Motivational Effects of Need to Belong on Intergroup Memory in Minimal Groups

Rachel C. O’Connor, Jay J. Van Bavel, & William A. Cunningham
The Ohio State University, Department of Psychology

Research Question
How do social motivations, specifically the need to belong, affect memory bias for group members?

Introduction
Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982) posits that people categorize themselves and others in terms of group affiliations and favor their ingroup. People can be categorized into multiple, cross-cutting, and overlapping social categories. For example, a Black male Ohio State student is a simultaneous member of his racial, gender, and university group. Making overlapping social identities salient can reduce the amount of ingroup bias by decreasing intergroup differentiation (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007).

Hypotheses
- People who are ostracised and made high in need to belong before being assigned to mixed-gender minimal group should show greater ingroup bias, in the form of greater memory for ingroup faces, compared to people in an inclusion condition.
- This effect should appear regardless of the gender of ingroup members.
- This effect should not be due to a change in emotional state.

Methods
- Participants: 140 white undergraduates (69 males)
- Design: 2 (gender: male, female) x 2 (group: ingroup, outgroup) x 3 (ostracism: included, excluded, control) mixed design
- Part A (Independent Variable = ostracism):
  - Randomly assigned to one of three conditions (Cohen, Aronson, & Steele, 2000).
  - Included: Wrote about a time they felt especially included in an important social group.
  - Excluded: Wrote about a time they felt excluded from an important social group.
  - Control: Wrote about a time they ate on the previous day.
- We hypothesized that participants in the included condition would become low in the need to belong and participants in the excluded condition would become high in the need to belong.
- Part B (Independent Variables = group and gender):
  - Randomly assigned to one of two mixed-gender teams, Sun or Moons, or a control condition.
  - Participants completed the following tasks in the following order:
    - Learning Task: Shown faces + team label for 4s.
    - Memory Task: Indicated if had seen face during Learning Task. Responses indicate how much participants attended to each face.

Results
- In the memory task, there was a marginal group x ostracism interaction, F(2,274)=2.56, p=.085.
- Compared to participants who wrote about a time they felt especially included and the control condition, participants who wrote about a time they felt excluded showed greater memory for ingroup members.

Conclusion
- As predicted, people who wrote about a time they were excluded and presumably had a heightened need to belong had greater memory for their ingroup, regardless of gender.
- This finding adds to previous research that has shown that assignment to a minimal mixed-gender group leads to preference for ingroup members, regardless of race.
- Ostracism caused participants to become high in need to belong and altered their affiliation goals.
- They were so desperate to reaffirm their social identity, that they showed greater bias when given the chance to join a group, even a minimal one.
- This finding adds to Crisp & Hewstone’s model of multiple social categorization, by showing that social motivation can alter the way people are perceived.
- The lack of significant changes in emotion, suggest that ostracism is different from core affect.

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References