



Original Article

Keeping the benefits of group cooperation: domain-specific responses to distinct causes of social exclusion[☆]



Theresa E. Robertson^{a,*}, Andrew W. Delton^b, Stanley B. Klein^c, Leda Cosmides^c, John Tooby^d

^a College of Business and Center for Behavioral Political Economy, Stony Brook University

^b Center for Behavioral Political Economy, Department of Political Science, and College of Business, Stony Brook University

^c Center for Evolutionary Psychology and Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of California, Santa Barbara

^d Center for Evolutionary Psychology and Department of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Barbara

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ABSTRACT

Some people are especially physically adept, others carry dangerous pathogens, some have valuable and rare knowledge, and still others cheat or deceive those around them. Because of these differences, and the costs and benefits they pose, natural selection has crafted mechanisms of partner choice that are selective: some people are chosen as social partners, others are not. When people are not chosen as partners—when they are socially excluded—they lose access to important fitness benefits. Thus, the mind should have adaptations to recapture these benefits by regaining inclusion. Is there one best way to regain inclusion? This is unlikely because there are multiple causes of exclusion; a single response is unlikely to be successful across all possible causes. Instead, distinct causes of exclusion might require adaptively tailored responses. We test whether there are tailored responses to five possible causes of exclusion from a cooperative group: inability to contribute, pathogen infection, free riding, disrupting group coordination, and exit from the group. Our results show that different causes of exclusion lead to distinct profiles of emotions and behavior. Each emotion and behavior profile is adaptively specialized to reverse or mitigate its specific cause of exclusion. Our research shows how taking an evolutionary view of human sociality can help map the psychology of cooperation and exclusion.

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1. Introduction

Some people are especially physically adept, others carry dangerous pathogens, some have valuable and rare knowledge, and still others cheat or deceive those around them. Because of these differences, and the costs and benefits they pose, natural selection has crafted mechanisms of partner choice that are selective: Some people are chosen as social partners; others are not (Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007; Delton & Robertson, 2012; Goffman, 1963; Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Neuberg, Smith, & Asher, 2000).

The flip side of selectivity is that some people are not chosen; they are socially excluded. Exclusion can range from subtle avoidance to outright expulsion (Kurzban & Leary, 2001). Regardless, excluded people may lose access to the benefits of sociality and cooperation, like food sharing, aid in health crises (Sugiyama, 2004), and defense from predators (both human and nonhuman; Wrangham & Peterson, 1996). Given these costs, there may be psychological mechanisms that respond to or defend against exclusion (e.g., Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007).

Past empirical research on the psychology of social exclusion has frequently treated exclusion as a unitary phenomenon: Exclusion is a single thing and, therefore, there is a single normatively correct way

to respond. Here we challenge these assumptions. Different causes of exclusion each create their own, unique adaptive problems. Thus, a mind well-designed to respond to exclusion should have a menu of possible responses; for each ancestrally common cause of exclusion, there should be an adaptively tailored response.

1.1. Social exclusion is not a unitary phenomenon

In typical laboratory experiments on social exclusion, people interact with strangers. There is no relationship context – indeed, the interactions are often anonymous – and the stakes are low. When people are excluded, it happens without reason or warning. These factors conspire to make laboratory exclusion unlike real-world exclusion (for a review of typical methods, see Williams, 2007). Despite their lack of ecological validity, typical lab methods are the logical outgrowth of a tacit assumption: Exclusion is unitary and can best be investigated by stripping away purportedly confounding factors such as who excluded who or why.

Because exclusion is a unitary phenomenon, it follows that responding to exclusion is also unitary. Just as a head cold always causes one particular constellation of symptoms (e.g., congestion, a runny nose) and never others (e.g., warts, tendonitis), the tacit assumption is that exclusion always causes a particular syndrome of responses. For instance, excluded people are thought to be more aggressive (Warburton, Williams, & Cairns, 2006), to be worse at logical reasoning (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002), and to feel hurt

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* Corresponding author. College of Business, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY 11794-3775.

E-mail address: theresa.robertson@stonybrook.edu (T.E. Robertson).

or numb (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998; Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003). Although many behaviors and feelings are elicited by exclusion, in the tacit model of most empirical work there is no connection between the context or causes of exclusion and the specifics of responding to it.

The empirical assumption that exclusion is unitary is surprising because there is a long-running theoretical literature hinting that not all exclusion is created equal (e.g., Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Leary, 2005; Williams, 1997). For example, the need threat model proposes that different exclusions threaten different intrapsychic needs (e.g., a need to belong, a need for self-esteem; Williams, 1997). Responding to exclusion depends on which need is threatened. Similarly, the multi-motive model proposes that exclusion arouses several competing reactions in the excluded person and the winning reaction is determined in part by people's perceptions of the exclusion (e.g., whether it was fair or unfair; Smart Richman & Leary, 2009). Moreover, in the published reports we are aware of that take this issue seriously, different causes of exclusion do lead to distinct responses (e.g., Bernstein & Claypool, 2012; Çelik, Lammers, van Beest, Bekker, & Vonk, 2013).

Our goal is to develop and test an evolutionary psychological model of responding to exclusion. Building on past theory, our model addresses why different types of exclusion would have occurred among human ancestors and how excluded people should adaptively respond. We focus on responses for regaining inclusion in cooperative groups. Although we do not study it, our approach can be extended to responding to exclusion from, for instance, mateships or friendships, and it could also be extended to understand strategies for strengthening outside relationships or forming new ones now that the focal relationship has ended. Our model has three key features and assumptions: (1) There are multiple causes of exclusion. (2) The mind has a menu of responses to exclusion, each adaptively tailored to a particular cause. (3) At a proximate level, responding to exclusion requires a suite of emotional and behavioral responses.

1.2. The role of emotions in organizing specialized responses to exclusion

Solving complex social problems like regaining acceptance after exclusion from a cooperative group requires integrating multiple sources of information, coordinating multiple psychological responses, and deploying appropriate behavioral responses. Past theory has suggested that emotional systems function in part to orchestrate these complex responses (Buck, 1985; Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). We apply this general framework to understand how the mind responds to exclusion from a group. Fig. 1 outlines hypothesized links between causes of exclusion, emotions, and behavioral responses. On this view, the mind first categorizes the exclusion event by the inferred motivation of the excluding group. This activates particular emotional systems. These then orchestrate a variety of psychological changes, including motivating behavioral responses. The emotions and behaviors depend on the initial categorization.

Borrowing from past taxonomies of emotion (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Frijda, 1986; Nesse, 1990; Plutchik, 1980), we focus on fear, pity, disgust, anger, guilt, and shame. Fear is elicited by physical safety threats or, our primary focus, social threats. Fear's activation motivates protective behaviors (Nesse, 1990; Plutchik, 1980; Watson & Friend, 1969). Pity is elicited when a valued other is experiencing costs and it motivates improving the other's welfare (Frijda, 1986). Disgust is elicited by physical or moral contamination and motivates contamination-avoidance behaviors (Rozin, Markwith, & Nemeroff, 1992; Tybur, Lieberman, & Griskevicius, 2009). Anger is elicited when one is being undervalued – i.e., when other individuals are not placing enough weight on one's personal welfare – and motivates behaviors to increase others' valuation of the self (e.g., by threatening to withdraw cooperation; Sell, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2009). Guilt is elicited when the self has placed too little weight on the welfare of valued others (in a sense, the converse of anger) and motivates behaviors that increase the others' welfare (Fessler, 1999; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Shame is elicited by cues that others will devalue you and motivates behaviors to minimize devaluation, such as hiding or displaying submission (Fessler, 1999; Sznycer & Tooby, 2011; Sznycer et al., 2012; Tangney et al., 2007).

1.3. Hypotheses connecting distinct types of exclusion to specialized responses

What causes of exclusion are sufficiently distinct to require specialized responses? Although there are many possibilities, we focus on five: (1) free riding, (2) inability to contribute, (3) pathogen infection, (4) disrupting group coordination, and (5) exit from the group (e.g., Cottrell et al., 2007; Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Moreland & Levine, 2002; Neuberg et al., 2000; Rozin et al., 1992; Tooby, Cosmides, & Price, 2006). This list is not exhaustive and is intended only as an initial starting point. Guided by the model in Fig. 1 and by task analyses of the different causes of exclusion, we derive a series of hypotheses about the particular emotional reactions and behavioral strategies that specific causes of exclusion should elicit (summarized in Table 1).

Free riders withhold contributions to the group but still take group benefits, reducing or eliminating the benefits of cooperation (Olson, 1965), thus showing they place little value on the group's welfare (Delton, Cosmides, Guemo, Robertson, & Tooby, 2012). Exclusion for free riding should therefore cause guilt and perhaps shame and reparative behavioral strategies such as apologizing and demonstrating valuation of the group by working harder and being a cooperative team player (see Section 1.2; also Bottom, Gibson, Daniels, & Murnighan, 2002).

Resource pooling accounts of human sociality suggest that people failing to contribute due to bad luck, error, or injury may expect support from their group (Kameda, Takezawa, & Hastie, 2005; Kaplan & Hill, 1985; Sugiyama, 2004). On the other hand, they may be excluded for making cooperation less efficient or mistakenly by being categorized as free riders (Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Neuberg et al., 2000). Exclusion for inability should therefore cause anger (for the group placing too little weight on the excluded party's welfare), but also possibly guilt for imposing costs on the group (motivating

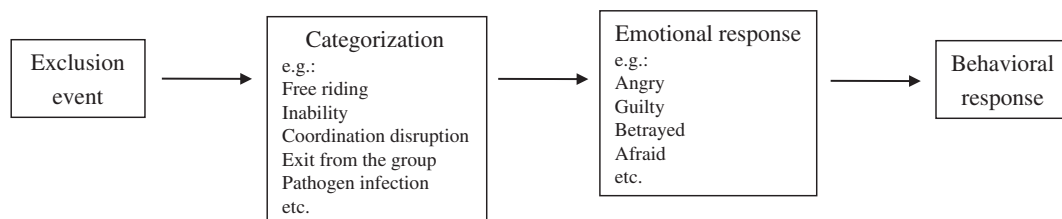


Fig. 1. Theoretical model: The mind first categorizes the exclusion event by the inferred motivation of the excluding group, which activates emotional systems, which then orchestrate a variety of psychological changes, including motivating behavioral responses. The elicited emotions and behaviors depend on initial categorization of the exclusion.

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