Social Inclusion Leads Individuals to Devalue Groups of Perceived Inferior Quality

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Much is known about how social exclusion influences affiliation interest; however, little research has explored how social inclusion affects individuals’ affiliative tendencies, such as their evaluation of their existing group memberships and interest in additional affiliative opportunities. We hypothesized that, because socially included individuals’ self-esteem and belongingness needs have been satiated, these individuals might display a reduced tendency to derive self-esteem benefits from negative (but not positive) groups to which they belong as well as reduced interest in joining lower status groups compared to individuals in a social exclusion or control condition. In 2 studies, individuals completed a writing task to activate feelings of inclusion, exclusion, or a control state. Study 1 participants then indicated their collective self-esteem associated with a positive and negative group to which they were a member. Social inclusion participants reported reduced collective self-esteem, specifically public collective self-esteem, from negative group memberships, compared to control and social exclusion participants (all participants reported deriving similar levels of collective self-esteem from positive group memberships). Study 2 participants were asked to indicate their interest in joining sororities/fraternities that varied in prestige and ease of entry. Compared to social exclusion and control participants, social inclusion participants showed reduced interest in joining a relatively low prestige fraternity/sorority that was easier to obtain membership into. Collectively, these 2 studies indicate that social inclusion leads individuals to set a higher criterion for personal group membership.

Keywords: social inclusion, groups, identity, self-esteem

Humans are intensely social animals that crave affiliation. Evidence for the pervasiveness of this belongingness need is supported by research indicating that social exclusion is an aversive experience (e.g., leads to low self-esteem; Leary, 1990) that often prompts efforts to regain social affiliation following an episode of social exclusion (e.g., Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007). Indeed, research demonstrates numerous reaffiliative tendencies associated with the experience of social exclusion, such as increased behavioral mimicry (a behavior shown to increase liking; Lakin, Chartrand, & Arkin, 2008), more prosocial behavior (allowing the excluded individual to appear as an attractive potential interaction partner; Maner et al., 2007), and more effort on a collective task (Williams & Sommer, 1997). Thus, so-
cially excluded individuals enact behaviors that might facilitate subsequent affiliation.

However, relatively little research has explored how the experience of social inclusion influences individuals’ social motivational tendencies. Indeed, the experience of social inclusion is treated much like a control condition (i.e., people generally feel socially included at baseline and social exclusion is the primary form of deviation from this baseline; cf., Riva, Williams, Torstrick, & Montali, 2014). This view suggests that individuals strive to achieve social inclusion as an end state and few attempts have been made to derive inclusion-specific hypotheses. Nonetheless, there are strong theoretical reasons to suggest that the experience of social inclusion might be a cue to adopt differential strategies for navigating one’s social environment.

For example, Brown, Young, Sacco, Bernstein, and Claypool (2009) have used a life history theory framework (Kaplan & Gangestad, 2005) to explain how social inclusion provides a proximal cue for individuals to pursue alternative affiliation strategies. Specifically, social inclusion leads individuals to become more interested in affiliation associated with mating, compared to social exclusion (or a control experience). Thus, whereas prior research demonstrates that social exclusion leads to an increase in general affiliation interest, this more recent work reveals that social inclusion leads to an increased interest in sexual affiliation. These authors suggest that social inclusion provides individuals with greater access to group resources that allow them to pursue mating more vigorously, a luxury not as readily available to socially excluded persons. Extending this logic, Sacco, Brown, Young, Bernstein, and Hugenberg (2011) found that social inclusion leads men to display more interest in engaging in risky and aggressive mating strategies (compared to social exclusion or a control experience), again arguing that the increased awareness of the resources provided by stable group membership allows included men to pursue an alternative mating strategy compared to socially excluded men (or men in a control condition).

While these previous findings relate the experience of social inclusion to fluctuations in mating behavior, their underlying logic suggests that the resources provided by existing social group memberships allow individuals to engage in alternative affiliation strategies (e.g., pursuing mating opportunities as opposed to general social affiliation) as well as strategies that, although potentially having a high payoff, can also have vast negative consequences (e.g., risky mating strategies that might facilitate mating opportunities, but may risk social reproba-

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sense to demonstrate disinterest in joining lower status groups, because affiliation with such groups is not necessary for self-esteem benefits. This latter strategy would conserve resources for additional (and potentially superior) affiliative opportunities in the future.

Indeed, recent research finds that individuals do not view all forms of social inclusion as desirable. For example, social inclusion by groups that individuals have a low desire to belong to can arouse aggressive thoughts toward the accepting group (Greenaway, Jetten, Ellemers, & van Bunderen, 2015). In one study, international students who had a low desire for inclusion in a host society behaved more aggressively when they were informed that the host society accepted them. In another study, individuals who experienced inclusion (i.e., were accepted into a workgroup) displayed more implicit aggressive cognitions when they did not desire to be included by that group (Greenaway et al., 2015). These findings suggest that individuals have different motives for pursuing affiliations that determine whether social inclusion by another group is deemed desirable or undesirable (i.e., the extent to which they want to be associated with that group).

The current studies intended to expand upon these previous findings in two critical ways. First, we tested the hypothesis that individuals primed with social inclusion might display a differential tendency to derive self-esteem benefits from groups to which they belong. For example, past research demonstrates that individuals will attempt to distance themselves, psychologically, from a group that they belong to (social mobility) if that group possesses negative distinctiveness (Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, & Hodge, 1996). Thus, we hypothesized that when individuals experience social inclusion, relative to social exclusion or a control experience, they should be less motivated to derive self-esteem benefits from groups to which they belong that are perceived (or they perceive) as negative (i.e., socially devalued groups). According to social identity theory, part of an individual’s self-esteem is derived from the groups to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

However, most individuals are members of many groups, which vary in the extent to which they are relatively negative (e.g., lower status, deviant) or positive (e.g., higher status, nondeviant). Although these various groups can offer individuals self-esteem benefits through membership, individuals may strategically vary the degree to which they derive self-esteem benefits from such groups.

Collective self-esteem (CSE) represents the extent to which individuals derive self-esteem benefits from a group, and a person’s social identity is a function of how one privately evaluates one’s groups, how one believes others evaluate those groups, and how identified one is with those groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In accordance with this logic, Luhtanen and Crocker’s (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES) assesses how individuals privately evaluate their social groups (Private CSE), how individuals believe others evaluate their social groups (Public CSE), the role of one’s group memberships in one’s self concept (Importance to Identity), and an individual’s sense of how well they function as members of their social groups (Membership SE).

In our first study, we hypothesized that individuals would demonstrate different patterns of CSE with respect to positive and negative groups to which they already belong, depending on whether they had been primed with an experience of social inclusion or exclusion. Specifically, because social inclusion leads individuals’ to experience belongingness satisfaction, included participants may temporarily display a reduced tendency to derive self-esteem from negative groups to which they already belong, relative to socially excluded individuals. Because their self-esteem and belonging have increased from recalling a social inclusion experience, these individuals may feel they can afford to down-regulate the extent to which they derive self-esteem benefits from negative group memberships, compared to those recalling a social exclusion or control experience. For more positively perceived groups to which individuals already belong, we did not anticipate any effects of inclusionary status because positive group memberships should be consistently emphasized as a means of deriving self-esteem benefits. Additionally, and in a more exploratory fashion, we sought to determine which aspects of collective self-esteem with respect to a particular group membership might fluctuate as a consequence of reliving an experience of social inclusion or exclusion.
Our second study was designed to test the additional hypothesis that being primed with social inclusion should lead individuals to be more judicious in the interest they have in additional social affiliative opportunities. Although various kinds of groups provide affiliation, they also vary with respect to the effort and resources required to gain membership as well as relative prestige. Thus, individuals must determine if a group is worth investing in for the attainment of social affiliation. Because individuals who have been primed with social inclusion may be more aware of their satiated belongingness, they may be inclined to set a more stringent criterion for joining groups, reflected in a reduced interest in joining low status groups (compared to social exclusion and control participants). Socially included participants may feel that it is not worth investing in additional group memberships if those memberships do not provide additional status benefits. Although this strategy potentially risks losing out on subsequent affiliation opportunities, socially included individuals can afford to demonstrate less interest in low status groups (thereby conserving resources to potentially invest in higher quality future affiliative opportunities).

To test these hypotheses, we conducted two studies in which we used a writing prompt to prime individuals with an experience of social inclusion, social exclusion, or a control experience. Study 1 participants then identified a positive and negative group to which they belonged, and reported the collective self-esteem benefits of each group membership. Although participants across all three conditions derived equivalent CSE benefits from positive group memberships, socially included participants reported reduced CSE benefits, specifically Public CSE, from negative group memberships (compared to control and social exclusion condition participants). Study 2 participants indicated their interest in joining a series of fraternities/sororities that varied in their prestige and ease of entry. Although participants across conditions indicated similar interest in joining the relatively high quality sororities/fraternities that were more difficult to successfully join, socially included participants were less interested than were control or socially excluded participants in joining the lowest prestige group.

**Study 1**

**Participants**

Eighty individuals (51 women) volunteered to participate in exchange for partial course credit (mean age = 20.80 years, SD = 3.57 years). Two participants were excluded for failing to write an essay on the topic they were instructed to write about. One additional participant reported that they had a negative experience earlier in the day, prior to the study, which influenced their responses; as such, we removed these five participants’ data from the analyses, resulting in a final sample of 75 participants.

**Materials**

**Basic Needs Scale.** We included the Basic Needs Scale (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000) as a manipulation check to ensure that our inclusionary status manipulation was effective. This scale measures four social needs shown to vary with the experience of social inclusion and exclusion: belonging (e.g., “I felt like I belonged to the group.”), control (e.g., “I felt I had control over the course of the event.”), self-esteem (e.g., “I felt good about myself.”), and meaningful existence (e.g., “I felt meaningless.”). We also asked participants to indicate their positive (good, friendly, pleasant, happy) and negative mood (bad, unfriendly, angry, sad) stemming from the event that they wrote about. For all questions, participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely). There were five individual questions assessing each need (these scales were adapted from Wirth, Lynam, & Williams, 2010; see Bernstein & Claypool, 2012b for the complete scale).

**Collective Self-Esteem Scale.** The main dependent measures for this study included two modified versions of the CSES (Luhtanen &
Crocker, 1992). The CSES contains 16 questions that represent four facets of collective self-esteem; we altered the questions so that they referred to the particular group that participants were prompted to reference when completing the scale: Membership Self-Esteem (Membership SE; e.g., “I am a worthy member of this group.”), Private CSE (e.g., “In general, I am glad to be a member of this group.”), Public CSE (e.g., “Overall, this group is considered good by others.”), and Importance to Identity (Identity; e.g., “In general, belonging to this group is an important part of my self-image.”). Participants completed this scale twice, once for a positive group membership and once for a negative group membership (presentation order of positive and negative CSES was randomized between participants). Specifically, participants were given the following instructions to use as a guide when completing the CSES:

We are all members of different social groups or social categories. We would like you to consider a group that you belong to that you consider POSITIVE [NEGATIVE] in responding to the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these statements; we are interested in your honest reactions and opinions.

Participants then completed the CSES for each group membership using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree).

Procedure

After providing informed consent, participants were told that the study was about perceptions of social groups. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three inclusionary status conditions on a between-participants basis. Social exclusion condition participants were asked to “Write about a time in which you felt rejected or excluded by others.” Social inclusion condition participants were asked to “Write about a time in which you felt socially included or accepted by others.” and control condition participants were asked to, “Write about your day yesterday (e.g., what you did).” This manipulation of inclusionary status has been found to consistently elicit the intended experiences of social inclusion and exclusion, respectively (Maner et al., 2007; Sacco, Bernstein, Young, & Hugenberg, 2014; Sacco et al., 2011; Sacco, Young, & Hugenberg, 2014). Participants were instructed to type for approximately 5 min and to provide as much detail as possible regarding the experience.

Following this recall task, participants were asked to complete the Basic Needs Scale (as the inclusionary status manipulation check), followed by the positive group CSES and negative group CSES for the group that they were prompted to think about in each case (CSES order randomized between-participants). Finally, participants completed a brief demographics form, were thanked for their participation, and were debriefed.

Results

Manipulation check. Because each basic need scale had satisfactory reliability (belonging: $\alpha = .82$; self-esteem: $\alpha = .91$; control: $\alpha = .81$; meaningful existence: $\alpha = .83$), we created a composite score for each basic need. One-way between-subjects analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed a significant main effect of condition for belonging, $F(2, 72) = 32.81, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .477$, self-esteem, $F(2, 72) = 23.37, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .394$, control, $F(2, 72) = 15.73, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .304$, and meaningful existence, $F(2, 72) = 16.67, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .316$ (Table 1 for descriptive statistics). Follow-up analyses (Tukey’s honestly significant difference [HSD] tests) revealed that social inclusion condition participants reported greater belonging than both control, $d = .70$, and social exclusion condition participants, $d = 2.17$; control condition participants reported greater belonging than exclusion condition participants, $d = 1.25$. Social inclusion condition participants reported higher self-esteem than both control, $d = .71$, and exclusion condition participants, $d = 2.00$; control condition participants reported higher self-esteem than exclusion condition participants, $d = 1.25$. Both social inclusion, $d = 1.00$, and control condition participants, $d = 1.64$, reported more control than exclusion condition participants; inclusion and control condition participants did not differ in their reported levels of control, $d = .53$. Both social inclusion, $d = 1.49$, and control condition participants, $d = 1.23$, reported more meaningful existence than exclusion condition participants; inclusion and control condition participants did not differ in their reported meaningful existence, $d = .37$.  


For positive mood, there was a significant effect of inclusionary status, $F(2, 72) = 18.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .342$; social inclusion participants reported more positive mood than both control, $d = .99$, and social exclusion participants, $d = 1.77$; control condition participants reported more positive mood than social exclusion condition participants, $d = .77$. For negative mood, there was also a significant effect of inclusionary status, $F(2, 72) = 17.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .332$; both social inclusion, $d = 1.51$, and control participants, $d = 1.43$, reported less negative mood than social exclusion condition participants; social inclusion and control condition participants did not differ in negative mood, $d = .23$. Thus, the inclusionary status manipulation was effective; the social inclusion prime led individuals to report greater levels of belonging, self-esteem, control, meaningful existence, and positive mood as well as less negative mood compared to the social exclusion prime (with control participants generally falling somewhere in the middle).

**Primary dependent measure: CSE.** Participants across conditions were able to identify group memberships they considered more or less positive: positive group memberships included a close group of friends, church organizations, and volunteer organizations; negative group memberships included groups that individuals “party with,” unemployed individuals, and the category of single moms.

We first computed the reliability of the four subscales of the CSES, for positive and negative group evaluations, respectfully. For the negative group CSES, the subscales were reliable: Identity ($\alpha = .74$), Membership SE ($\alpha = .73$), Private CSE ($\alpha = .87$), Public CSE ($\alpha = .78$). The subscales for the positive group CSES were reliable: Identity ($\alpha = .75$), Membership SE ($\alpha = .77$), Private CSE ($\alpha = .79$), Public CSE ($\alpha = .64$).

To test our primary hypothesis, we conducted a 3 Condition (social inclusion, control, social exclusion) × 2 Group (Positive Group, Negative Group) × 4 CSES subscale (Importance to Identity, Membership SE, Private CSE, Public CSE) mixed model ANOVA, with repeated measures over the second and third factors (Table 2 for descriptive statistics and pairwise comparisons). This analysis yielded a significant effect of group, $F(1, 72) = 193.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .729$; not surprisingly, participants reported higher overall CSE for positive ($M = 5.91, SE = .09$) relative to negative group memberships ($M = 3.70, SE = .13$). However, this main effect of group was qualified by an interaction between group and CSES subscale, $F(3, 216) = 8.97$, $p < .001, \eta^2_p = .111$. Follow-up analyses indicated that participants reported greater Membership SE for positive group ($M = 6.01, SE = .11$) relative to negative group memberships ($M = 4.14, SE = .15$), $d = 2.46$, greater Private CSE for positive group ($M = 6.18, SE = .11$) relative to negative group memberships ($M = 3.55, SE = .18$), $d = 2.87$, greater Public CSE for positive group ($M = 5.87, SE = .10$) relative to negative group memberships ($M = 3.58, SE = .16$), $d = 2.59$, and greater Identity for positive group ($M = 5.60, SE = .13$) relative to negative group memberships ($M = 3.58, SE = .16$), $d = 2.65$ (all $p$s < .001). Thus, although individuals reported greater CSE for positive group memberships across the subscales, this effect was largest for Private CSE and smallest for Membership SE.

Importantly, this analysis yielded a significant interaction between group and condition, $F(2, 72) = 3.11$, $p = .051, \eta^2_p = .080$. Consistent with our hypothesis, simple effects analyses

| Table 1: Basic Needs and Mood Data Across Inclusionary Status Condition |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Item                        | Social inclusion            | Control                     | Social exclusion             |
| Belonging                   | 4.11 (.20)$^a$              | 3.50 (.16)$^b$              | 2.15 (.17)$^c$              |
| Self-esteem                 | 3.98 (.22)$^a$              | 3.24 (.21)$^b$              | 2.03 (.18)$^b$              |
| Control                     | 3.13 (.20)$^a$              | 3.58 (.15)$^a$              | 2.18 (.19)$^b$              |
| Meaningful existence        | 4.03 (.20)$^a$              | 3.70 (.17)$^a$              | 2.53 (.21)$^b$              |
| Positive mood               | 4.06 (.25)$^a$              | 2.88 (.24)$^b$              | 1.98 (.23)$^c$              |
| Negative mood               | 1.90 (.24)$^a$              | 2.14 (.19)$^a$              | 3.52 (.20)$^b$              |

Note. Standard error of the mean is in parentheses. Entries in the same row that do not share a superscript differ at $p < .05$ according to Tukey’s HSD.
revealed that for negative group memberships, inclusion condition participants reported marginally lower overall CSE ($M = 3.26, SE = .23$) than control condition participants ($M = 3.81, SE = .23, p = .094, d = .49$) and significantly less CSE than social exclusion condition participants ($M = 4.04, SE = .22, p = .017, d = .71$). CSE for negative group memberships did not differ between control and social exclusion condition participants, $p = .47, d = .21$. For positive group memberships, there were no significant differences in CSE across the three conditions (all $ps > .30$).

However, all of these effects were subsumed within a significant three-way interaction between condition, group, and CSES subscale, $F(6, 216) = 2.93, p = .009, \eta^2_p = .075$. To decompose this interaction, we conducted four Condition × Group mixed-model ANOVAs, with repeated measures over the second factor; one for each of the four CSES subscales. These analyses revealed only a main effect of group for the Membership SE, $F(1, 72) = 113.29, p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .611$, and Importance to Identity subscales, $F(1, 72) = 130.18, p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .644$; there was no main effect of condition nor an interaction between condition and group (all $ps > .25$); thus, participants reported greater Membership SE for positive relative to negative group memberships and greater Importance to Identity for positive relative to negative group memberships, regardless of inclusionary status condition.

There was a main effect of group for the Private CSE, $F(1, 72) = 168.42, p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .701$, and Public CSE subscales, $F(1, 72) = 147.37, p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .672$; participants reported greater Private CSE for positive relative to negative group memberships and greater Public CSE for positive relative to negative group memberships. Importantly, there was an interaction between condition and group for the Private CSE subscale, $F(2, 72) = 3.81, p = .027, \eta^2_p = .096$. Simple effects tests revealed no significant effect of condition for positive group memberships; however, for negative group memberships, social inclusion condition participants reported significantly less Private CSE than did social exclusion condition participants, $d = .54$; no additional effects emerged. For the Public CSE subscale, there was an interaction between condition and group, $F(2, 72) = 6.46, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .152$. Simple effects test revealed no significant effect of condition for positive group memberships; however, for negative group memberships, social inclusion condition participants reported significantly less Public CSE than did both social exclusion, $d = 1.03$, and control condition participants, $d = .94$ (social exclusion and control participants did not differ in their reported Public CSE for negative group memberships, $d = .09$).

**Discussion**

Consistent with our hypothesis, social inclusion condition participants reported deriving less CSE from their negative group membership than did control or social exclusion condition participants. However, individuals across all three conditions reported deriving equivalent
levels of self-esteem from positive group memberships. In essence, because socially included participants are reminded of their satisfied belongingness, they may not need to rely on negative group memberships for self-esteem benefits, thus shielding them from any aversive effects of associating with a negative group. Although this would reduce the social affiliation benefits they could derive from that membership, they do not require affiliation with this negative group due to the fact that their belonging needs are currently satisfied. However, the experience of social inclusion does not lead to reduced reliance on positive group memberships for self-esteem benefits, perhaps because it is still valuable to prefer those memberships because of their positivity.

Importantly, and rather unexpectedly, the effect of social inclusion on CSE with respect to negative group memberships was driven almost entirely by socially included participants reporting reduced Public CSE. Thus, it seems that social inclusion may not influence general CSE with respect to negative group memberships, but Public CSE more specifically. Past research has found that low Public CSE can be a means of differentiating oneself from a group to which one belongs (Long & Spears, 1998). Thus, the fact that included participants displayed lower Public CSE scores could be taken as tentative evidence of an attempt to differentiate themselves from this negative group to which they belong. However, future research should determine the reliability of the effect of this specific subscale found in the current study.

Although these preliminary results are interesting, they offer only a limited understanding of how priming inclusion influences affiliative tendencies. Specifically, we asked participants to evaluate an already secured affiliation opportunity, which is different than evaluating new affiliation opportunities. Thus, although it seems like socially included individuals place less value on low status groups (i.e., derive less self-esteem benefits from negative groups they already belong to), compared to social exclusion and control participants, this does not tell us how they evaluate new opportunities for affiliation. This is particularly important, given our theoretical argument that social inclusion should create higher thresholds for joining potential groups that offer affiliative opportunities. Our second study was designed to directly test this hypothesis.

Specifically, following our inclusionary status manipulation, Study 2 participants viewed a series of fraternity or sorority descriptions that varied in both their prestige and ease of entry, and then rated their interest in joining each of these fraternities/sororities. Similar to our first study, we predicted that participants across conditions would display interest in joining the higher quality fraternities and sororities equivalently; however, we hypothesized that included participants would show less interest in joining the lowest quality fraternity/sorority, compared to control and excluded participants. Such a low prestige affiliative opportunity would fall short of the criterion for judging social groups that socially included persons might display. Given that belonging to social groups requires investment by an individual in that social group (e.g., time and resources), it was predicted that socially included participants would perceive less value in investing their resources in this low prestige group (as indexed by their reduced interest in joining this group compared to socially excluded and control participants).

Study 2

Participants

117 individuals (88 women) volunteered to participate in exchange for partial course credit (mean age = 20.74 years, SD = 2.98 years). Forty-six participants were Caucasian American, 65 participants were African American, two participants were Hispanic, one participant was American Indian, and one participant was Asian; two participants did not provide ethnicity information.

Materials

Basic needs questionnaire. We used the same basic needs and mood questionnaire from Study 1.

Greek life questionnaire. We designed the main dependent measure for this study to manipulate the “attractiveness” of entry into different groups by varying the perceived status of the groups as well as the probability of successfully gaining entry into each particular group. Specifically, we had participants imagine that
they were intending to pledge a particular fraternity (sorority) on campus. We used this manipulation because Greek life is reported as a significant and valued group membership on the university’s Office of Greek Life). Specifically, participants were provided with the following prompt (sorority-specific for female participants and fraternity-specific for male participants):

Imagine that you are new to college and it is “rush” week at your school. You are really interested in joining a sorority [fraternity] because you have heard that you will make lifelong friends and connections through this social opportunity. After talking to some fellow students to learn more about the opportunities to gain entry in one of these organizations, you find out that some of these sororities [fraternities] are considered better than others (are more valued and respected), but also these are the ones that are more challenging to get into. A friend who ‘rushed’ a couple of years ago and successfully gained entry into her [his] preferred sorority [fraternity] compiled the following information to help you determine how to invest your time during rush week.

Participants were asked to indicate their interest in joining four different sororities [fraternities] that varied in their prestige and entrance difficulty:

Sorority [Fraternity] 1: This is considered the most respected and valued sorority [fraternity] to gain entry into. However, individuals invest highly during rush week and only one in 12 people who rush gain entry.

Sorority [Fraternity] 2: This is considered a highly respected and valued sorority [fraternity] to gain entry into. It also requires a lot of investment during rush week and only one in nine people who rush gain entry.

Sorority [Fraternity] 3: This is considered a relatively respected and valued sorority [fraternity] to gain entry into. It requires some investment during rush week and one in six people who rush gain entry.

Sorority [Fraternity] 4: This is considered an acceptable sorority [fraternity] to gain entry into. It requires very little investment during rush week and one in three people who rush gain entry.

Participants were presented with these four descriptions (order randomized between participants) and were asked to indicate, “How interested would you be in joining this sorority [fraternity]?”), using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all interested; 7 = Very interested). Importantly, this dependent measure allowed us to determine the extent to which individuals might value the prestige of a particular sorority or fraternity, even though it might be harder group in which to gain entry.

Procedure

The procedure for our second study was identical to Study 1 except that the primary dependent measure was the Greek Life Survey described above. Specifically, upon obtaining informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of three inclusionary status writing prime conditions (inclusion, control, exclusion) on a between-participants basis. All participants then completed the basic needs and mood questionnaires, followed by the Greek Life Survey. Finally, participants completed a brief demographics questionnaire, were thanked for their participation, and were debriefed.

Results

Manipulation check. Because each basic need scale had satisfactory reliability (belonging: \(\alpha = .90\); self-esteem: \(\alpha = .91\); control: \(\alpha = .73\); meaningful existence: \(\alpha = .89\)), we created a composite score for each basic need. One-way between-subjects ANOVAs revealed a significant main effect of condition for belonging, \(F(2, 114) = 78.94, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .581\), self-esteem, \(F(2, 114) = 40.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .413\), control, \(F(2, 114) = 28.65, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .335\), and meaningful existence, \(F(2, 114) = 63.43, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .527\) (see Table 3 for descriptive statistics). Follow-up analyses (Tukey’s HSD tests) revealed that inclusion condition participants reported more belonging than both control, \(d = 1.10\), and social exclusion condition participants, \(d = 2.81\); control condition participants reported more belonging than exclusion condition participants, \(d = 1.76\). Inclusion condition participants reported higher self-esteem than both control, \(d = .76\), and exclusion condition participants, \(d =\)
2.05;control condition participants reported higher self-esteem than exclusion condition participants, $d = 1.22$. Both social inclusion, $d = 1.46$, and control condition participants, $d = 1.40$, reported more control than social exclusion condition participants; social inclusion and control condition participants did not differ in reported control, $d = .07$. For meaningful existence, Levene’s test for equal variances was violated, $F(2, 114) = 5.52, p = .005$; post hoc tests were conducted using the Games-Howell procedure. Social inclusion condition participants reported greater meaningful existence than both control, $d = .58$, and social exclusion condition participants, $d = 2.40$; control condition participants reported greater meaningful existence than social exclusion condition participants, $d = 1.75$.

For positive mood, there was a significant effect of inclusionary status condition, $F(2, 114) = 33.21, p < .001, \eta^2_g = .368$; social inclusion condition participants indicated more positive mood than control, $d = .75$, and social exclusion condition participants, $d = 2.00$; control condition participants reported more positive mood than social exclusion condition participants, $d = 1.09$. For negative mood, there was a significant effect of inclusionary status condition, $F(2, 114) = 50.90, p < .001, \eta^2_g = .472$; both social inclusion, $d = 2.06$, and control condition participants, $d = 1.70$, reported less negative mood than social exclusion condition participants; social inclusion and control condition participants’ reported negative mood did not differ, $d = .35$. Thus, the inclusionary status manipulation was again effective; the social inclusion prime led individuals to report greater levels of belonging, self-esteem, control, meaningful existence and positive mood as well as less negative mood than the social exclusion prime (with control participants generally falling somewhere in the middle).

**Primary dependent variable: Greek Life Survey.** To determine whether inclusionary status influences individuals’ preferences for entering groups that vary in prestige and probability of successful entry, we conducted a 3 Condition (inclusion, control, exclusion) $\times$ 4 Group Type (Status Group 1, Status Group 2, Status Group 3, Status Group 4) mixed model ANOVA, with repeated measures over the second factor. Not surprisingly, there was a significant main effect of group type, $F(3, 342) = 46.40, p < .001, \eta^2_g = .289$. Participants were equally interested in joining Status Group 1 ($M = 5.10, SE = .19$) and Status Group 2 ($M = 5.35, SE = .16$), $p = .169, d = .13$, but more interested in joining Status Group 1 and Status Group 2 than either Status Group 3 ($M = 4.10, SE = .14$), $ps < .001 (d = .55$ and .78, respectively) and Status Group 4 ($M = 3.06, SE = .17$), $ps < .001 (d = 1.03$ and 1.29, respectively); furthermore, individuals were more interested in joining Status Group 3 than Status Group 4 ($p < .001, d = .62$). Thus, participants showed a general tendency to prefer the higher status fraternities and sororities (i.e., those considered most prestigious and harder to gain entry into).

Importantly, and in support of our hypothesis, there was a significant interaction between group type and inclusionary status condition, $F(6, 342) = 2.26, p = .037, \eta^2_g = .038$ (see Table 4 for descriptive statistics). Simple effects tests largely supported our primary hypothesis. Specifically, there were no effects of condition for the “top” three status groups (all $ps > .160$). However, for the lowest status group (Group 4), simple effects revealed that social inclusion condition participants reported significantly less

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Social inclusion</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Social exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>4.41 (.11)</td>
<td>3.59 (.13)</td>
<td>1.96 (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>4.15 (.14)</td>
<td>3.44 (.16)</td>
<td>2.20 (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.55 (.12)</td>
<td>3.50 (.12)</td>
<td>2.29 (.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful existence</td>
<td>4.39 (.10)</td>
<td>3.97 (.13)</td>
<td>2.35 (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive mood</td>
<td>4.15 (.17)</td>
<td>3.29 (.20)</td>
<td>2.01 (.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative mood</td>
<td>1.52 (.13)</td>
<td>1.81 (.14)</td>
<td>3.49 (.18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Standard error of the mean is in parentheses. Entries in the same row that do not share a superscript differ at $p < .05$ according to Tukey’s HSD or the Games-Howell test.
interest in joining this group ($M = 2.44, SE = .29$) than social exclusion condition participants, $d = .67$, and marginally less interest in joining this group than control participants, $d = .39$. Interest in joining the lowest status group did not differ between control and social exclusion condition participants, $d = .28$. These results are consistent with our hypothesis that individuals primed with a social inclusion experience would be more judicious in their pursuit of social affiliation, specifically by demonstrating less interest in joining a relatively lower status group compared to individuals primed with social exclusion or individuals in a control condition.

**Mediation analyses.** Across both studies, we conducted exploratory mediational analyses, using each of the basic needs as well as positive and negative mood as individual mediators, to determine their influence on significant differences in outcome variables (i.e., CSES subscales in Study 1 and interest in joining sororities/fraternities in Study 2). Because there was an effect of inclusionary status condition for the Private and Public CSE subscales in Study 1 and the lowest quality fraternity/sorority in Study 2, we conducted 18 separate mediational models (6 potential mediators × 3 dependent measures that differed based on the inclusionary status manipulation; 18 models). Specifically, we used Preacher & Hayes’ (2008) PROCESS model and bootstrapping of 5,000 samples to estimate the 95% confidence interval. In all cases, the confidence interval included zero, suggesting no mediational effects across both studies.

**Discussion**

Consistent with our hypothesis, social inclusion condition participants reported less interest in joining the lowest quality group (i.e., low prestige fraternity/sorority) compared to social exclusion and control participants. Because social inclusion condition participants are aware of their satiated belonging needs, they can better afford to forgo this “low quality” affiliative opportunity. Importantly, socially included individuals were as interested in joining high quality, prestigious groups as participants in the other conditions. However, when the quality of the group reached a certain threshold indicative of low status, social inclusion condition participants were much more sensitive to this cue than were participants in the other conditions, and consequently displayed reduced interest in joining this group.

**General Discussion**

The current studies sought to test the hypothesis that social inclusion might lead individuals to set a higher criterion for acceptable group membership. Demonstrating a reduced propensity to derive self-esteem, specifically Public CSE in Study 1, from an existing group membership (negative group membership) and displaying decreased interest in joining additional social groups (low status groups) in Study 2 could potentially deprive an individual of belonging satisfaction. Nonetheless, individuals whose current belonging needs are satiated can better afford to display such selectivity in the pursuit of social affiliation, specifically by being motivated to affiliate with only relatively higher status groups. Such a luxury may not be as readily available to individuals whose belongingness needs are not currently satiated. Much as socially included individuals have been shown to shift their interest toward riskier mating strategies (Sacco et al., 2011), the current
research tested the hypothesis that socially included participants might become riskier in their social foraging more generally, preferring to derive self-esteem benefits from social groups they already belong to that are perceived positively, and demonstrating interest in additional affiliation opportunities only to the extent that they are offered by relatively high status groups.

In Study 1, whereas participants across all of the conditions reported similar levels of collective self-esteem benefits from positive group memberships, socially included individuals reported deriving less self-esteem benefits from negative group memberships, compared to participants in the social exclusion and control conditions, particularly less Public CSE; thus socially included participants, whose self-esteem needs may have been satiated, reported deriving less self-esteem from a negative group membership. Although this may eliminate a viable opportunity for self-esteem enhancement, included individuals could afford to take this risk, because they may not currently need this negative group for derivation of self-esteem. This also provides socially included individuals with the advantage of not having to be associated with a negatively perceived group. Indeed, to the extent that individuals in the current study viewed their negative group membership as a less successful or effective group membership than their positive group membership, these findings align well with research showing that individuals prefer to associate more strongly with a successful group that they belong to (i.e., basking in reflected glory), but to associate less strongly with a group they belong to when that group experiences failure (i.e., cutting off from reflected failure; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986). Specifically, whereas participants across the inclusionary status conditions reported an equally strong association with the positive group that they listed belonging to (basking in reflected glory), socially included participants were more likely than socially excluded and control participants to report a reduced association with a negative group they belonged to (cutting off from reflected failure).

In Study 2, although participants across conditions were equally interested in joining the higher prestige sororities/fraternities, participants in the social inclusion condition were less interested in joining the lowest quality sorority/fraternity than participants in the social exclusion (significantly) and control conditions (marginally). Thus, socially included participants seem to set a higher standard for pursuing additional social affiliative opportunities by showing less interest in joining a lower prestige fraternity/sorority than socially excluded or control participants. Taken together, these studies provide support for the hypothesis that social inclusion allows individuals to become more selective in how they pursue social affiliation, specifically by deriving reduced self-esteem benefits from negative group memberships and disinterest in joining lower status groups. Whereas past research has demonstrated that individuals who have been rejected by another group tend to identify more strongly with their current group (rejection-identification model; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), the current research, particularly our first study, reveals that the experience of social inclusion can also result in fluctuations in how people derive self-esteem benefits from the groups to which they belong.

It is also worth noting that across both studies, we tested whether changes in basic needs and mood mediated changes in CSE (Study 1) and interest in joining the lowest prestige group (Study 2). In neither study did fluctuations in basic needs satisfaction and mood mediate the findings. Although it was possible that changes in self-esteem, belonging, or mood following the manipulation of inclusionary status could have been viable mechanisms in the current study, past research has rarely shown that basic needs satisfaction and mood (which are often manipulation checks) are mechanistically responsible for outcomes following social inclusion and exclusion manipulations (cf., Bernstein, Sacco, Brown, Young, & Claypool, 2010). Thus, future research would benefit by identifying potential mediators for the current findings (e.g., entitlement).

There are, nonetheless, limitations to this research and future directions worthy of additional pursuit. For example, control and excluded participants were equally willing to join groups of lower prestige, but there likely are circumstances under which excluded people may act differently than control participants. For example, given the importance of group belonging, particularly to excluded people, exclusion may result in individuals setting an even
lower threshold for acceptable groups than we saw in the current studies. In other words, it is possible that there are groups that control condition participants would not be willing to join but that excluded people would consider to meet their belonging needs (e.g., a sorority or fraternity with a negative reputation may be more appealing to socially rejected individuals because affiliation in this more negatively viewed group may be better than no affiliative opportunity at all).

Additionally, Study 2 simultaneously manipulated the groups’ prestige, effort to join, and probability of attaining membership. It is likely that each of these factors contribute to the risk of pursuing membership in a particular group (i.e., it is risky to display interest in a high prestige group that requires a lot of effort to join and has a low probability of actually being selected for membership), and future research should determine the independent impact of each of these factors. It is also the case that much like social exclusion, social inclusion is not a unitary construct and that different kinds of social inclusion might lead to different patterns of CSE and interest in joining a group than that documented in the current study.

Generalizing this to other manipulations of inclusion and exclusion would also be of value. While often manipulations of inclusion and exclusion lead to similar outcomes, recent work reveals that this is not always the case (Bernstein & Claypool, 2012a, 2012b); indeed, recent research suggests that compared to autobiographical recall manipulations, in vivo manipulations are capable of producing stronger responses in participants (Godwin et al., 2014). Thus, examining how the effects of in vivo inclusionary status manipulations compare to the effects of the autobiographical manipulation utilized in the current study would bolster support for our findings and help determine whether our findings are moderated by the type of inclusion experience.

**Conclusion**

Much past research has documented how the experience of social exclusion influences affiliation interest and behavior. The current studies explored the hypothesis that, when immediate affiliation needs are satisfied, socially included persons should demonstrate affiliation strategies that devalue interest in low status groups. Consistent with this hypothesis, socially included individuals (compared to socially excluded and control experience individuals) reported deriving less self-esteem from their negative group memberships and reduced interest in joining a low status group.

**References**


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