

Resisting Connection Following Social Exclusion: Rejection by an Attractive Suitor Provokes Derogation of an Unattractive Suitor

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Abstract

Social psychologists theorize that individuals seek connection following rejection. However, accepting connection from a low status other may imply that one is of similarly low status, which may call into question one's prospects for future acceptance. Thus, we hypothesized that rejection would lead individuals to distance themselves from a low status other even when the low status other is accepting. In two studies, single, heterosexual, female participants received simultaneous acceptance/rejection feedback from one physically attractive man and one less attractive man. As predicted, rejected individuals derogated their rejecters as indicated by a decreased desire for affiliation and more negative evaluations. Moreover, participants rejected by the attractive man also derogated the unattractive man even when the unattractive man offered acceptance. These data may shed light on specific circumstances under which rejection leads to antisocial behavior.

Keywords

social exclusion, acceptance, rejection, dating, attractiveness

Humans have an innate desire to form and maintain meaningful relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As a result, threats to social inclusion, such as rejection, are often experienced as distressing and painful (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Although individuals sometimes cope with rejection by engaging in prosocial behaviors seemingly aimed at restoring social connection (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007), they also have been shown to react aggressively or antisocially (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). Perhaps the best hypothesis as to which reaction rejection will elicit is that rejected individuals are likely to behave prosocially when social inclusion is possible and aggressively when it is not (DeWall & Richman, 2011). In the present research, we propose that rejection can provoke antisocial responses even when acceptance is possible if acceptance comes from someone low in social status.

Although the vast majority of social exclusion research has focused on only one source of acceptance/rejection at a time, a small number of studies have examined coping behaviors in response to acceptance and rejection feedback received from multiple sources simultaneously. This research has found that aggressive tendencies following rejection are reduced when individuals experience acceptance (DeWall, Twenge, Bushman, Im, & Williams, 2010; Zwolinski, 2014), supporting the notion that acceptance eases the pain of rejection. Importantly, however, this research assumes that rejected individuals are willing to engage with acceptance feedback.

Another line of research indicates that people selectively disidentify with social entities that reflect poorly on them, suggesting that not every source of acceptance may be welcomed. For example, Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford (1986) found that members of a poorly performing group reported less willingness to participate in group activities and to wear group-identifying badges than participants in success or no feedback conditions (i.e., cutting off reflected failure). More generally, research has shown that individuals derogate and distance themselves from others who exhibit a negative quality to avoid the perception that they share this undesirable trait (Cooper & Jones, 1969; Novak & Lerner, 1968; Schimel, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, O'Mahen, & Arndt, 2000; Taylor & Mettee, 1971). Moreover, terror management research suggests that distancing oneself from those whose traits may reflect negatively on the self is more likely under conditions of threat (Arndt, Greenberg, Schimel, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 2002;

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Martens, Greenberg, Schimel, & Landau, 2004). In other words, distancing may be especially prevalent when the need for a sense of self-worth is strong, such as following rejection (Williams, 2007). Thus, rejection may heighten the desire to distance oneself from others who reflect negatively on the self, such as those with low social value.

The importance of social value in acceptance/rejection has been largely ignored, as most social inclusion/exclusion research does not specify the social value of the individual providing feedback (in-group/out-group status research is an exception; Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007). Within the context of romantic initiation, an individual's physical attractiveness can be a particularly important indicator of social value. For example, physically attractive individuals are assumed to have better personalities and greater social competence than less physically attractive people (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991). Thus, we propose that individuals will distance themselves from unattractive others after having experienced a romantic rejection to avoid being associated with unattractiveness. Importantly, we expect distancing even when the unattractive person offers acceptance. Accepting positive feedback from an unattractive individual (e.g., accepting a date) following a romantic rejection may imply that an unattractive partner is what one "deserves."

Derogation is a common form of social distancing. For example, individuals who feel uncertain about acceptance from a romantic partner devalue the importance of that relationship (e.g., through lower ratings of a partner's quality) as a means of distancing (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998). Similarly, individuals who have been socially excluded often derogate their rejecter (Bourgeois & Leary, 2001). These findings are consistent with Baumeister's (1999) argument that derogation enables individuals to minimize the importance of others' evaluations, thereby protecting their feelings following rejection. Thus, romantically rejected individuals may selectively derogate others to restore a sense of distance or dissimilarity from rejecting or unattractive targets.

In the present research, we led heterosexual, single, female participants to believe that they could have the opportunity to meet an attractive and an unattractive man. We then randomly assigned participants to receive various combinations of acceptance/rejection feedback from the two men (as well as a no feedback control condition) after which participants indicated whether or not they wanted to meet each man. Participants also evaluated the men, providing them with an opportunity to value or derogate them. We hypothesized that rejection would lead to distancing from and derogation of that rejecter in order to reduce the sting of rejection. In addition, we hypothesized that rejection by an attractive man would stimulate sufficient threat to participants' sense of attractiveness that they would draw a clear dissociation between themselves and the unattractive man. Thus, we hypothesized that rejection from the attractive man would lead to distancing from and derogation of the unattractive man even when that unattractive man offered acceptance.¹

Study I

Method

Participants

Participants were 135 self-identified heterosexual female undergraduate students at the University of Toronto, not involved in a romantic relationship. Five individuals expressed suspicion and 4 withdrew, leaving 126 participants.

Design

The experiment was a 2 (attractive man feedback: accept versus reject) \times 2 (unattractive man feedback: accept vs. reject) design with a no-feedback control condition. To evenly distribute participants, conditions were run in sequence (e.g., each fifth participant was assigned to the control condition).

Procedure

The experimenter told participants we were interested in how individuals select potential partners using dating websites and whether the impressions they form differ from those formed during in-person interactions. The experimenter began by taking a photograph of the participant which was ostensibly to be used as part of a dating profile. Participants also created a written portion for their profile in which they described themselves. Participants believed their dating profile would be viewed and evaluated by two men that they could potentially meet at the end of the experiment. After completing their profile, participants received a photograph and written description of the two men (created by the researchers).

Each of the men's dating profiles included a self-description. A pilot study indicated that the descriptions did not significantly differ in ratings of romantic appeal, attractiveness, and partner responsiveness. Each profile was paired with either a photograph of an attractive or unattractive male. Two different photos were used at each level of attractiveness to ensure that any effects were due to attractiveness level and not to idiosyncratic features of an individual profile. Pilot testing confirmed that the attractive men ($M = 4.39$) were seen as significantly more attractive than the unattractive men ($M = 1.79$), $t(44) = 9.44, p < .001$. The presentation order of the attractive versus unattractive photographs as well as the written descriptions was counterbalanced.

After viewing the photos and profiles of the men, participants received acceptance/rejection feedback from both men simultaneously after the men had supposedly viewed participants' profiles. The feedback was a "yes" or "no" response to the statement, "I am interested in meeting this person." Experimental participants were randomly assigned to receive a "yes" or "no" from the attractive man as well as a "yes" or "no" from the unattractive man. Participants in the control condition did not receive feedback. Next, all participants were given the opportunity to indicate "yes" or "no" to whether they were interested in meeting each man. Participants also

Table 1. Participant Interest in Meeting Each Man.

	Attractive Man Accept		Attractive Man Reject		Control
	Unattractive Man Accept	Unattractive Man Reject	Unattractive Man Accept	Unattractive Man Reject	
Study 1					
% Interested in attractive man	84	68	32	32	58
% Interested in unattractive man	80	24	24	4	46
N	25	25	25	24	26
Study 2					
% Interested in attractive man	76	74	32	15	69
% Interested in unattractive man	76	17	23	9	22
N	34	35	31	35	32

evaluated each man's physical attractiveness, perceived level of responsiveness, and romantic appeal, enabling them to value or derogate each man.

Measures

Interest in meeting. Participants indicated "yes" or "no" to the statement, "I am interested in meeting this person."

Physical attractiveness. Participants responded to five attractiveness statements (e.g., "This individual is handsome") using a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .90$ for the attractive man and $.92$ for the unattractive man).

Partner responsiveness. Participants responded to 11 statements regarding responsiveness (e.g., "This person seemed supportive") using a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .89$ for both the attractive and unattractive man).

Romantic appeal. Participants responded to five romantic appeal statements (e.g., "This is the kind of person I hope to be in a relationship with in the future") using a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .90$ for the attractive man and $.88$ for the unattractive man).

Results

Interest in Meeting

We first used chi-square analysis to examine the influence of feedback from the attractive and unattractive men on the dichotomous variable of interest in a face-to-face meeting (for now, leaving the control condition out of analyses). We hypothesized that participants would be less interested in meeting the attractive man when he rejected them, but that interest would be unrelated to feedback from the unattractive man (i.e., main effect of feedback from the attractive man but not the unattractive man). Table 1 shows that interest in meeting the attractive man was influenced by his feedback such that participants were more interested in meeting him when he accepted them than when he rejected them, $\chi^2(1) = 19.49, p < .001$.

Interest in meeting the attractive man was not influenced by feedback from the unattractive man, $\chi^2(1) = .64, p = .42$. We also hypothesized that participants would be less interested in meeting the unattractive man when they were rejected by either the unattractive or attractive man (i.e., a main effect of feedback from both the unattractive and attractive man on interest in meeting the unattractive man). Results showed that interest in meeting the unattractive man was influenced by feedback from him such that participants were more interested in meeting the unattractive man when he was accepting than when he was rejecting, $\chi^2(1) = 16.33, p < .001$. Interest in meeting the unattractive man was also related to feedback from the attractive man, such that interest was greater when the attractive man was accepting than when he was rejecting, $\chi^2(1) = 16.33, p < .001$.

Ratings of the Attractive Man

We conducted a series of 2 (attractive man: acceptance versus rejection) \times 2 (unattractive man: acceptance vs. rejection) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to test our continuous variables. Where significant main effects were found, we conducted contrasts using the error term from a one-way 5-condition ANOVA to examine effects relative to the no feedback control condition. Ratings of responsiveness and romantic appeal were highly correlated ($r = .67$ for the attractive man, $.57$ for the unattractive man) so we collapsed these variables. We analyzed ratings of attractiveness separately, given that this measure was directly relevant to the manipulation.²

For ratings of the attractive man, we expected only a main effect of feedback from the attractive man. For evaluations of his attractiveness, a main effect of feedback from the attractive man was found such that participants evaluated him as significantly more attractive when he was accepting ($M = 4.94$) than when he was rejecting ($M = 4.13$), $F(1, 96) = 14.35, p < .001$ (see Table 2). Comparison to the control condition ($M = 4.95$) indicated that acceptance condition participants did not differ from controls, $t(121) = .04, p = .97$, whereas rejection condition participants rated the attractive man as significantly less attractive than controls, $t(121) = 3.31, p = .001$. No effect of feedback from the unattractive man was found,

Table 2. Ratings of the Attractive Man.

	Attractive Man Feedback Main Effect		Unattractive Man Feedback Main Effect		Control
	Accept	Reject	Accept	Reject	
Study 1					
Attractiveness	4.94 ^a	4.13 ^b	4.59 ^a	4.48 ^a	4.95 ^a
Responsiveness/appeal	5.21 ^a	4.14 ^b	4.78 ^a	4.57 ^a	4.89 ^a
Study 2					
Attractiveness	4.93 ^a	4.32 ^b	4.62 ^a	4.65 ^a	4.75 ^a
Responsiveness/appeal	4.95 ^a	4.27 ^b	4.63 ^a	4.62 ^a	4.92 ^a

Note. Superscripts represent differences at $p < .05$.

$F(1, 96) = .25, p = .62$, nor was there a significant interaction between feedback from the attractive and unattractive men, $F(1, 96) = .03, p = .87$.

On the combined measure of responsiveness and romantic appeal for the attractive man, a main effect of feedback from the attractive man was found, $F(1, 96) = 52.24, p < .001$. The attractive man was evaluated more positively when he was accepting ($M = 5.21$) than when he was rejecting ($M = 4.14$). Those in the acceptance condition evaluated the attractive man marginally more positively than controls ($M = 4.89$), $t(121) = 1.80, p = .08$, whereas rejected participants evaluated him significantly more negatively than controls, $t(121) = 4.18, p < .001$. No effect of feedback from the unattractive man was found, $F(1, 96) = 1.92, p = .17$, nor was there a significant interaction between feedback from the attractive and unattractive men, $F(1, 96) = .23, p = .64$.

Ratings of the Unattractive Man

For ratings of the unattractive man, we expected main effects of feedback from both the unattractive and attractive men. For evaluations of the unattractive man's attractiveness, there was a significant main effect of feedback from the unattractive man such that participants accepted by him ($M = 3.61$) evaluated him as significantly more attractive than participants rejected by him ($M = 2.98$), $F(1, 96) = 10.03, p = .002$ (see Table 3). Comparison with the control condition ($M = 3.37$) indicated that accepted participants did not significantly differ from controls, $t(121) = .98, p = .33$, whereas participants rejected by the unattractive man evaluated him as marginally less attractive than controls, $t(121) = 1.59, p = .11$. There was a main effect of feedback from the attractive man such that participants accepted by the attractive man ($M = 3.66$) evaluated the unattractive man as significantly more attractive than participants rejected by the attractive man ($M = 2.98$), $F(1, 96) = 13.01, p < .001$. Contrasts indicated that participants accepted by the attractive man did not differ from controls, $t(121) = 1.16, p = .25$, whereas participants rejected by the attractive man evaluated the unattractive man as marginally less attractive than controls, $t(121) = 1.77, p = .08$. No interaction between

Table 3. Ratings of the Unattractive Man.

	Attractive Man Feedback Main Effect		Unattractive Man Feedback Main Effect		Control
	Accept	Reject	Accept	Reject	
Study 1					
Attractiveness	3.66 ^a	2.98 ^b	3.61 ^a	2.98 ^b	3.37 ^{a,b}
Responsiveness/appeal	4.61 ^a	4.11 ^b	4.66 ^a	4.07 ^b	4.61 ^a
Study 2					
Attractiveness	3.62 ^a	3.16 ^b	3.40 ^a	3.12 ^b	3.73 ^a
Responsiveness/appeal	4.37 ^a	4.09 ^b	4.50 ^a	3.98 ^b	4.26 ^{a,b}

Note. Superscripts represent differences at $p < .05$.

feedback from the two men was found, $F(1, 96) = .49, p = .49$.

For the combined responsiveness/appeal variable, there was a main effect of feedback from the unattractive man such that participants accepted by him ($M = 4.66$) evaluated him more positively than participants rejected by him ($M = 4.07$), $F(1, 96) = 13.71, p < .001$. Participants accepted by the unattractive man did not differ from controls ($M = 4.61$), $t(121) = .26, p = .80$, whereas participants rejected by the unattractive man evaluated him significantly more negatively than controls, $t(121) = 2.88, p = .01$. There was a main effect of feedback from the attractive man such that participants accepted by the attractive man ($M = 4.61$) evaluated the unattractive man more positively than participants rejected by the attractive man ($M = 4.11$), $F(1, 96) = 9.76, p < .001$. Participants accepted by the attractive man did not differ from control participants, $t(121) = .01, p = .99$, whereas participants rejected by the attractive man evaluated the unattractive man significantly more negatively than controls, $t(121) = 2.64, p = .01$. No interaction between feedback from the two men was found, $F(1, 96) = .001, p = .98$.

Discussion

Consistent with our hypotheses, participants who were rejected by one of the men distanced themselves from and derogated him as indicated by less interest in meeting him and lower ratings of attractiveness, responsiveness, and romantic appeal compared to those in the acceptance and control conditions. Of greatest interest, participants who were rejected by the attractive man were also relatively uninterested in meeting the unattractive man and derogated him even when he was accepting. That is, being rejected by the attractive man appeared to make participants less willing to affiliate with the unattractive man and more inclined to evaluate him harshly. This is consistent with our hypothesis that individuals distance themselves from unattractive others following rejections that call into question their attractiveness. Derogating and avoiding affiliation with the unattractive man may have enabled rejected individuals to psychologically distance themselves from the stigma

of being associated with unattractive others. Consistent with this interpretation, it was not the case that rejection by an unattractive man stimulated derogation of and distancing from the attractive man. Affiliating with an attractive individual should help rather than hurt following romantic rejection. Although these data were consistent with our hypotheses, we sought to replicate these findings to establish their reliability.

Study 2

Method

Participants

Participants were 185 heterosexual female undergraduate students at the University of Toronto, not involved in a romantic relationship. Seventeen participants expressed suspicion and 2 participants withdrew leaving 166 participants.

Procedure and Measures

The procedure and measures for Study 2 were the same as Study 1.³

Results

Interest in Meeting

The analysis strategy was the same as Study 1. Chi-square analyses indicated that interest in meeting the attractive man was influenced by his feedback such that participants were more interested in meeting him when he was accepting than when he was rejecting, $\chi^2(1) = 36.60, p < .001$. Interest in meeting the attractive man was not affected by feedback from the unattractive man, $\chi^2(1) = 1.46, p = .23$. Interest in meeting the unattractive man was related to his feedback such that participants were more interested in meeting the unattractive man when he was accepting than when he was rejecting, $\chi^2(1) = 22.14, p < .001$. Interest in meeting the unattractive man was also related to the attractive man's feedback such that meeting the unattractive man was more desired if the attractive man had been accepting rather than rejecting, $\chi^2(1) = 14.94, p < .001$.

Ratings of the Attractive Man

For evaluations of the attractive man's attractiveness, a main effect of acceptance from the attractive man was found such that participants accepted by him ($M = 4.93$) evaluated him as significantly more attractive than participants rejected by him ($M = 4.32$), $F(1, 130) = 10.88, p = .001$. No significant difference was found between no feedback controls ($M = 4.75$) and accepted participants, $t(161) = .82, p = .42$, but participants rejected by the attractive man evaluated him as significantly less attractive than controls, $t(161) = 1.94, p = .05$. No main effect of feedback from the unattractive man was found, $F(1, 130) = .03, p = .86$, nor was there an interaction between feedback from the attractive and unattractive men, $F(1, 130) = 2.15, p = .15$.

On the combined responsiveness/appeal variable (correlations between responsiveness and appeal; $r = .60$ for the attractive man, $.53$ for the unattractive man), a main effect of feedback from the attractive man was found such that participants accepted by him ($M = 4.95$) evaluated him significantly more positively than participants rejected by him ($M = 4.27$), $F(1, 130) = 22.01, p < .001$. Comparisons with control participants ($M = 4.92$) revealed that participants who were accepted by the attractive man did not differ from controls, $t(161) = .16, p = .87$, whereas participants who were rejected by the attractive man evaluated him significantly more negatively than controls, $t(161) = 3.84, p < .001$. There was no main effect of feedback from the unattractive man, $F(1, 130) < .001, p = .99$, nor was the interaction between feedback from the two men significant, $F(1, 130) = .49, p = .49$.

Ratings of the Unattractive Man

For ratings of the unattractive man's attractiveness, a significant main effect of feedback from the unattractive man was found, $F(1, 130) = 3.82, p = .05$. Contrasts indicated that whereas participants accepted by the unattractive man ($M = 3.40$) did not differ from controls ($M = 3.73$), $t(161) = .67, p = .51$, participants rejected by the unattractive man ($M = 3.12$) evaluated him as significantly less attractive than controls, $t(161) = 2.28, p = .02$. A main effect was also found for feedback from the attractive man, such that the unattractive man was rated as significantly more attractive following acceptance by the attractive man ($M = 3.62$) than rejection by the attractive man ($M = 3.16$), $F(1, 130) = 5.83, p = .02$. Participants accepted by the attractive man did not differ from controls, $t(161) = .48, p = .63$, but participants rejected by the attractive man evaluated the unattractive man as significantly less attractive than controls, $t(161) = 2.44, p = .02$. The interaction between feedback from the two men was not significant, $F(1, 130) = .35, p = .56$.

For the responsiveness/appeal variable, a main effect of feedback from the unattractive man was found such that participants accepted by the unattractive man ($M = 4.50$) evaluated him more positively than participants rejected by him ($M = 3.98$), $F(1, 130) = 14.94, p < .001$. Comparisons with the control condition ($M = 4.26$) revealed that participants accepted by the unattractive man did not differ from controls, $t(161) = 1.38, p = .17$, whereas participants rejected by the unattractive man evaluated him marginally more negatively than controls, $t(161) = 1.72, p = .09$. A main effect of feedback from the attractive man was found such that participants accepted by the attractive man ($M = 4.37$) evaluated the unattractive man more positively than participants rejected by the attractive man ($M = 4.09$), $F(1, 130) = 4.44, p = .04$. Participants accepted by the attractive man did not differ from controls, $t(161) = .69, p = .49$, nor did participants rejected by the attractive man, $t(161) = 1.00, p = .32$. Unexpectedly, the interaction between feedback from the two men was significant, $F(1, 130) = 3.94, p = .05$. Simple effects analyses showed that (consistent with hypotheses) when the unattractive man

was accepting, participants evaluated the unattractive man more positively if they were accepted by the attractive man ($M = 4.75$) than if they were rejected by the attractive man ($M = 4.22$), $t(130) = 8.12$, $p < .001$. However, when the unattractive man was rejecting, there was no significant difference in evaluations of the unattractive man when the attractive man was accepting ($M = 3.99$) versus rejecting ($M = 3.98$), $t(130) = 0.01$, $p = .99$. Thus, double rejection did not seem to lead to more derogation than single rejection only on this measure.

Discussion

The data from Study 2 largely replicated Study 1. Participants who were rejected were less interested in meeting their rejecter and evaluated him more harshly than participants in acceptance or control conditions. Participants were also less willing to affiliate with the unattractive man and evaluated him as less attractive when they were rejected by the attractive man relative to both acceptance and control participants. In contrast, being rejected by an unattractive man did not influence participants' evaluations of the attractive man's attractiveness or their desire to meet him. Inconsistent with Study 1, however, there was no evidence of participants derogating the unattractive man on the responsiveness/appeal variable following rejection by the attractive man relative to controls (despite a significant difference relative to those in the acceptance condition). However, a significant interaction on this variable suggested that this was because participants did not "punish" the unattractive man for a double rejection. Nevertheless, the interaction revealed that participants were much harsher toward an accepting, unattractive man when the attractive man had been rejecting rather than accepting. This is consistent with our interpretation that acceptance from low status targets is resisted following rejection from high status targets. Overall, Study 2 provides further support for our hypothesis that rejection stimulates distancing not only from the source of rejection but also from low status others.

General Discussion

Across two studies, we demonstrated that although rejection provoked derogation of and distancing from the rejecter, rejection by an attractive man also led to derogation of and distancing from an unattractive man—even when that unattractive man offered acceptance. Thus, although past research has suggested that acceptance may mitigate the negative impact of rejection (DeWall et al., 2010), rejection itself may influence from which targets an individual desires acceptance. By accounting for the social value of the source of acceptance/rejection, which we operationalized as physical attractiveness, we demonstrated that experiencing rejection from a higher value social target can lead to distancing from a lower value social target even if that lower value social target offers acceptance.

These data shed light on mixed findings in the social exclusion literature whereby rejection sometimes leads to prosocial

behaviors seemingly aimed at restoring connection (Maner et al., 2007) and other times to antisocial behaviors seemingly aimed at undermining connection (Twenge et al., 2001). It is possible that resisting connection following rejection is exactly the goal when it comes to low value sources of acceptance. Specifically, we suggest that feeling connected to low-value social targets validates a low social standing, motivating individuals to actively avoid connections with low status others. Of course, our studies do not provide direct evidence for identification with a low attractiveness person as a mechanism so this explanation needs to be examined in future research. Indeed, without testing other contexts (e.g., feedback from two attractive individuals), we cannot be sure if the distancing and derogation observed in our research is specifically targeted at unattractive individuals or if it is a broader pattern spurred by rejection by an attractive individual. However, consistent with our theoretical position, we did not find evidence that rejection by an unattractive man spurred derogation of an attractive man.

More broadly, these findings suggest that social exclusion studies need to better account for the nuances of real-world rejection experiences. By accounting for multiple sources of rejection/acceptance simultaneously, implementing a relatively ecologically valid and emotionally impactful type of exclusion experience, and accounting for variation in the social value of the actors, our research provides unique insight. However, our research is not without limitations. First, we only included heterosexual, female, undergraduate participants. For believability, these studies needed to be run in person, so we chose undergraduate psychology students as our target population. In order to minimize the number of dating profiles needed, we focused on females as they comprise the majority of the undergraduate pool. Another limitation is that we only manipulated social value through attractiveness, so it is not clear whether our effects pertain only to attractiveness or if they would generalize to social value more broadly. Furthermore, based on participants' ratings, our attractive males may arguably be labeled as moderately attractive. Thus, it is unclear what effects would emerge if rejection came from a highly attractive individual. It is possible that rejection by a highly attractive individual would not spur the same defensive reactions, given that most people should not expect to be desired by the most attractive potential partners and thus may not experience threat to their own sense of attractiveness. Future research should investigate whether our findings can be replicated using samples including men and same-sex-attracted individuals as well as manipulations of other forms of social value (e.g., charm).

Overall, the present research suggests that not all rejections are created equal, and variability in the characteristics of sources of acceptance/rejection needs to be taken into account in order to understand reactions to social exclusion. Furthermore, these results suggest that the notion that rejection should always stimulate a desire for connection may ignore the psychological consequences of identifying with others of low social standing.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. These hypotheses were developed after data collection and analyses. The authors thank the action editor for her input into our theoretical framework.
2. The authors thank the action editor and reviewers for their suggestions.
3. Study 2 included social self-esteem and perceived mate value scales to test mediation related to our original hypotheses. Although the mate value scale appears relevant, it assesses general perceptions of other-sex interest (e.g., “Members of the opposite sex are attracted to me”). Given that our hypotheses suggest that, following rejection, interest from attractive men is desired but interest from unattractive men is problematic, a scale measuring men’s interest in general is not precise enough to test mediation. The patterns of results on these measures were not consistent with our other dependent measures (i.e., null results) and are available on request.

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