quicker to identify smiling faces in a visual search task (DeWall, Maner, & Rouby, 2009), and can more easily make the distinction between real and fake smiles (Bernstein, Young, Sacco, Brown, & Claypool, 2008).

The perceptual and memorial dexterity of excluded participants would be of little consequence, however, unless they also experienced a strong motivation to approach reaffiliation candidates. Several findings do suggest, however, that exclusion does strengthen people’s desire to interact with others. For example, Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, and Schaller (2007) found that excluded participants were more eager to meet new people than were included participants. Excluded participants also expressed a stronger interest in working with someone else on a subsequent task rather than working alone and experienced this preference to a larger degree than did included participants.

Thus, the broad role of the SMS is to aid in the complex and difficult process of reaffiliating with others after exclusion. To reaffiliate successfully with others, exclusion victims must do at least two things. First, they must identify potential reaffiliation candidates, and, second, they must engage those candidates in a way that maximizes the likelihood of successful connection. Activation of the SMS assists directly and indirectly with the completion of both phases and provides an auspicious commencement to the process of reaffiliation. First, the SMS directly assists with the identification phase of reaffiliation by highlighting those who are more likely to provide reaffiliation (e.g., those who express a genuine smile) over others less likely to provide reaffiliation (e.g., those who express a fake smile; Bernstein et al., 2008). Second, the SMS likely provides further, indirect, assistance with the engagement phase as it provides exclusion victims with information about how interactions subsequent to exclusion are unfolding. Pickett and colleagues (2004), for instance, found that excluded participants were better at labeling emotionally laden facial expressions and sound clips of people speaking with the correct emotion. Such insight is likely beneficial to exclusion victims in the engagement phase because, if the exclusion victim is to have a smooth and successful social interaction, he or she must maintain a certain level of awareness of the other’s body language, affect, and other socially relevant signals. For instance, if, during an interaction with a reaffiliation candidate, an excluded individual can accurately gauge the responses of the other, he or she might be able to adjust his or her interaction style to promote success (e.g., by changing the conversation if the other seems bored or by continuing with the same story if the other seems engaged and interested).

Thus, a functioning SMS has the potential to greatly aid the excluded individual once he or she has approached a promising reaffiliation candidate. The literature offers few accounts, however, of the strategies or behavioral responses excluded individuals employ once they have reached this critical point. One exception is work by Lakin, Chartrand, and Arkin (2008), who found that participants mimicked a confederate (i.e., a reaffiliation candidate) more after exclusion than after inclusion. Mimicry is a nonconscious behavior known to facilitate liking and smoothness in social interactions (e.g., Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Given that mimicry requires a certain degree of awareness of, and coordination with, another’s nonverbal behaviors, it seems likely that the SMS has a hand in making the employment of such an adaptive strategy possible. Though an interesting finding, the literature on such adaptive behavioral responses following
exclusion remains impoverished. Crucially, because behavioral responses to exclusion will play the largest role in securing reaffiliation, this gap in the literature deserves continued attention.

Accordingly, the goal of the current work is to investigate additional reaffiliative strategies individuals adopt post exclusion. Specifically, the current work concerns how excluded individuals promote their chance of successful reaffiliation through strategic self-presentation. It is hypothesized that the wake of exclusion is a situation in which impression management motivation is particularly strong, and this motivation will be made manifest in how excluded versus control participants present themselves to others. The prediction that people will engage in effective self-presentation after exclusion is seen as a complement to the several cognitive and motivational changes that accompany exclusion. Indeed, effective self-presentation, along with nonconscious mimicry, is arguably one behavior for which the information gathered by the SMS is purposed (Gardner et al., 2005).

**Self-Presentation**

If one is to affiliate successfully with others, identifying and interacting with potential affiliation candidates is only part of the battle. Once excluded individuals identify and approach potential reaffiliation candidates, they must be accepted by them in order to replenish belongingness needs. To maximize their chance of acceptance, people need to ensure that they themselves are seen as good affiliation partners. Thus, those seeking affiliation will need to “market” themselves to others successfully. In other words, excluded individuals need to manage the impression they convey to reaffiliation candidates carefully and effectively.

Research on self-presentation, defined as “the use of behavior to communicate some information about oneself to others,” has confirmed that most people care about how others view them and routinely conceal negative aspects about themselves while accentuating positive ones (Baumeister, 1982, p. 3). Naturally, certain people manage their impression more than others (e.g., Snyder & Monson, 1975), and certain situations motivate greater impression management than do others (e.g., Schneider, 1969). Because exclusion motivates people to seek reinclusion (Williams & Zadro, 2005), stimulates cognitive (e.g., DeWall et al., 2009; Gardner et al., 2000) and motivational (Maner et al., 2007) changes that encourage engagement of reaffiliation candidates, and prioritizes the goal of ingratiation (Lakin et al, 2008; Maner et al., 2007), the wake of exclusion may be another situation in which people are particularly likely to manage their impression.

As discussed above, research in the social exclusion literature suggests, indirectly, that effective self-presentation should accompany social exclusion. For example, findings regarding the role played by the SMS in securing reaffiliation after exclusion is suggestive of excluded individuals having greater impression management motivation than included individuals (but cannot speak to engagement in self-presentational tactics per se). An individual with an active SMS benefits from the same cognitive awareness and dexterity (Gardner et al., 2000; Gardner et al., 2005; Pickett et al., 2004) that would be enjoyed by individuals high in self-monitoring. Similar to excluded individuals, those high in self-monitoring are, on average, better at gleaning information from social stimuli (Geizer, Rarick, & Soldow, 1977; Synder, 1974; Synder & Monson, 1975) and, by definition, have chronically high impression management motivation (Synder, 1974). Thus, post exclusion, people navigate the social world in a manner similar to those high in a trait associated with continuously high impression management motivation.

More direct evidence that people have greater impression management motivation post exclusion is found in the work revealing exclusion victims to behave in a more agreeable manner than included participants. In his pioneering work on ostracism, Williams (Williams & Sommer,
1997) found that females, but not males, worked harder on a group task if they had previously been ostracized by the group than if they had previously been included. In a related study, Williams, Cheung, and Choi (2000, Experiment 2) found that people who had been excluded were more likely to agree with patently inaccurate judgments made by others in a group decision-making task than if they had been previously included. Such behavior could be interpreted as exclusion victims presenting themselves as more agreeable following exclusion.

The clearest evidence that exclusion victims take greater care when presenting themselves is provided by work showing that such individuals are capable of recognizing the preferences and values of others and using this information to encourage reafﬁliation. In a series of experiments, Mead, Baumeister, Stillman, Rawn, and Vohs (2011) found that excluded participants were more likely to tailor their spending habits to match those of a fellow participant (i.e., a reafﬁliation candidate) than were included participants. Additionally, participants were more willing to spend money on an undesired product if they had been previously excluded and were led to believe that such an investment would promote their chance of reafﬁliation than if they had previously been included or believed that spending money on an undesired product would not improve the likelihood of afﬁliation. These findings provide further evidence that exclusion victims apply their relatively keen sensitivity to sources of social information in ways that assist them in restoring belongingness. Moreover, they suggest that exclusion victims are aware of how others evaluate them and can modify their own actions to elicit a favorable evaluation.

This research was not an optimal exploration of how exclusion affects self-presentation, however. First, the work of Mead and colleagues (2011) focused more on explicit consumer behavior and less on how exclusion victims presents their unique selves to others. Second, the effects witnessed by Mead and colleagues, like those of Williams and colleagues (2003), could be explained in ways other than excluded participants engaging in self-presentational tactics. It is possible, for instance, that, consistent with work finding that exclusion can induce apathy and passivity (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003), excluded participants may have merely adopted the preferences of others out of pure indifference. Similar effects would also emerge if exclusion encouraged submissiveness; exclusion victims may just adopt the preferences of others because their weak preferences can be supplanted by the comparatively stronger preferences of those around them. The current work, in contrast to this previous research, explored directly how exclusion affects subsequent self-presentation. In it, I hypothesized that exclusion would increase self-presentational tactics, and that this would be done in the service of securing reafﬁliation with others.

**Self-presentation, social exclusion, and failure.** If, as suggested, individuals do engage in self-presentational strategies following exclusion, one might argue that these effects emerge not because of a desire to gain reconnection with others, but as a ploy to regain self-worth following failure. This is because, under some conditions, exclusion might reasonably be construed as one’s own failure. For example, one might conclude that he was “dumped” by a signiﬁcant other because of his colorless personality. Or, one might wonder if her characteristically acidic attitude led her friends forego inviting her to a party. To the extent that these individuals interpret such experiences as the result of them failing (socially), they may be more motivated to repair their incompetent image than to secure reafﬁliation.

The conceptual and phenomenological overlap between failure and social exclusion was an important consideration for the current work because failure itself has been shown to motivate impression management and, in turn, raise self-presentational concerns. Specifically, several
studies have shown that failure encourages engagement in certain forms of self-presentational tactics (e.g., self-enhancement) in the service of self-esteem repair (e.g., Miller & Leary, 1992; Schlenker, 1975; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Schneider, 1969). Schneider (1969), for example, found that those whose state self-esteem was lowered by failure on a non-social task presented themselves more favorably to a confederate interviewer than those who had their self-esteem fortified through success on the same task. Interestingly, this self-enhancement occurred only when failure participants expected to receive feedback from the interviewer. Schneider argued that was because failed participants’ self-enhancement occurred not as an ingratiation strategy, but rather as a means of securing positive feedback which could then repair their damaged self-esteem (i.e., they were “fishing for compliments”). Without explicit feedback, one’s self-esteem could not be restored, therefore obviating the need for self-enhancement. Moreover, in a study conducted by Park, Crocker, and Kiefer (2007), participants cared about appearing competent to others following academic failure, although this was only true to the extent that participants had high levels of trait self-esteem and placed a great deal of personal importance on doing well in academics. Collectively, these findings suggest that failure prompts self-enhancement when doing so can bolster self-esteem in a domain important to the self.

Though there is an apparent link between failure and self-presentation, I do not believe the hypothesized link between social exclusion and self-presentation results from the same process, despite the fact that social exclusion might be considered just another example of failure. One possible way to demonstrate the distinction between failure’s effect on self-presentation and exclusion’s possible effect on self-presentation would be to examine both effects and test if either is susceptible to certain situational moderators. Although both failure and exclusion may motivate engagement in self-presentational tactics to repair self-esteem, I believe that this is the only motivation for those who experience failure but not the only motivation for those who experience exclusion (cf. Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). On the contrary, the adoption of a self-presentational strategy (e.g., self-enhancement) for the socially excluded should be motivated in large part by a desire to regain social belongingness. This should be made evident through engagement in self-presentational tactics following exclusion regardless of whether such engagement will afford the opportunity for self-esteem repair. Self-presentation following failure, on the other hand, should be sensitive to manipulations promising more or less opportunity for self-esteem repair.

Social exclusion and desired impression. If, as theorized, social exclusion motivates the adoption of self-presentational strategies in the service of reaffiliation, the question, then, becomes what specific strategy might excluded individuals adopt? Self-presentation has been studied in a variety of settings, and numerous specific self-presentational strategies have been observed in experimental studies (for a review, see Jones & Pittman, 1982). Though these strategies come in many and diverse forms to reflect the breadth of goals pursued commonly in various social interactions (e.g., to be liked, feared, revered, etc.), ingratiation has received the lion’s share of researchers’ attention (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Ingratiation can be defined as “a class of strategic behaviors illicitly designed to influence a particular other person concerning the attractiveness of one’s personal qualities” (Jones & Wortman, 1973, p. 3). If exclusion victims do engage in strategic self-presentation, then, given the evidence already documenting their employment of ingratiating behaviors (e.g., mimicry; Lakin et al., 2008), it follows that their self-presentations will also be ingratiating in nature.

Given that ingratiation represents a broad range of behaviors and manifests itself in many different ways, adoption of such a self-presentational strategy could take any number of forms
such as conformity, flattery, or self-enhancement (Jones & Wortman, 1973). In the interest of assessing what kind of impression exclusion victims would like to convey to reaffiliation candidates as cleanly as possible, the current experiment examined publicly reported trait ratings, a common method for assessing domain-specific or strategic self-enhancement (e.g., Schlenker, 1975; Schlenker & Wowra, 2003). If exclusion strengthens people’s desire to be seen as attractive affiliation candidates, then excluded participants, relative to control participants, should exaggerate the possession of traits associated with interpersonal competence (e.g., kindness, warmth, sociability), but perhaps not those less associated with social competence, such as academic competence (e.g., intelligent, studious, mindless, bookish). Furthermore, this self-enhancement should be in the service of reaffiliation, and not merely self-esteem repair in a threatened domain, as predicted by a failure account.

**Overview of Research**

To test the hypothesis that exclusion stimulates self-presentation goals and that such effects (if found) are not driven by failure-induced motivations for self-esteem repair, Introductory Psychology students were placed in an exclusion, non-social failure, or control condition. After this, participants presented themselves to others on traits related to social and academic competence. During this self-presentation task, participants either believed they would or would not receive feedback about their self-presentations. Because excluded participants should want to make themselves appear worthy of social affiliation, I hypothesized that such participants would rate themselves higher than control participants on social traits (but not higher on academic competence traits). Such effects, I hypothesized, should occur regardless of whether feedback was anticipated because excluded participants should not self-enhance purely in an attempt to repair self-esteem. With respect to the failure condition, I hypothesized that these participants would self-enhance on academic competence traits (but not on social competence traits) relative to the control condition, but that this self-enhancement would occur only in the feedback condition. Because expectations about receiving (potentially) self-affirming feedback should moderate self-enhancement done in the service of self-esteem repair (as a failure account would expect; see Schneider, 1969) but not in the service of reaffiliation, the feedback manipulation allowed me to distinguish self-enhancement following a belongingness threat from self-enhancement following failure.

As a secondary and more exploratory hypothesis, I also speculated that individual-differences relevant to concerns about and reactions to belongingness threats may moderate the impact of exclusion on self-presentation, but have little or no impact on how failure affects self-presentation. To explain, after missing a meal, someone with a chronically hearty appetite could be expected to search for food with greater fervor than someone who typically has a more modest appetite. In the case of exclusion, the person with chronically high belongingness needs, like the hearty eater who misses a meal, is particularly motivated to sate his or her appetite for belongingness, and in line with the primary predictions of this work, could be expected to do so in a more ardent fashion (i.e., be especially likely to self-enhance on social competence traits). Thus, individuals high in the Need to Belong (NTB; Leary et al., 2007) or those who score highly on the Other’s Approval (OA) subscale of Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, and Bouvrette’s (2003) Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale may be especially likely to present themselves favorably to others following exclusion. Conversely, those who become defensive when belongingness needs are threatened may be less inclined to respond to exclusion in this adaptive way. For example, those high in Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) generally anticipate that social encounters will go badly and lack an appropriate understanding of how to navigate various
social situations successfully (Leary, 1983). Accordingly, Maner and colleagues (2007) found that those high in FNE failed to respond to exclusion in the adaptive ways that those low in FNE did. Therefore, my speculative expectation was that those high (versus low) in NTB and OA would respond more adaptively to exclusion (i.e., present themselves more favorably compared to control participants). On the other hand, I expected that those high (versus low) in FNE would respond to exclusion less adaptively (i.e., they would present themselves less favorably compared to control participants). These supplementary hypotheses were tested by having participants complete the individual-difference measures previously described just prior to engaging in the main study.

**Method**

**Participants and Design**

Seventy-two Introductory Psychology students (49 female) were recruited to participate in a study on personal experiences and personality in exchange for course credit. They were assigned randomly to a 3 (Social Experience: Exclusion, Academic Failure, Control) × 2 (Anticipated Feedback: Yes, No) × 2 (Trait Domain: Social, Academic) mixed-model design, with the third factor manipulated within participants. Due to experimenter error, data from four participants were lost, leaving 68 total participants for analysis. Unless indicated otherwise, computers were used to collect data from participants.

**Procedure**

Upon arrival to the lab, participants were greeted by an experimenter and seated at a computer inside a private cubicle. After granting consent, they were directed to complete a series of individual-difference measures on the computer. These measures included the NTB Scale (Leary et al., 2007), the FNE Scale (Leary, 1983), and the OA subscale of the Contingency of Self-Worth (CSW) Scale (Crocker et al., 2003).

The 10-item NTB Scale (Leary et al., 2007) is designed to assess how strongly participants desire the company and acceptance of others with items such as, “I want other people to accept me.” The 12-item FNE Scale is designed to assess how much participants fear being evaluated harshly by others in social situations with items such as, “I am afraid that people will find fault with me.” Finally, the five-item OA subscale measures the extent to which being in the good graces of others matters when evaluating oneself with items such as, “I can’t respect myself if others don’t respect me” (Crocker et al., 2003). To mask any perceived connection between these scales and the interests of the study, these measures were mixed with 20 items from the Need for Cognitive Closure Scale (Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993) and the 18-item Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984). Additionally, after completing these measures, participants completed a five-minute filler task during which they identified states on a US map to further fog the connection between administration of the above measures and the purpose of the current study.

Following this filler task, participants were directed to complete an essay. Via random assignment, they were asked to write about an experience of exclusion, academic failure, or monotony (control condition). Specifically, each participant spent five minutes authoring an essay about a time in which he or she felt “rejected or excluded,” about “a disappointing grade” he or she recently received, or about their “typical Tuesday.” This task has been used widely to manipulate social experiences (e.g., Gardner et al., 2000; Pickett et al., 2004). Once participants finished writing their essays, they completed a measure that assessed satisfaction of the basic needs of belongingness, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence (Zadro et al., 2004). Administration of this scale served as a manipulation check, as participants in the exclusion
condition, relative to those in the control condition, should report weaker satisfaction of each of these needs. It was expected that those in the academic failure condition would experience depressed self-esteem (e.g., Park et al., 2007), but not necessarily experience weaker satisfaction of belongingness, control, or meaningful existence.

After participants reported current satisfaction of their basic needs, the computer informed them that the rest of the session involved forming an impression of another “participant” who would also form an impression of them. To facilitate this, each participant was asked to fill out a brief questionnaire to be given to another “participant” whose completed questionnaire would also be given to him or her. Participants were told that, once they had exchanged questionnaires, they would be asked to write a paragraph detailing their impression of the “participant.” Half of the participants were told further that they would exchange these impressions with their partners (in the anticipated feedback condition), whereas the other half were told that only the study’s primary investigators would see these impressions (in the no anticipated feedback condition). These questionnaires were located in a cupboard above participants’ computers. They were instructed to take one, fill it out with a provided pen, and slide it under the door of their computer room when they were finished.

The questionnaire asked participants to provide their first name, age, home state and town, and intended major to maximize experimental realism. Critically, they also rated their own personality on traits related to social competence (unfriendly, good listener, impatient, likable, polite, warm, unkind, socially inappropriate), traits related to academic competence (mindless, unscholarly, studious, deep thinker, intelligent, procrastinator, unproductive, competent), and filler traits designed to distract from the primary interests of the experiment (athletic, informal, straightforward, modern, optimistic, tidy, competitive, contemplative) on 7-point scales (1 = not at all and 7 = very much). After all participants completed their questionnaires, the experimenter instructed participants to exit their cubicles and subsequently debriefed, thanked, and dismissed them.

Results

Manipulation Check

Items from the basic needs measure (Zadro et al., 2004) were reverse scored where appropriate and averaged to form a composite index of basic needs satisfaction (α = .96), where larger scores indicate greater need satisfaction. A 3 (Social Experience: Exclusion, Academic Failure, Control) × 2 (Anticipated Feedback: Yes, No) between-participants ANOVA on participants’ scores found only a significant main effect of Social Experience, $F(2, 62) = 43.28, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .58$. As expected, participants who wrote about exclusion ($M = 2.60, SD = 1.05$) reported significantly weaker basic needs satisfaction than participants who wrote about their typical Tuesday ($M = 5.18, SD = .94$), $t(62) = 8.61, p < .01, d = 2.59$. Furthermore, participants who wrote about a recent academic failure ($M = 2.99, SD = .94$) also reported significantly weaker basic need satisfaction than control participants, $t(62) = 7.45, p < .01, d = 2.33$. Exclusion and academic failure participants did not differ significantly from each other in basic needs satisfaction, $t(62) = 1.33, p = .19, d = .39$.

Self-Presentation

Items relevant to social or academic competence on the personality questionnaire were reverse scored where appropriate and averaged to form composite indices of self-rated social competence (α = .55) and academic competence (α = .59), where higher scores indicate greater competence ratings. Given the modest internal consistencies of these composites, I conducted analyses to determine if removal of one (or more) of the traits from these composites would
substantially improve their respective Chronbach’s alphas. The results showed that boosting the internal consistency for the social competency traits was not possible, but did show that removing “procrastinator” from the academic competency traits would raise its alpha to .63. Thus, those items were re-averaged without this trait to form a more internally consistent composite of academic competency ratings.

To examine the primary hypothesis regarding the impact of exclusion on self-presentation, these indices were entered into a 3 (Experience: Exclusion, Academic Failure, Control) × 2 (Anticipated Feedback: Yes, No) × 2 (Trait Domain: Social, Academic) mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the third factor. My hypotheses regarding the respective impacts of failure and exclusion on participants’ self-presentation would manifest themselves in a three-way interaction. The pattern of this interaction should show that exclusion participants presented themselves as more socially competent than failure or control participants whereas failure participants presented themselves as more academically competent than control or exclusion participants, but that this latter effect would be true only for those in the Anticipated Feedback condition. In the No Anticipated Feedback condition, only exclusion participants were expected to engage in self-enhancement, whereas the failure participants, in a replication of Schneider (1969), would mimic their control condition counterparts. This analysis, however, revealed only a main effect of Trait Domain, $F(1, 62) = 4.25, p = .04, \eta^2_p = .06$, showing that participants generally presented themselves as possessing more social competence ($M = 5.72, SD = .50$) than academic competence ($M = 5.53, SD = .64$). No other main or interactive effects emerged (all $p$s > .19).

Contrary to expectations, the theoretically meaningful three-way interaction did not emerge ($F < 1$). Not only was this three-way interaction not significant, but the pattern of the means (see Figure 1) was only partially consistent with my expectations. Though those in the social exclusion condition did not alter their reported academic competence traits (as expected), they actually presented themselves, at least descriptively, as less socially competent ($M = 5.56, SD = .55$) than those in the failure ($M = 5.81, SD = .47$) and control ($M = 5.76, SD = .45$) conditions. This pattern was not significant but was in the opposite direction of what I expected. Furthermore, not only did exclusion not impact self-presentation as anticipated, there was also no evidence that I replicated Schneider’s (1969) finding on how failure impacts self-presentation. Schneider’s work suggests that those who failed and expected to receive feedback should have rated themselves higher on academic competency traits than those in the control condition, but as shown in Figure 1, this did not occur.

**Dispositional Moderators**

A secondary and more exploratory hypothesis in this experiment was that key individual-differences may have moderated the impact of exclusion on self-presentation. Those with high belongingness needs (i.e., those high in NTB or OA), I speculated, may be more likely than others to respond adaptively to exclusion, in this case by presenting themselves more favorably to others, because they place a great deal of important on success in social situations. By contrast, I speculated that those high in FNE may be less likely to present themselves positively following exclusion, as previous work as shown that such individuals tend to respond maladaptively to exclusion (Maner et al., 2007).

To explore these possibilities, participants’ scores on the NTB ($\alpha = .87$), OA, ($\alpha = .84$), and FNE ($\alpha = .92$) scales were reverse scored where appropriate and averaged to form composite indices where higher scores indicate greater levels of the trait. Because NTB and OA are both constructs that consider how important others’ thoughts and feelings are to the individual and
were highly correlated ($r = .82$), they were combined to form a composite index of belongingness needs (BN).^

To test if BN played a role in self-presentation on social competency ratings following exclusion, participants’ BN scores were transformed into $z$-scores and entered into a regression model with discrete predictors for each level of the Experience and Feedback factors, the three two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction. This analysis yielded only a marginal interaction between the Exclusion (versus Control) predictor and BN, ($\beta = .45$), $t(56) = 1.80$, $p = .08$. No other main or interactive effects emerged (all other $ps > .16$). To probe this marginal interaction, I analyzed data only from the exclusion and control conditions, collapsed across the feedback factor, and conducted follow-up simple slope analyses following the guidelines of Aiken and West (1991) to explore the effect of exclusion on social competency ratings at relatively low and high levels of BN (i.e., one standard deviation above and below the mean). As displayed in Figure 2, those low in BN responded maladaptively to exclusion, presenting themselves as significantly less socially competent when in the exclusion condition than when in the control condition, ($\beta = -.53$), $t(40) = -2.71$, $p < .01$. In contrast, the trait endorsements made by those high in BN were unaffected by exclusion, who descriptively presented themselves as more socially competent when in the exclusion condition than when in the control condition, though not significantly so ($\beta = .19$), $t(40) = .87$, $p = .39$.

I anticipated that excluded participants would self-enhance only on social traits and, thus, if BN moderated this effect, such a finding would emerge only with these ratings. Nevertheless, I performed an additional analysis identical to the one just described with academic competency ratings as the dependent measure. As expected, this analysis revealed no main or interactive effects (all $ps > .14$), indicating that neither BN nor its interaction with any experimental condition was a significant predictor of participants’ academic competency ratings.

I next turned my attention to FNE as a possible individual-difference moderator of exclusion’s impact on self-presentation. The same regression analyses just described were conducted, substituting participants’ BN scores with their FNE scores. In the regression analysis of participants’ social competence ratings, only an interaction between the Exclusion (versus control) predictor and FNE emerged, ($\beta = .56$), $t(56) = 2.46$, $p = .02$. No other main or interactive were found (all other $ps > .32$). As shown in Figure 3, this interaction unfolded contrary to predictions, however. Instead of greater levels of FNE predicting more maladaptive responding, those low in FNE responded maladaptively to exclusion, presenting themselves as significantly less socially competent when in the exclusion condition than when in the control condition, ($\beta = -.60$), $t(60) = -3.10$, $p < .01$. In contrast, those high in FNE, like those high in BN, descriptively presented themselves as more socially competent when in the exclusion condition than when in the control condition, but not strongly enough to reach statistical significance, ($\beta = .21$), $t(40) = 1.02$, $p = .31$. In the regression analysis of participants’ academic competency ratings, no significant effects emerged (all $ps > .10$).

**Discussion**

The present study explored the self-presentational tactics adopted by individuals searching for affiliation partners in the wake of exclusion. A substantial body of work suggests that, following exclusion, individuals hunger for reaffiliation and enjoy perceptual and memorial advantages that presumably facilitate the ease with which exclusion victims can form new bonds with others. The current work failed to find that this cognitive boon also coincides with the adoption of self-presentational strategies that would increase the social attractiveness of exclusion victims to potential new friends.
The social experience manipulation did not have a significant impact on how participants subsequently presented themselves to other participants. In fact, those in the exclusion condition, contrary to my predictions, marketed themselves, at least descriptively, as less socially competent than did those in the academic failure or control conditions. Descriptively, then, excluded individuals appeared to behave maladaptively in how they marketed themselves to others. I also failed to replicate the findings of Schneider (1969). That is, participants who wrote about a recent academic failure did not seek to repair their self-esteem by marketing themselves as being especially academically competent, even if they could receive feedback on their impression that might facilitate self-esteem repair.

This work did find that the (descriptively) maladaptive trend among excluded participants was moderated by certain individual differences. Indeed, those low in chronic belongingness needs and fear of negative social evaluation presented themselves as significantly less socially competent following exclusion (relative to the control condition). That is, they were more likely to respond to exclusion maladaptively. By contrast, excluded participants with chronically high belongingness needs and those who fear the negative evaluation of others did not respond maladaptively to exclusion, marketing themselves just as socially competent as control participants. I initially predicted that BN and FNE would moderate the impact of exclusion on self-presentation in quite different ways. Instead, results showed that these individual differences moderated the relationship in similar fashions. Indeed, BN were highly correlated with FNE ($r = .90$).

Not only did my findings with FNE not follow my prediction, these findings also contradict those of Maner and colleagues (2007), who found that those high in FNE were more likely to respond maladaptively to exclusion. In their work, those high in FNE were less likely to see another participant (i.e., a reaffiliation candidate) as friendly or deserving of a reward for their work, both responses that make less likely the formation of a bond between the exclusion victim and the affiliation candidate. Based on these findings, one would have expected high FNE participants in the current work to behave maladaptively in terms of self-presentational tactics; instead, it was those low in FNE who behaved this way.

**Limitations**

The failure to produce the predicted results may, in part, be attributed to weaknesses inherent to the study. First, this study measured self-presentation by asking participants to rate themselves publicly on a personality questionnaire, a common technique in the self-presentation literature (e.g., Schlenker, 1975; Schlenker & Wowra, 2003). I assumed that excluded participants, who should want to “market” themselves favorably to secure reaffiliation, would present themselves as especially socially competent. It is possible, however, that excluded participants reasoned that they could make a better impression if they presented themselves in humble ways by reporting lower social competence ratings. If, for instance, independent coders were asked to form an impression of participants based on their completed questionnaires, would the personality profiles of excluded participants, with their more modest social competency ratings, actually be judged to be more attractive than the profiles of participants in other conditions (who had descriptively higher ratings)? The current study is unable to speak to this question. It is worth noting, however, that participants generally rated themselves as very socially competent. Even the lowest scores, which occurred for excluded participants in the No Feedback condition, were still quite high ($M = 5.17$ out of 7). It is possible that these more modest ratings would, paradoxically, be perceived as belonging to a more likeable person. If this is the case, then excluded participants may have actually been successful (descriptively) in
altering their self-presentations in ways that would secure reaffiliation. In retrospect, the use of this type of trait-rating measure may not have been ideal, as one could argue that it is unclear *a priori* whether low or high ratings on these judgments reflects a more likable person.

Second, individuals may have a difficult time expressing themselves on a personality questionnaire. Rarely in life do people encounter situations in which the impression others form of them is based *solely* on their responses to a series of close-ended trait questions. Even dating websites—where people presumably try to present themselves to others favorably to gain affiliation—typically include a photograph of the person, along with an open-ended description in which one expresses a variety of features about one’s self, including his or her hobbies, values, likes and dislikes, and so forth. The hypothesis that exclusion stimulates a desire to appear particularly socially attractive in the service of reaffiliation may have been better explored by allowing participants to self-present as they would do in everyday life, without forcing them to speculate on how to construct their desired presentation on a personality questionnaire. For example, would excluded participants opt to show a more attractive photo of themselves to others or to write an especially humorous description of something they had done to convey a socially desirable sense of humor? Or might the motivation to appear attractive manifest itself through the use of more subtle, nonverbal behaviors? Previous work has shown that exclusion stimulates nonverbal behaviors (e.g., mimicry; Lakin et al., 2008) that are known to favorably influence the impressions that others form (e.g., Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Perhaps it is primarily or exclusively through these more subtle mechanisms of impression formation, such as mimicry, that exclusion affects self-presentation. To examine this possibility, participants could interact with a confederate following an exclusion or control manipulation. Such a study may find that confederates form a more favorable impression of exclusion participants than they do of control participants.

Third, participants may not have treated the self-presentation measure as a true opportunity to convey an impression to another person. Participants were never led to believe that they would interact with the person with whom they would trade impressions. Other work has found that anticipated interaction with an affiliation candidate is a key ingredient in producing adaptive responses to inclusion (e.g., Maner et al., 2007). Such a manipulation was not included in this study because I predicted that participants who felt excluded would experience a general shift in self-presentational strategy that would manifest itself without the prospect of interacting with another person. Still, if the stakes were raised in this manner for excluded participants, they may have chosen to present themselves differently than they did in this study to other participants.

**Future Directions**

To address these weaknesses future work should explore the actual impression that exclusion victims convey to reaffiliation candidates in a face-to-face setting. Such a study would address the major weaknesses of the current work. First, the true result of the self-presentational tactics employed by exclusion victims could be examined. Even if exclusion victims do present themselves as less socially competent than control participants, this humility may come across as attractive to the interaction partner, resulting, paradoxically, in a more positive impression. Second, if there is something about an actual interaction that is required to elicit an adaptive self-presentation, the self-presentation of exclusion victims may be different than what was found in the current study. If this were the case, it is wholly possible that exclusion victims would choose to present themselves to others in a way that is objectively socially attractive.
Future work may also want to proceed on the assumption that exclusion actually elicits less favorable self-presentations that hinder victims’ ability to attract reaffiliation candidates. Exclusion participants in this study descriptively presented themselves as less socially competent than other participants, which I would characterize as a maladaptive response. There remains a spirited debate in social exclusion literature as to whether behavioral reactions to exclusion are adaptive or maladaptive, and contradictory findings have emerged. For instance, Maner and colleagues (2007) found that exclusion victims were more charitable in their evaluations of another person’s creative work than were control participants, whereas Twenge and colleagues (2007) found that exclusion victims were less likely to help someone after spilling a canister of pencils than were control participants. Thus, given that maladaptive responses are possible following exclusion, the fundamental hypothesis that I began with—that exclusion will bring about more effective self-presentation—could simply be incorrect. It is further possible that exclusion has the potential to bring about both adaptive and maladaptive self-presentational responses but that key moderators not explored here dictate the self-presentational strategy employed. For example, excluded participants’ may present themselves negatively in exclusion’s immediate wake but may work to present themselves positively after some time to “cool off” has passed.

Finally, it is possible that self-presentation is not impacted one way or another by exclusion. Exclusion victims do enjoy certain social cognitive advantages over non-excluded individuals, and these advantages might facilitate other forms of positive behavioral reaffiliation strategies besides effective self-presentation. Future work may find certain adaptive behaviors that victims do engage in that help them put their best foot forward but have little to do with strategic self-presentation. For example, perhaps excluded individuals experience greater positive affect upon seeing an affiliation candidate than do non-excluded individuals and, because of this, are more likely to greet that candidate with a genuine smile (versus a fake smile).

Conclusion

The proposed work explored a heretofore unexamined potential response to social exclusion. It was hypothesized that exclusion would motivate impression management in the service of reaffiliation. Because exclusion motivates people to seek reinclusion (Williams & Zadro, 2005), excluded individuals should care more about the image they impress on potential reaffiliation candidates. The results of this work, in large part, failed to bear out this prediction, however. Although one of several methodological limitations could account for the study’s null results, it is conceivable that, post-exclusion, individuals are unable to put their best foot forward and engage potential sources of belongingness in an adaptive manner.
References


Notes

1 Though one might be able to increase one’s perceived likeability and affiliation potential through presentation of one’s self to others as above average on any desirable quality (e.g., academic competence), this strategy would be less direct (and less parsimonious) than simply presenting one’s self as a friendly, likeable person. It is nevertheless possible that excluded individuals might rate themselves higher on traits relating to intellectual competence relative to control participants, but I expected greater movement on traits relating to social competence.

2 Naturally, one may not have expected each of the basic needs of belongingness, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence to move in the same pattern collectively given the predicted differences between exclusion and failure, despite the full scale’s high internal consistency. Analyses at the level of individual needs did find, however, that the fulfillment of each need moved in the same pattern as the overall composite score with the exception of belongingness. Excluded participants ($M = 2.54, SD = 1.26$) reported significantly weaker satisfaction of belongingness needs than did failure participants ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.47$), $t(62) = 2.50, p = .02, d = .75$, who themselves still experienced weaker satisfaction of belongingness needs than did control participants ($M = 5.35, SD = 1.40$), $t(62) = 4.26, p < .01, d = 1.21$.

3 All reported results were similar regardless of whether or not “procrastinator” was included in the composite measure of academic competence.

4 Because work in the social exclusion literature has sometimes found that men and women respond differently to exclusion (e.g., Williams & Sommer, 1997), this analysis was initially run with gender in the model. Inclusion of this variable did not reveal any easily interpretable or theoretically meaningful effects, however, and thus was dropped from the overall analysis and is not discussed further.

5 Analyses using each of these individual differences separately (rather than combined) yielded similar results.
Figure 1. Participants’ average trait ratings as a function of social experience and whether the participants’ believed they would or would not receive feedback from their impression formation task partners. Error bars represent ± 1 pooled SEM.
Figure 2. Belongingness needs (BN) moderated the effect of exclusion on participants’ public ratings of social competency. Those low in BN responded to exclusion maladaptively, decreasing their ratings of social competency in response to exclusion. By contrast, the social competency ratings made by those high in BN were unaffected by exclusion.
Figure 3. Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) moderated the effect of exclusion on participants’ public ratings of social competency. Those low in FNE responded to exclusion maladaptively, decreasing their ratings of social competency in response to exclusion. By contrast, the social competency ratings made by those high in FNE were unaffected by exclusion.