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**Rejecting to Be Respected:
Maintaining Perceived Regard through Rejection**

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Maintaining Perceived Regard through Rejection**

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Dedication

To my family.

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Rejecting to Be Respected: Maintaining Perceived Regard through Rejection

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People report that they find it difficult and unpleasant to reject, so why do they do it? The devastating consequences of social rejection are well researched yet we know very little about why people reject in circumstances other than antisocial bullying. One possibility is that threat to one's own perceived regard may actually promote the likelihood that one will reject others. To test this question, the present research examines (a) how perceived regard affects rejection (Experiments 1 and 2) and (b) two potential mediators of the connection between perceived regard and rejection (Experiment 3: discernment; Experiment 4: empathy). Experiment 1 manipulated perceived regard while participants made decisions about whether to reject or accept candidates hoping to join the participants' group. People are more likely to reject when they experience the possibility of losing perceived regard, but not when they experience the possibility of gaining perceived regard. In Experiment 2, the concept of perceived regard is further broken down into two elements: group membership and respect, and findings show that threat to respect, not group membership, increased the tendency to reject others. Both Experiments

3 and 4 found null results for the potential mediators of discernment and empathy.

Overall, the findings suggest that people engage in social rejection to prevent a loss of respect from their peers. The present research provides a starting point for considering motivations to socially reject. By better understanding sources of rejection, research can create more effective social rejection interventions. If people are more likely to reject others when they are concerned about their respect, one way to decrease the negative side effects of social rejection is to intervene with the source rather than the target.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What would you do if you happily ate lunch with four coworkers every week, and your coworkers did not want to include anyone else, but a friend of yours asked to join? Would you invite your friend along anyway and risk losing the positive regard your group has for you? Research does not have a great answer to this question because research on social rejection has mostly focused on the devastating consequences for the target and the need to develop interventions to mitigate damage to the target (e.g., Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002; DeWall & Bushman, 2011; Leary, 1990; Slavich, Way, Eisenberger, & Taylor, 2010; Williams, 2007a,b; Williams & Nida, 2011). Yet interventions would benefit from an understanding of both the source and target including insight into sources' motivations and how those motivations can be altered. The little that is known about sources of rejection (i.e. someone who denies a request for social inclusion) suggests that sources find it unpleasant, difficult and potentially reputation-damaging (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993; Chen, Poon, Bernstein, & Teng, 2014; Ciarocco, Sommer, & Baumeister, 2001; Kashy & Poulsen, 2012; Legate, DeHaan, Weinstein, & Ryan, 2013; Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, & Baumeister, 2001; Sommer & Yoon, 2013; Williams, Bernieri, Faulkner, Grahe, & Gada-Jain, 2000; Williams & Sommer, 1997). Therefore, the question of the mechanisms that underlie decisions to reject others remains unanswered. The current research begins to address this gap by examining whether the desire to maintain perceived regard increases the tendency to reject and investigating potential mediators for the relationship between perceived regard and rejection rates.

WHY DO PEOPLE SOCIALLY REJECT?

Why do people socially reject others? One answer that may spring to mind is that a person socially rejects because he or she does not like the other person. In other words, sources may be motivated to reject a target when that target exhibits behaviors that the source finds unpleasant (e.g., a source may reject a target who is unkind to animals). However, this is not always the case. People are reluctant to reject others, including individuals they do like as well as those they do not like (Joel, Teper, & MacDonald, 2014). Therefore, it is important to consider other factors that may influence the tendency to reject.

Ironically, it might be the desire to maintain one's own acceptance that motivates decisions to reject others. For example, research on bullying provides some insight into how the need to belong may influence rejection in bullying situations. This research raises the possibility that the desire to maintain perceived regard motivates people to reject others. When asked for an explanation of why they bully, bullies sometimes cite group pressure and maintenance of group affiliation with their friends (Burns, Maycock, Cross, & Brown, 2008). That is, bullies engage in rejection at least partially because they are concerned with how their peers view them.

Yet this research may or may not answer the question of why non-bullies socially reject others. Bullies are not a representative population in terms of studying more general social rejection because of their wide range of antisocial behavior. For example, only 10% of school samples are characterized as bullies (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Solberg & Olweus, 2002), while 67% of an adult sample admitted to socially rejecting another person at least once (Faulkner, Williams, Sherman, & Williams, 1997).

Furthermore, social rejection in non-bullying populations may not always be repeated against the same person or targeted at someone of unequal power. Therefore, the question remains as to why people who do not fit the bullying profile engage in rejection and whether perceived regard may play a role in their decisions to reject.

THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED REGARD ON SOCIAL REJECTION: MAINTENANCE VS. PROMOTION? GROUP MEMBERSHIP VS. RESPECT?

Perceived regard is one way in which people are able to assess whether their need to belong is being met (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In other words, people feel a sense of belongingness when they know that others view them in a positive light. The desire to maintain perceived regard is a strong driving force in much of human behavior because people experience intense negative reactions their regard is decreased. For example, decreased perceived regard is associated with a range of negative consequences ranging from enhanced physical pain (Eisenberger, Jarcho, Lieberman, Naliboff, 2006; Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; Kross, Berman, Mischel, Smith, & Wager, 2011; MacDonald & Leary, 2005) to a sense of numbness (DeWall & Baumeister, 2006; Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007; Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003). In fact, people will go out of their way to avoid a decrease in perceived regard, even at the expense of other highly rewarding possibilities, such as monetary compensation (van Beest & Williams, 2006). Furthermore, people feel negative emotions and lowered senses of control, belongingness, meaningful existence, and self-esteem even when they experience decreased perceived regard from a strongly disliked group (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007) or an inanimate object (Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004). Taken together, this research paints a picture of the importance of regulating perceived regard.

If the regulation of perceived regard is a significant factor in the decision to socially reject, does it influence social rejection when individuals are motivated to *increase* their perceived regard? Or is social rejection motivated by a simple desire to *maintain* perceived regard? Previous research suggests that the desire to maintain perceived regard, rather than the desire to increase perceived regard, is likely to be a more potent driving force in decision making. Outside of the domain of social exclusion, people are more motivated to avoid losses than to achieve gains (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Research on group dynamics finds similar effects. In response to potential status loss (as compared to potential status gain), participants value their current status more, are willing to pay more money to maintain their status (i.e., avoid a loss), and will even work against the best interest of the group to avoid a personal loss of status (Pettit et al., 2010). In other words, when people feel that their perceived regard is threatened, they are motivated to act in their own self-interest to prevent loss of regard rather than increase perceived regard.

Furthermore, the present research investigates two distinct components of perceived regard: group membership and respect. Group membership reflects the aspect of perceived regard that concerns whether one is actually included as a member of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In some sense, group membership is a binary property of perceived regard: is a person recognized as part of the group or not part of the group? The desire to be part of a group is a well-established phenomenon even within a minimal group paradigm (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the minimal group paradigm, group members do not know each other, they do not expect to form relationships, and they share no features that would generally lead to spontaneous group formation (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel et al., 1971). Therefore, it is a testament to the power of the desire to be in a group that even minimal

groups show the tendency to see their group in a more positive light and want to remain in the group. In fact, although there are different theoretical approaches to group behavior, one key aspect of many is the desire to be in a group (e.g., Brewer, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherall, 1987). Interestingly, regardless of the type of group, members feel that the group has value. For example, people assigned to an arbitrary group see that group as better than another arbitrary group (i.e., exhibit ingroup bias; Brewer, 1979; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Therefore, a key aspect of one's perceived regard can arise from group membership: people place high value on their membership within a group even minimally acquainted groups.

The group membership aspect of perceived regard may be distinct from whether one is respected by the group. That is, group members want to feel as though the group not just includes them but also values their contribution (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1989). Group members want to feel a sense of respect from others, and when they feel that they are marginalized within the group, they strive to regain the sense of respect even though group membership is intact (Breakwell, 1979; Noel, Wann, & Branscombe, 1995). For example, when group members feel that their respect is in jeopardy, they engage in more out-group discrimination, but only when they believe that their fellow group members will find out about their actions (Noel et al., 1995). In other words, group members are not merely satisfied to be in the group; they also want to know that they have their group's respect.

How might the different elements of perceive regard, group membership and respect, influence social rejection? One possibility is that threat to both group membership and respect increase social rejection in the interest of regulating perceived regard. However, previous research raises the possibility that respect, rather than group

membership, may be more likely to increase social rejection. When group members feel that they may become more peripheral to the group, they tend to base their self-worth on personal factors rather than perceived regard (e.g., Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002). Therefore, once group membership is lost, they may see no need to engage in the unpleasant action of rejecting someone because their self-esteem is less contingent on perceived regard. However, group members who are still part of the group yet worried about their respect may be willing to reject others as a means of ingratiation. Therefore, the present research hypothesizes that threats to the maintenance of perceived regard will increase social rejection and the driving force will be threatened respect.

TWO POTENTIAL MEDIATORS: DISCERNMENT AND EMPATHY

What mediators might explain the hypothesized relation between maintaining respect and the decision to socially reject someone? As a first step, the present research focuses on two potential mediators that may result from increased concerns about maintaining perceived regard: the desire to broadcast discernment to one's group and a loss of empathy for outgroup members.

Discernment

In order to preserve their perceived regard, group members may try to broadcast their value to the group through their actions. For example, when people attempt to manage the impressions of others by broadcasting their intelligence, they sometimes become hypercritical of others (Gibson & Oberlander, 2008). This association may arise from people's hope that their criticism is perceived as reflecting intelligent insight and careful thought in comparison to positive comments, which might be construed as glib (Amabile, 1983). The current study investigates whether a similar trend towards critique explains why concerns about perceived regard increase social rejection. For example, if a

group is deciding whether to add more group members, a current group member may broadcast that he or she is a good judge of character by rejecting more potential group members. That is, group members may be motivated to socially reject others as a way of proving their ability to discern who is right for the group.

Empathy

Another potential consequence of being concerned with one's own perceived regard in a group setting is a decrease in one's empathy for people (DeWall & Baumeister, 2006; Twenge et al., 2007). Does the decrease in empathy increase rejection rates for those who are concerned about maintaining their perceived regard? Although the link between empathy and willingness to reject others has not been directly tested, previous research has shown that empathy is a driving force in prosocial behaviors (for a review, see Batson & Shaw, 1991). In other words, people who experience more empathy may be less willing to reject others because they want to behave in a prosocial manner. A wide range of studies have shown an association between empathy and prosocial behaviors ranging from volunteering to take the place of a participant receiving painful shocks (Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, & Birch, 1981) to helping an injured person (Harris & Huang, 1973) to engaging in charitable activities (Shelton & Roger, 1981; for a meta-analysis of the association of empathy and prosocial behavior, see Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). If empathy motivates people to protect others and engage in affiliative behaviors (e.g., de Vignemont, & Singer, 2006), it is possible that a decrease in empathy will result in a comparatively higher rate of non-affiliative behaviors such as social rejection. Another piece of evidence that empathy may impact rejection decisions comes from the research on bullying. Preadolescents who show less empathy are more likely to be bullies whereas preadolescents who show more empathy are more likely to

defend others against bullying (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoè, 2007; Nickerson, & Mele-Taylor, 2014). In fact, one effective intervention against bullying in children involves increasing the children's empathy towards others (Şahin, 2012). Therefore, if concerns about perceived regard drive down empathy, then social rejection may be increased in comparison to contexts where empathy is preserved.

OVERVIEW OF EXPERIMENTS

Four experiments test how threats to perceived regard affect decisions to reject (Experiment 1 and 2) and potential mediators of this relationship (Experiments 3 and 4). In all four experiments, participants either imagine themselves in a group or are in a face-to-face group situation. In Experiment 1, participants imagine themselves in a group while implications for perceived regard are made salient. Experiment 2 builds on Experiment 1 by conducting the paradigm in a face-to-face interaction and by disentangling the two components of the desire to maintain perceived regard: group membership and respect. Experiment 3 tests whether the desire to prove that one is discerning mediates the relationship between threat to perceived regard and increased rejection rates. Experiment 4 tests whether empathy may mediate the relationship. The four experiments relied on the minimal group paradigm as it provides the most rigorous test of processes associated with the regulation of perceived regard (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971).

Chapter 2: Experiment 1

Experiment 1 tested how the potential to increase or decrease perceived regard within a group context impacts social rejection rates. In an online study, participants imagined themselves in a group scenario in which they had to decide to accept or reject ten potential group members. Participants faced one of three potential consequences: loss of perceived regard through group expulsion, gain of perceived regard through rising in the group hierarchy, or no impact on perceived regard. The effect of potential changes to perceived regard on willingness to reject potential group members was assessed.

METHOD

Participants

Three hundred sixty-seven (226 female; mean age = 31.2, $SD = 11.6$ years; 4.9% African American, 10.6% Asian, 4.6% Latino/Hispanic, .3% Native American, 75.7% Caucasian, and 3.8% “other”) participants completed the experiment for monetary compensation on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (for a description and evaluation of Mechanical Turk see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). All procedures were approved by the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board.

Procedure

Participants were instructed to imagine themselves in a room with a group with four other people (“Pat, Emily, Michael, and Jennifer”) that had to select a new group member. Participants were informed that the new group member would not be selected on the basis of majority decision. Instead, one group member’s vote would be randomly selected as the deciding vote. Therefore, participants were made aware that their votes could determine the new group member. Participants did not view other group members’ responses but believed they were making their candidate decisions in one of three

randomly assigned Perceived Regard conditions: (a) Potential Loss of Perceived Regard (Loss); (b) Potential Gain of Perceived Regard (Gain); and (c) a Control condition. After being randomly assigned to a Perceived Regard condition, participants were given instructions about the task. In all of the instructions, the experimenter informed the participants that the Perceived Regard task would take place after the voting was complete. In Loss, participants were instructed that current group members would vote on a group member to reject from the group after the new group member was added. In Gain, participants were instructed that current group members would vote on their favorite group member after the new member had been selected. During the instructions in the Control condition, there was no description of further interaction with the group.

After the instructions on Perceived Regard, participants were presented with descriptions of ten candidates for the group. The descriptions consisted of introductory statements about the potential group members and were neutral (i.e., no particular candidate was more desirable than the others). For example, participants would read: “Hi everyone. I’m Anna, and I just started at UT this semester. I like playing Frisbee and cooking in my free time. I also enjoy swimming, and I was on the swim team in high school. Right now I think I am going to major in English, but I also like Anthropology”. After reading each description, the participants chose one of two options on the screen: “Accept” or “Reject”. Participants could accept or reject as many of the candidates as they wanted. Rejection rates were computed by assigning 0 to “accept” and 1 to “reject” and averaging across group candidates within in each Perceived Regard condition.

RESULTS

Overall, people accepted candidates more often than they rejected them ($M = .38$, $SD = .27$; for a breakdown by candidate see Table 1). Participants were most likely to

reject when faced with the possibility of threat to perceived regard than in the other two conditions, and rejection rates in all three conditions were below chance. Perceived Regard showed a main effect on rejection rates ($F(2, 364) = 4.27, p < .05$). Rejection rates were significantly higher in the Loss condition ($M = .43, SD = .25$) compared to the Gain condition ($M = .35, SD = .28; t(253) = 2.53, p < .05$), and the Control condition ($M = .35, SD = .27; t(246) = 2.53, p < .05$). There were no significant differences in the rejection rates between the Gain and Control conditions ($t(136) = .79, p = .43, ns$). Finally, participants elected to reject the targets significantly less than chance (.5) in all three Perceived Regard conditions: Loss ($t(136) = 3.06, p < .05$), Gain ($t(118) = 5.86, p < .05$), and Control ($t(111) = 6.02, p < .05$).

Candidate	Mean Rejection Rate (SD)
Anna	.37 (.48)
Lauren	.36 (.48)
Kim	.32 (.47)
Erica	.37 (.48)
Greg	.48 (.50)
David	.25 (.43)
Andrew	.46 (.50)
Gabriel	.37 (.48)
Isaac	.50 (.50)
Melissa	.34 (.47)

Table 1: Rejection Rates of all candidates in Experiment 1.

DISCUSSION

The desire for maintaining perceived regard significantly increased the extent to which participants chose to reject candidates. In other words, although participants were significantly more likely to accept than reject others, they were most likely to reject when they were in a situation in which their ability to maintain perceived regard was threatened. Furthermore, the potential to increase perceived regard did not have the same impact: participants rejected at similar rates in the Control condition and Gain condition. Experiment 1 provides evidence that only the desire to maintain perceived regard, not the desire to increase perceived regard, increases the tendency to reject others. In other words, merely thinking about perceived regard does not increase rejection: only the desire to maintain perceived regard increases rejection. Finally, Experiment 1 found that participants will elect to actively reject other people at less than chance across conditions.

Chapter 3: Experiment 2

Experiment 2 examined rejection processes in a face-to-face interaction and disentangled the desire to maintain perceived regard. Perceived regard may have two distinct components: being a part of the group and having the respect of others. Although Experiment 1 provided evidence that desire to maintain perceived regard increases rejection, it is unclear whether participants in the Loss condition were concerned with group membership or respect. They were told that they could be expelled from the group and therefore both their group membership and respect within the group were at risk. Experiment 2 examines whether the threat of group expulsion is necessary to increase rejection or if merely the thought of losing respect can impact willingness to reject others. In other words, at what point on the continuum from loss of respect to complete expulsion do people alter their behavior and choose to engage in more rejection? To answer this question group pressure was used to provide a threat to perceived regard without the threat of losing group membership. If participants choose to reject more under group pressure, when there is no possibility of expulsion from the group (i.e., in the Gain and Control conditions), participants cannot have been influenced by group membership. However, if participants still reject more in Loss than in the other two Perceived Regard conditions when there is group pressure, the threat of group expulsion is necessary to impact the rejection behaviors.

METHOD

Participants

Three hundred thirteen college students (187 female—one person did not report sex; mean age = 18.8, $SD = 1.2$ years; 5.8% African American, 15.7% Asian, 28.4% Latino/Hispanic, .3% Native American, 46.6% Caucasian, and 3.2% “other”) participated

for course credit. All procedures were approved by the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board.

Procedure

The procedure from Experiment 1 was applied to a face-to-face social interaction with the addition of a Group Pressure condition. Specifically, participants were randomly assigned to Loss, Gain, or Control, as in Experiment 1. Participants were also assigned to Group Pressure or No Group Pressure.

In Group Pressure, participants were in a modified Asch conformity paradigm (Asch, 1951) in which confederates portrayed group members and candidates. After providing consent, the participant and four confederates were told they had randomly been assigned to be in the group. The group members were seated in a row and the participant was always seated at the end of the row. The participants were led to believe that the order of seating and, therefore, the order of response were randomly assigned. In No Group Pressure, individual participants made up the group members and confederates portrayed the candidates. The order of seating was randomly assigned. In both conditions, group members were randomly assigned to a Perceived Regard condition (as in Experiment 1) and given instructions that they were to add a new member to the group.

As in Experiment 1, participants were informed that the final decision regarding the new candidate would be based on a random selection of one group member's decision. After that decision, the group would vote on who would be expelled from the group (Loss) or who would be promoted to group favorite (Gain). The remaining six confederates were told they had been assigned to be candidates and were led into an adjacent room. One by one, each candidate entered the room with the group members and described him/herself using six of the same descriptions from the previous three

experiments. The candidate stayed in the room in front of the group members while the group members responded. In Group Pressure, the confederate group members then responded verbally to either “Accept” or “Reject” the candidate based on a script. Group member rejection rates varied and were randomly assigned across candidate descriptions. The critical conditions were those in which there was unanimous group pressure to reject a candidate. Three of the six group responses were unanimous rejection. The other three were other answers for believability purposes. After the group members gave their responses, it was the participant’s turn to respond with “Accept” or “Reject.” In No Group Pressure, participants wrote their responses on individual white boards in boxes. Participants were unable to see what their fellow group members had written. They all responded with “Accept” or “Reject” on the whiteboards (see Figure 1).

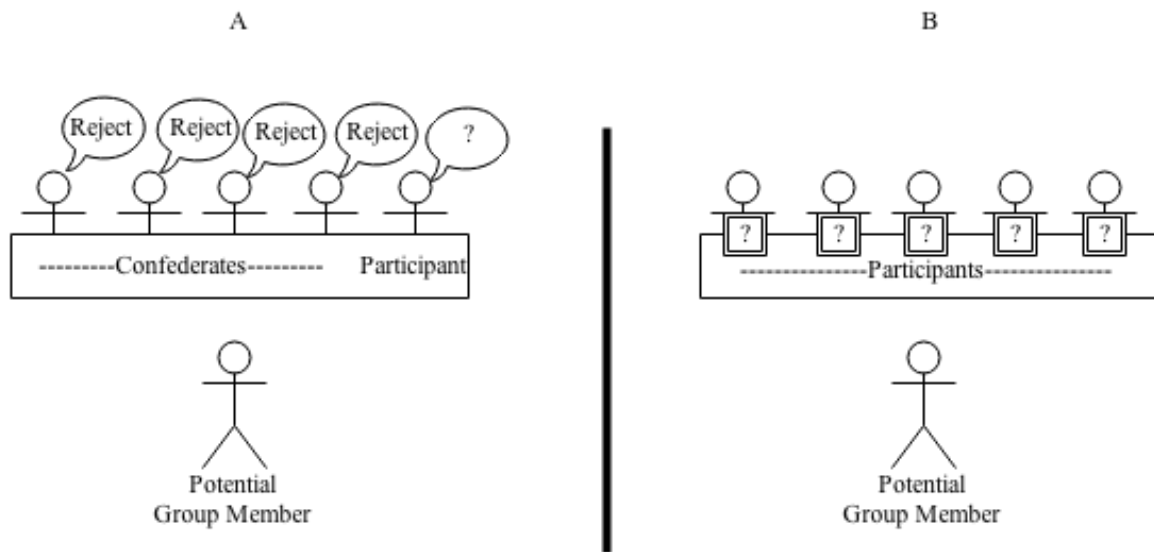


Figure 1: Setup for Experiment 2. A) The setup for the Group Pressure condition in Experiment 2; B) The setup for the No Group Pressure condition in Experiment 2.

RESULTS

Potential for loss of perceived regard increases rejection rates. A 2 (No Group Pressure, Group Pressure) x 3 (Loss, Gain, Control) Between Subject ANOVA found that Group Pressure and Perceived Regard had an interactive effect on rejection rates. There was a main effect of Group Pressure $F(1, 307) = 89.71, p < .05$ with more rejection in Group Pressure ($M = .37, SD = .29$) than No Group Pressure ($M = .12, SD = .18$). The main effect of Group Pressure was qualified by an interaction between Group Pressure and Perceived Regard ($F(2, 307) = 5.27, p < .05$; see Figure 2). The interaction was driven by a comparatively larger increase in response to Group Pressure (versus No Group Pressure) in Gain ($\beta = .36, SE = .05, 95\% CI = .26-.45$) and Control ($\beta = .28, SE = .05, 95\% CI = .19-.38$) than in Loss ($\beta = .14, SE = .05, 95\% CI = .05-.24$). Within the No Group Pressure condition, the findings from Experiment 1 were replicated: rejection rates were significantly higher in the Loss condition ($M = .18, SD = .23$) compared to the Gain condition ($M = .07, SD = .12; t(98) = 2.97, p < .05$), and the Control condition ($M = .10, SD = .14; t(101) = 2.08, p < .05$). There were no significant differences in the rejection rates between the Gain and Control conditions ($t(95) = 1.20, p = .23, ns$).

Finally, as in Experiment 1, in No Group Pressure, participants elected to reject the targets significantly less than chance (.5) in all three Perceived Regard conditions: Loss ($t(52) = 10.13, p < .05$), Gain ($t(46) = 23.99, p < .05$), and Control ($t(50) = 19.80, p < .05$). In Group Pressure, participants in Loss and Control rejected significantly less than chance, and participants in Gain rejected marginally less than chance: Loss ($t(55) = 4.83, p < .05$), Gain ($t(52) = 1.83, p = .07$), and Control ($t(53) = 2.88, p < .05$).

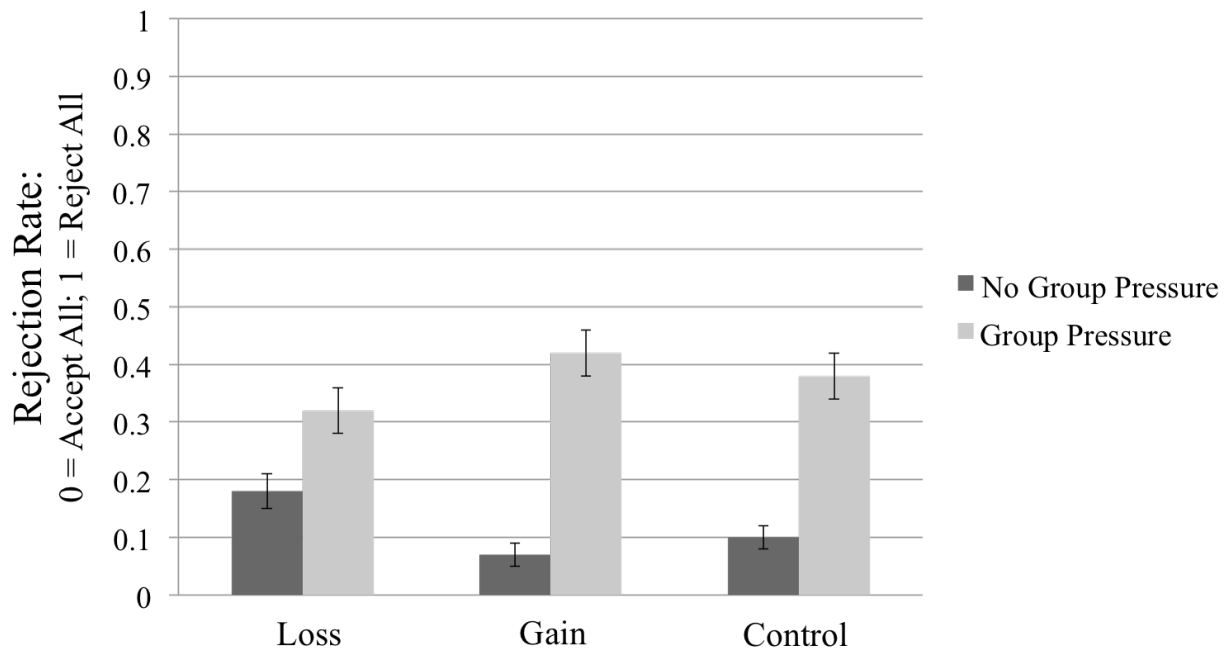


Figure 2: Desire to maintain respect increases rejection in Experiment 2. Increased rejection in response to Group Pressure to Reject, qualified by an interaction between Group Pressure and Perceived Regard. Interaction is driven by greater increase between No Group Pressure and Group Pressure in Gain and Control than in Loss. Error bars indicate standard error.

DISCUSSION

Experiment 2 built on Experiment 1 by breaking down the concept of perceived regard into two components: group membership and respect. Results indicated that the desire to maintain respect, not the desire to maintain group membership increased rejection rates. When participants did not know what fellow group members were doing, they rejected the most when they were experiencing a threat to their perceived regard. Experiment 2 added a Group Pressure condition to examine how the desire to maintain respect, without the threat of losing group membership, impacted rejection rates. Group

pressure acted across all three perceived regard conditions to increase rejection rates. In other words, even when participants could not lose group membership (i.e., in Gain and Control), they rejected more when their respect was in jeopardy because of a conformity situation. Therefore, Experiment 2 provides evidence that concern for maintaining respect increases the tendency to reject. Beyond breaking down the concept of perceived regard, Experiment 2 also used a face-to-face interaction based on the minimal group paradigm. Strikingly, even though participants were in a minimal group paradigm, they still changed their behavior when their respect was in jeopardy. The finding that participants care about rejection regardless of the source of the rejection fits with social rejection showing that even rejection at the hands of a hated outgroup (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007) or an inanimate object (Zadro et al., 2004) is hurtful. Experiments 3 and 4 examine two potential mediators for the relationship between threat to respect and increased rejection.

Chapter 4: Experiment 3

Experiments 1 and 2 provide evidence that when people sense a threat to their perceived regard, specifically respect from others, they are willing to reject more. But why does the threat to respect increase the tendency to reject? One possibility is that when under threat, people try to show the group that they are worthy group members. For example, in the case of choosing group candidates, they may reject more because they want to be seen as discerning and capable of the task at hand. If the relationship between threatened respect and increased rejection is mediated by the desire to be seen as discerning, people should also reject more objects in an object-choosing task when under threat. Therefore, Experiment 3 tests how participants respond to an object-choosing task when they are in the three perceived regard conditions.

METHODS

Participants

As part of a classroom exercise in an online Introduction to Psychology class, 1614 college students (944 female; 47 did not report; M age = 18.8, SD = 2.3 years; 4.4% African American, 22.9% Asian, 23.5% Hispanic/Latino, 43.7% Caucasian, .4% Native American, 4.0%, Other, 1.1% did not report) participated. All procedures were approved by the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board.

Procedure

The procedure from Experiment 1 was used with two modifications. The first modification was to the descriptions of the Perceived Regard manipulations. The second modification was to add an object-choosing condition.

As in Experiment 1, participants were randomly assigned to Loss, Gain, or Control. After being randomly assigned to a Perceived Regard condition, participants

were given instructions about the task. In Loss, participants were told, “If your choices turn out badly, your judgment will be called into question and you will lose the group’s respect for the foreseeable future”. In Gain, participants were told, “If your choices turn out well, you will be respected, honored, and deeply valued for the foreseeable future by the group”. During the instructions in the Control condition, there was no description of further interaction with the group.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the task from Experiment 1 (the Person Task) or an object-choosing task (the Object Task). The Person Task was the same as in Experiment 1. The Object Task was a medical scenario in which participants had to choose which medical items to bring to a medical outbreak. The medical scenario was adapted from the Lost on the Moon task (Hall & Watson, 1970). The medical scenario was as follows:

There has been an outbreak of an unknown disease in an isolated part of the world. You and your four colleagues were sent in as the medical team to manage the outbreak. On your way your helicopter is grounded 15 miles away from the site. You will have to walk the rest of the way. Ten pieces of medical equipment are intact. You will be deciding which of those medical items to accept for your journey. The other four members of the team have already made their selections and every option is split. Your responses will likely decide the final decision for the group -- and everyone knows it.

Participants then had to choose among ten objects: thermometers, gloves, IV fluids, IV lines and needles, bottled water, antiseptic/alcohol, isolation gowns, antibiotics, sphygmomanometers, respirators. Each object had a description of a similar length to the descriptions of each candidate in the Person Task.

RESULTS

A 2 (Person Task, Object Task) x 3 (Loss, Gain, Control) Between Subjects ANOVA found a main effect of Task ($F(1, 1608) = 110.31, p < .05$) in which participants in the Person Task were more willing to reject ($M = .45, SD = .23$) than participants in the Object Task ($M = .34, SD = .15$). There was no main effect of perceived regard ($F(2, 1608) = .04, p = .96$; Gain $M = .40, SD = .21$; Loss $M = .39, SD = .20$; Control $M = .39, SD = .20$). There was also no interaction of Task and Perceived Regard ($F(2, 1608) = .10, p = .91$). If the effect of threat to perceived regard increases rejection because people want to be seen as more discerning, the pattern of results from Experiments 1 and 2 would replicate for the Object Task. There was no support for that hypothesis: there was no significant effect of Perceived Regard on rejection in the Object Task: $F(2, 813) = .11, p = .89$ (Gain $M = .34, SD = .16$; Loss $M = .35, SD = .16$; Control $M = .34, SD = .15$). Furthermore, the effect of Perceived Regard on rejection rates from Experiments 1 and 2 did not replicate in the Person Task ($F(2, 795) = .05, p = .96$; Gain $M = .45, SD = .23$; Loss $M = .44, SD = .23$; Control $M = .45, SD = .23$).

DISCUSSION

Experiment 3 failed to replicate the finding from Experiments 1 and 2. Additionally, there was no effect of the proposed mediator. Some key differences in how that study was conducted may have led to the null effects for both the overall effect and the mechanism. First, the study was done within the context of an online class. One possibility is that the participants were distracted while completing the survey. For example, in the online class environment, the students are quizzed on course material in each class period. It is therefore possible that participants were in a different state of mind (e.g., perhaps they were anxious) than the participants in the other three experiments while participating. Second, Experiment 3 used modified descriptions of the

consequences for perceive regard. Although the essence of the descriptions were similar, it is possible that participants were less able to vividly imagine the situation than in the other experiments. Additionally, discernment was tested using a medical survival scenario. It is possible that participants felt that the medical scenario was too far removed from what was important for their group and therefore they may not have felt it was important domain in which to show discernment.

Chapter 5: Experiment 4

Experiment 4 tests whether the finding from Experiments 1 and 2 replicates and whether empathy may mediate the relationship between threat to perceived regard and increased rejection. When people feel a threat to their perceived regard, they may be less likely to take other people's feelings into account. That lack of empathy may make them more likely to reject others. Empathy was tested as a potential mediator in a modification of Experiment 1.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred ninety-two people (197 female) participated in Experiment 4 (M age = 18.7, SD = 1.2; 5.8% African American, 21.9% Asian, 22.6% Latino/Hispanic, 46.6% Caucasian, 2.7% Other). Participants were drawn from the Introduction to Psychology subject pool and were compensated with course credit.

Procedure

The same procedure from Experiment 1 was used, but an empathy intervention was added. Participants were randomly assigned to Gain, Loss, and Control using the same descriptions for the manipulation from Experiment 1. However, before the participants accepted or rejected the group candidates, they viewed a photograph of a young woman. The empathy intervention involved describing the photograph and was modified from an empathy intervention in previous research (Sibicky, Schroeder, & Dovidio, 1995). In both the No Empathy and Empathy conditions, participants were told that the photograph shows a potential group member from a previous version of the experiment and that she was awaiting the group members' feedback. In No Empathy, the instructions were the following:

Please write for a full minute about what you see in this photograph. Try to be as objective as possible, carefully attending to all the information about the situation the person is in and what they are doing. Concentrate on trying to watch objectively to all the information you can pick up about the situation.

In the Empathy condition, the instructions were the following:

Please write for a full minute about what you see in this photograph. Imagine how she feels about what is happening and how it is affecting her. Try not to concern yourself with attending to all the information you are observing, just concentrate on trying to imagine how the other person waiting for feedback feels.

After writing for a full minute, participants were directed to complete the group candidate selection task.

RESULTS

Manipulation check

The writing samples were analyzed using LIWC (Pennebaker, Booth, & Francis, 2007) to assess whether the empathy manipulation worked. Empathy was assessed based on the affective and cognitive components of empathy (Davis, 1983). The writing samples in the Empathy condition contained more affect words ($M = 11.72$, $SD = 5.26$; $t(290) = 4.50$, $p < .05$) and more cognitive mechanism words ($M = 22.44$, $SD = 8.05$; $t(290) = 8.46$, $p < .05$) than the writing samples in the No Empathy condition ($M = 8.65$, $SD = 6.38$; $M = 15.45$, $SD = 5.89$, respectively). Therefore, the empathy manipulation was effective in producing writing samples that focused more on feelings and thoughts in the Empathy condition than in the No Empathy condition.

Dependent measures

A 2 (No Empathy, Empathy) x 3 (Loss, Gain, Control) Between Subjects ANOVA found a main effect of Perceived Regard ($F(2, 286) = 6.50, p < .05$). Rejection rates were significantly higher in the Loss condition ($M = .45, SD = .21$) compared to the Gain condition ($M = .33, SD = .24; t(187) = 3.57, p < .05$), and marginally higher compared to the Control condition ($M = .40, SD = .22; t(194) = 1.72, p = .09$). Participants also rejected significantly more in Gain compared to Control ($t(197) = 1.98, p = .05$). There was no main effect of Empathy on rejection rates ($F(1, 286) = .03, p = .86$; No Empathy: $M = .40, SD = .21$; Empathy: $M = .39, SD = .24$) or interaction between Perceived Regard and Empathy ($F(2, 286) = .47, p = .63$). Furthermore, there was also no evidence for an effect of empathy on rejection if the analysis used the frequencies of empathic words as the independent variables ($p > .2$).

DISCUSSION

Experiment 4 replicated the effect of threatened perceived regard on rejection rates. The role of empathy as a potential mediator of the effect was not supported. However, a manipulation check revealed that participants were writing in a more empathetic way in the empathy condition providing evidence that empathy may not be a mediator. Therefore, the null effect in this study may indicate that reduced empathy does not account for the relation between concerns about perceived regard and social rejection. However, it is possible that a different aspect of empathy might show different effects. Although there is a great deal of debate surrounding the definition of empathy (see Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990 for a discussion), empathy is generally considered to be a multi-dimensional state involving both affective (i.e., feeling the other person's emotions or a congruent emotion; Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987; Davis, 1983; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990) and cognitive components (i.e., perspective taking; e.g., Davis, 1983). In the

present research, empathy was manipulated through a perspective-taking task, which might reflect the more cognitive aspects of empathy. Perhaps the more affective element of empathy, the ability to experience personal distress of others, may mediate the relation between concerns about perceived regard and rejection. Despite the lack of evidence for a potential mediator, Experiment 4 provides further evidence that the threat to perceived regard increases the tendency to reject.

SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSES

A fixed effects meta-analysis was performed on the Loss vs. Control contrast for each of the four experiments. The aim of the meta-analysis was to assess the consistency and reliability of the finding that threats to perceived regard increase rejection. Experiment 2 was divided into Group Pressure and No Group Pressure and included as two different studies for the purposes of the meta-analysis. Therefore, the meta-analysis reports the results of five studies. The analysis was performed in Comprehensive Meta-analysis (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2005). The meta-analysis found support for increased rejection across the studies in Loss vs. Control: Hedges' $g = 0.119$, $SE = .058$, 95% CI [0.005, 0.233], $p < .05$.

Chapter 6: General Discussion

Four experiments investigate the association between concerns about perceived regard and willingness to socially reject others. In three of the four experiments, participants rejected more when their perceived regard was in jeopardy. Furthermore, only the desire to maintain (i.e., not jeopardize) perceived regard increased social rejection; the desire to increase perceived regard did not significantly impact rejection rates. Experiment 2 found that concerns about perceived respect rather than perceived group membership drove the effects on social rejection. There was no evidence that either discernment or empathy mediated the relation between concerns about perceived regard and social rejection. The current research illuminates the impact of concerns about perceived regard on social rejection in non-bullying populations and demonstrates that this association is present even in groups that are only minimally acquainted. These findings raise questions about how these processes might play out in groups that are more than minimally acquainted and highlight the need to further investigate possible mediator variable to explain why concerns about perceived regard increase social rejection.

GROUP FACTORS IN REJECTION DECISIONS

Do the group dynamics in existing groups alter the effect of concerns about perceived regard on willingness to reject? Groups can vary on intimacy, formation, and hierarchy. For example, intimacy may change the relationship between perceived regard and rejection. One possibility is that intimacy would guard against the need to reject. In an intimate group, members may be less concerned about a decrease in perceived regard because they feel secure in the group. However, it is also possible that a threat to perceived regard in an intimate group may cause even more concern than in a minimally acquainted group and may lead to more rejection on behalf of the intimate group. Future

research can examine how the closeness of the group may impact willingness to reject others.

Similarly, the formation of the group may impact how members react to a threat to perceived regard. Whereas some groups are naturally formed and people do not generally have a choice of whether to be a member (e.g., a family), other groups are formed through choice (e.g., a sorority). In the present research, participants did not have a choice: they were ostensibly randomly put in a group and could not leave of their own accord. In terms of a chosen group, a group member may feel that if the group will see him or her in a less positive light if the member does not do something the group wants, then the member can just leave the group. However, a person may also experience the sense that they chose to be in the group, and therefore they have to change their behavior to match the group's expectations. Therefore, future research should investigate how the voluntary nature of group membership affects how much concerns about respect impact decisions to reject.

The group hierarchy may also influence how each member responds to the potential for lowered perceived regard. Would a group leader be as susceptible to the effects of threatened perceived regard? One possibility is that group leaders (i.e., people with more power) are immune to those effects because they do not worry about their fellow members' opinions (e.g., Gordon & Chen, 2013). That is, a group leader may feel that he or she has a defined and secure place in the group regardless of how others feel. However, it is also possible that group leaders are especially vulnerable to the effects of threatened perceived regard. Leaders are often interested in maintaining or increasing their power, and will sometimes do so at the expense of others (Maner & Mead, 2010; Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008; Williams, 2014). Leaders are especially likely to try to increase their power when they feel that their position is threatened (Williams, 2014).

Therefore, it is possible that leaders may show pronounced effects on threats to perceived regard on social rejection and may even show effects in cases where perceived regard can be increased rather than just maintained. In the present study, all group members were equal and the instructions stressed the importance of each member's vote. Future research can establish how positions within the group affect the outcomes of threatened perceived regard.

WHY DOES THREATENED PERCEIVED REGARD INCREASE REJECTION?

Although the present research provided strong evidence that threatened perceived regard increases the tendency to socially reject others, no significant mediators were identified. Null effects are difficult to interpret, and therefore, the question remains of which mechanisms are most likely responsible for the effect of threatened perceived regard on rejection. Experiment 3 tested the possibility that people want to be seen as more discerning and are therefore more likely to reject when their perceived regard is threatened. The lack of replication of the main effect in Experiment 3 leaves open the question of whether discernment is a possible mediator. Therefore, future research should continue to consider how the desire to appear discerning may impact willingness to reject. Furthermore, future research should also examine whether threat to perceived regard actually leads to better judgment in an objective sense. In contrast to Experiment 3, Experiment 4, which tested empathy as a mediator, did replicate the main effect of threatened perceived regard on rejection. Furthermore, there was also evidence that empathy was successfully manipulated in the experiment. As mentioned previously, one potential issue with Experiment 4 is that a different form of empathy may have been more pertinent than the one that was manipulated (perspective taking). Future research

can manipulate other forms of empathy such as personal distress to examine how it impacts the tendency to reject others.

Beyond discernment and empathy, there are other variables that may mediate the relationship between perceived regard and rejection, such as loss aversion. When people are faced with a potential loss, they would rather take the definite loss than gamble and potentially lose more (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). That is, when people are in a state of loss aversion, they often choose to maintain the status quo rather than risk a worse situation. In the context of perceived regard threat, when people experience threat they may decide that the status quo is safer and be more willing to reject people who could alter the group dynamics. Future research can examine this possibility by manipulating loss aversion through the framing of a gambling task and examine how that affects rejection rates in the group task.

CONCLUSION

Although previous research has examined the plight of targets of rejection, very little research has considered why people reject in the first place. To create a more informative and nuanced view on social rejection, research needs to examine the roles of both targets and sources. Specifically, for social psychological research to inform interventions aimed at decreasing the negative effects of social rejection, we need to understand why people reject. Although social rejection may be a fact of life, it does not have to be as hurtful as it often is. The present research takes the first step in addressing the issues of social rejection from the point of view of the source by asking what motivates people to socially reject others.

In four experiments, the present research established one reason for social rejection: people are more likely to reject others when they feel that their perceived

regard is in jeopardy. Participants rejected others more in response to threatened perceived regard even in minimal groups. Although there was no evidence for discernment or empathy as mediators of this relationship, future research can continue to examine the relationship between perceived regard and rejection. The present research begins to address the other side of rejection and can lead to future research on how to make rejection a less painful experience for both people involved.

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