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# The Effect of Social Exclusion on Perceptions of Poverty and American Identity



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## Abstract

The current study aims to unveil how social exclusion and physical vulnerability influence personal perception. We hypothesized that social exclusion (versus acceptance and a neutral control) would facilitate negative perceptions of people in poverty and racial ethnic minorities and limit who is perceived as possessing an American identity. We utilized the reliving task paradigm to manipulate the experience of social exclusion and participants completed questionnaires assessing thoughts of physical vulnerability, perceptions of the poor and middle-class, and attributions for poverty, as well as questionnaires assessing personal impressions and perceptions of Americanness amongst various ethnic Americans. Although our hypotheses were largely unsupported, supplemental analyses including political orientation suggest this may be an important moderator.

*Keywords: attributions, person perception, physical vulnerability, social exclusion*

Social psychology's interest in studying social exclusion escalated in the 1990s. This research became vastly influential when Baumeister and Leary (1995) published their now-classic article arguing for the fundamental nature of the need to belong. One key assertion they made was that if belonging needs are not fulfilled and a connection with others is not restored, one will experience pain on psychological and even physical levels (Williams, 2009). Much of the subsequent research on belonging has focused primarily on the psychological consequences of exclusion and isolation (Williams, 2009). For example, social exclusion threatens vital psychological functioning including core needs for belonging (Baumeister Leary, 1995), self-esteem (Steele, 1988; Tesser, 1988), control (Burger, 1992; Peterson et al., 1993; Seligman, 1975), and meaningful existence (Greenberg, Pyszczkynski & Solomon, 1986). Although research has focused on the nature of psychological ramifications, physical consequences of exclusion have recently been examined.

Importantly, researchers have come to agree that our needs for belonging and physical safety are inherently interconnected (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Wesselman

et al. (2012) provides an evolutionary argument for this interconnection; they suggest that the desire to belong is a product of an evolutionary adaptation to guarantee safety as threats arise. That is, social connection with others is an adaptive mechanism utilized from generation to generation for kin to ensure they and their potential offspring will survive – to the extent that an individual belongs within a social network or community, they have access to resources that safeguard the self and one's offspring. However, sometimes individuals do not adhere to the group roles and receive rejection. Universally, acts of rejection (i.e., explicit exclusion) or ostracism (i.e., being ignored or excluded from contact) occur when an individual displays capricious, risky behavior that might conflict with the group's perception of their strength and survival (Williams, 2009). For our evolutionary ancestors, social exclusion meant almost certain death, as exclusion meant loss of access to resources necessary for survival such as food, shelter, and protection from predators.

As dire the consequences of social exclusion and physical harm, they are beneficial in the sense that the pain they elicit are a signal that a threat has been experienced. This idea is consistent with error management theory which holds that it is advantageous for us to be hypersensitive to all cues of threat, so we can avoid that threat or rectify the preceding social errors (see Williams, 2009, for a discussion). Given belonging and safety needs are so intertwined, this means that threats to one need may be interpreted as signaling that the other need may also be threatened or vulnerable to threat.

There is some preliminary evidence in support of this idea. Dean, Wentworth, and LeCompte (accepted, 2017) examined social exclusion and physical vulnerability among college undergraduates. Across three studies, participants were asked to relive an event that involved some type of social acceptance or exclusion. In Study 1, participants were told to relive a memorable experience where they were either accepted or ignored specifically. After writing this essay, participants completed a word-stem task where 14 word fragments were completed as acceptance or non-acceptance words and physical vulnerability or non-

physical vulnerability words. For example, “\_ISK” could be filled as “risk” or “disk” in the physical vulnerability set. Overall, Dean et al. (accepted, 2017) found that participants who were clearly ostracized produced fewer acceptance words and more physical vulnerability words. In a second study, Dean et al. utilized the reliving essay and asked participants to report feelings of safety when walking alone on campus. These questions were in respect to time of day (day vs. night) and location (the rural campus location vs. the city campus location). The results indicated that socially excluded participants reported higher levels of physical vulnerability in surroundings that are typically viewed as threatening, such as at night or in densely populated urban areas. Lastly, Dean et al. (accepted, 2017), again using the reliving task paradigm, assessed participants’ anticipated experiences of physical injury, illness, and harm from others in the future. The results show that thinking about a past social exclusion experience, compared to social acceptance, led participants to expect feeling physically vulnerable in the future.

These findings suggest that instances of social vulnerability, such as social exclusion, can increase thoughts and feelings of physical vulnerability. Additionally, Study 2 in Dean et al. (accepted, 2017) demonstrates that social exclusion influences how people perceive their surroundings, and in this case, their campus environment. Could social exclusion also affect perceptions of others? This is an interesting question given that most social exclusion research has focused on how exclusion affects the individual’s internal states or behavior. There is relatively little research exploring how social exclusion affects how the individual perceives others.

There is some evidence from research supporting the notion that exclusion affects how we perceive others. Interestingly, these studies suggest that a lack of belonging motivates individuals to be especially socially sensitive to others, particularly to cues that indicate whether another person will express acceptance and thereby help the self recover a sense of belonging. For example, studies show that people who relived a past social exclusion, compared to a past social acceptance, were more accurate when distinguishing between genuine and non-genuine smiles (Bernstein, Young, Brown, Sacco, & Claypool, 2008). Specifically, socially excluded participants could more accurately identify genuine

smiles as genuine as well as detect that a feigned smile was in fact not a genuine reflection of that person’s emotional experience. A follow up study illustrates how the manipulation of social exclusion is affiliated with reported preference for friendlier or cooperative coworkers when imagining a working scenario (Bernstein, Sacco, & Brown, 2010). This study confirms that enhanced social sensitivity helps them identify interaction partners who are likely to accept them and thus fulfill their thwarted belonging needs.

Additional evidence was found by Pickett and colleagues who examined trait levels of belonging instead of state experiences of belonging (Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004). Across several studies, Pickett et al., (2004) found that people with chronically unfulfilled belonging needs attended to social cues (e.g., vocal tone, facial expression, emotional identification) more carefully than those who were accepted. Interestingly, a high need to belong facilitated performance on social tasks like these but not cognitive, intellectual tasks, suggesting that effects of exclusion focus on social cues that foster connection with others. Overall, these findings suggest that social exclusion prompts people to more accurately perceive social cues exhibited by others and that this heightened social sensitivity helps the individual socially connect with others and fulfill their need to belong. But will social exclusion elicit such positive, prosocial perceptions when people are feeling physically vulnerable?

Given that social exclusion has been shown to heighten perceptions of physical vulnerability (Dean et al., accepted, 2016), it is possible that such feelings of physical vulnerability will shift attention away from positive social cues and instead increase sensitivity to social cues signaling negativity and threat. Stated another way, social exclusion, to the extent it increases feelings of physical vulnerability, may prompt people to perceive others as negative and harmful.

Although this specific question has not been addressed in the literature, studies examining similar concepts provide indirect support of physical vulnerability and negative person perception. For example, He and colleagues (2016) found that in a medical setting, participants receiving shots by a nurse versus those not receiving shots viewed the nurse as possessing negative qualities (e.g., cold, distant; He, Guo, Jiang, Zhou, & Gao, 2016). Additionally, He et al. conducted a conceptual

replication in a laboratory setting utilizing a cold pressor task, which involves immersing hands in ice water (pain condition) or room temperature water (control condition). Again they found that participants in the pain condition elucidated negative person perception as participants rated neutral faces as more negative versus positive (He et al., 2016). If physical pain exhorts negative thoughts of others, then it seems likely that the social pain of exclusion could elicit similar effects.

Additional literature utilizes a third-party approach with participants observing social exclusion rather than directly experiencing it (Park & Park, 2015). In this study, participants observed a cyberball game where one player was explicitly a perpetrator of social exclusion and a second player the victim; participants then rated dehumanization in terms of human nature (HN) and human uniqueness (HU) (Park & Park, 2015). For example, HN was measured using positive and negative traits such as *active, curious, helpful, impatient, impulsive, and nervous*. While (HU) was measured utilizing positive and negative traits that were more specific, such as *broadminded, humble, polite, ignorant, rude, stingy* (Park & Park, 2015). Park and Park (2015) found that victims of social exclusion are dehumanized in terms of their scores of human nature and uniqueness while at the same time being evaluated positively in comparison to the perpetrator. Essentially, social exclusion potentially leads observers to derogate victims by viewing them less than human while simultaneously holding favorable views of victims (Park & Park, 2015). If observers of social exclusion at an implicit level find victims of social exclusion less than human, then it seems likely that participants who feel socially excluded might dehumanize marginalized members of society to fulfill a sense of protection that was lost when they felt excluded themselves.

Drawing on these findings, the current study will focus attention on the effects of social exclusion on perceptions of poverty and American identity. As such, the current research seeks to examine how the experience of social exclusion impacts perceptions of people who, by feature of their social experience (poverty) or social group (racial-ethnic minority), are stigmatized in American society.

### Perceptions of Poverty

Poverty is a social issue that has received growing attention in many fields in

relation to health, race, public policy, and environmental issues. Importantly, perspectives on poverty – what causes it, who experiences it – shape stances on poverty that are adopted nationwide and shape public policy and law. However, little research has assessed individual perceptions and attitudes of poverty through experimental manipulation in psychology. Generally, correlational studies examine demographic difference in poverty related to age, gender, political affiliation, social class, wealth, and race (Lott, 2002).

Lott (2002) provides insight on poverty through classism. Specifically, Lott posits that the middle class performs cognitive and behavioral distancing from the poor by exclusion, discounting, and derogating the poor as “other” through stereotypes and prejudice (Lott, 2002). The utilization of stereotypes and prejudice depicts cognitive distancing. For instance, Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler (2001) examined middle class beliefs of the poor by asking participants to indicate the degree to which different traits accurately characterized those who were poor. Participants rated poor people more negatively and less positively than middle-class people; some example traits used in the study include uneducated, unmotivated, lazy, dirty, angry, stupid, unpleasant, immoral, criminal, alcoholic, abusive, and violent (Cozzarelli et al., 2001). Lott (2002) finds that even middle class children hold similar views toward people who are poor.

The literature on poverty also demonstrates patterns among certain populations in terms of their attributions and whether they are internal or external. Internal attributions explain a person’s behavior based on the person’s traits, whereas external attributions explain a person’s behavior as caused by external, situational factors (Cozzarelli et al., 2001). Not only did Cozzarelli et al. (2001) find that the middle class had negative attitudes toward the poor, their research also showed that poverty was attributed to internal causes, thereby placing blame for poverty on those who were experiencing it.

Poverty entails a lack of money and other financial resources. As such, research examining the effects of money may provide insight into our perceptions of people who lack money. Interestingly, money is a symbol that people use to derive meaning because money symbolizes power, possession of material goods, and status. Terror management theory argues

that we cope with the knowledge of our eventual death and the anxiety this creates by bolstering our cultural worldviews and symbols of our culture, which can include money (Greenberg et al., 1990). Thus, money has been examined in TMT research as an existential anxiety buffer. Zaleskiwicz, Gasiorowska, Kesebir, and Luszczynska (2013) predicted that when death was salient people would value money more. Specifically, they found that when people were reminded of their mortality they overestimated the size of money, overestimated the money needed to be labelled as “affluent,” and desired more immediate compensation of money if it were borrowed. Given social exclusion can be perceived as “social death,” it stands to reason that social exclusion may also increase the value of money and consequently lead to negative perceptions of people without money.

Taking all this suggestive evidence together, we hypothesize that social exclusion will activate physical vulnerability thoughts which will create negative attitudes towards people living in poverty. In addition, we expect that social exclusion will prompt participants to attribute individuals’ poverty position as an internal, individual outcome versus an external or situational outcome.

Devos and Banaji (2005) examined beliefs about the extent to which three groups of Americans –Whites, Africans, and Asians –are perceived as possessing an American identity. Participants in this study completed *The Definition of American Identity* questionnaire which included statements regarding voting in elections, respecting America’s political institutions and laws, treating all people equally, American citizenship, patriotism, and etc. Additionally, egalitarian principles were measured; for example, Devos and Banaji (2005) asked people their level of agreement/disagreement to the statement “In my mind, I truly believe that I ought to treat members of different ethnic groups equally.” Overall, they found that 88.4% of their participants strongly believed African-, White-, and Asian-Americans should be treated equally. Despite this belief in equality, which is rooted in the origins of our American, democratic culture, participants did not rate each ethnicity as equally American. Their findings indicate that White-Americans are perceived as more American than African-Americans, who are viewed as more American than Asian-Americans.

Overall, Devos and Banaji (2005) convey an overarching phenomenon of American =White based on the results.

### Perceptions of American Identity

In addition to poverty perceptions, we are interested in examining perceptions of racial-ethnic minorities as possessing an American Identity. A few recent studies provide some initial insight into the effect of social exclusion on perceived American identity by studying related concepts. For instance, within the person perception literature, Van Bavel and colleagues examined the own-race bias, where people are better able to remember members of their own race instead of another (Van Bavel, Swencionis, O’Connor, & Cunningham, 2012). They found that high belonging needs and social exclusion exacerbate in-group bias motivation particularly when it comes to memory of an ingroup such as examining race, or college university (Van Bavel et al., 2012). These findings provide direct evidence to explain own-group bias shaping how we might see similar results when examining a possible own-group bias when participants are identifying American Identity between different racial groups.

Prior research has examined belonging needs and social exclusion as motivators for characterizing racially ambiguous faces as belonging in an outgroup or in-group (Gaither, Pauker, Slepian, & Sommers, 2016). Essentially, belonging needs and a participant’s racial category facilitated identifying an ambiguous mixed-racial face as an outgroup category versus in-group. Gaither et al., (2016) found that characterization of an ambiguous face was dependent on self-relevant goals meaning that threats to unfair advantages such as a higher status may be ameliorated when participants decided to exclude racially ambiguous faces from their in-group. In addition, when need to belong and social exclusion were compared between white and black participants, black participants’ categorization of racially ambiguous faces reports were more inclusive versus white participants (Gaither et al., 2016).

Additionally, social exclusion research has assessed attitudes toward out-group members as well. Aydin, Krueger, Frey, Kastenmuller, and Fischer (2013) conducted an experimental study among native-born German participants. After the exclusion (vs. acceptance) manipulation, participants read newspaper clips about the naturalization of German citizens

and the construction of a local mosque and then indicated their attitudes toward the naturalization test and the proposed mosque. For example, participants indicated if they strongly agreed or disagreed with a difficult language test for citizenship, if immigrants with a criminal past should be given a second chance for German citizenship, or questions regarding opposition or tolerance of mosque construction. Results reveal that social exclusion, compared to acceptance, fostered an intolerant, xenophobic attitude toward immigrants and Muslims.

These studies confirm that experiences of social threat, whether chronic or temporary, prompt negative perceptions of and reactions to people categorized as outgroup members. Aydin et al. (2013) goes a step further in demonstrating how social exclusion fosters cognitive and emotional distancing from people considered “other.” Is it possible, then, that an experience of social exclusion will elicit a different type of cognitive distancing—the denial of a shared, American identity to racial-ethnic minority individuals? According to social dominance theory (see Devos & Banaji, 2005, for a discussion), the relationships between ethnic groups derives from social status and power inequalities. This theory argues that Caucasian counterparts in the U.S. have heightened status and power versus other ethnic groups and consequently cultural expectations emerge whereby Caucasian individuals develop a national attachment to whiteness because they are rendered the prototype. Nativist perspectives may also play into these cultural expectations, as Caucasian Europeans were some of the first inhabitants of the American colonies.

In sum, the person perception literature suggest that social exclusion fosters negative attitudes toward social outgroup members as it potentially threatens social dominance and highlights how one’s ethnic group is socially vulnerable. The findings imply that social exclusion may elicit a similar effect in terms of perceptions of the Americanness of social outgroup members like ethnic minorities. Therefore, we hypothesize that social exclusion will lead participants to view ethnic minority individuals as more threatening and less American than White/Caucasian individuals.

## Method

### Participants

One hundred and twenty participants were

recruited on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (i.e., MTurk,  $M$  age = 34.17) and received \$2.25 for their time. The sample included 71.7% European Americans, 12.5% Asian-Americans, 6.7% African-Americans, 7.5% Hispanic Americans, and 1.7% multi-ethnic; all participants self-identified as American citizens. Across 3 conditions, there were 40 participants in the social acceptance condition, 43 participants in the neutral condition, and 37 in the social exclusion condition.

### Materials and Procedures

Participants were recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk; all data was collected using Qualtrics research software and analyzed utilizing SPSS. After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to the experimental condition and instructed to spend 3-5 minutes recalling and writing about a past experience of acceptance, exclusion, or a time spent preparing a meal. Specifically, participants in the social exclusion condition ( $n = 37$ ) read the following:

This can include a situation where someone prevented you from engaging in an activity, criticized you or your abilities, made you feel unwelcome and unwanted in a group, etc. Nearly everyone has experienced social rejection more than once. Choose an experience recent and memorable enough that you can relive the event and all its accompanying emotions. Actually, put yourself back in the time and place and conjure up all your feelings and senses. Please visualize this experience and write about it with as much detail as possible.

Given the same prompt format, individuals assigned to the acceptance condition ( $n = 40$ ) were told to imagine and recall a time they were socially accepted, while those in the neutral condition ( $n = 43$ ) were told to imagine and recall themselves preparing a meal. Each essay prompt expressed the importance of choosing a vivid event in order increase the potency of the experimental manipulation as they conjured up all the event’s accompanying emotions. Additionally, participants responded to two post-task questions where participants reported their emotional state from the experience on a scale from 1 (*very negative*) to 7 (*very positive*) and how excluded they felt on a scale from 1 (*not at all excluded*) to 7 (*very excluded*).

Directly after the reliving task, study

participants completed the word completion task, which was used to assess thoughts of physical vulnerability. Twelve word fragments were presented and participants were instructed to fill in the missing letters to form the first word that comes to mind. Of these 12 word fragments, 6 fragments could be completed to form physical vulnerability-related words (e.g., “\_ ISK” completed as “risk”). The current word fragment task was adapted from studies assessing death thought accessibility (see Hayes, Schimmel, Arndt, & Faucher, 2010). A physical vulnerability score was calculated by summing the total number of physical vulnerability-related words created (out of 6).

Next, participants were presented with two separate questionnaires assessing beliefs about characteristics of the poor and middle class. The order of these questionnaires was counterbalanced across participants. Specifically, participants were presented with a list of 24 traits (e.g., lazy, healthy, uneducated, friendly) and were asked, “To what degree does each statement describe poor people?” or “To what degree does each statement describe the middle class?” The questionnaire conveyed an equal number of positive (e.g., hardworking, healthy, proud) and negative qualities (e.g., dangerous, criminal, drug abuser). Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic*) for each trait. This questionnaire was adapted from a correlational study assessing attitudes of the poor and attributions for poverty (see Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). We reverse scored negatively valenced items, and separate mean scores for perceptions of the poor and middle class were calculated so that higher mean scores meant greater endorsement of positive characteristics.

Participants then completed a questionnaire on causes of poverty. Directions prompted participants to rate each of the 18 factors as a cause of poverty. These 16 items were utilized to assess the extent to which participants made internal ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and external ( $\alpha = .87$ ) attributions for those in poverty. To obtain the alpha for external attributions we combined cultural and external attributions to increase reliability; items 2 and 14 were dropped because they significantly reduced reliability. An example of an internal, personal factor is “lack of effort and laziness by the poor”; an example of an external factor is “prejudice and discrimination in promotion and wages.” Participants responded on a scale ranging

from 1 (*not at all important as a cause of poverty*) to 5 (*extremely important as a cause of poverty*). We computed separate internal and external attribution mean scores; higher scores meant greater endorsement of that type of cause of poverty.

Next, participants were presented with a series of faces and asked to report their impressions of each person portrayed as well as their beliefs about the person's American identity. Specifically, four photographs were presented illustrating European American, Hispanic-American, African-American, and Asian-American men. These photographs were drawn from the Chicago Face Database where participants rate hundreds of photographs (Ma, Correll, & Wittenbrink, 2015) and were chosen based on dimensions of similarity in specific features (e.g., masculinity, attractiveness, age, and neutral emotion). Participants were asked to rate their impressions of each person in the photograph on 6 general qualities (e.g., friendliness, threatening, honest) on a 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*) scale. Separate mean scores were created for each target photograph by averaging the ratings for the 6 qualities; higher scores represent more positive impressions of the European-American ( $\alpha = .65$ ), Hispanic-American, ( $\alpha = .73$ ), African-American ( $\alpha = .78$ ), and Asian-American ( $\alpha = .68$ ) males depicted in the photographs.

The last questionnaire assessed perceptions of American identity. Specifically, participants again viewed each of the four photographs and rated each man in terms of the extent to which the 18 statements regarding American values and identification applied to them. The 18 questions tapped into different perspectives of what it means to be an American, including nativist ideas ( $\alpha = .86$ , e.g., "Possesses U.S citizenship," "Resides in U.S most one's life"), belief in core civic values ( $\alpha = .86$ , e.g., "How patriotic is this person?", "How critical of the U.S. government is this person?"), religious affiliation ( $\alpha = .71$ , e.g., "Believes in God, Is a Christian"), and emotional attachment to one's country ( $\alpha = .89$ , e.g., "Feels American"). In addition to creating separate subscale mean scores to represent each of these components of American identity, we also created an overall mean score including all 16 items; reliability was highest for this overall mean score ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Two additional questions referred to the 2016 election of President Donald Trump (e.g., "Voted for Donald Trump

as president," "Approves of President Trump's performance so far"). Participants rated beliefs of each person's possession of American Identity from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). This questionnaire was adapted from past research on perceived racial-ethnic differences in American identity (see Devos & Banaji, 2005).

Finally, participants completed a variety of demographics questions including race, income, political orientation, and educational background and a variety of suspicion check questions. Lastly, they read the debriefing form describing the study in more detail.

## Results

### Primary Analyses

**Manipulation check.** To assess the effectiveness of our manipulation, participants reported their emotion after reliving and writing about their experience as well as their overall state of exclusion felt. We conducted separate three way ANOVAs (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection) on these two questions. Participants in the exclusion condition ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) reported feeling more negative than those in the acceptance ( $M = 6.55$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) and neutral condition ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ),  $F(2, 117) = 237.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . Additionally, participants in the exclusion condition ( $M = 5.68$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) reported feeling more excluded than those in the acceptance ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) and neutral condition ( $M = 1.77$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ),  $F(2, 117) = 82.23$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Physical vulnerability.** We hypothesized that social exclusion would heighten physical vulnerability feelings relative to the acceptance and neutral control conditions based on how belonging and safety needs are intertwined. We conducted a three-way ANOVA (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection) to examine the number of physical vulnerability words created. We found that condition did not affect the salience of physical vulnerability,  $F(2, 117) = 1.08$ ,  $p = .342$ .

**Perceptions of poor and middle class.** We hypothesized that social exclusion, compared to our control conditions would provoke a more negative portrayal of characteristics possessed by the poor but not the middle class. We conducted a three-way ANOVA (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection) on the mean scores of poor and middle class characteristics. We found that our manipulation did not

significantly affect the beliefs about the characteristics of the poor,  $F(2, 117) = .74$ ,  $p = .48$  or the middle class,  $F(2, 117) = .50$ ,  $p = .61$ . We also predicted, based on past research (Cozzarelli et al., 2001), that participants would evaluate poor people more negatively than the middle class and that this effect would be especially strong among participants in the social exclusion condition. To examine this, we conducted a 3 (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection) x 2 (class: poor, middle) mixed model ANOVA; class was measured within subjects. A main effect of class emerged,  $F(2, 117) = 103.55$ ,  $p < .001$ , such that participants rated the poor ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) more negatively than the middle class ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = .51$ ), consistent with hypotheses. However, the expected condition X class interaction was nonsignificant,  $F(2, 117) = .77$ ,  $p = .47$ .

**Causes for poverty.** We hypothesized that social exclusion, compared to the control conditions, would elicit more agreement with internal attributions but less agreement with external attributions. Separate three way ANOVAs (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection) show that condition did not influence agreement with either internal causes of poverty  $F(2, 117) = .14$ ,  $p = .87$  or external causes,  $F(2, 117) = .28$ ,  $p = .75$ . We also hypothesized that participants would report more agreement with internal vs. external attributions, especially after a social exclusion experience. To test this, we conducted a 3 (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection) x 2 (cause of poverty: internal, external) mixed model ANOVA, with cause of poverty measured within subjects. A main effect of causes of poverty emerged,  $F(1, 117) = 21.80$ ,  $p < .001$ , such that participants endorsed external attributions ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) more than internal attributions ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = .97$ ). Contrary to hypotheses, the condition X causes of poverty interaction was not significant,  $F(2, 117) = .16$ ,  $p = .85$ .

**Perceptions of racial ethnic minorities.** We hypothesized that social exclusion, compared to the control conditions, would exacerbate negative perceptions of racial ethnic minorities (i.e., Asian American, Hispanic American, African American) but not European Americans. We conducted a three way ANOVA (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection) on mean impression ratings for each of the four photograph targets. We found that the experimental manipulation did not significantly affect impressions of the European American

man  $F(2, 117) = .70, p = .50$ , Hispanic American man  $F(2, 117) = .51, p = .60$ , African American man  $F(2, 117) = .28, p = .76$ , and Asian man  $F(2, 117) = .19, p = .83$ . We also conducted a 3 (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection)  $\times$  4 (perceptions of ethnic targets: European American, Hispanic American, African American, Asian American) mixed model ANOVA, with perceptions measured as a within-subjects variable. A main effect of perceptions emerged,  $F(2, 117) = 3.61, p = .01$ . Specifically, the African American man ( $M = 3.54, SD = .59$ ) was rated more positively than the European American man ( $M = 3.42, SD = .52$ ),  $p = .03$ , the Hispanic American man ( $M = 3.37, SD = .55$ ),  $p = .002$ , and the Asian American man ( $M = 3.41, SD = .55$ ),  $p = .024$ . However, contrary to predictions, the condition  $\times$  perceptions of ethnic targets interaction was not significant,  $F(6, 351) = .81, p = .56$ .

**Perceptions of American identity.** We hypothesized that the experience of social exclusion, compared to the control conditions, would lead participants to derogate the minority targets by granting American identity to European Americans at a greater extent than the minority individuals portrayed in the photographs. To examine this, we first conducted a three way ANOVA (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection) on mean scores of American identity for each of the four photographed targets. Results show that condition did not influence perceptions of American identity for the Hispanic-American target,  $F(2, 117) = .728, p = .485$ , African-American target,  $F(2, 117) = .962, p = .385$ , or the Asian-American target,  $F(2, 117) = .797, p = .453$ . However, we did find that the condition influenced perceptions of American identity for the European-American target,  $F(2, 117) = 7.03, p = .001$ . Specifically, participants in the neutral condition ( $M = 4.34, SD = .45$ ) rated the European-American target as more American than did participants in the acceptance condition ( $M = 3.91, SD = .55$ ),  $t(117) = -3.70, p < .001$ , and exclusion condition ( $M = 4.07, SD = .59$ ),  $t(117) = 2.31, p = .02$ . We also conducted a 3 (condition: acceptance, neutral, rejection)  $\times$  4 (American identity of ethnic targets: European-American, Hispanic-American, African-American, Asian-American) mixed model ANOVA, with American identity ratings included as a within-subjects factor. A main effect of American identity ratings emerged,  $F(3, 351) = 44.81, p < .001$ . Consistent with

past research (Devos & Banaji, 2005), the European-American target ( $M = 4.11, SD = .56$ ) was perceived as more American than the Hispanic-American target ( $M = 3.61, SD = .67$ ),  $p < .001$ , the African-American target ( $M = 3.94, SD = .56$ ),  $p = .001$ , and the Asian-American target ( $M = 3.57, SD = .62$ ),  $p < .001$ . However, the expected interaction between condition  $\times$  American identity of ethnic targets was not significant,  $F(6, 351) = 1.35, p = .23$ .

### Supplemental Analyses

We suspected that our experimental manipulation, particularly the effect of rejection, would be specific to certain people. Specifically, we thought that condition would evince a stronger effect among those who report more political conservatism; that is, social rejection would prompt greater derogation of members of marginalized groups only among people who also hold a conservative political orientation. We also expected the acceptance and exclusion conditions to yield the most straightforward test of our hypotheses, and so our supplemental analyses focus on these two conditions. We tested these hypotheses by conducting separate multiple regression analyses on our dependent variables of interest. Specifically, condition (dummy coded acceptance = 0, rejection = 1), political orientation (centered), and their interaction were included as predictors.

**Physical vulnerability.** Results show that there was no main effect of condition,  $t(73) = 1.02, p = .31$  nor a main effect of political orientation,  $t(73) = 1.03, p = .31$ . The condition  $\times$  political orientation interaction was also not significant,  $t(73) = -.006, p = .99$ .

**Perceptions of poor and middle class.** Results show that there was not a main effect of condition  $t(73) = -1.12, p = .27$  on perceptions of the poor. There was not a main effect for political orientation  $t(73) = -.84, p = .40$  on perceptions of the poor. The condition  $\times$  political orientation interaction was not significant  $t(73) = -.45, p = .65$  when assessing perceptions of the poor. Results show there was not a main effect of condition  $t(73) = -.53, p = .60$ , nor a main effect for political orientation  $t(73) = 1.35, p = .18$  on perceptions of the middle class. The condition  $\times$  political orientation interaction was not significant  $t(73) = -1.04, p = .30$  on perceptions of the middle class.

**Causes for poverty.** In terms of internal

attribution, the main effect of condition was not significant,  $t(73) = -.62, p = .54$ , but there was a marginal main effect of political orientation,  $t(73) = 1.82, p = .072$  such that greater political conservatism was associated with greater endorsement of internal attributions. The interaction between condition and political orientation was not significant  $t(73) = .70, p = .49$ . There was no main effect of condition for external attributions  $t(73) = .14, p = .89$ . There was a main effect on political orientation  $t(73) = -3.29, p = .002$ , such that greater political conservatism was associated with a reduced endorsement of external attributions. The interaction between condition and political orientation was not significant,  $t(73) = -1.14, p = .26$ .

### Perceptions of racial ethnic minorities.

When examining negative perceptions of ethnic groups there was not a main effect on condition for the European American target  $t(73) = -.99, p = .33$ , Hispanic American target  $t(73) = .33, p = .74$ , African American target  $t(73) = -.56, p = .58$ , and Asian American target  $t(73) = -.30, p = .77$ . There was no main effect on political orientation for the European American target  $t(73) = .99, p = .32$ , Hispanic American target  $t(73) = -.17, p = .86$ , African American target  $t(73) = .07, p = .94$ , and Asian American target  $t(73) = 1.09, p = .28$ . The condition  $\times$  political orientation interaction was not significant for the European American target  $t(73) = -.67, p = .50$ , Hispanic American target  $t(73) = -.53, p = .60$ , and Asian American target  $t(73) = -.97, p = .33$ . However, there was a condition  $\times$  political orientation interaction with negative person perception with the African American target  $t(73) = -1.72, p = .09$ . For participants in the acceptance condition, political orientation was not associated with perceptions of the African American target,  $t(38) = .08, p = .94$ . But for participants in the rejection condition, greater political conservatism was associated with more negative perceptions of the African American target,  $t(35) = -2.43, p = .02$ .

**Perceptions of American identity.** When examining American identity of ethnic groups there was not a main effect on condition for the European American target  $t(73) = 1.07, p = .29$ , Hispanic American target  $t(73) = 1.15, p = .26$ , African American target  $t(73) = -.11, p = .91$ , and Asian American target  $t(73) = .40, p = .69$ . There was no main effect on political orientation for the European American target  $t(73) = .81, p = .42$ ,

Hispanic American target  $t(73) = -.87$ ,  $p = .39$ , African American target  $t(73) = .68$ ,  $p = .50$ , and Asian American target  $t(73) = .06$ ,  $p = .96$ . The condition X political orientation interaction was not significant for the European American target  $t(73) = -.91$ ,  $p = .37$ , Hispanic American target  $t(73) = .03$ ,  $p = .98$ , and Asian American target  $t(73) = -.87$ ,  $p = .39$ . However, a condition X political orientation interaction did emerge for the African American target,  $t(73) = -2.03$ ,  $p = .046$ . A simple effect did not emerge for the acceptance condition; specifically, for participants in this condition, political orientation was not related to perceptions of Americanness for the African American target,  $t(38) = .62$ ,  $p = .54$ . However, a simple effect emerged such that for participants in the rejection condition, greater political conservatism was associated with less Americanness granted to the African American target,  $t(35) = -2.56$ ,  $p = .02$ .

## Discussion

The results of the current study suggest that experiencing social exclusion does not appear to heighten thought of physical vulnerability, nor does it lead people to derogate members of marginalized groups. The few effects that did emerge were not consistent with our hypotheses; later in the discussion, we offer a potential explanation and suggestions for future research. However, consistent with predictions and past research (Cozzarelli et al, 2001), we found that people, regardless of condition, evaluated the poor more negatively than the middle class and attributed the causes of poverty to be more internal rather than external. Additionally, consistent with predictions and past research (Devos & Banaji, 2005), American identity was granted to European Americans to a greater extent than ethnic minority Americans.

Our supplemental analyses revealed that political orientation plays a role in our effects. First, for attributions, we found that there was a marginal effect of condition, such that greater political conservatism led to endorsement of more internal attributions versus external. Second, we also found that political orientation moderated the effect of social exclusion on person perceptions and American identity. Specifically, when participants were rejected, greater political conservatism was related to more negative perceptions of and less Americanness attributed to the African American target

(but not the other ethnic minority targets). These results suggest that the effects of social exclusion on perceptions of ethnicity minorities is specific to people who possess a certain political ideology.

But why would social exclusion and conservative political ideology negatively influence perceptions of the African American target but not the other men of color? Although this is speculation, there is a divisive history that goes back to the Atlantic slave trade that may explain the strain that is evident from these findings. As European Americans and African Americans predominately represent the majority of the United States, it is not entirely shocking to think that long-standing tensions between these two groups could result in negative perceptions. For example, tensions have been prevalent historically since the Atlantic slave trade, slave code and Black code eras, and Jim Crow laws. Even now, there is still a fight for civil rights as movements fight systemic racism, police brutality, and mass incarceration of African Americans. These historical tensions may be inter-generational as well. Additional speculation of this phenomenon points in the direction of media. Stereotypes of African American men are frequently disseminated to the public through social media, highly accessible news articles, newspapers, and news stations where African American men are portrayed in stereotypic terms as threatening and unlawful. The dissemination of these stereotypes may instill a state of physical vulnerability specific to conservatives who may more readily adopt these stereotypes. Similarly, the exposure of civil rights activism through Black Lives Matter, a common topic of discussion in the news at the time this research was conducted, might have led conservative European American participants facing rejection to enter a defensive-like state by protecting their in-group and derogating the African American community to combat the voiced concerns of the BLM movement.

Another explanation for these findings may stem from moral foundations theory. According to Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009), moral foundations are endorsed differently between liberals and conservatives. Graham et al. (2009) has examined the moral differences between liberals and conservatives where 5 sets of moral institutions are examined: Harm/care, Fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/Sanctity.

Consistent with their moral foundations hypothesis, liberals valued Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity the most whereas conservatives upheld all 5 moral sets to a similar degree (Graham et al., 2009). Additionally, this work shows that greater endorsement of political conservatism was associated with increased emphasis on in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. The past research connects with the current study in that self-identified conservatives in our study, especially those who are socially excluded, may value these particular moral systems that influence feelings of vulnerability around and thus perceptions of ethnic minorities. For example, authority and in-group are especially endorsed by conservatives where adherence to laws and middle class values are cherished. For example, Graham et al. (2009) provides an example where authority would be threatened by not respecting traditions of society, or for cursing the founders or early heroes of our country. Another example where in-group moral systems would be threatened is when there is a lack of loyalty to the in-group membership (Graham et al., 2009). For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement may be a threat to in-group loyalty as the majority of the United States identifies as White or European American. Perhaps socially excluded conservatives are endorsing these specific moral sets when their in-group is threatened or because often stereotypes illustrate the misconception that African American men do not adhere to the moral set of obeying authority.

Additionally, moral foundations theory is applicable to the relationship of internal attributions for poverty and conservatism when participants are excluded. Perhaps personal characteristics are believed to be the cause of poverty due to the belief in lack of conformity among the poor. Those who live in poverty are perceived as not reflective of the in-group of the nation. According to Graham et al. (2009), in-group moral relevance can be examined when actions affect the in-group, while authority moral relevance relates to how individuals fail to fulfil the duty of their role in society. These moral sets and what they mean connect with the very personal causes for poverty versus externally made causes.

As with any study, ours had some limitations. Our neutral condition did not appear to be neutral in the coding process, as there was a mix of acceptance

and exclusion-like experiences reported in the reliving tasks. For example, some individuals wrote about their meal preparation experience with the involvement of others (e.g., spouse, children, friends) which may have impacted how negative or positive their experience was. Additionally, participants wrote about experiences which were off topic, such as describing the birth of a child instead of a time preparing a meal. In general, people associate preparing a meal with positive emotions versus negative; however, essays that involve exclusion-related themes (e.g., potential exclusion by a partner who dislikes the meal) or physical harm themes (e.g., a kitchen fire) lead us to question whether these participants' experience was more exclusionary than neutral. Furthermore, coping mechanisms may have been employed in the rejection essays where participants wrote about a negative experience but at some point addressed feeling better about the experience in the present. Participants who were coded for coping may have a more positive than negative experience in our condition which may explain the inconsistencies in our results. Additional analyses will be conducted to examine whether excluding these participants from analyses has had an effect on the results.

The coding process also revealed potential social desirability bias among some participants. Participants might have been reluctant to provide genuine answers as some participants responded along the lines of wanting to be "PC," or politically correct and not racist. Obviously, when these sorts of responses are provided participants were holding back from reporting more authentic answers. It is also possible that participants altered their responses but did not reference this in the post-study questionnaire; more concerning is the possibility that participants were not consciously aware that they were altering their responses to be more egalitarian. Social desirability could have been decreased had we had a more implicit way of measuring perceptions of the poor, person perception of ethnic minorities, and Americanness granted to ethnic minority Americans. Future research should utilize an implicit measure when examining these perceptions as well as others to diminish desirability bias as there is a time restriction. However, it is important to note that participants were not able to go back to any questionnaire completed previously to change answers; this procedural choice, which was purposeful in our study, prevented participants from comparing their

answer to the different ethnic targets so as to appear more egalitarian.

The composition of our sample, which was majority White, European American, limited our ability to compare how members of different ethnic groups reacted to the social exclusion prime. Specifically, an insufficient number of non-white participants completed our study, and thus there was limited power to detect any effects, and any comparisons between ethnic groups would be prone to Type 1 error. It would be interesting to examine whether ethnicity moderates the effect of exclusion on perceptions of others in future research. We would expect that socially excluded European American participants might perceive the poor more negatively, attribute causes to be more internal than external, and perceive ethnic minorities more negatively, and rate the ethnic minority targets as less American versus the European American target more than other racial groups based on different life experiences in the United States.

Although results do not provide much insight on how social exclusion affects perceptions of marginalized groups, these questions are still important. Given the interesting results of our supplemental analyses, further research would likely unveil a more nuanced understanding of the wider range of impacts of social exclusion. Because most social exclusion research is focused at the individual level, there is a void that needs to be filled regarding how one person's experience of exclusion affects others. Going beyond ourselves, and our individual experience of exclusion, further inquiry and devotion to this topic may provide us with a better understanding of how experiencing exclusion perpetuates the exclusion of others.

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