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Power motivates interpersonal connection following social exclusion

Jayanth Narayanan [a,*], Kenneth Tai [b], Zoe Kinias [c]

[a] National University of Singapore, Department of Management and Organisation, NUS Business School, 15 Kent Ridge Drive, Mochtar Riady Building, Singapore 119245, Singapore
[b] Singapore Management University, Department of Organisational Behavior and Human Resources, Lee Kong Chian School of Business, 50, Stamford Road, Singapore 178899, Singapore
[c] INSEAD, Organisational Behaviour Department, 1 Ayer Rajah Avenue, Singapore 138676, Singapore

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ABSTRACT

Research has systematically documented the negative effects of social exclusion, yet little is known about how these negative effects can be mitigated. Building on the approach-inhibition theory of power (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), we examined the role of power in facilitating social connection following exclusion. Four experiments found that following exclusion, high power (relative to low power) individuals intend to socially connect more with others. Specifically, following exclusion, individuals primed with high power sought new social connections more than those primed with low power (Studies 1–4) or those receiving no power prime (Study 1). The intention to seek social connection as a function of power was limited to situations of exclusion, as it did not occur when individuals were included (Studies 3 and 4). Approach orientation mediates the effect of power on intentions to connect with others (Studies 2 and 4).

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Introduction

Establishing and maintaining a sense of social connection with others is a universal and fundamental human need akin to that for food and water (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Exclusion from social groups thwarts this need and affects individuals' physical and psychological well-being (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Williams, 2007). In fact, social exclusion (hereafter exclusion) has been described as one of the most severe punishments people can mete out to each other. As William James (1890; pp. 293–294) remarked – "No more a fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof." Although exclusion is so damaging, organizational behavior scholars have only recently begun to examine this aversive interpersonal phenemenon (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008).

The experience of exclusion indicates that one's need to belong has been thwarted (Baumeister, Brewer, Tice, & Twenge, 2007). As a result, excluded individuals should have a strong desire to regain social connections with others in order to fulfill the fundamental need to belong (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Despite the functionality of seeking social connections to meet the need to belong, people may not always appear to do so. For example, excluded individuals sometimes isolate themselves from further social interactions (Derfler-Rozin, Pillutla, & Thau, 2010; Mead & Maner, 2012). Therefore, although the need to belong is fundamental, individuals may not always behave in a manner that directly meets this need.

Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that excluded individuals sometimes further isolate themselves from social connections (see Baumeister et al., 2007, for a review; Ferris et al., 2008; Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006; Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007). For example, exclusion has been shown to increase anti-social behavior (Leary et al., 2006) and decrease pro-social behavior towards others (Twenge et al., 2007), indicating that excluded individuals may further distance themselves from others. However, other research suggests that following exclusion, people may engage in actions to regain social connections (Carter-Sowell, Chen, & Williams, 2008; Williams, 2007; Williams & Govan, 2005). For example, excluded individuals show a greater motivation to connect with new sources of social connections as compared to non-excluded individuals (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007).

Although these two sets of findings – socially distancing oneself from others and seeking new social connections – may seem contradictory, they may signal the same underlying motive. In fact, they point to two different means by which individuals can subjectively experience that their need to belong is met. It is clear that when people engage in actions to regain social connections, they are directly striving to fulfill their need to belong, or at least feel that they are doing so. It is less apparent how people feel that they are meeting their need to belong when they socially withdraw following exclusion. However, social withdrawal minimizes vulnerability to additional exclusion, which can further threaten individuals who have experienced prior exclusion (Baumeister et al., 2007). Therefore, social withdrawal following exclusion

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: bizjayan@nus.edu.sg (J. Narayanan).

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may also be an attempt for people to feel that they are at least preserving their sense of belonging.

The two responses to exclusion – actively seeking social connection and avoiding situations that might involve further exclusion – align with the two self-regulation systems proposed by (Higgins, 1997; Higgins, 1998). Specifically, actively striving to socially connect and build new ties aligns with a promotion focus that is driven by the potential for attaining positive outcomes (Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994; Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998). Alternatively, socially withdrawing and avoiding further harm aligns with a prevention focus that is driven by the potential for avoiding negative outcomes (Higgins et al., 1994; Shah et al., 1998). Following exclusion, people can engage in either of these means to feel that they are meeting or at least preserving their need to belong and both these means – promotion-focused and prevention-focused – should be activated. However, which of the two is predominant depends on chronic and environmental factors. The current research examines how power determines which of the two means will predominate to influence the intention to connect following exclusion.

Power and social exclusion

A dominant model in the study of the effects of power is the approach-inhibition model (Keltner et al., 2003). This model outlines the effects of power – an inherent and important property of social relationships, on affect, cognition, and behavior. In this model, power is defined as the capacity to influence others by having control over resources (Emerson, 1962; French & Raven, 1959). This control over resources provides high power actors with the discretion to administer rewards and punishments. This definition of power is inherently social where power is derived through one's relationship to others (Fiske, 1993; Overbeck & Park, 2001). Our conceptualization and definition of power provides the foundation for the current investigation of how power affects the intention to connect following exclusion.

According to the approach-inhibition model, the experience of power engenders an approach-oriented motivational state, whereas a lack of power engenders an avoidance-oriented motivational state (Keltner et al., 2003). Specifically, high power individuals display approach-oriented behaviors, behavioral disinhibition, and elevated positive emotion (e.g., Guinote, 2007a; Guinote, 2007b; see Keltner et al., 2003). These behaviors have been broadly termed as an approach orientation – active behaviors that engage with others and the environment (Carver & White, 1994; Higgins, 1997). The approach-inhibition model has received strong empirical support (e.g. Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Lammers, Stoker, & Stapel, 2010; Smith & Bargh, 2008). Furthermore, this theory predicts that powerful actors are more likely to take risks (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche, 2007), take actions to improve their circumstances (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003) and make the first move in competitive interactions (Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007).

As mentioned earlier, following exclusion, individuals may feel that their need to belong is met through either promotion or prevention means. Due to the alignment between power and the two self-regulatory systems, we propose that power determines which of the two means would predominate. Specifically, approach orientation, engendered by power, is conceptually similar to a promotion focus, and an avoidance orientation, engendered by a lack of power, is conceptually similar to a prevention focus (Keltner et al., 2003). We use regulatory fit theory (Higgins, 2000) to examine how the alignment between power and the two means affects the intention to connect following exclusion.

Regulatory fit theory proposes that an alignment between the motivational orientation to a goal and the means used to attain the goal creates a state of regulatory fit that increases the feeling of rightness about goal pursuit (Higgins, 2000; Higgins, 2005). Building on this theory, following exclusion of high power actors, an alignment between promotion means and an approach orientation produces a state of regulatory fit. As a result of this fit, for high power actors, promotion means feel more "right" than prevention means. In other words, for high power individuals, the intention to connect is more dominant than the fear of further exclusion. This leads to a greater intention to connect with others following exclusion. In contrast, for low power actors, an alignment between prevention means and an avoidance orientation also produces a state of regulatory fit. As a result of this regulatory fit, for low power actors, prevention means feel more "right" than promotion means. Therefore, for low power individuals, the fear of further exclusion is more dominant, which leads to a lower intention to connect following exclusion.

Furthermore, power creates an inclination toward taking action (Galinsky et al., 2003; Guinote, Judd, & Brauer, 2002). Following exclusion, there are two means available to make people feel that they belong, that vary in the amount of action involved in their enactment– to socially connect or to socially withdraw. Specifically, seeking new social connections involves more action than does social withdrawal. Since high power actors actively strive to improve their situations, they may be more likely to seek social connections following exclusion. Thus, taken together, an alignment of power with promotion means and the inclination power creates toward taking action suggest that high power individuals are likely to seek social connections following exclusion.

On the other hand, low power individuals display avoidance-oriented behaviors, behavioral inhibition, and negative emotion (Keltner et al., 2003). Thus relative to high power individuals, low power individuals are more likely to engage in prevention means to preserve their need to belong. Furthermore, when low power actors are excluded, they are less likely to intitate action to change their undesirable predicament. Consequently when low power individuals are excluded, they are more likely to socially withdraw and thereby display a lower intention to connect with potential new affiliates.

Overview of studies

We conducted four studies to test the effects of power on the intention to connect with others following exclusion. In Study 1, high power, low power, and control participants were excluded in the context of an online ball-tossing game called Cyberball (Williams & Jarvis, 2006) and they then indicated their intention to connect with others. Study 2 used the group exclusion paradigm (Leary et al., 1995) and assessed intentions to connect with others following exclusion. This study also examined approach vs. avoidance as the mechanism underlying the effects of power on intention to connect. Study 3 examined whether the effects of power on intentions to connect are specific to conditions of exclusion, where high power and low power participants were randomly assigned to be excluded or not in the Cyberball game. Study 4 again tested approach vs. avoidance as the mediator, again using the group exclusion paradigm but including a behavioral measure of the intention to connect.

Study 1

Study 1 examined whether having power leads people to show a greater intention to connect following exclusion. Participants completed commonly used experiential power primes (Galinsky et al., 2003) in which they were asked to recall a particular incident in their lives. All participants experienced exclusion in a game of Cyberball, a virtual ball-tossing paradigm in which they are

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