

# ***Social Exclusion and Sense of Belonging: Being Excluded by Strangers and Being Excluded by Familiar People***

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**Abstract:** Humans are social animals, and sense of belonging is one of our existence needs. When people are placed in a new environment with both strangers and familiar people, they tend to first contact with people they are familiar with. The study aims to find out the relationship between people's sense of belonging and the identity of the excluder. I conducted a questionnaire to examine whether there is a difference in sense of belonging when the identity of the excluder is different. There are five different conditions displayed in the questionnaire in separate sections, and participants are going to complete all five sections. The closeness between the excluder and the participants in the five conditions is divided into five scales (completely strange; seen but do not know; know but not well; know and familiar with; and recognized to be friends). The five conditions in the questionnaire test the relationship between participants' sense of belonging and different degrees of the closeness between the excluder and the participants. The hypothesized result is that as the closeness between the excluder and participants is higher, participants' senses of belonging will be lower. The analysis of the results of the questionnaire demonstrates that people's sense of belonging is significantly different when the identity of the excluder is different.

**Keywords:** Social exclusion, Ostracism, Belonging, Closeness, Friendship

## **1. Introduction**

Imagine you attend a meeting in a place you have never gone to before with many people that you do not know and several that you know much better. What will you do? When people are placed in a new environment with both strangers and familiar people, they tend to make first contact with people they are familiar with. People behave this way because of the need for belonging. A person who is made to feel lonely through social exclusion will have the sense of being threatened, anxious, and dysphoric [1]. Failure to satisfy the need for positive social relationships can have devastating consequences for psychological well-being [2]. Well-being is strongly related to one's life satisfaction, referring to a cognitive, judgmental process [3].

Previous studies have conducted several experiments to test the effects of social exclusion, some narrowing it down to more specific topics such as one-person exclusion. The study also specifically measured participants' feelings of belonging at the end of the experiment, and the results showed that the lower feeling of belonging caused by one-person exclusion is similar to the effects induced by two-person exclusion [4]. Another study conducted experiments to examine cultural differences in social exclusion, and it also involves consideration of how close the excluder is to the participants.

Results indicated that Asians and Asian Americans felt more in control than European Americans when the excluder was a close other [5]. The results of previous studies raise the curiosity about how people's sense of belonging is different when the excluder's identity is different.

Since people have different perceptions of strangers and people they are familiar with, their sense of belonging may be different when being excluded by different people in a new environment. In this study, I want to discuss whether there is a difference in sense of well-being when the identity of the excluder is different. The hypothesis is that people have higher expectations for the attitude of familiar people toward themselves in a new environment, thus as the closeness between the excluder and participants becomes higher, participants' senses of belonging will be lower.

The questionnaire describes a scenario in which participants are placed in a new environment that they have never been to before. In the place, there are five different types of people: people who is a complete stranger to the participant; people the participant has met but does not know; people the participant knows but not well; people the participant knows and is familiar with; and people the participant recognizes to be friends. These five conditions represent five different scales of the closeness between the excluder and the participant. The questionnaire is divided into five sections. Each section describes an exclusion scenario, and the only difference is the identity of the excluder in each section. In each scenario, participants rate their sense of belonging on a five-point scale in a set condition. After collecting the data, a box plot will be used to show the difference between the means of participants' senses of belonging as the closeness between the excluder and the participant increases.

## 2. Present Work

Ostracism threatens belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence needs [6]. A need to belong is a fundamental human motivation, and proposing it can provide a starting point for understanding human interpersonal behavior [7]. Satisfying a general need for positive social relationships, such as participating in a fraternity or sorority, in fact, does not guarantee the subjective sense of belonging [8]. A situation called a "borderline case" is introduced in a previous study. One of the two types of borderline cases describes the condition that fits but negates being valued. For example, Mary joined a sorority that her mother and two sisters had belonged to, and she knew that she fit in with the group, but many of them did not value her presence [9]. Humans are social animals, and our sense of belonging is one of the most meaningful components of subjective well-being. The research aims to find out if participants' sense of belonging is associated with the closeness between the excluder and participants.

## 3. Method

**Participants.** 90 individuals will be invited to participate in the completion of the questionnaire. All the participants are Chinese young people in the age range of 16 to 22. The expected demographics of participants are as follows (45 females;  $M=17.6$  years).

A power analysis using the software package G\*Power [10] indicates that with  $N = 90$ , the study could detect an effect size of Cohen's  $f$  of .40, using a one-way ANOVA at a 5% alpha level threshold with 85.6% statistical power.

**Design of the questionnaire.** The content of the questionnaire is all in Chinese. There are six questions in total; in addition to the rating questions of the five conditions, the first question asks the age of the participants for the calculation of the average age of the participants.

After answering the age question, participants are introduced to a set scenario: Imagine that you are invited to a party in a place you have never been and are completely new to. You arrive at the party and look around. You find that there are complete strangers, people you have met but do not

know, people you know but do not know well, people you are familiar with, and your friends. Next, I will describe five different scenarios, and after you read each one, you will need to give honest feedback in the form of a score.

In each section, participants read the description of the scenario first; then, they are instructed to rate their senses of belonging to the party on a five-point scale. Their answers are recorded in the report. Any incompleteness of the questionnaire is excluded from the data.

After completing the questionnaire, participants are informed of the real purpose of the questionnaire and how the data will be used in the study.

Measure 1. The first scenario describes the exclusion from a stranger: At the party, you walk towards a stranger you have never met and try to communicate with him/her. You offer a greeting and prepare to introduce yourself, but the stranger does not respond to you. Instead, he/she goes straight to other people. Now, please rate your sense of belonging to this party.

Measure 2. The second scenario describes the exclusion from a person you have met but do not know: You see a familiar face at the party and you are sure you have seen him/her before, but you do not know anything else about him/her. You walk towards the person and try to interact with him/her. You offer a greeting and are ready to introduce yourself, but the person does not respond to you. Instead, he/she goes straight to other people. Now, please rate your sense of belonging to this party.

Measure 3. The third scenario describes the exclusion from a person you know but do not know well: You see someone you know at the party. You know the person's name and some basic information, but you are not familiar with him/her. You walk towards the person and offer a greeting, but the person does not respond to you. Instead, he/she goes straight to other people. Now, please rate your sense of belonging to this party.

Measure 4. The fourth scenario describes the exclusion from a person you know and are familiar with: You see someone you know at the party. You two have a relatively good relationship and have had some communication. You walk towards the person and offer a greeting, but the person does not respond to you. Instead, he/she goes straight to other people. Now, please rate your sense of belonging to this party.

Measure 5. The fifth scenario describes the exclusion from a friend: You find out that your friend is also at the party and you want to go up to him. You walk towards your friend and offer a greeting, but your friend does not respond to you. Instead, he/she goes straight to other people. Now, please rate your sense of belonging to this party.

Data Analytic Approach. A one-way ANOVA is used to analyze whether the mean ratings of the five conditions are significantly different or not. The categorical independent variables are different scales of the closeness between the excluder and the participant or, in this case, different identities of the excluder. The dependent variable is the rating of the scales. Data is collected from the report of the questionnaire and input into the data analysis software SPSS.

## 4. Results

Descriptive statistics.

Table1: Descriptive results of the five conditions

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1	90	3.82	1.097	.116	3.59	4.05	1	5
2	90	3.51	1.041	.110	3.29	3.73	1	5
3	90	3.13	1.041	.110	2.92	3.35	1	5
4	90	2.69	1.056	.111	2.47	2.91	1	5
5	90	2.37	1.194	.126	2.12	2.62	1	5
Total	450	3.10	1.205	.057	2.99	3.22	1	5

Results illustrate the means of the ratings under five different conditions, simulated by the software SPSS. There are 90 effective answers for each group, 450 effective answers in total. The calculated means of the ratings are 3.82, 3.51, 3.13, 2.69, and 2.37, representing the results of the groups in the order of completely strange, seen but do not know, know but not well, know and familiar with, and recognized to be friends (marked as number 1 to number 5 in the descriptives).

Table2: Analyzing the results using one-way ANOVA

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)		125.858	4	31.464	26.607	.000
	Linear Term	Contrast	125.440	1	125.440	106.076	.000
		Deviation	.418	3	.139	.118	.950
	Quadratic Term	Contrast	.051	1	.051	.043	.836
		Deviation	.367	2	.183	.155	.856
	Cubic Term	Contrast	.321	1	.321	.272	.603
		Deviation	.046	1	.046	.039	.844
	4th-order Term	Contrast	.046	1	.046	.039	.844
Within Groups			526.233	445	1.183		
Total			652.091	449			

The statistical significance is  $p > 0.05$ , which there are significant differences between the means of the five groups.

Aim 1.

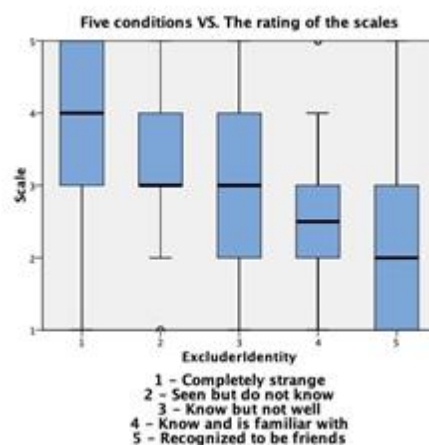


Figure1: A box plot illustrating the five conditions vs. the rating of the scales.

## 5. General Discussion

The study aims to find the relationship between the identity of the excluder and the sense of belonging of the excluded one after social exclusion. The hypothesis is that there are differences between people's sense of belonging when the closeness between the excluder and the excluded is at different levels.

It is not the first time to associate social exclusion with human social needs; however, previous studies rarely focus on how the identity of the excluder is associated with different degrees of people's sense of belonging as a result of social exclusion. The study can add a new sight on the relationship between social exclusion and human needs to previous literature.

The research method used in the study is descriptive, not experimental. Conducting a study in the form of a questionnaire cannot generate a conclusion that indicates a causal relationship. In descriptive methods, there is no random assignment involved to minimize individual predispositions; thus, the results are produced without intervening individual differences.

Since personality is hard to measure and define, it is impossible to easily control the individual differences in personality. In addition, cultural differences are a problem. From different cultural backgrounds, people's responses to the five conditions are very likely to be different. In this study, all the participants who completed the questionnaire are Chinese; thus, the results can only be generalized to a relatively small population rather than every person in the world.

The study gives a general perspective on the relationship between closeness and its role in social exclusion. Future research can explore more about the different degrees of closeness and how they act differently in social situations. The study is limited because of its research method. Further experiments are needed to strengthen the conclusion of the study, including more professional experimental designs and considerations of additional factors that will probably affect the results.

## 6. Conclusion

According to Boxplot Figure 1, the means of all five groups are under the scale of 4, suggesting that exclusion is indeed associated negatively with people's sense of belonging, regardless of the identity of the excluder. According to the findings, ostracism threatens people's needs for belonging and positive social relationships, which is consistent with previous research and literature.

Results indicate that people's sense of belonging becomes lower as their familiarity with the excluder increases; in other words, there are differences between people's sense of belonging when being excluded by people with different degrees of closeness.

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