Not all Social Exclusion is the Same: Comparing Ostracism, Rejection, and A Future Alone

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**Introduction**

Social exclusion, or the experience of being ostracized or rejected, is extensively researched in social psychology. This pervasive social punishment affects mood, psychosocial needs, and behavior. Most experimental studies utilize one of three manipulations, but few studies compare these methodologies, thereby making it impossible to assess the differences between types of social exclusion. The current research features a 3 [manipulation] x 3 (exclusion/exclusion design to understand how different types of social exclusion impact positive affect, negative affect, and threats to psychosocial need. Evidence for two competing theories regarding the mechanisms behind social exclusion are also discussed.

**Model of Ostracism:** Social exclusion prevents individuals from satisfying the fundamental psychological needs, thus resulting in worsened mood and hurt feelings, as well as behavior designed to repair and maintain the self (Williams & Sommer, 1997).

**Mood Numbness Hypothesis:** Social exclusion causes a numeration of affect, that is neither positive nor negative. This “deconstructed state” is defined by disordered time perception, lack of meaningful existence, lethargy, lack of emotion, and an escape from self-awareness (Tweneng, Cantanese, & Baumeister, 2003).

**Current Research**

1. **Ostracism:** “Being ignored and excluded, and often occurs without excessive explanation or explicit negative attention” (Williams, 2007, p.429). The current induction features a Flash version of Cyberball wherein participants are passively excluded from a ball-tossing game with two online confederates (www.charisselpree.com/flash-cyberball).

2. **Rejection:** “A declaration by an individual or group that they do not (or no longer) want to interact or be in the company of the individual” (Williams, 2007, p.429). The current induction informs participants that they were not chosen by online confederates.

3. **A Future Alone:** (i.e. hypothetical long-term social exclusion): “Being excluded, alone, or isolated, sometimes with explicit declarations of dislike, but other times not.” (Williams, 2007, p.429). The current induction informs participants that, due to their personality type, they will spend a future alone, devoid of meaningful social relationships.

**Methods**

- **Participants:** Excluded participants via Ostracism reported the greatest Threats to Psychosocial Needs compared to participants excluded via Rejection or A Future Alone.
- **Model of Ostracism:** Exclusion via Cyberball did not affect Psychosocial Needs.
- **Mood Numbness:** Excluded participants provided neutral responses to Positive Affect according to a One-sample t-test.

Exclusion via Cyberball affects negative mood, but does not adhere to the Model of Ostracism or the Mood Numbness Hypothesis.

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**A Future Alone (n = 118)**

- **Participants excluded via A Future Alone reported the lowest Positive Affect compared to participants excluded via Ostracism or Rejection.**
- **Model of Ostracism:** Psychosocial Needs did not mediate effect of A Future Alone on Mood.
- **Mood Numbness:** Excluded participants reported neutral responses to Positive (p = .676) and Negative (p = .045) Affect according to One-sample t-Tests.

Exclusion via A Future Alone has the strongest effect, and adheres to the Mood Numbness Hypothesis but not the Model of Ostracism.

**Effects of lab-induced exclusion differ by manipulation type.**

To understand the effects of exclusion on mood, threats to psychosocial needs, and post exclusion behavior, studies must be repeated using multiple manipulations.

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**References:**


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**Questions:**

- What are the differences between Ostracism, Rejection, and A Future Alone in terms of their impact on mood, psychosocial needs, and behavior?
- How do the models of Ostracism and Mood Numbness explain the mechanisms behind social exclusion?
- What are the implications of these findings for understanding social exclusion in real-life situations?