Coping with Rejection: Does Rejection Affect the Motivation to Seek Power?

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DOES REJECTION AFFECT THE MOTIVATION TO SEEK POWER?

By

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Abstract

Social exclusion can threaten a person’s need to belong, need for control, and need to feel that one’s life has meaning. The current research investigated how rejected people reintegrate themselves into new social groups. In this experiment, rejected (and non-rejected control) participants were given the opportunity to join an ostensibly new experiment in which they would complete a group activity with two other participants. I then measured their motivation to attain a powerful or subordinate position within the group. While pursuing a position of power in a new group may allow rejected people to restore control and meaning, subordinate positions in a new group may be better suited to restore belonging. The results were consistent with the latter possibility. That is, rejected participants preferred a subordinate position more than non-rejected participants, especially if the subordinate position allowed a high level of involvement in the group activity. These results suggest that rejected people interacting with a new group prefer roles in which they can contribute to the group goal without taking responsibility for group outcomes.

Keywords: rejection, power, motivation
Humans have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Achieving social acceptance and belonging to social groups allows individuals to obtain benefits that would be impossible to achieve alone. Therefore, individuals are highly motivated to maintain their place within their respective groups. People who are ostracized, rejected, or excluded by their group experience threats to their need to belong, need for control, and need for meaning (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Smith & Williams, 2004; Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, & Baumeister, 2001; Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000; Williams & Nida, 2011; Zadro & Williams, 2006; Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004). Although responses to rejection vary, a straightforward prediction is that people who are rejected will seek to restore their thwarted need to belong, need for control, and need for meaning by attempting to reintegrate themselves into another social group. The purpose of the current project is to examine how people attempt to reintegrate themselves into a new group after rejection. Specifically, the research is designed to investigate the type of role rejected people prefer when they have the opportunity to become part of a new group. Will rejection lead to the desire for a subordinate position in which one can blend into the group or will rejection increase the desire for power, thereby allowing the individual to restore control while maintaining social distance?

Ostracism, social exclusion, and rejection

I begin with a brief overview of the use of the terms ostracism, social exclusion, and rejection in past research because these terms have been used interchangeably in the literature to some degree (Williams, 2007). Ostracism is often defined as being ignored and excluded (Williams, 2007). Social exclusion has been defined as being excluded, alone, or isolated (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice & Stucke, 2001), and rejection has been defined as receiving explicit feedback that another person or group does not want to interact with a target person (Leary,
These definitions of ostracism, social exclusion, and rejection suggest substantial overlap among the concepts. Although researchers have aimed to differentiate these concepts (e.g., Leary, 2001; Leary, 2005), there is little empirical evidence that ostracism, social exclusion and rejection lead to different outcomes or consequences (Williams, 2007). For the purpose of reviewing past literature, I will use whichever term the authors chose to describe their work. The current research is perhaps best captured by the term rejection. I will therefore draw on the operational definition of rejection offered by Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer (2005). That is, rejection occurs when a target person learns that another person or group does not want to interact with the target person.

**Reflexive versus reflective responses to rejection**

The starting point for the current research is the temporal need threat model of ostracism (Williams, 2009). This model suggests that ostracized individuals experience a series of responses that can be characterized in three stages. The reflexive stage refers to the immediate reactions to ostracism. An ostracized person may experience acute social pain and also feel a threatened sense of belonging, control, and meaning in life. Other immediate emotional responses may include anger and sadness (Williams, 2009). The reflexive stage is then followed by the reflective stage. In this stage, the ostracized person may begin to cope with being ostracized by reflecting on the meaning of the experience and, if necessary, working to restore threatened needs (e.g., by seeking reacceptance, restoring control, or pursuing a sense of meaning). In the reflective stage, individual differences and situational factors may be particularly important in determining how a person responds to ostracism. Ostracized people who feel capable of restoring their threatened needs may respond to ostracism in a more prosocial manner because prosocial behavior will aid in the goal of restoring threatened needs.
People who experience repeated ostracism might feel incapable of restoring belonging, control, and meaning. This lack of efficacy among people who are repeatedly ostracized may lead them to experience resignation, which is the third stage of ostracism. Resignation is accompanied by feelings of helplessness and depression.

Laboratory studies have shown that threatening a person’s sense of belonging through ostracism, social exclusion, or rejection often leads that person to attend more closely to social cues (DeWall, Maner, & Rouby, 2009; Gardner, Gabriel, & Diekman, 2000; Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004; Pickett & Gardner, 2005; for a review, see Williams, 2009). Rejected people may be especially likely to attend to social cues because they are motivated to attain reacceptance in a group. A series of experiments by Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller (2007) showed that socially excluded people were more motivated to form bonds with other people and had more positive impressions of other people when they expected a face-to-face interaction and were low in fear of negative evaluation.

Contrary to the evidence that rejection increases behavior aimed at rekindling relationships, a number of research investigations have also found anti-social responses to rejection, such as decreased prosocial behavior (Tice & Gailliot, 2006) and increased aggression toward the source of exclusion and even toward third-parties who were not responsible for the initial act of exclusion (Bourgeois & Leary, 2001; DeWall, Twenge, Gitter, & Baumeister, 2009; Gaertner & Iuzzini, 2005; Twenge et al., 2001; Warburton, Williams & Cairns, 2006). An extreme example of anti-social consequences of exclusion is provided by research linking mass shootings in schools and other public places to social isolation (Twenge, 2000). Speculatively, anti-social responses to rejection may be common among people who have experienced chronic exclusion or isolation and view their odds of reacceptance as slim or nonexistent (Williams &
Nida, 2011). Prosocial responses to rejection may be more common (see Carter-Sowell, Chen, & Williams, 2006; Lakin & Chartrand, 2005; Maner et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2000) because prosocial actions would facilitate reacceptance into the group or another group.

The current research is based on the premise that most people who are rejected will seek social reacceptance. In the current experiment, participants were rejected or not rejected and then given the opportunity to integrate themselves into a new social group. The question of interest was not whether rejected people would accept the opportunity to interact with a new group, but rather what type of role rejected people would prefer to hold in the new group. Below I review evidence suggesting reasons why rejected individuals may or may not prefer to pursue positions of power in a new group.

**Pursuing high power to cope with threatened needs**

Power has been defined as “the ability to control resources, own and others’, without social interference (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003, pp. 454). Inherent in this definition of power is the idea that power allows people to control not only the outcomes experienced by other people but also their own outcomes. People who attain power can allocate rewards and punishments to others and thereby influence their social environment. A series of experiments showed that having power created a sense of personal control over one’s outcomes (Inesi, Botti, Dubois, Rucker & Galinsky, 2011). Moreover, the experience of power may even give people the illusion that they have control over outcomes that are determined by chance, such as the outcome of a roll of a six-sided die (Fast, Gruenfeld, Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2009). These findings suggest that attaining power is one method of satisfying the fundamental need for control. Thus, rejected people may seek to restore their thwarted need for control by pursuing a position of power within a new group.
Rejected people may also be attracted to positions of power because power may provide a way to restore the perception that one’s life is meaningful. Baumeister (1991) suggested that four components contribute to people’s perception that their life is meaningful. These include a sense of purpose, efficacy, value, and self-worth. In particular, the experience of power may lead to increased perceptions of efficacy and, more speculatively, purpose. Efficacy is defined as experiencing control over one’s outcomes, and purpose is defined as seeing one’s current activities as contributing to future outcomes. The evidence that power increases control over one’s outcome suggests that power should also increase perceptions of efficacy. There is also evidence that power allows people to pursue their goals with fewer social and environmental constraints (DePaulo & Friedman, 1998; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008). Thus, people who obtain power may experience an increase in purpose because unhindered goal pursuit should lead a person to see their current activities as contributing to future outcomes. Taken together, rejected people who pursue power may be able to restore their sense that life is meaningful by indirectly increasing efficacy and purpose.

Power may increase a person’s sense of personal control and meaning in life while simultaneously decreasing their need for social acceptance from others. Power enables people to achieve their goals and obtain desirable outcomes without depending on others. Thus, people in power may experience a decreased motivation to achieve acceptance from others. A series of experiments have shown that people who attain power, especially those who are high in power motivation, show decreased desire to affiliate with others (Conlon & Maner, in prep). Additionally, power leads to an increased desire to maintain social distance (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012). These findings suggest that power may enable rejected people to sidestep the need for social acceptance. Rejected people may pursue power in a new group
because they would then be less dependent on the acceptance of others for achieving their goals and meeting their needs.

**Pursuing low power positions to cope with threatened needs**

Contrary to the hypothesis that rejection will lead to an increased desire for power, there are also reasons to predict that rejection will lead people to avoid obtaining power in a new group. Power may confer benefits to rejected people by providing them with a way to restore their sense of control and possibly the perception that life is meaningful, but power may interfere with the goal of restoring belonging. Power may interfere with belonging because certain features of power create ambiguity in social relationships. One source of ambiguity is that power may create uncertainty regarding the motives of others in social interactions. On the one hand, powerful people may interpret the kindness or generosity of another person as a signal that the other person genuinely values the relationship. Alternatively, people may display kindness or generosity to a powerful person not because they want to develop a relationship with him or her but rather because they stand to benefit from the relationship. Powerful people know that others may act generously toward them for instrumental purposes, and this may lead powerful people to adopt a cynical attitude toward others that undermines relationships (Inesi, Gruenfeld, & Galinsky, 2012). Rejected people may therefore prefer subordinate positions in new groups to avoid relational ambiguity when interacting with new group members. Additionally, most groups have more subordinates than leaders, so rejected people may prefer subordinate positions to increase the number of possible social interaction partners. Taken together, rejected people may prefer subordinate positions in new groups because subordinate positions may be better suited at restoring one’s need to belong than powerful positions.
The Current Experiment

The purpose of the current experiment is to investigate how rejected people cope with rejection when they have the opportunity to join a new social group. More specifically, the current experiment was designed to investigate how rejection influences the motivation to obtain positions of power in new groups. The temporal need threat model of ostracism suggests that rejection threatens one’s sense of belonging, control, and meaning in life. One hypothesis derived from this theory is that rejected participants will experience an increased motivation to attain power in a new group because power would allow the rejected person to restore their sense of control and promote meaning while decreasing the need to achieve acceptance from others. A competing hypothesis is that rejection will decrease the motivation to attain power and instead increase the motivation to attain a subordinate position within the group because subordinate positions may increase the opportunity for affiliation with other subordinates while decreasing personal responsibility for any group outcomes.

Method

In the current experiment, participants were randomly assigned to a rejection condition or to a non-rejection control condition. Participants in the rejection condition were led to believe that their ostensible partner in the experiment refused to work with them after viewing the participant’s introductory video. Participants in the control condition were led to believe that the partner forgot a prior commitment and had to leave the experiment early. Following the experimental manipulation, participants completed an evidently unrelated experiment designed to measure their power preferences.

Participants
Participants included 48 undergraduate students (38 women) enrolled in Introduction to Psychology courses at Florida State University. Four participants were excluded from analyses because they reported suspicion that their partner was a confederate. This left a total of 44 participants (36 women).

Procedure

Upon arrival to the laboratory, participants were informed that they would complete the experiment with an ostensible partner. Participants were then asked to record a short introductory video that they would exchange with their partner before actually meeting the partner. The interview consisted of eight questions about participants’ personal experiences in college, including negative and positive social experiences, academic experiences, and any other experiences participants considered important to share with their partner.

After recording the introductory video, participants watched the interview video that appeared to have been made by their partner. In actuality, a same-sex confederate prerecorded this video. The key experimental manipulation was delivered after participants finished watching their partner’s interview. Regardless of condition, the experimenter informed the participant that they were not going to be working with their partner during the experiment after all. The only difference between conditions was the reason the experimenter gave participants to explain why they could not continue the experiment with their partner. Participants assigned to the rejection condition were told: “I am not sure what happened, but your partner doesn’t want to meet you…. Umm, do you guys know each other or something? Well, ummm, I guess you won’t be working together, because I can’t ask a participant to do something that they’re not comfortable with.” Participants assigned to the control condition were told: “I am not sure what happened,
but your partner won’t be able to meet you… I guess s/he has to leave all of a sudden to go do something s/he forgot about… ummm, well I guess you won’t be working together.”

Following the experimental manipulation, participants were asked whether they would be willing to participate in a different experiment on group leadership in which they would complete a group activity with two other participants. All participants agreed to continue with this ostensibly unrelated experiment. Participants were then taken to a different lab. Before receiving further instructions, participants completed the Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS; Mayer & Gaschke, 1988) to provide measures of mood and arousal. Participants reported the extent to which they were currently experiencing 16 different emotions (e.g. jittery, loving) on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = definitely do not feel, 4 = definitely feel).

Next, the experimenter explained that the group performance task involved building something called a Tanagram out of Legos with two other participants. Furthermore, each participant in the experiment would be assigned a distinct role for the group performance task, including the role of manager, builder, and time keeper. Participants then read a short description detailing the responsibilities associated with each role. The description of the manager role stated manager would direct the subordinates, decide how to structure the process for building the Tanagram, and evaluate the work completed by the subordinates. The description of the builder role said that the builder would build the Tanagram according to the instructions given by the manager. The description of the time keeper role explained that the time keeper would time how long the builder took to complete his/her task.

To assess power preferences, participants were asked to report their preferences for each role by responding to three questions about each role. These questions included: “To what extent do you wish to play the role of [manger/builder/time keeper]?” “How appealing do you find the
role of [manager/builder/time keeper]”, “How well qualified are you for the role of [manager/builder/time keeper]”. Responses were recorded on 9-point Likert-type scales (1 = not at all, 9 = extremely). Responses to these three questions had high levels of internal consistency for each role ($\alpha = .92$ for manager role, $\alpha = .88$ for builder role, and $\alpha = .84$ for time keeper role), so I averaged responses to the questions for each role to provide a single measure of how much participants desired each role. These composite measures served as the first measure of power preferences. Whereas preferences for the manager role indicate that the participant desired a high power/high involvement position, preferences for the time keeper roles indicate that the participant preferred a low power/low involvement role. The builder role represented a low power/high involvement role.

Next, participants were told that the experimenter would choose the most qualified person to perform the manager role. Participants were told that they would complete a cognitive reaction time task and complete two questionnaires to assess leadership potential. First, participants completed the Stroop task. The Stroop task does not assess leadership potential, but I predicted that rejected participants would either increase effort during this task to pursue the manager position or decrease effort to avoid the manager position. The Stroop task was administered on the computer. Words that were the names of colors appeared on the computer screen one at a time, and participants were asked to indicate the color in which a word was written as quickly as possible by pressing a key labeled with the first letter of that color. The Stroop task includes compatible (i.e., the word blue written in blue ink) and incompatible (i.e., the word blue written in green ink) trials. To accurately respond to incompatible trials, participants must override their tendency to simply read the word instead of responding to the color in which it is written.
Following the Stroop task, participants completed the Achievement Motivation Scale ($\alpha = .89$; Cassidy & Lynn, 1989). The Achievement Motivation Scale measures a person’s inclination to achieve their goals. The scale consists of 20 items (e.g., “People take notice of what I say.”). Participants’ responses were recorded on 5-point Likert-type scales in which higher scores indicated higher levels of achievement motivation (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Next, participants completed the dominant subscale of the Interpersonal Adjective Scale-Revised ($\alpha = .85$; Wiggins, Trapnell, Phillips, 1988). This subscale measures individual differences in dominance. The dominance subscale consists of eight items (e.g., “Dominant”). Responses were recorded on 7-point Likert-type scales in which higher scores indicated higher levels of dominance (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). Because I told participants that the experimenter would use participants’ scores on the Achievement Motivation Scale and Interpersonal Adjective scale to select the manager, I predicted that participants would intentionally vary their scores based on whether they wanted the manager role. That is, participants who desired the manager role would score higher on the scales, and participants who wanted to avoid the manager role would score lower on the scales.

Results

This experiment was designed to test the competing predictions about the effect of rejection on the motivation to attain power. On the one hand, rejection may increase desire for power because power can be used to regain control and meaning while decreasing the need for social acceptance from others. On the other hand, rejection may decrease the desire for power because rejected people may seek to restore their need to belong by affiliating with other subordinates. First, I assessed self-reported preferences for each role (manager, builder, time...
keeper). To do this, I ran a repeated measure ANOVA to test for differences in preferences for each role and whether preferences for each role differed by experimental condition. There was a main effect of type of role, $F(2, 84) = 9.82, p < .01$. This main effect was qualified by a marginally significant experimental condition by type of role interaction, $F(2, 84) = 2.60, p = .08$, indicating the overall preference for each type of role differed by experimental condition. See Figure 1.

To deconstruct the interaction between experimental condition and type of role, I conducted a series of independent samples $t$-tests to test whether the preferences for each type of role differed by condition. First, I predicted preferences for the manager role from experimental condition, $t(42) = -1.21, p = .23$. Participants in the rejection condition ($M = 4.42, SD = 2.15$) were no more likely to prefer the manager position than participants in the control condition ($M = 5.21, SD = 2.18$). A similar pattern of results was observed for the timekeeper position, $t(42) = -.06, p = .95$. Participants in the rejection condition ($M = 6.62, SD = 1.80$) preferred the timekeeper position just as much as participants in the control condition ($M = 6.62, SD = 1.80$). There was, however, a marginally significant difference for preferences for the builder role, $t(42) = 1.92, p = .06$. Participants in the rejection condition ($M = 5.89, SD = 1.59$) had stronger preferences for the builder role than participants in the control condition ($M = 4.80, SD = 2.13$). Taken together, these results suggest that rejected participants preferred the subordinate role that would require the most effort more than non-rejected participants.

The next analysis tested for differences in Stroop performance. I predicted that participants would increase their effort during this task if they wanted the manager position or decrease their effort if they wanted to avoid the manager position. To analyze Stroop performance, I used ANOVA to predict response latencies on incompatible Stroop trials from
experimental condition while controlling for response latencies on compatible trials, $F(1, 40) = .62, p = .44$. There were no differences in Stroop performance observed for participants in the rejection condition ($M = 946.27, SD = 210.31$) or in the control condition ($M = 922.44, SD = 260.39$). This suggests that rejection had no effect on Stroop performance.

In the final set of analyses, I tested whether scores on the Achievement Motivation Scale or scores on the dominant subscale of the Interpersonal Adjective Scale-Revised differed by experimental condition. Scores on the Achievement Motivation Scale differed significantly by condition, $t(42) = -2.50, p = .02$. Rejected participants ($M = 3.23, SD = .59$) scored lower on the scale than control participants ($M = 3.61, SD = .41$). A similar pattern of results was found for the dominant subscale of the Interpersonal Adjective Scale-Revised, $t(46) = -1.71, p = .09$. Rejected participants ($M = 4.18, SD = 1.22$) scored marginally lower on the dominant subscale than control participants ($M = 4.69, SD = .72$). These results suggest that rejected participants may have intentionally reported lower scores on these scales to avoid assignment to the manager role. An alternative explanation is that rejection led participants to actually experience temporary decreases in achievement motivation and decreases in self-assessed dominance.

I also conducted several ancillary analyses to provide evidence that the results obtained in this experiment were not due to differences in mood valence or mood arousal. Neither mood valence, $p = .63$, nor mood arousal, $p = .58$, differed by condition. Additionally, the significance of the experimental results remained unchanged when controlling for mood valence and mood arousal, including the results for participants’ preference for the builder role, $F(1, 40) = 4.55, p = .04, \eta^2 = .10$, the Achievement Motivation Scale, $F(1, 40) = 5.57, p = .02, \eta^2 = .12$, and the dominant subscale of the Revised Interpersonal Adjective Scale, $F(1, 40) = 2.68, p = .11, \eta^2 = .06$. 
Discussion

In most social animals, ostracism leads to death (Gruter & Masters, 1986). This dramatically illustrates the importance of maintaining social acceptance. Due to the dire consequences of ostracism, most ostracized people may at least initially seek ways to either reintegrate themselves into their group or find a new group to join. The purpose of the current project was to provide a preliminary investigation into how rejected people prefer to reintegrate themselves into new groups. That is, what type of roles do rejected people pursue when joining a new group? When given the choice, do rejected people pursue positions of leadership or power to increase their control over others and while maintaining social distance? Do rejected people instead prefer to blend into the group in a more subordinate role?

The results of the experiment were consistent with the hypothesis that rejected people would prefer more subordinate positions when reintegrating themselves into a new group. When asked about their explicit preferences for the manager position (high power/high involvement), builder position (low power/high involvement), or time keeper position (low power/low involvement), rejected participants preferred the builder position to a greater extent than non-rejected participants. There were no differences in the extent to which rejected and non-rejected participants preferred the manager position or the time keeper position. Across conditions, participants overwhelmingly preferred the time keeper position to either the builder or manager position. Participants may have preferred the time keeper position because it would have enabled them to obtain their research credit with the least effort possible. Nonetheless, rejected participants were more likely than non-rejected participants to report a preference for the builder position. This may have been because the builder position allowed participants to make a substantial contribution to the group without having to take direct responsibility for the outcome.
of the project. Thus, participants in the rejection condition were willing to exert more effort on the group task than control participants, but only if they could do so without assuming responsibility for the group performance task.

Additionally, rejected participants scored lower on the Achievement Motivation Scale and the dominant subscale from the Interpersonal Adjective Scale-Revised. Participants were told that their scores on these scales would be used to select the leader in the group task. Therefore, one interpretation of these results is that participants altered their responses on the questionnaires either to avoid or to seek the manager position. Participants in the rejection condition may have reported slightly lower scores to avoid the manager position or control participants may have slightly inflated their scores to attain the manager position. Another possibility is that rejected participants may actually have experienced temporary decreases in achievement motivation and decreased feelings of dominance due to the rejection manipulation. This interpretation is consistent with the finding that mere belonging increases achievement motivation (Walton, Cohen, Cwir & Spencer, 2012). Rejection may decrease achievement motivation.

A third possibility is that the differences in achievement motivation and self-reported dominance were simply due to a failure of randomization. That is, participants low in achievement motivation and dominance were disproportionately assigned to the rejection condition. This interpretation is less plausible than the other interpretations. Nonetheless, I obtained mass screening data for the dominance subscale of the Achievement Motivation Scale for 27 participants, and there were no differences in scores between the participants in the rejection and non-rejection condition, $p = .90$. This suggests that the decreased reports of
dominance and achievement motivation were due to the experimental manipulation rather than a failure of randomization.

I also included the Stroop task as a fourth dependent variable to assess desire to attain power in the new group. Participants were told that their performance on the Stroop task would be used to select the manager in the group performance task. I expected Stroop performance to be related to people’s desire to attain the manager role. The prediction was that people who desired the manager position would be motivated to perform well on the task and would therefore demonstrate lower levels of Stroop interference than people who did not desire the manager position. Analyses of Stroop data indicated no differences in Stroop interference scores between participants assigned to the rejection condition and participants assigned to the non-rejection control condition. This null result suggests that assumptions underlying the operation of this dependent variable may have been problematic. One potential issue is that the Stroop task is a classic measure of self-regulatory performance, and past research has shown that rejection causes decreased self-regulation (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005). Nonetheless, rejection decreases the motivation to self-regulate, not the ability. Rejected people can effectively self-regulate when their prospective of future acceptance depends on it (DeWall, Baumeister, & Vohs, 2008). This suggests that Stroop performance should vary with participants’ effort or motivation to attain the manager position. It may have been problematic to assume that participants would calibrate their effort on the task to their desire for the manager position. Instead, participants in the experiment may have been equally motivated (or unmotivated) to put effort into the task, regardless of their desire for the manager position.
Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the experiment was that some participants might have felt more similar to the videotaped confederate than others. Although one might predict that rejection by a similar other would lead to stronger responses than rejection by a dissimilar other, there is evidence to the contrary. People feel similar levels of social pain when rejected by a similar other as they do when rejected by a despised other (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007).

The results of the current study may have also depended on the particular type of rejection manipulation employed. According to the temporal need threat model of ostracism (Williams, 2009), ostracized people in the reflective, or coping, stage of ostracism will focus on restoring whichever need was most strongly threatened. Speculatively, the rejection manipulation employed in the current experiment may have particularly threatened one’s sense of belonging. All participants in the rejection condition were explicitly told that their partner, who had ostensibly just watched an introductory video recorded by the participant, did not want to work with the participant. This peer rejection manipulation implies that something about the way the participant presented himself or herself led the partner to avoid the interaction with the participant. Peer rejection may especially threaten the belonging of new undergraduate students who may be in the process of developing new friendship networks at college. Thus, participants may have preferred the lower-power position because it offered more opportunities for affiliation with the other subordinate. Different results may have been found if I had used a different rejection manipulation. In particular, the future-alone paradigm in which participants are led to believe that they will spend their future alone (e.g., DeWall et al., 2009) may threaten the need for control to a greater extent than the peer rejection paradigm because participants are led to believe that their lonely future is unavoidable. Thus, participants rejected in the future-alone
paradigm may be more likely to pursue a powerful position in a new group as a way to restore their threatened sense of control.

Another possibility for future research is that repeated experiences with ostracism would lead people to focus more on coping strategies that could be used to restore their sense of control and meaning without necessarily restoring their sense of belonging. Two possible strategies that could be used to achieve these goals include the use of aggression, which has been considered by some as a form of control (Tedeschi, 2001), or the pursuit of power, which has also been shown to restore control (Inesi et al., 2011). There is substantial evidence that rejected or ostracized people who believe they will not be able to achieve reacceptance sometimes turn to aggression (Bourgeois & Leary, 2001; DeWall et al., 2009; Gaertner & Iuzzini, 2005; Twenge et al., 2001, Warburton et al., 2006). Yet there is almost no research exploring conditions under which rejection may strengthen the desire for power. One possibility is that preferences to obtain power in a new group may be stronger among people who have experienced more sustained or repeated ostracism or among people who perceived their chance of reacceptance in the group as relatively lower. If chronically ostracized people can achieve power, then they have a way of restoring control in their lives (Inesi et al., 2011). Additionally, attaining power may provide other benefits to the chronically ostracized because power may lead them to experience a decreased need for social affiliation (Conlon & Maner, in prep).

The current research left a number of potentially moderating variables unexplored. Future research could profitably explore how individual differences in self-esteem, social anxiety, narcissism, or achievement motivation are related to types of positions people pursue when they attempt to reintegrate themselves into new groups following rejection. Several experiments have shown that individual differences in self-esteem, individual-collectivism, introversion-
extraversion, loneliness, and need for belonging do not moderate initial reactions to rejection (Carter-Sowell et al., 2006; Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998; Zadro & Williams, 2006). Nonetheless, there is some evidence that individual differences moderate how people cope with rejection. Based on the evidence that narcissists respond to rejection with increased direct and displaced aggression (Twenge & Campbell, 2003), I would predict that narcissists might also try to restore their sense of control following rejection by trying to attain power over others. Additionally, I would predict that rejected people who score high on achievement motivation may be motivated to obtain power in new groups following rejection if they believe that they can provide the most benefit to their new group by taking a leadership position. Self-esteem or social anxiety could also moderate the extent to which rejection leads to particular role preferences in new groups. According to the sociometer theory, experiences with rejection should lead to decreased self-esteem and motivate behaviors that promote belonging (Leary, 1999). People with diminished self-esteem following rejection may pursue more subordinate positions in new groups because they feel unworthy or incapable of assuming more responsibility and because subordinate positions offer greater opportunities for affiliation.

**Conclusion**

The current research offers insight into how rejected people cope with rejection when they have the opportunity to join a new social group. One idea was that rejected people would prefer to be in a powerful position in a new group because power could be used to restore one’s sense of control and meaning in life while maintaining a comfortable social distance that would prevent further rejection. Another idea was that rejected people would prefer more subordinate roles in a new group because subordinate roles may offer greater opportunities for affiliation than power-holding roles. The results supported the second idea. Indeed, rejected participants were more
interested than non-rejected participants in a subordinate role that would demand a substantial, effortful contribution to the group outcome. Consistent with other research, this suggests that rejected participants were more motivated than non-rejected participants to make extra effort on the group task, possibly to facilitate reacceptance within the group. The implication is that rejected people may be motivated to work harder in new groups to secure their place in the new group.
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Figure 1. Preferences for each role in the group performance task. Participants in the rejection condition preferred the builder role significantly more than participants in the non-rejection control condition. There was no difference in preferences for the manager or time keeper position between rejection and non-rejected participants.