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
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Nonverbal Reactions to Ostracism: When Does Ostracism Prompt Us to Reconnect or to Disconnect?

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Abstract

The present research explored the potential ability of various nonverbal behaviors to facilitate social reconnection following ostracism. In two experiments, participants played Cyberball prior to watching a film. In Experiment 1, ostracism prompted disconnection rather than reconnection, as ostracized participants smiled and laughed less while watching a compilation of humorous animal shorts than did included participants, especially with perceived out-group audience members. In Experiment 2, ostracized participants who watched someone who felt like a part of their group smiled as much as those who had been included, providing some support for attempted reconnection. These results highlight the importance of one of the boundary conditions of the social reconnection hypothesis; that ostracism only prompts reconnection attempts with those who are believed to represent viable avenues of belongingness repair.

Background

The deleterious psychological consequences of ostracism are well-established (Williams, 2009).

Following ostracism, individuals often increase affiliative or pro-social behavior while interacting with subsequent interaction partners in order to repair their belongingness needs (Lakin, et al., 2008; Maner, DeWall, Baumeister & Schaller, 2007).

However, individuals do not uniformly cope with ostracism by increasing affiliative behavior. Research by Twenge and her colleagues found that social exclusion caused increased aggression (2001) and decreased prosocial behavior (2007). Furthermore, Maner et al. (2007) delineated several boundary conditions of the social reconnection hypothesis, one of which is the *perceived* ability of an interaction partner to repair belongingness needs.

We argue here that perceived in-group status moderates nonverbal reactions to social ostracism. Consistent with the social reconnection hypothesis:

We predicted that participants would respond to ostracism by increasing affiliative nonverbal behavior in subsequent interactions, but that these behaviors would be selectively directed at perceived in-group members (Lakin, et al., 2008)

Experiment 1: Method and Results

Participants ($N = 95$, 63 women) were either ostracized or included in a game of Cyberball.

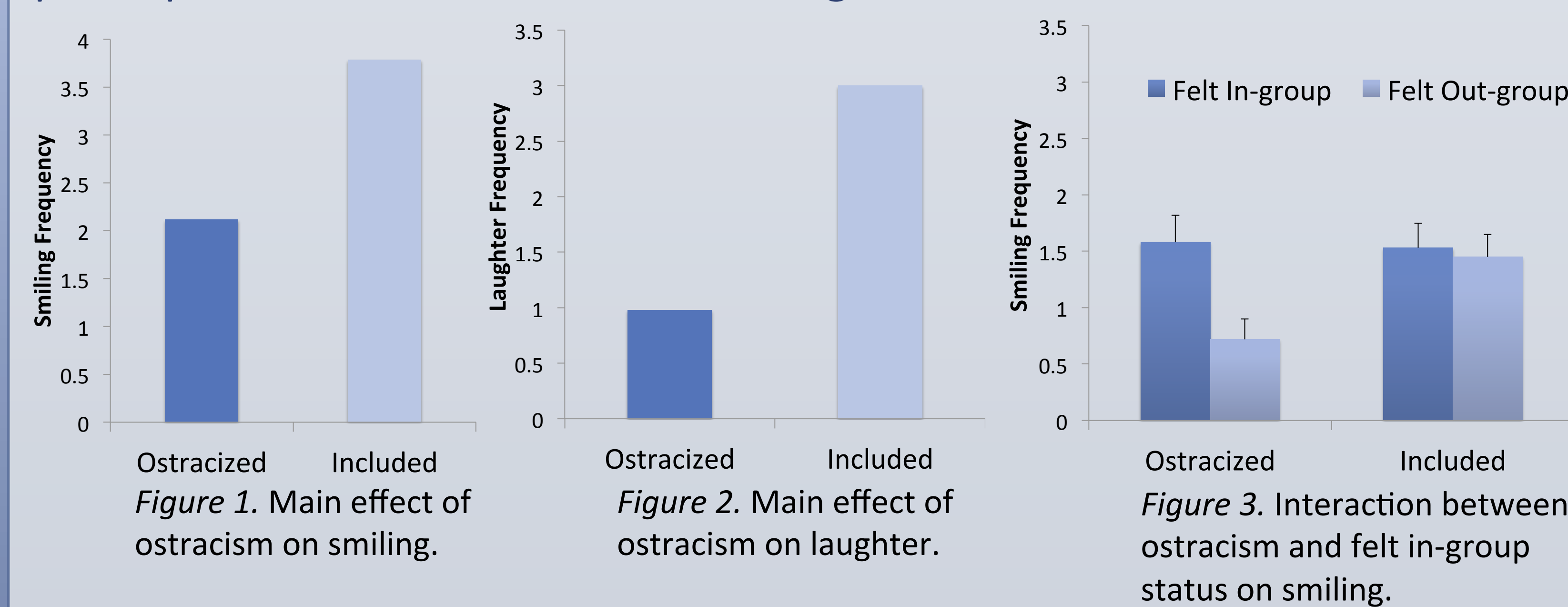
Next, in an “unrelated” task, participants were videotaped while they viewed a YouTube compilation of humorous animal videos with in-group (same-sex) or out-group (other-sex) dubbed laughter.

Two raters (blind to condition) coded the frequency of affiliative nonverbal behavior (laughter, smiling, and nodding)(α ranged from .87 to .99).

Because Ps did not like in-group audience members more than out-group members, $t(90) = -1.58$, $p = .12$ (*means trending in the opposite direction*), we conducted additional tests using *felt in-group status* as a PV.

Regardless of in-group status, ostracized participants smiled and laughed less than included participants, [$F(1,69) = 5.14$, $p = .03$ for smiling; $F(1,69) = 9.82$, $p = .003$ for laughter]. See Figures 1 and 2.

We also found a marginally significant interaction between *perceived* in-group status (as opposed to assigned in-group status) and ostracism for smiling, $F(1,68) = 3.55$, $p = .06$. Ostracized participants who felt that the audience was not a part of their group smiled significantly less than participants in other conditions. See Figure 3.



Experiment 1: Discussion

Contrary to our hypothesis, Ps reacted to Cyber-ostracism by decreasing affiliative nonverbal behavior in a subsequent task, potentially offering evidence of disconnection rather than attempted reconnection.

Yet, as Figure 3 illustrates, perceived in-group status did influence smiling. Ostracized Ps who were subsequently exposed to an audience who felt like a part of their group **smiled as much as those who were included**, showing the potential buffering effects of in-group exposure.

Experiment 2: Method and Results

Participants ($N = 93$, 70 women) were either ostracized or included in a game of Cyberball.

Next, participants were videotaped while they viewed a video of a woman answering questions about herself. In-group status was manipulated via university affiliation.

Two raters (blind to condition) coded the frequency of affiliative nonverbal behavior (laughter, smiling, and nodding) and negative nonverbal behavior (head-shaking and eye-rolling)(α ranged from .87 to .94).

The group status manipulation was not successful at inducing greater liking for the in-group, $t(91) = 1.07$, $p = .29$, so again, we conducted additional tests using *felt in-group status* as a predictor variable.

More negative nonverbal behavior was directed at the woman when she felt like an out-group member than an in-group member, $F(1, 88) = 4.16$, $p = .04$.

A significant interaction between *perceived* in-group status and ostracism emerged for smiling, $F(1,81) = 4.69$, $p = .03$. See Figure 4.

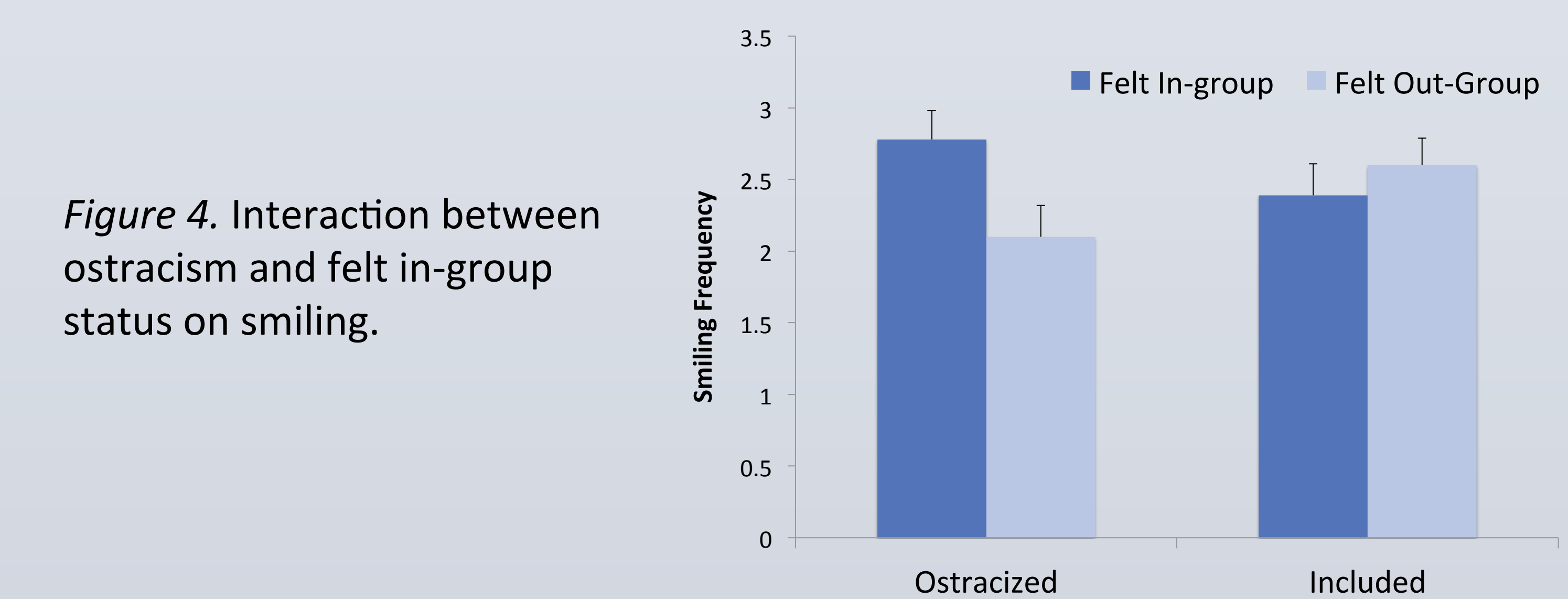


Figure 4. Interaction between ostracism and felt in-group status on smiling.

General Discussion

In both experiments, ostracized participants who were exposed to individuals who felt like a part of their group smiled as much as those who had been included, providing some support for attempted reconnection. These results highlight the importance of one of the boundary conditions of the social reconnection hypothesis; that ostracism only prompts reconnection attempts with those who are perceived as legitimate sources of belongingness repair.

Future research should carefully attend to the meaningfulness of in-group manipulations, and the role of nonverbal behavior (both positive and negative) as a low cost strategy for social reconnection/disconnection.