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Approaching extraverts: Socially excluded men prefer extraverted faces

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ABSTRACT

Social exclusion creates a powerful motivation for individuals to seek affiliation with others. Satisfying this affiliative motive would be facilitated by the ability to detect cues in others indicative of their own affiliative propensity. Given the association of extraverted personality with affiliative interest and social access, gravitating toward more extraverted others could serve to ensure satisfaction of one's own affiliation goals. Consistent with past research, we hypothesized that social exclusion (relative to social inclusion) would heighten preferences for faces that veridically connote extraversion. Results partially supported this primary hypothesis as socially excluded men upregulated their preferences for extraverted faces following an exclusionary experience, whereas no difference emerged for women's extraversion preferences based on inclusionary status. These findings suggest men favored the affiliative benefits of extraversion over its potential interpersonal costs following exclusion. Conversely, socially included men did not prefer extraverted faces, which could reflect greater wariness of dominant conspecifics, despite the potential gregariousness communicated in target faces, when such men's affiliative needs are adequately met. We frame these results using an evolutionary framework discussing how salient needs influence interpersonal preferences.

1. Introduction

Social support systems are crucial to humans' wellbeing and sense of belonging. Research finds greater social support is associated with successful coping in stressful life events and pursuing opportunities for growth and development (Feeney & Collins, 2015). People use various interpersonal cues to identify potentially supportive others, including information about their past behavior, both inferred through one's own observations and reports from others, and inferences about others' personality traits that may themselves be associated with sociality. Given their potential for extensive social networks and greater willingness to connect with other people (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Pollet, Roberts, & Dunbar, 2011), extraverted individuals could be particularly interested in providing social support and be especially desirable when one's affiliative needs have been thwarted through social exclusion.

To benefit from others' extraversion, it would thus be adaptive for humans to possess the ability to infer others' level of extraversion, in part, through an individual's appearance (Funder, 2012). Such accurate inferences could even occur with minimal information for more immediate assessments of another's social value quickly and efficiently (Borkenau, Mauer, Riemann, Spinath, & Angleitner, 2004). One channel through which inferences about another's extraversion can occur is through facial structures that reliably connote the trait (Sacco & Brown, 2018a; Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997). By obtaining a relatively accurate estimate of another's trait extraversion from brief exposure to another's face, those seeking affiliative opportunities would have an efficient channel for identifying how well another person could satisfy their affiliative needs. Given the enhanced affiliative interest of excluded individuals and their concomitant ability to infer others' affiliative intentions, particularly from facial information (Bernstein, Sacco, Brown, Young, & Claypool, 2010), social exclusion should adaptively augment preferences toward faces that connote extraversion.

1.1. Affiliative motives and social sensitivity

Humans possess a fundamental need to belong that motivates the pursuit of relatively stable social access to others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Such affiliation would provide access to the benefits of group living, including reciprocal altruism and alloparenting (Trivers, 1971). To facilitate inclusion, it has been hypothesized that humans evolved a sociometer, a psychological system alerting them to feelings of exclusion in the service of identifying affiliative opportunities, either through reparation of threatened existing relationships or the establishment of new ones, to ensure feelings of inclusion (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). This alarm system further elicits considerable desire to

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ensure access to those capable of satisfying belongingness needs. Those motivated to affiliate following an exclusionary experience become more prosocial (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007), contribute more in cooperative tasks in the service of signaling desirability (Williams & Sommer, 1997), and are more accepting of others with low social value (Sacco & Bernstein, 2015; Sacco, Brown, May, & Medlin, 2018).

It would further be adaptive for the sociometer to heighten perceptual acuity toward those affording greater affiliative opportunities. Exclusionary experiences heighten acuity and attention toward facial cues connoting another's affiliative interest (e.g., smiles; DeWall, Maner, & Rouby, 2009). Such experiences further increase accuracy at discerning between Duchenne smiles, a genuine affiliative signal, and non-Duchenne smiles, "fake" smiles, which possibly connote deceptive or non-affiliative intentions. Heightened smile discrimination is in the service of identifying high-probability affiliative opportunities and avoiding non-affiliative others following exclusion (Bernstein, Young, Brown, Sacco, & Claypool, 2008). This elicited sensitivity further increases preferences to engage those displaying Duchenne smiles compared to non-Duchenne smiles, which could be in the service of increasing opportunities for engaging those most interested in affiliation (Bernstein et al., 2010).

1.2. Benefits of and identifying extraversion

Extraverted individuals are especially sociable and would therefore be desirable among those seeking affiliation (Anderson & Shirako, 2008; Ashton & Lee, 2007). The extensive social networks of more extraverted persons would afford those sensitive to cues connoting another's extraversion considerable downstream social benefits in the form of access to extraverts' extensive social networks, ensuring affiliative opportunities that would benefit survival and reproductive fitness (Pollet et al., 2011). With these social benefits, it becomes incumbent upon individuals to recognize features of another that connote extraversion in the service of identifying affiliative opportunities. Individuals can infer others' personality through their physical appearance, particularly the interpersonal components of extraversion (Borkenau et al., 2004). Extraverted individuals are also more likely to display positive emotionality, such as smiling more (Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009), which could suggest the preference for affiliative signals following social exclusion could serve to identify individuals with sociable personalities (e.g., Bernstein et al., 2010; DeWall et al., 2009). These personality inferences could subsequently inform perceivers of an individual's likely behavioral repertoire, thus indicating that individual's social value.

The human face is a robust social stimulus from which individuals can infer considerable information about conspecifics, including their personality and behavioral intentions (Parkinson, 2005). In fact, research has identified typical facial structures of various personality traits. For example, using composites of faces of individuals who completed a personality inventory, Little and Perrett (2007) created images connoting the typical facial structures of individuals who are high and low on the Big Five traits. Importantly, extraversion was the most accurately inferred in these structures, and this inference occurs within 150 ms of exposure (Borkenau, Brecke, Möttig, & Paelecke, 2009; Little & Perrett, 2007). The identification of facially communicated personality would subsequently elicit recognition of the target's affordances and form the basis of a preference as a function of the perceiver's salient social motives (Sacco & Brown, 2018a). Thus, individuals may be able to recognize the beneficial affiliative opportunities in an extraverted face. Dispositionally heightened affiliative motives heighten preferences for facially communicated extraversion (Brown & Sacco, 2017a), suggesting individuals recognized the sociability of prospective conspecifics to ensure access to affiliative opportunities. However, previous research is limited insofar as there was no consideration of acutely activated affiliative motives. It would nonetheless seem sensible to predict that an acute exclusionary experience would heighten preferences for facially communicated extraversion.

1.3. Current research

The current research sought to extend previous research suggesting a social desirability of extraversion, particularly following exclusionary experiences. Given extraverted individuals' affiliative nature (e.g., Pollet et al., 2011), and the fact that social exclusion heightens preferences for cues connoting genuine affiliative intent (Bernstein et al., 2010), we predicted exclusionary experiences would heighten preferences for extraverted faces in the service of ingratiating oneself with an optimally affiliative person.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

We recruited 253 participants from a public university in Southeast U.S. for course credit. A power analysis indicated that a study of 200 participants would sufficiently detect small-medium effects (Cohen's $f = 0.15$, $\beta = 0.95$). We deliberately oversampled in case we had to exclude data from analyses. A computer malfunction during one session resulted in excluding one participant from final analyses ($n = 252$; 169 Women, 83 Men; $M_{Age} = 20.01$, $SD = 3.37$; 47.6% Black, 45.2% White, 7.2% Other).[1]

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Cyberball

Participants played an online ball-tossing game, ostensibly with other students, through a simulated Cyberball interaction (Williams & Jarvis, 2006). Three other players were preprogrammed agents who either included or excluded participants in the game. Exclusion occurred when the agents ceased throwing the ball to participants ($n = 124$), whereas continued passing of the ball constituted inclusion ($n = 128$). Following Cyberball, participants completed a manipulation check including a Basic Needs Questionnaire (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). Operating along 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = *Not at All*; 5 = *Extremely*), Basic Needs items assessed need satisfaction related to belongingness, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence (4 items each; $\alpha s > 0.73$). Basic Needs scores were highly related ($\alpha = 0.89$), prompting us to average scores into a single score (Bernstein, Sacco, Young, & Hugenberg, 2014; Sacco & Bernstein, 2015; Sacco et al., 2018). Participants also indicated their positive and negative affect (4 items each; $\alpha s > 0.85$), and how painful they found Cyberball (2 items; $r = 0.58$).

2.2.2. Facial extraversion

Participants indicated preferences among face pairs manipulated to communicate high and low levels of extraversion (Brown & Sacco, 2016; see Fig. 1). Faces were 20 unique Caucasian individuals of both sexes between the ages of 18–40 years, which were subsequently morphed with extraverted and introverted (i.e., low-extraversion) composite face prototypes connoting high and low levels of

[1] Because of the possibility that White and non-White participants could have differential preferences for extraversion in Caucasian faces (i.e., cross-race effect; Young, Hugenberg, Bernstein, & Sacco, 2012), especially considering the relatively even split between White and non-White participants in this sample, we conducted an exploratory analysis to consider whether participant race moderated these findings (i.e., White versus non-White participants). The effects reported in this paper were not moderated by race nor was there a main effect of race, $Fs < 1.64$, $ps > 0.20$.

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