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Effects of Social Rejection on Intrinsic Motivation: Possible Benefits of Social Rejection

Nolan R. Liang

ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL, Charlottesville, USA
nliang2020@gmail.com

Abstract: This research seeks to see if there is a positive correlation between social rejection and intrinsic motivation. Not only will this research help identify the effects of social rejection, but it will also prove how social rejection can create a better future for individuals. If social rejection is proven to increase motivation, then individuals will seek to improve themselves and thus their lives, leading to success. In the experiment, participants will experience two types of social rejection, warmth rejection and competence rejection. Those in the warmth rejection group will be excluded from group activity, while those in the competence rejection group will complete a test and be told that they do not have the social skills necessary to continue in the study. Following these scenarios, participants will take the Achievement Motivation Inventory (AMI) to measure their level of intrinsic motivation. Comparing these to their respective control groups, similar scenarios in which participants will instead be included and accepted, it's predicted that those who have experienced rejection, in particular competence rejection, will have higher AMI scores. Additionally, participants' level of neuroticism, measured by the Big 5 Personality Test, will be taken into account, the prediction being that those high on neuroticism will have decreased motivation following rejection rather than increased. The AMI results will determine how social rejection influences motivation, as those with larger positive changes in their scores will be more motivated to succeed in life.

Keywords: social rejection, motivation, perseverance.

1. Introduction

This study aims to uncover whether a relationship exists between social rejection and intrinsic motivation. Under the basis of personal growth, it was hypothesized that in a social rejection event individuals would become motivated to improve themselves. Linked to the personality trait of conscientiousness, one's level of perseverance and motivation can accurately predict one's success in their personal life from income level to personal health. This suggests that if social rejection and intrinsic motivation are positively correlated, then social rejection actually has a positive outcome on an individual, prompting them to improve themselves and thus their lives. If this is to be the case, perhaps societal expectations may shift in coming to realize that perfection is not always the path to success.

Looking at existing research, it's possible to understand how this connection between rejection and motivation is substantial. In Motivating Personal Growth by Seeking Discomfort, Kaitlin Wooley and Ayelet Fishbach prove how actively seeking discomfort increases engagement and perceived

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achievement in discomforting fields [1-2]. In their study, participants were placed in discomforting situations over a period of time, one such example being improvisation classes. Later, these same participants found to have increased engagement and goal setting in the area of discomfort. Due to the nature of social rejection being discomforting, it could be reasoned that people would become engaged in improving themselves in their rejected aspects, setting goals and ultimately motivating themselves to be better.

It's also important to take into account the vast number of personality types and their roles in intrinsic motivation. In The role of neuroticism and conscientious facets in academic motivation, it was found that people with depression were less likely to be motivated, while people high on conscientiousness were more likely to be motivated [3]. In the study, students were tested and surveyed to find their major personality traits and their level of academic motivation, finding that most neurotic traits, excluding anxiety, led to decreased academic motivation, while most conscientious traits led to increased academic motivation. Assuming these patterns were followed in intrinsic motivation, it could be inferred that highly conscientious people would be more receptive to personal growth and motivation while highly neurotic people would not. As a result, it was predicted that measuring high in neuroticism would actually decrease the level of motivation that an individual felt after a rejection event, rather than an increase in motivation.

Additionally, according to Divergent effects of warmth and competence social rejection: An explanation based on the need-threat model, different aspects of rejection can create different effects on individuals [4]. In the study, participants experience two types of social rejection, warmth rejection and competence rejection. Specifically, warmth rejection, in which an individual's sense of belonging is compromised, lead to individuals acting more affiliative, while competence rejection, in which an individual's ability to perform tasks is criticized, lead to individuals becoming more self-oriented to work on themselves. As a result of the findings it was predicted that competence rejection would have greater motivational effects than warmth rejection. Although warmth rejection could produce some social motivational effects in its ability to produce affiliative behaviors, this may not translate to long term motivation and perseverance. On the other hand, competence rejection's self-focusing effect showed signs of stable long term growth, thus creating a stronger sense of intrinsic motivation.

Finally, looking at Perseverance, a measure of conscientiousness, is a valid predictor of achievement and truancy across the globe, it can be noted that motivation and perseverance in an area can lead to achievement and success in one's personal life [5]. The study looked specifically at participant's level of perseverance and their level of academic achievement, finding that those with higher levels of perseverance were more likely to academically succeed. Assuming that this relationship could be translated to a social aspect, then socially motivated individuals would seek to improve themselves, thus finding success and achievement in their lives.

2. Methods

This research will report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions. The study will also be approved by and carried out in accordance with the recommendations of the Institutional Review Board for human participants with written informed consent obtained from all participants. Additionally, throughout this experiment attention checks will be present in the questionnaire of respective groups to ensure the participants' answer validity.

160 participants will be recruited for this experiment in exchange for 50 USD per participant. The study will also seek to recruit equal numbers of all age groups, ethnicities, and genders. Specifically, 80 men and 80 women will be recruited and equally divided into the four groups. The only age group that will be excluded from this study are minors, those under the age of 18, as their minds are still in developmental stages and should not be exposed to stressors such as social rejection. In addition, 32 actors will be hired at a rate of 150 USD per day to act as participants.

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The experiment's primary hypothesis is that social rejection will increase the level of intrinsic motivation that participants will experience. Performing a power analysis using the software package G*Power, it was determined that the 160 participants in the experiment could detect an effect size of Cohen's d of 0.25 using a paired t-test at a two-tailed 5% alpha level threshold with 90% statistical power[6]. With this number of participants in the study, it's likely that the results will be generalizable and accurate.

In this experiment, the Achievement Motivation Inventory (AMI) will be used primarily to gather the individuals' sense of intrinsic motivation [1]. After completing a series of questions, participants will be scored from 0 to 100 across various aspects which can be sorted into three categories: self-assurance, ambition, and self-control. Scoring high in all three categories, as well as an overall high score suggests that individuals are particularly driven to complete their personal goals. For this experiment, the AMI total score will be utilized primarily.

To test the effects of social rejection on the participants, the main study involves an experimental research design with a social rejection simulator. First, participants will take the AMI in respect to their social goals in order to measure their existing level of intrinsic motivation as well as the Big 5 Personality Test to measure their personality traits [1]. Then participants will be split by gender and will be randomly assigned into four groups, each with 20 men and 20 women. Two groups will act as experimental groups, while the other two groups will act as the control groups. The two experimental groups will be tested to see if there is a difference in the type of social rejection induced on individuals, the types being warmth rejection and competence rejection.

In the warmth rejection group, participants will be individually invited into a room with eight of the actors, which are unknown to be actors for the participants. The group of nine people, eight actors and one participant, will then be instructed to answer a series of questions to integrate the group. One such question in the series will ask participants to raise their hands if they voluntarily participated in the experiment without any monetary reward. At this point, all the actors should raise their hands, making a point to stare at the participant who will not raise their hand. If the participant chooses to lie and raise their hand, the researcher will inform everyone that they have lied, thus creating the same reaction. This effect creates a perceived lack of empathy in the participant, a key component to warmth rejection. After the series of questions, the researcher will instruct the group to get in pairs to complete the next step of the experiment. At this time, all the actors should pair together, leaving the participant to work alone. The researcher will then instruct them all to work on a series of logic puzzles as a team, all under the guise of researching teamwork versus individual performance. At the end of the experiment, the participant will be taken into a private room to complete the AMI once again, still primarily focused on their social goals and how they might be motivated to form better bonds [1].

Another group, this time a control group, will mimic this experiment, utilizing a group of nine people with eight actors and one participant. However, this time the monetary question will not be posed and when the group is asked to divide into smaller groups they will instead be put in groups of three. At the end of the experiment, participants will take the AMI to measure if there is any change in their social motivation [1].

Additionally, the warmth rejection experimental group and the warmth rejection control group will each have two sets of acting groups to increase the speed of the study. Thus, between the 32 actors, 16 will be with the warmth rejection experimental group while the other 16 will be with the warmth rejection control group. While this will create some variability in actor performance, this should increase the speed at which the experiment is done.

Meanwhile, the other two participant groups will engage in the competence rejection experiment, one group again acting as the control. In this simulation, participants will be asked to take a social skills test such as those found in job training programs. Following this test, participants will be

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individually brought into a room to discuss their scores. For the experimental group, participants will be told that their answers were not satisfactory and that they will not be able to advance in the study. On the other hand, the control participants will be told that their answers were satisfactory and that they will be permitted to advance in the study. Following this discussion, participants will take the AMI in respect to their social skills to assess any changes in their social motivation levels [1].

Following these procedures, participants will be debriefed on the study, including the presence of actors in the warmth rejection simulation. If any participants wish, adequate therapy will be provided for any psychological harm or stressors induced during the study.

After gathering data from the AMI scores, analyses will be performed to find the relationship between social rejection and motivation. AMI scores preceding the experiment will be subtracted from AMI scores following the procedure to find the change in motivation of the individuals. The only participants who will be excluded from the final data analysis are those who failed to meet the attention checks. Then, all pairwise comparisons of the four groups will be conducted, utilizing t-tests to compare the mean change in each group.

Additionally, the trait of neuroticism will be taken into account, categorizing individuals based on their level of the trait. Those that scored under 40% will be in one group, those between 40% and 60% in another, and those over 60% will be in a third group. These neuroticism levels will also be compared with the rest of the data to see how this trait might affect the results of social rejection.

3. Results

It is predicted that the results of this experiment will show how social rejection increases intrinsic motivation. As seen in Figure 1, it's predicted that the change in motivation following a social rejection event is 70% to 80%. Acknowledging the possibility that the environment itself could increase motivation, it's still believed that social rejection in particular will enlarge this effect. Specifically, it's predicted that the warmth control group and competence control group will experience a 20% and a 10% increase in motivation, respectively. This difference is due to the nature of social interactions, as interacting with others can increase motivation. It's also predicted that competence rejection will have a larger impact than warmth rejection. As seen in the experimental groups, it's predicted that warmth rejection will have a 75% increase in motivation, while competence rejection will have an 80% increase in motivation. This variation is due to the nature of competence rejection eliciting anger while warmth rejection may elicit sadness. It's believed that individuals will be more motivated to improve themselves if they are angry rather than sad.

Additionally, it's predicted that neuroticism will create an inverse effect on how social rejection impacts intrinsic motivation. As seen in Figure 2, it's predicted how individuals tested higher for neuroticism, those over the 60% threshold, will have a decrease in motivation following a rejection event. Specifically, it's predicted that highly neurotic individuals will experience a decrease in motivation by 50% after warmth rejection and 30% after competence rejection. This decrease is predicted because of the facets of neuroticism, such as depression, which can create a depressed mindset instead of a self improvement mindset. Conversely, this predicts that control settings, where social rejection is discouraged, will increase intrinsic motivation more significantly. As in Figure 2, it's predicted that there will be a 40% increase in the warmth control group and a 35% increase in the competence control group. Thus, for individuals high in neuroticism, it's predicted that social rejection will decrease one's intrinsic motivation.

4. General discussion

Overall, this study seeks to develop many of the existing ideas within the field of psychology. Not only is it relevant to many rejected individuals, but also to people across the world. As a result of the

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participants recruited to this study, the results should be applicable to a majority of the population. Despite this, the research still has specific limitations, specifically in respect to the methods of the experiment. Several outside factors could influence participants' AMI results, particularly the environment. Those in the warmth rejection group and warmth rejection control group were exposed to different sets of actors during the experiment. Though they are instructed to follow the same directions, minute differences among the actors could create unforeseen effects. Additionally, factors such as the time of day and the room of the test could influence participants. Individuals could be more motivated during different times of the day, they could draw inspiration from something within the room, or an outside event could even create stress for the participant. Lastly, it's important to note that the research relies on self report measures, which can be subject to participant bias and inaccuracy. Participants could experience demand effects or could become aware of the research hypothesis, thus altering their AMI answers and the data. Ultimately, if this research would be performed in real life, several steps could be taken to strengthen the legitimacy of the results.

5. Conclusion

This research experiment seeks to find the relationship between social rejection and intrinsic motivation, whether one may affect the other and how it does. In understanding how social rejection can motivate individuals, the experiment uncovers how rejection events can influence futures. This research not only helps predict how rejection might positively affect us, but can also predict who might become successful in the future. Through this research, people would come to embrace their rejections and take each event as an opportunity to grow and improve on oneself.

The predicted result of the study is that social rejection will increase one's intrinsic motivation. Due to the nature of rejection, it is believed that people will become motivated to improve themselves in the aspect of rejection. Additionally, it's predicted that the type of social rejection will influence the level of motivation increased. Two types of social rejection were examined, warmth rejection and competence rejection. Warmth rejection is related to an individual's sense of belonging in a group and how they might be rejected due to perceived lack of empathy. On the other hand, competence rejection is related to an individual's sense of worth and how they might be rejected due to perceived lack of skills or intelligence. In respect to these two types of rejection, it was predicted that competence rejection would increase one's motivation more dramatically as it elicits feelings of anger, rather than feelings of sadness as in warmth rejection. The basis of this prediction is due to the fact that individuals are more likely to be motivated when angry in comparison to when sad. It is also predicted that several personality traits may affect this outcome, notably neuroticism. Since those with high levels of neuroticism tend to experience depression in rejection events, it is predicted that social rejection will instead decrease their intrinsic motivation. In the experiment performed, the data should be able to accurately reflect these predictions, showing how rejection will increase motivation in all individuals that are not high on neuroticism.

Though this research is preliminary, the implications of this work are large. If this work is proven to be true, then this would not only reshape the understanding of motivation, but also the societal perspective on social rejection. In a way, it could help social rejection become a less painful practice as people become oriented to take it as a sign of self improvement. Overall, the real strength of this research is how it benefits people and the lives that everyone lives.

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Appendix

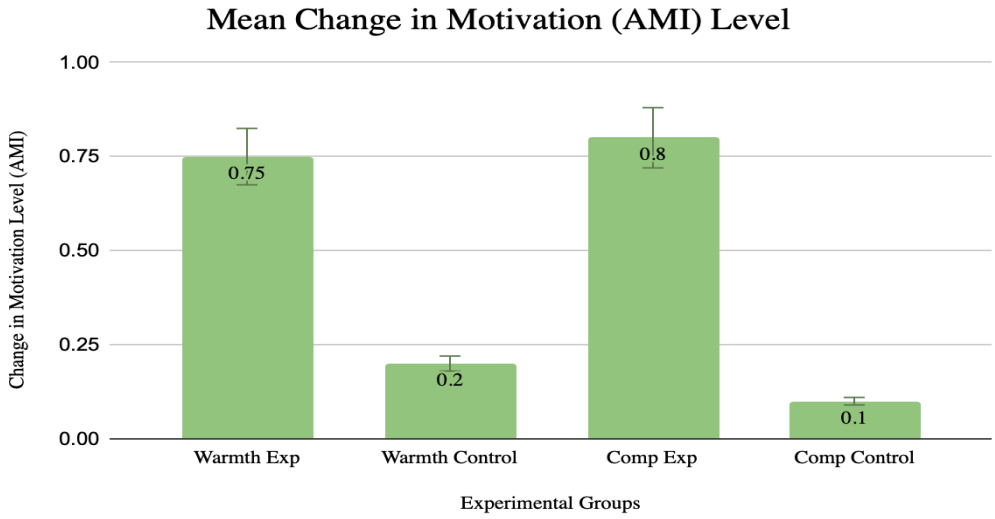


Figure 1: Mean change in motivation (AMI) level

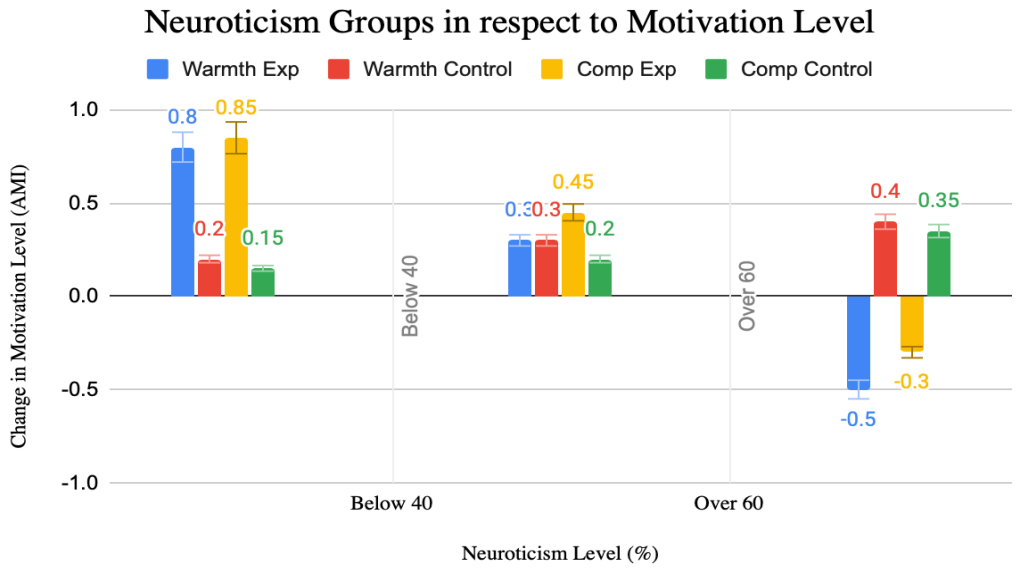


Figure 2: Neuroticism groups in respect to motivation level

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Figure 1 displays the mean change in motivation level, as according to the Achievement Motivation Inventory (AMI), for all test groups. The change is marked from preceding the experiment to after the experiment has taken place.

Figure 2 displays the mean change in motivation level, as according to the AMI, for all test groups, sorted into groups based on level of neuroticism. Individuals were divided into groups based on their scores on the Big 5 test, the ones marked low on neuroticism being under 40%, individuals marked high on neuroticism being over 60%, and those marked neutral falling in the middle. In this chart, individuals low on neuroticism are seen on the far left, individuals high on neuroticism are seen on the far right, and individuals marked neutral are seen in the middle.

*This data is fabricated and should not be used as the experiment has not occurred yet. These charts are simply for projected results and perceived outcome.