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# Conspicuous Consumption versus Charitable Behavior in Response to Social Exclusion: A Differential Needs Explanation

JAEHOON LEE  
L. J. SHRUM

Social exclusion has been shown to produce a number of different responses. This research examines the proposition that social exclusion may produce either self-focused or prosocial responses, depending on which needs are threatened. Different types of social exclusion threaten different needs, which in turn produce distinct outcomes (differential needs hypothesis). Social exclusion in the form of being implicitly ignored increased conspicuous consumption, whereas being explicitly rejected increased helping and donation behavior. However, when efficacy needs (power, meaningful existence) were bolstered, the effects of being ignored were eliminated, whereas when relational needs (self-esteem) were bolstered, the effects of being rejected were eliminated. The results indicate that certain types of social exclusion produce prosocial responses, whereas others produce self-focused and attention-getting responses.

It is well established that people have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Forming and maintaining relationships likely have survival benefits through resource sharing and mutual protection (Buss 1990). For this reason, the need to belong is considered to be universal across cultures, and in fact cultures themselves may be considered manifestations of the need to belong. And marketers certainly seem well aware of this tendency toward affiliation. One need only look at the clothing of college

students—much of which displays affiliation through school logos and colors—to see its magnitude. There are also affiliation credit cards that display one's school (or any group) logo; membership in exclusive clubs is often a major selling point for products (e.g., credit cards, airline lounges), and even brand communities serve as good examples of affiliative behaviors (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

But what happens when this need to belong is threatened, a situation most people experience from time to time? Social exclusion may occur in consumer contexts (e.g., turned back by the doorman at an exclusive club or not even able to get his attention, denied membership in a country club) and nonconsumer contexts (e.g., turned down for a date, rejected on a job application). Recent consumer research has shown that social exclusion can lead to attempts at social reconnection through means such as affiliative spending (Mead et al. 2011) and purchase of nostalgic products that help strengthen reconnection with the past (Loveland, Smeesters, and Mandel 2010). These findings are consistent with research showing that social exclusion increases prosocial behaviors in general (Williams 2007). However, not all responses to social exclusion are prosocial, and some are quite the opposite. Social exclusion has also been shown to increase aggression (Twenge et al. 2001; Warburton, Williams, and Cairns 2006) and reduce prosocial behavior (Twenge et al. 2007). Consequently, it is reasonable to think that there are conditions under which social exclusion may lead to consumer responses that are likewise not prosocial.

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The purpose of the research presented here is to test the proposition that self-threats resulting from social exclusion can produce both self-focused and prosocial consumer responses, depending on the situation, and to explore the mechanisms underlying these effects. We test what we refer to as the differential needs hypothesis, which is the proposition that the outcomes of social exclusion may depend on which fundamental needs are threatened (Williams 2007). In four experiments, we show that threats to efficacy needs, such as power and meaningful existence, produce self-focused responses, such as increased conspicuous consumption. In contrast, threats to relational needs, such as self-esteem, produce prosocial responses, such as increased charitable donations and helping behavior.

In doing so, we contribute to the literature in three ways. First, we offer important qualifications to previous research showing that social exclusion produces affiliative consumer responses. We conceptually replicate the general findings of Mead et al. (2011) and Loveland et al. (2010) that social exclusion produces affiliative and prosocial responses, but only when relational needs such as self-esteem are threatened by social exclusion. In contrast, when social exclusion threatens efficacy needs, self-focused responses are produced, and prosocial responses are unaffected. Second, we provide what, to our knowledge, is the first comprehensive test of the differential needs hypothesis, which focuses specifically on the processes that underlie social exclusion effects. We show that different types of social exclusion can threaten different needs, which in turn produce very different outcomes. These findings have the potential to reconcile seemingly conflicting findings in the literature that show that social exclusion produces both prosocial and antisocial behaviors. Third, we extend research that shows that what appear to be relatively subtle differences in social exclusion, such as implicit (being ignored) versus explicit (being rejected) exclusion, produce very different motivations (Molden et al. 2009). We provide the first research to show that these different types of exclusion produce different behavioral outcomes, and do so because they threaten different needs.

### **SOCIAL EXCLUSION, HUMAN NEEDS, AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES**

Social exclusion has been shown to produce a wide variety of behavioral responses. Some studies have found that exclusion increases aggressive, antisocial behaviors. For example, socially excluded people gave a more negative job evaluation of someone who insulted them (Twenge et al. 2001); gave unappealing snacks, relative to appealing snacks, to their interaction partners (Chow, Tiedens, and Govan 2008); and allocated more hot sauce to others who they thought disliked spicy food (Warburton et al. 2006). In contrast, other studies have found that exclusion increases affiliative, prosocial behaviors. Socially excluded people expressed greater interest in meeting new people via a student connection service and an increased desire to work with

others (Maner et al. 2007), engaged in nonconscious behavioral mimicry (Lakin, Chartrand, and Arkin 2008), and became more socially attentive (Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004). In the consumer behavior domain, social exclusion increased spending that promoted affiliation (Mead et al. 2011) and increased preferences for nostalgic products that helped individuals feel reconnected with people from the past (Loveland et al. 2010).

Thus, social exclusion produces a number of effects, many of which differ greatly from the others. One explanation, explored in this research, is that different types of social exclusion threaten different needs, which in turn produce different outcomes. Research on social exclusion has used many manipulations to induce feelings of social exclusion (Blackhart et al. 2009). Thus, part of the explanation for the different outcomes may relate to precisely what needs are threatened and what avenues are available to people to mitigate those threats.

### **Social Exclusion and Threats to Needs**

Social exclusion threatens four fundamental human needs: belongingness, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence (Williams 2001; Zadro, Williams, and Richardson 2004). The belongingness hypothesis suggests that people have a desire to form and maintain positive interpersonal relationships (Baumeister and Leary 1995). As a fundamental interpersonal need, a need to belong facilitates reconnection with others (Pickett et al. 2004). For example, people with a strong need to belong tend to seek out interpersonal contacts and cultivate interpersonal relationships, at least until they have reached a minimum level of social contact and relatedness (Baumeister and Leary 1995), and they seek to cultivate a good public image (Williams 2001).

Social exclusion also threatens self-esteem needs. Self-esteem can be derived from both inner-directed (e.g., self-respect based on competence) and other-directed (e.g., respect and admiration of others, acceptance) foci (Maslow 1954/1987). With respect to the latter, the sociometer hypothesis suggests that the self-esteem system functions as a sociometer that monitors the degree to which a person is included versus excluded by other people and motivates the person to behave in ways that minimize the possibility of social exclusion (Leary et al. 1995). It also suggests that self-esteem is highly sensitive to changes in perceived inclusionary status. The sociometer perspective can explain why people with low self-esteem are more sensitive to socially relevant cues than those with high self-esteem (Brockner 1983). The sociometer system responds to social exclusion by motivating behavior to restore relational appreciation.

A third need that social exclusion threatens is perceived power and control. A perceived loss of control is linked to aggression, which is viewed as a coercive action used to control the behavior of others (Tedeschi and Felson 1994). Individuals may aggress in attempts to restore a generalized sense of personal power or control over others (Frieze and Boneva 2001). In addition, aggression need not be direct.

Symbolic status or superiority may be used as an indirect aggression to restore a sense of personal power or control, thus achieving a sense of superiority over others (Baumeister, Smart, and Boden 1996).

The fourth need that social exclusion threatens is one's sense of a meaningful existence. Individuals have a need to maintain beliefs in a meaningful existence (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 2004), and meaning exists within social interactions. Social exclusion symbolizes social death because it involves cutting off individuals from social interactions (Warburton and Williams 2005). As a result, social exclusion can make individuals feel socially invisible and nonexistent (Williams 2001) and view themselves as less human (Bastian and Haslam 2010). This reduced sense of a meaningful existence is associated with motivations to gain attention (Warburton and Williams 2005). Gaining attention restores social visibility and thus affirms one's existence. As with attempts to gain power and control, one way of gaining attention is through antisocial behaviors.

### Distinct Threats to Human Needs

One possible answer to why social exclusion may elicit such different responses relates to the particular needs that are threatened and the means by which people attempt to repair those needs. In a review monograph, Williams (2007) proposed that the four human needs that are threatened by social exclusion can be grouped into two categories: relational needs (belonging, self-esteem) and efficacy needs (control, meaningful existence). He further proposed that relational needs and efficacy needs may produce different behavioral responses. When relational needs (belonging, self-esteem) are most threatened, individuals may attempt to fortify those needs by feeling, thinking, and behaving in a prosocial, affiliative manner, because prosocial acts increase interpersonal attractiveness. In contrast, when efficacy needs (control, meaningful existence) are most threatened, individuals may attempt to fortify those needs, which may result in controlling, provocative, and attention-getting behaviors. Consequently, if different types of social exclusion threaten different needs, then the behavioral responses that result from attempts to repair those needs should correspondingly differ.

## HYPOTHESES AND OVERVIEW

To summarize, the differential needs hypothesis suggests that different types of social exclusion may threaten different needs, which in turn produce different attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in response to those need threats. Thus, we propose that the effects of particular types of social exclusion produce distinct outcomes. We further propose that the underlying mechanism of these effects is the desire to repair the particular needs that are threatened by the different types of social exclusion.

To test these propositions, we used Molden et al.'s (2009) distinction between experiences of social exclusion: being ignored versus being rejected. Being ignored and being re-

jected differ on a number of dimensions. One is that being ignored is more implicit and indirect, whereas being rejected is more explicit and direct. Another difference pertains to the types of social failures that may be communicated by each type of exclusion and which primary needs are threatened for each. When people are ignored, the primary needs that are threatened are likely to be efficacy needs such as power and control and a meaningful existence. Being ignored reduces one's power to gain attention from others. Unlike explicit rejection, in which a rejected person can attempt to argue with a rejection decision (and thus assert control), being ignored is unilateral and provides no control mechanism unless the attention is gained. Being ignored (ostracized) has also been likened to being invisible and having no existence (socially dead; Warburton and Williams 2005; Williams 2009). Thus, it is also likely to threaten feelings of a meaningful existence. However, because being ignored does not immediately convey rejection or reasons for it, relational needs such as self-esteem and a sense of belongingness may not be immediately threatened (although these needs may eventually be threatened when the intensity or duration of being ignored makes the social exclusion explicit).

In contrast, when people are rejected, the primary needs that are threatened are likely to be relational needs such as self-esteem and belonging. Being rejected involves explicit feedback concerning an individual's poor standing within a relationship or group, and self-esteem is considered by many theorists to be a function of one's evaluations of his or her inclusionary status (Leary et al. 1995). Thus, motivation to reconnect with others is likely to be more dominant than a motivation to assert power or control.

Based on this reasoning, we used manipulations of being ignored and rejected to test the differential needs hypothesis. Being ignored should threaten efficacy needs such as power and control, and a meaningful existence, because it reflects an unworthiness of attention and denies acknowledgment of one's existence. When these needs are threatened, individuals will seek to regain power and control and reinforce their existence, and one way of accomplishing this is by trying to gain attention and be noticed by showing off to others. In a consumer context, showing off and gaining attention may be achieved through conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption is a self-focused, showy behavior intended to impress others by calling attention to the self (Griskevicius et al. 2007; Veblen 1899/1994). The intended motives to impress others are to augment one's power over them (Rucker and Galinsky 2008, 2009) and to communicate meaning of who one is (Belk 1988; Schau and Gilly 2003). Thus, we predict that being ignored, which threatens efficacy needs (control and meaningful existence), will increase conspicuous consumption.

In contrast, being rejected should threaten relational needs such as self-esteem and belonging because it sends clear signals that one is not valued by a particular person or group. When these needs are threatened, individuals may seek ways to reconnect with society through more prosocial responses.

If so, being rejected should produce more prosocial responses than being ignored. Prosocial behavior is an umbrella term used to describe intentional actions to help or benefit others, such as helpful interventions, volunteer work, and donating money or blood (Weinstein and Ryan 2010). Thus, we predict that being rejected, which threatens relational needs (belonging and self-esteem), will increase helping and donation behavior.

A depiction of the general set of relations we are testing is presented in figure 1. As the figure shows, being ignored is expected to threaten efficacy needs, which in turn will increase conspicuous consumption. In contrast, being rejected is expected to threaten relational needs, which in turn will increase helping and donation behavior. Note that the differential needs hypothesis also suggests that being ignored should have little impact on relational needs and thus should not influence helping and donation behavior. Similarly, being rejected should have little impact on efficacy needs and thus should not influence conspicuous consumption. Thus,

- H1a:** Being ignored will increase conspicuous consumption but being rejected will not.
- H1b:** Being rejected will increase helping and donation behavior but being ignored will not.

These hypotheses were tested in all four experiments. In experiments 1, 3, and 4, being ignored and rejected were manipulated through writing tasks that asked participants to recall and write about a time in which they had been either ignored or rejected (Maner et al. 2007; Molden et al. 2009). In experiment 2, the manipulations consisted of situations in which participants were actually ignored or rejected through chat-room interactions with confederates. For the dependent variables, conspicuous consumption and helping and donation behavior were operationalized as either scale preferences for clothing with conspicuous logos and for

helping and charitable contributions (experiments 1, 3, and 4), or actual product choice and donation behavior (experiment 2).

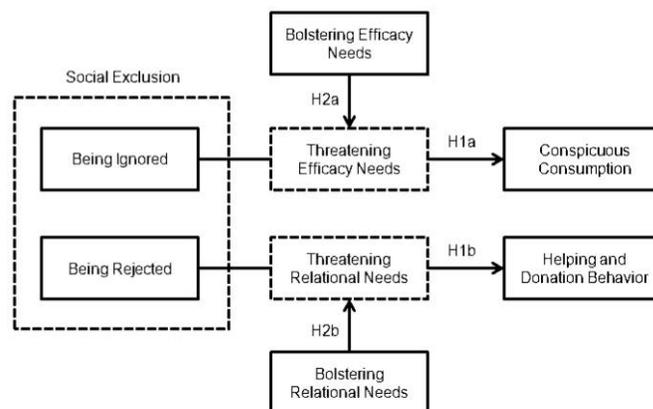
To examine the underlying process of the differential needs threat, we used the moderation-of-process design (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005), in which we manipulated the psychological processes (e.g., bolstering threatened needs). We expect that bolstering the specific needs that are threatened by different types of social exclusion will reduce or eliminate the effects on the outcome variables. Again, the differential needs hypothesis also makes predictions about which effects are expected and which are not. Specifically, it implies that bolstering needs that are not threatened should have little effect. Thus, we expect that although bolstering efficacy needs in ignored conditions will reduce or eliminate effects on conspicuous consumption, bolstering relational needs should have little effect on conspicuous consumption. Likewise, bolstering relational needs in rejected conditions should reduce or eliminate effects on helping and donation behavior, but bolstering efficacy needs should have little effect on helping and donation behavior. Thus,

- H2a:** Bolstering efficacy needs will reduce or eliminate the effects of being ignored on conspicuous consumption, but bolstering relational needs will not.
- H2b:** Bolstering relational needs will reduce or eliminate the effects of being rejected on helping and donation behavior, but bolstering efficacy needs will not.

In experiment 3, we bolstered either power (efficacy need) or self-esteem (relational need). In experiment 4, we replicated and extended the findings from experiment 3 by bolstering the same relational need (self-esteem) but a different efficacy need (meaningful existence). We did not bol-

FIGURE 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



ster the need to belong, the other relational need proposed by Williams (2007), primarily because belongingness is conceptually opposite of being excluded. Consequently, bolstering a sense of belonging would simply cancel the effects of both being ignored and being rejected. In contrast, the other manipulations of bolstering needs do not have any direct relation to exclusion.

## EXPERIMENT 1

### Method

*Participants, Design, and Procedure.* Eighty undergraduate business students (39 men, 41 women) participated in the study for partial course credit. All participants provided informed consent. To reduce suspicion about the purpose of the study, participants were told they would be participating in two separate studies. They were told that the purpose of the first study (which manipulated social exclusion) was to develop counseling techniques for college students in conjunction with the psychology department. For the second study, they were told they would be participating in a study that investigated consumer preferences across many different situations.

Upon arrival at the lab, participants were randomly assigned to the ignored, the rejected, or the control condition. To manipulate these conditions, we used a recall and writing task adapted from Molden et al. (2009). Participants in the exclusion conditions were asked to recall a time in which they had been either passively ignored or actively rejected, and then to write about that incident for 5 minutes. Participants assigned to the ignored (rejected) condition were instructed to "write about a time in which you felt intensely ignored (rejected) in some way . . . it must be a time that you were clearly ignored (rejected), but no one actually said that they did not want or like you (where you were told you were not accepted because you were not wanted or liked)." In addition, we included a no-exclusion control condition that consisted of having participants recall and write about a time in which they had driven or walked to the grocery store. Following this task, participants were asked to indicate how implicitly ignored and explicitly rejected they felt at the time on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). These measures were included as manipulation checks.

Next, ostensibly as part of the second study, all participants were given two hypothetical scenarios designed to assess their preferences for conspicuous consumption and helping. Finally, participants provided demographic information and were asked to provide their thoughts on the study's purpose. They were then debriefed. No one correctly guessed the research purpose.

*Measures.* We measured preferences for conspicuous consumption by asking participants to imagine they were buying a piece of high-end clothing and then to indicate their preferences for conspicuous brand logos using the scale developed by Rucker and Galinsky (2009). The 9-point scale has four items, anchored by visible/nonvisible, big/small,

noticeable/unnoticeable, and conspicuous/inconspicuous. The four items were averaged to form a composite score ( $\alpha = .87$ ), with higher values indicating a greater preference for conspicuous logos. Following that, we measured preferences for helping others with two hypothetical scenarios that involved donating money (DeWall et al. 2008). Participants were asked to imagine they had the opportunity to help others by giving money to a homeless person and by donating money to a fund for children with terminal illnesses. Participants indicated how likely they would be to give money in each situation at that moment on a 9-point scale (1 = not at all likely, 9 = very likely). The two items were aggregated ( $\alpha = .63$ ), with higher values indicating a greater likelihood of giving money.

In addition, to test the possibility that affect is accounting for some of the social exclusion effects (Twenge et al. 2001), we assessed positive and negative affect with the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) scale, adapted from Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988). This measure includes two 10-item scales that comprise the positive affect scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and the negative affect scale ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Participants indicated how they felt at the present time on a 5-point scale (1 = very slightly or not at all, 5 = extremely). Items on each scale were averaged to form composite scores of negative and positive affect.

### Results and Discussion

*Manipulation Checks and Controls.* As expected, participants who were asked to describe experiences of being ignored reported feeling more ignored than rejected ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 5.84$ ,  $SD = 1.21$  vs.  $M_{\text{rejected}} = 5.28$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ;  $F(1, 24) = 4.69$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .43$ ), whereas participants who were asked to describe experiences of being rejected reported feeling more rejected than ignored ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = 6.39$ ,  $SD = .92$  vs.  $M_{\text{ignored}} = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 2.00$ ;  $F(1, 27) = 10.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .66$ ). Participants who were asked to describe going grocery shopping did not show any differences in feeling rejected versus ignored ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = 1.85$ ,  $SD = 1.23$  vs.  $M_{\text{ignored}} = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ; NS), and those who wrote about being rejected or being ignored each indicated feeling more rejected or ignored than those who wrote about going grocery shopping (both  $p < .001$ ). These results indicate that the manipulations were successful. Next, we tested for effects of gender and age. Neither was related to any of the focal variables for this or subsequent studies, and thus demographic effects are not discussed further. Finally, we also tested for possible effects of affect. There were no differences between exclusion conditions for positive affect ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 2.79$ ,  $SD = .69$  vs.  $M_{\text{rejected}} = 2.93$ ,  $SD = .70$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 2.57$ ,  $SD = .95$ ;  $F(2, 72) = 1.36$ ,  $p > .25$ ; for all contrasts,  $p > .13$ ). However, there was a marginally significant difference for negative affect between the ignored and rejected conditions ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 1.46$ ,  $SD = .70$  vs.  $M_{\text{rejected}} = 1.80$ ,  $SD = .69$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 1.57$ ,  $SD = .58$ ;  $F(2, 72) = 1.75$ ,  $p > .17$ ; for all contrasts,  $p > .095$ ). To test the possibility that negative affect differences between conditions influenced the pattern of our results, we

reran all analyses with negative affect as a covariate. However, including negative affect as a covariate had virtually no influence on the results.

*Test of Hypotheses.* To test the hypotheses that being ignored would increase conspicuous consumption, but being rejected would not (hypothesis 1a), and being rejected would increase helping and donation, but being ignored would not (hypothesis 1b), we conducted separate one-way ANOVAs for all predicted contrasts. The results of this analysis are presented in figure 2. For conspicuous consumption (see fig. 2A), participants in the ignored condition expressed greater preferences for high-end clothing with conspicuous brand logos than those in the rejected condition ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 4.93$ ,  $SD = 2.09$  vs.  $M_{\text{rejected}} = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ;  $F(1, 51) = 10.60$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .88$ ) and control condition ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 4.93$ ,  $SD = 2.09$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ;  $F(1, 50) = 6.40$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .70$ ), whereas preferences in rejected and control conditions did not significantly differ ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.57$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ; NS). These results support hypothesis 1a. For helping and donation (see fig. 2B), the opposite was true: participants in the rejected condition expressed greater willingness to give money than those in the ignored condition ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = 6.11$ ,  $SD = 2.35$  vs.  $M_{\text{ignored}} = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 2.69$ ;  $F(1, 51) = 3.88$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .54$ ) and control condition ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = 6.11$ ,  $SD = 2.35$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.76$ ,  $SD = 2.40$ ;  $F(1, 53) = 4.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .57$ ), but preferences in the ignored and control conditions did not differ ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 2.69$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.76$ ,  $SD = 2.40$ ; NS). These results support hypothesis 1b.

The results of experiment 1 support our hypothesis that different types of social exclusion produce different behavioral preferences. Priming feelings of being ignored increased preferences for conspicuous consumption, but priming feelings of being rejected did not. In contrast, priming feelings of being rejected increased intentions to donate money to people in need, but priming feelings of being ignored did not. Thus, a fairly subtle difference in the type of social exclusion (implicit vs. explicit) produced quite different outcomes.

In experiment 1, we manipulated social exclusion by having participants recall a time when they had experienced either being ignored or being rejected. In experiment 2, we tested our hypotheses under actual social exclusion conditions. In addition, we measured actual product choice and donation behavior rather than measuring preferences through hypothetical scenarios, as some research suggests that self-reports and actual behavior may differ, particularly for donations (Baumeister, Vohs, and Funder 2007).

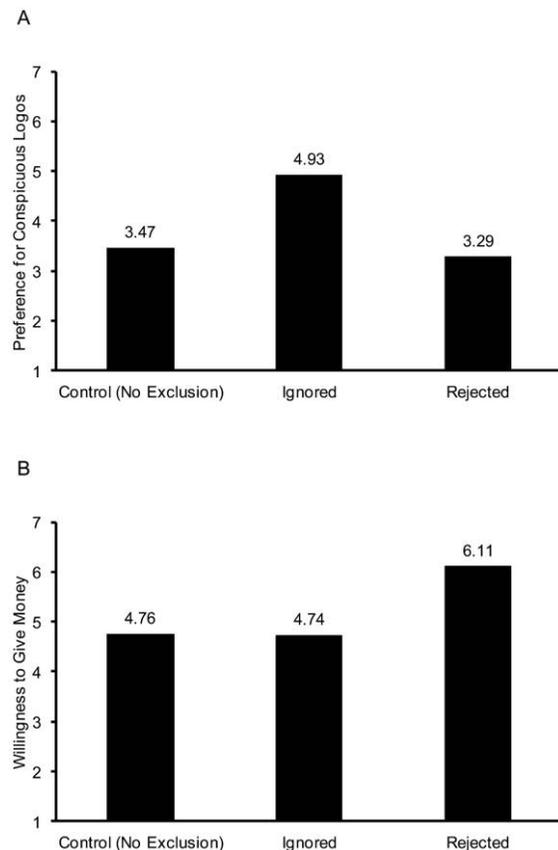
## EXPERIMENT 2

### Method

*Participants, Design, and Procedure.* Fifty-five undergraduate business students (30 men, 25 women) participated in the study in return for \$7.00. Participants arrived at the

FIGURE 2

EXPERIMENT 1: (A) PREFERENCE FOR CONSPICUOUS BRAND LOGOS AND (B) WILLINGNESS TO GIVE MONEY AS A FUNCTION OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION CONDITIONS



lab individually. After providing informed consent, they were told they would be participating in a series of unrelated studies. The first study represented the manipulation of social exclusion and was a modification of the manipulation used by Molden et al. (2009). Participants were told that they would be participating in a study about how people form friendships and communities online and that they would be discussing two randomly selected topics with two fellow students in an online chat room using the Blackboard instructional interface they use in their classes. They were further informed that each individual would be assigned a letter to protect anonymity (e.g., participant A, participant B, or participant C) and take turns sending a message to the other participants, beginning with participant A. However, unbeknownst to participants, A and C were actually confederates, and the main parts of the online communication between the two confederates were scripted ahead of time to either ignore or reject participants.

Participants were told that one of the group members had been randomly chosen to receive the topic and would start

the conversation and be responsible for keeping the conversation flowing. In reality, one confederate always received the topic and initiated the conversation. Finally, participants were told that at some point they would receive a message that their time was up. At that point, they would be asked to answer questions about their experience.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the ignored or rejected condition. In both conditions, the discussion topic was a new law banning texting while driving. The topic was chosen because of its timeliness and ease with which plausible arguments for both sides could be constructed (e.g., safety vs. freedom). The interaction was scripted so that participants (as opposed to confederates) were always the first to state an opinion. In the rejected condition, the two confederates immediately disparaged the participant's opinion, regardless of what it was (e.g., "you're kidding, right?") and proceeded to provide counterarguments to the participant's position. In the ignored condition, the two confederates talked only to each other without acknowledging anything the participant said, after ostensibly discovering something they had in common. As the discussion progressed, the confederates continued to direct their questions and responses solely toward each other and never acknowledged any attempt by the participant to enter the conversation.

The online discussion for each condition took about 10 minutes. After being told their chat time was up, participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) how ignored and rejected they felt during chatting. Next, as part of a second study, participants filled out a battery of filler items that bolstered the credibility of our cover story. Finally, participants were informed that the experiment was over, and each was presented with seven \$1 bills in return for their participation. At this point, before they left the lab, we informed some participants ( $n = 28$ ) that as a further token of our appreciation, they would be entered into a lottery for a Nike T-shirt. For other participants ( $n = 27$ ), we offered them the opportunity to donate money to a charity. Thus, participants either indicated their choice of T-shirts or were given the opportunity to donate money. All participants were then asked to provide their thoughts on the study's purpose and fully debriefed. One participant correctly guessed the research purpose and was removed from the analyses.

**Measures.** For the conspicuous consumption measure, participants were told they could enter a real lottery for a Nike T-shirt, with the drawing to be held when the study was fully completed. Participants were asked to choose a size, color, and style. For style, participants could choose between two Nike T-shirt designs taken from the NikeiD website (<http://www.nikeid.com>; retail value = \$35), one with a big Swoosh logo or one with a small Swoosh logo (see the appendix). Winners of the lottery received their choice of T-shirt after completion of all sessions. The dependent measure of interest was the choice share of the big logo option relative to the small logo option. Higher shares

thus indicate a greater preference for conspicuous consumption.

For the helping measure, participants were presented with seven \$1 bills, an envelope, and a letter from an actual charity, Feeding America. We asked participants to read the donation request letter from the charity. In this letter, a brief description of Feeding America was provided, so participants would know the organization was real. The letter further informed the participants of the opportunity to donate any of their just-earned \$7.00 to the charity organization. Participants were then asked to put the envelope, sealed with any amount of the \$7.00 they chose to donate, in a donation box (even if they were giving nothing). The donation box was located away from the experimenter to ensure privacy. The dependent measure was the amount donated by participants. All money was actually donated to the Feeding America charity.

## Results and Discussion

**Manipulation Checks.** As expected, participants who were ignored reported feeling more ignored than rejected ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 5.81$ ,  $SD = 1.54$  vs.  $M_{\text{rejected}} = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 1.95$ ;  $F(1, 25) = 6.91$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .48$ ), whereas participants who were rejected reported feeling more rejected than ignored ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = 5.69$ ,  $SD = 1.23$  vs.  $M_{\text{ignored}} = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 2.00$ ;  $F(1, 25) = 54.83$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = 1.74$ ).

**Tests of Hypotheses.** We expected that participants would express greater preferences for conspicuous consumption when ignored than when rejected (hypothesis 1a). To test this hypothesis, we employed a binary logistic regression model in which we analyzed the proportion of participants choosing the big Swoosh logo option over the small Swoosh logo option. As expected, there was a significant effect of type of social exclusion on conspicuous choices ( $\beta = 2.02$ ; Wald = 4.63,  $p < .05$ ). Specifically, 60% of participants who were ignored chose the big Swoosh logo T-shirt compared to only 17% of participants who were rejected. These results support hypothesis 1a.

We also expected that participants would express greater preferences for helping, and thus donate more money, when rejected than when ignored (hypothesis 1b). To test this hypothesis, we conducted a one-way ANOVA. The dependent variable was the amount of money donated by participants. As expected, participants who were rejected donated more money to the charity than those who were ignored ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = \$4.08$ ,  $SD = 2.43$  vs.  $M_{\text{ignored}} = \$2.08$ ,  $SD = 2.50$ ;  $F(1, 24) = 3.91$ ,  $p = .06$ ,  $d = .79$ ), although the difference is only marginally significant. We also examined social exclusion as a function of whether a participant donated or not. All (100%) of the participants who were rejected donated some money, compared to only 67% of participants who were ignored ( $\chi^2(1) = 5.52$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These results support hypothesis 1b.

The results of experiment 2 replicate those from experiment 1 and show that different types of social exclusion produce different responses. Moreover, we demonstrated

that these effects hold under actual social exclusion conditions and for actual behavior. However, although consistent with our theoretical reasoning, we have yet to fully test the differential needs hypothesis, which specifies the psychological processes underlying these effects. We hypothesized that the effect of being ignored on conspicuous consumption would be reduced or eliminated when efficacy needs are bolstered (hypothesis 2a). In contrast, we hypothesized that the effect of being rejected on helping and donation behavior would be reduced or eliminated when relational needs are bolstered (hypothesis 2b). Experiments 3 and 4 tested these psychological process hypotheses.

### EXPERIMENT 3

#### Method

*Participants, Design, and Procedure.* One hundred and sixty-four undergraduate business students (96 men, 68 women) participated in the study for partial course credit. All participants provided informed consent. The cover story and social exclusion manipulations were the same as experiment 1, and participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions in a 2 (social exclusion: ignored vs. rejected)  $\times$  3 (boost: self-esteem vs. power vs. no boost) between-subjects design. In what was billed as a separate study on a cognitive intelligence task, participants received either a self-esteem boost, a power boost, or no boost (control). In the power-boost condition, participants completed a word-search puzzle adapted from Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh (2001). They were instructed to find and circle 10 words, six of which were power related (authority, boss, control, etc.). Following this task, they recalled and wrote about a time in which they had power over other individuals (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003).

In the self-esteem boost condition, participants completed a word-search puzzle within a 2-minute time limit (Hart, Shaver, and Goldenberg 2005). Most of the 16 words that could be found in the puzzle were very easy to find. However, the instructions indicated that the average student usually finds only six words in 2 minutes, and they were told that the more words they found, the more exceptional they were, leading participants to believe that they performed better than average on the word-search task. Following this task, participants recalled and wrote about a time in which they were proud of themselves.

Thus, the power and self-esteem manipulations consisted of two parts: engaging in a word-search puzzle and recalling and writing about a previous experience related to either power or self-esteem. The double priming was used because research suggests that social exclusion effects are very powerful and may be difficult to mitigate (Williams 2007). For the third, no-boost control condition, participants completed a word-search puzzle. They were instructed to find and circle 10 words (house, coffee, lamp, etc.), all of which were unrelated to either power or self-esteem. They then recalled and wrote about a time in which they went grocery shopping.

*Measures.* For the conspicuous consumption measure, participants were asked to consider a scenario in which Calvin Klein was ready to launch a newly designed T-shirt, but before the launch, the company wanted to pilot-test college students' preferences. Participants were asked to imagine they were going to buy a new T-shirt at that moment. All participants were then shown two images of a Calvin Klein T-shirt, one with a prominent, visible logo and one without a logo (see the appendix). The stimuli were created from the same image of a T-shirt, which was digitally altered to have either no visible logo or a visible logo. Both were clearly labeled as Calvin Klein T-shirts in the instructions.

Participants' preferences for conspicuous logos were measured with four items (which one is most appealing to you, attractive to you, would you spend more on, would you choose right now) using a 9-point scale (1 = definitely one with no logo, 9 = definitely one with a logo). The four items were averaged to form a composite score ( $\alpha = .94$ ). For the helping measure, participants were asked to read six hypothetical scenarios in which they had the opportunity to help others (giving food to the homeless, donating to charity, helping strangers, etc.), adapted from DeWall et al. (2008). Participants indicated the likelihood that they would help in each situation at that moment on a 9-point scale (1 = not at all likely, 9 = very likely). Responses to the six scenarios were averaged to form a composite score ( $\alpha = .70$ ).

#### Results and Discussion

A routine check for extreme outliers revealed two participants whose scores were greater than three standard deviations from the mean. Data for these participants were thus excluded from all subsequent analyses (McClelland 2000).

*Manipulation Checks.* Participants who were asked to describe experiences of being ignored reported feeling more ignored than rejected ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 5.68$ ,  $SD = 1.22$  vs.  $M_{\text{rejected}} = 5.21$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ;  $F(1, 82) = 9.59$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .35$ ), whereas participants who were asked to describe experiences of being rejected reported feeling more rejected than ignored ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = 6.10$ ,  $SD = 1.12$  vs.  $M_{\text{ignored}} = 4.84$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ;  $F(1, 78) = 35.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .82$ ).

*Tests of Hypotheses.* We expected that being ignored would increase preferences for conspicuous consumption relative to being rejected (hypothesis 1a) and that being rejected would increase preferences for helping relative to being ignored (hypothesis 1b). However, we expected that the effects of being ignored on preferences for conspicuous consumption would be reduced or eliminated under the power-boost condition, but not under the self-esteem boost condition (hypothesis 2a), and that the effects of being rejected on preferences for helping would be reduced or eliminated under the self-esteem boost condition, but not under the power boost condition (hypothesis 2b).

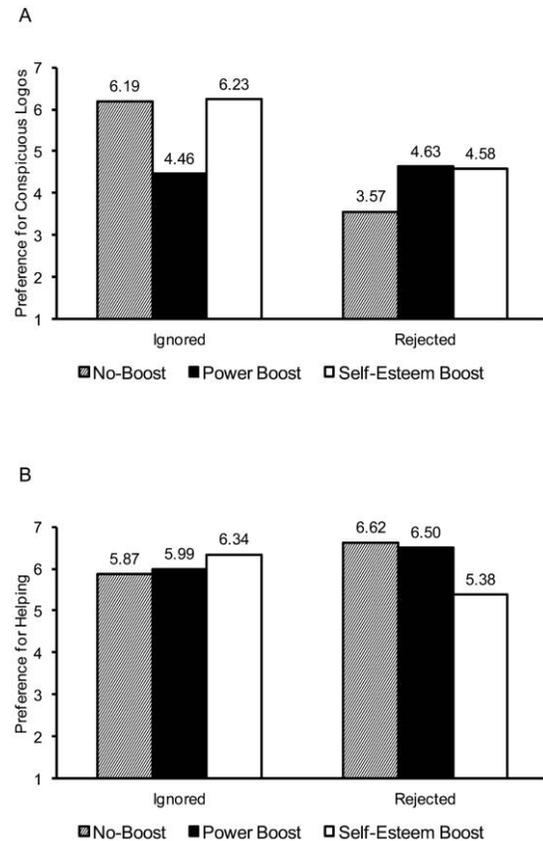
To test these hypotheses, we conducted 2  $\times$  3 ANOVAs for each dependent variable. The results of these analyses

are presented in figure 3. The social exclusion  $\times$  boost interaction was significant for both conspicuous consumption ( $F(2, 156) = 3.17, p < .05$ ) and helping ( $F(2, 156) = 4.91, p < .01$ ). To decompose these interactions, we first examined the effects of social exclusion in no-boost-only (control) conditions, which allows us to determine whether the findings from experiments 1 and 2 were replicated. As expected, participants in the ignored condition expressed greater preferences for the T-shirt with the conspicuous brand logo than those in the rejected condition ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 6.19, SD = 2.87$  vs.  $M_{\text{rejected}} = 3.57, SD = 2.81; F(1, 156) = 10.91, p < .01, d = .92$ ). Also, as expected, participants in the rejected condition expressed a greater preference for helping others than those in the ignored condition ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = 6.62, SD = 1.32$  vs.  $M_{\text{ignored}} = 5.87, SD = 1.37; F(1, 156) = 3.93, p < .05, d = .55$ ). These results support hypotheses 1a and 1b and fully replicate the findings from the first two experiments.

To test the hypotheses that power and self-esteem boosts would reduce or eliminate the respective effects of being ignored and being rejected, we conducted two sets of contrasts. In the first, we examined the effects of being ignored on conspicuous consumption under the three boost conditions. The results of this analysis are presented in the left portion of figure 3A. We expected that providing a power boost prior to making judgments of a preference for conspicuous consumption would significantly reduce or eliminate the preferences relative to providing no boost, but providing a self-esteem boost would have little effect (hypothesis 2a). These hypotheses were confirmed. The power boost reduced preferences for conspicuous logos relative to both no boost ( $M_{\text{power}} = 4.46, SD = 2.96$  vs.  $M_{\text{no-boost}} = 6.19, SD = 2.87; F(1, 156) = 4.84, p < .05, d = .59$ ) and the self-esteem boost ( $M_{\text{power}} = 4.46, SD = 2.96$  vs.  $M_{\text{self-esteem}} = 6.23, SD = 2.95; F(1, 156) = 5.15, p < .05, d = .60$ ). Also, as expected, the self-esteem boost had little effect on preferences for conspicuous brand logos relative to no boost ( $M_{\text{self-esteem}} = 6.23, SD = 2.95$  vs.  $M_{\text{no-boost}} = 6.19, SD = 2.87; NS$ ). In contrast, for the rejected condition (fig. 3A, right portion), the boosts had little effect on preferences for conspicuous brand logos ( $p > .19$  for all contrasts).

For the second set of contrasts, we examined the effects of being rejected on preferences for helping under the three boost conditions. The results of this analysis are presented in figure 3B (right portion). We expected that providing a self-esteem boost prior to making judgments of a preference for helping others would reduce or eliminate the preferences relative to providing no boost, but providing a power boost would have little effect (hypothesis 2b). These hypotheses were also confirmed. The self-esteem boost reduced preferences for helping relative to both no boost ( $M_{\text{self-esteem}} = 5.38, SD = 1.88$  vs.  $M_{\text{no-boost}} = 6.62, SD = 1.32; F(1, 156) = 8.62, p < .01, d = .76$ ) and the power boost ( $M_{\text{self-esteem}} = 5.38, SD = 1.88$  vs.  $M_{\text{power}} = 6.50, SD = 1.09; F(1, 156) = 6.93, p < .01, d = .72$ ). Also, as expected, the power boost had little effect on helping preferences rel-

**FIGURE 3**  
EXPERIMENT 3: (A) EFFECTS OF BEING IGNORED ON CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION AND (B) EFFECTS OF BEING REJECTED ON HELPING UNDER BOOSTING CONDITIONS



ative to no boost ( $M_{\text{power}} = 6.50, SD = 1.09$  vs.  $M_{\text{no-boost}} = 6.62, SD = 1.32; NS$ ). In contrast, for the ignored condition (fig. 3B, left portion), the boosts had little effect on helping preferences ( $p > .26$  for all contrasts).

The results of experiment 3 provide compelling evidence that the respective effects of being ignored and being rejected on conspicuous consumption and helping can be traced to the different underlying needs that being ignored and being rejected threaten. When efficacy needs such as power were bolstered after feelings of being ignored were induced, the effects of being ignored on conspicuous consumption were eliminated, but bolstering relational needs such as self-esteem had little effect. Similarly, when relational needs such as self-esteem were bolstered after feelings of being rejected were induced, the effects of being rejected on helping behavior were eliminated, but bolstering efficacy needs such as power had little effect.

In experiment 4, we were interested in replicating and extending these findings by bolstering the same relational need (self-esteem), but a different efficacy need (meaningful

existence), and using different operationalizations of the dependent variables. We expected that, in the ignored condition, preferences for conspicuous logos would be significantly less when a meaningful existence was boosted than when self-esteem was boosted. In contrast, in the rejected condition, we expected that preferences for helping would be significantly less when self-esteem was boosted than when a meaningful existence was boosted.

## EXPERIMENT 4

### Method

*Participants, Design, and Procedure.* Sixty-seven undergraduate business students (37 men, 30 women) participated in the study for partial course credit. All participants provided informed consent. The cover story and social exclusion manipulations were the same as those used in the previous experiment, and participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions in a 2 (social exclusion: ignored vs. rejected)  $\times$  2 (boost: self-esteem vs. meaningful existence) between-subjects design. After writing about a previous instance of being either ignored or rejected, as ostensibly part of a separate study on a cognitive intelligence task, participants received either a meaningful existence boost or a self-esteem boost. The self-esteem boost was identical to the one used in experiment 3, and the meaningful existence boost used the same procedure. Participants completed a word-search puzzle in which they were instructed to find and circle 10 words, six of which were related to a meaningful existence (contribution, meaning, values, etc.), after which they recalled and wrote about a time in which they perceived their life as very meaningful and important.

*Measures.* For the conspicuous consumption measure, participants were asked to consider a scenario in which Nike was ready to launch a newly designed cap, but before the launch, the company wanted to pilot-test college students' preferences. Participants were asked to imagine they were going to buy this new cap at that moment. They were then shown two images of a Nike cap, one with a large Swoosh logo and one with a small Swoosh logo (see the appendix). Participants' preferences for the conspicuous logos were measured with the same four items that were used in experiment 3. The items were averaged to form a composite measure ( $\alpha = .98$ ).

For the helping measures, participants were asked to imagine that they found the following donation campaign posted near the checkout lane at a grocery store. This was an actual campaign recently started at a local grocery store chain. The donation campaign stated, "One in seven babies is born prematurely. Prematurity is the leading cause of newborn death. Join us in the fight to give every baby a healthy start. Donate Today!" Participants were then asked to indicate their likelihood of donating money on a 9-point scale (1 = not at all likely, 9 = very likely) and the amount they would donate at the present moment on a 9-point scale

(\$1 to \$9 in one-dollar increments). The two items were averaged to form a composite measure ( $\alpha = .63$ ).

### Results and Discussion

*Manipulation Checks.* Participants who were asked to describe experiences of being ignored reported feeling more ignored than rejected ( $M_{\text{ignored}} = 5.94$ ,  $SD = 1.41$  vs.  $M_{\text{rejected}} = 5.33$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ;  $F(1, 32) = 7.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .45$ ), whereas participants who were asked to describe experiences of being rejected reported feeling more rejected than ignored ( $M_{\text{rejected}} = 6.18$ ,  $SD = .93$  vs.  $M_{\text{ignored}} = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ;  $F(1, 33) = 15.39$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .88$ ).

*Tests of Hypotheses.* We expected that a meaningful existence boost would reduce the effects of being ignored on conspicuous consumption relative to a self-esteem boost (hypothesis 2a), whereas a self-esteem boost would reduce the effects of being rejected on helping behavior relative to a meaningful existence boost (hypothesis 2b). To test these hypotheses, we conducted separate 2  $\times$  2 ANOVAs for the two dependent variables. The social exclusion  $\times$  boost interaction was significant for both conspicuous consumption ( $F(1, 63) = 4.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and helping ( $F(1, 63) = 4.75$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

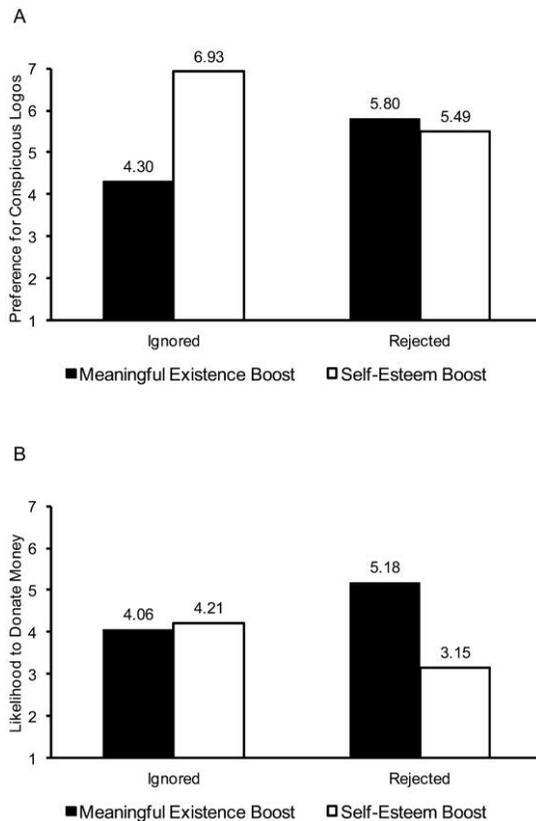
To decompose the interactions and directly test our hypotheses, we conducted two sets of contrasts. In the first, we examined the effects of being ignored on conspicuous consumption under the two boost conditions. The results of this analysis are presented in figure 4A (left portion). As expected, in the ignored condition, the meaningful existence boost-reduced preferences for a large visible Swoosh logo relative to the self-esteem boost ( $M_{\text{mean. ex.}} = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 3.21$  vs.  $M_{\text{self-esteem}} = 6.93$ ,  $SD = 2.45$ ;  $F(1, 63) = 6.68$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .92$ ). In contrast, in the rejected condition (fig. 4A, right portion), preferences for conspicuous consumption did not differ between the boost conditions ( $p > .75$ ). These results support hypothesis 2a.

For the second set of contrasts, we investigated the effects of being rejected on a preference for helping under the two boost conditions. The results of this analysis are presented in portion figure 4B (right portion). As expected, in the rejected condition, the self-esteem boost reduced preferences for helping relative to the meaningful existence boost ( $M_{\text{self-esteem}} = 3.15$ ;  $SD = 1.84$  vs.  $M_{\text{mean. ex.}} = 5.18$ ,  $SD = 2.49$ ;  $F(1, 63) = 8.41$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .93$ ). In contrast, in the ignored condition (bottom left), preferences for helping did not differ between the boost conditions ( $p > .84$ ).

These findings replicate those of experiment 3, again showing that bolstering the particular needs that are threatened by the different types of social exclusion reduces or eliminates exclusion effects, but bolstering the needs that are not threatened has little effect. We observed these effects for the same relational need investigated in experiment 3 (self-esteem) but for a different efficacy need (meaningful existence), showing not only that the specific effects from experiment 3 are stable, but also that the differential needs hypothesis is generalizable to other needs.

FIGURE 4

EXPERIMENT 4: (A) EFFECTS OF BEING IGNORED ON CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION AND (B) EFFECTS OF BEING REJECTED ON HELPING UNDER BOOSTING CONDITIONS



## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Previous research on the effects of social exclusion has clearly established that exclusion produces a number of different outcomes. However, what is less clear is the precise nature of these effects, including when they occur and why. Social exclusion has at times been shown to increase prosocial attitudes and behaviors (Lakin et al. 2008; Maner et al. 2007; Mead et al. 2011; Pickett et al. 2004), but has at other times been shown to decrease prosocial behavior (Twenge et al. 2007) and increase antisocial behavior, including aggression (Twenge et al. 2001; Warburton et al. 2006). Certain types of exclusion (e.g., ostracism) seem to threaten four particular needs simultaneously (belongingness, self-esteem, control, meaningful existence; Williams 2007; Zadro et al. 2004), whereas other types of exclusion appear to threaten some needs but not others (Molden et al. 2009). Some researchers have suggested that threats to certain needs (e.g., relational needs such as self-esteem and belonging) may produce prosocial responses, whereas threats to other needs (e.g., efficacy needs such as power

and meaningful existence) may produce antisocial responses (Williams 2007; Williams and Zadro 2005).

In the research presented here, we combine these disparate findings into a comprehensive framework to derive some novel hypotheses regarding the effects of social exclusion on two constructs that are important to consumer research, conspicuous consumption, and helping and donation behavior. We show that what seem to be subtly different types of social exclusion—being ignored and being rejected—actually produce very different outcomes. Across four experiments, we show that being ignored increases conspicuous consumption preferences but being rejected does not, whereas being rejected increases helping preferences but being ignored does not. More important, we pinpoint the specific mechanisms that underlie these effects. In what we term the differential needs hypothesis, we show that being ignored (but not being rejected) threatens certain needs (power, meaningful existence), whereas being rejected (but not being ignored) threatens other needs (self-esteem). In turn, we show that threats to the different needs resulting from the different types of social exclusion produce very different responses. Threats to relational needs resulting from being rejected produce more prosocial responses (e.g., giving money to people in need, helping strangers). In contrast, threats to efficacy needs resulting from being ignored produce more self-focused and attention-getting responses, demonstrated by a stronger preference for conspicuous brand logos.

## Contributions

This research makes a number of contributions. First, it adds to the recent work on social exclusion effects in consumer behavior and in fact provides some important qualifications. Two recent sets of studies have shown that social exclusion produces affiliative responses. Mead et al. (2011) showed that social exclusion (being rejected as a partner, being told one is destined to be alone in the future, recalling a previous exclusion experience) increases spending in the service of affiliation, and Loveland et al. (2010) demonstrated that social exclusion (ostracism, future alone) increases interest in nostalgic products that strengthen connections with the past. These findings are consistent with our findings for being explicitly rejected. However, in our experiments, when social exclusion involved being passively ignored, the effects were quite different. Being ignored produced no prosocial, affiliative responses such as helping others and donating money. Instead, being ignored produced more self-focused responses aimed at getting attention and being noticed through conspicuous consumption.

A second contribution of this research is its implications for reconciling previous research. Typical research on social exclusion effects uses a number of operationalizations of social exclusion to show generalizability. Social exclusion has been manipulated through bogus feedback on a personality test by telling participants they are destined to end up alone in life, by telling participants that no one picked them to be a part of their group, by excluding participants in a

three-way ball toss, by having participants recall a personal exclusion event, and by having participants imagine an exclusion experience (for reviews, see Blackhart et al. 2009; Williams 2007). Although all seem to be representative of social exclusion, what type is not clear. More important, which needs are being threatened is even less clear. Our research suggests that a focus on determining precisely which needs are threatened by the different types of social exclusion and their manipulations may provide a path to better prediction of social exclusion outcomes. It may be that what appear to be unimportant subtle differences in social exclusion manipulations result in different need threats, which in turn may produce very different effects, to which our experiments attest.

As one example, consider the research by Twenge et al. (2007). In that research, exclusion was manipulated by telling some participants they would be destined to end up alone later in life or that they were not chosen by anyone as a group member, and these manipulations were found to reduce prosocial behavior (e.g., donation to a student fund, helping the experimenter after a mishap), results quite different from our findings. Although methodological differences between the two studies are too numerous to allow for firm speculation on why our results differ from theirs, one possibility is that the alone-in-life or group exclusion manipulations they used may have threatened different needs (e.g., a meaningful existence, control) than did our rejection manipulations. Thus, a focus on the underlying processes and what needs are threatened may help reconcile many of the conflicting findings in social exclusion research.

A third contribution is a comprehensive test of the differential needs hypothesis. The notion that when social exclusion threatens different needs it may produce very different responses (prosocial vs. antisocial) was proposed by Williams (2007). However, it was proposed within the context of only one type of social exclusion (ostracism), which has been shown to threaten both efficacy and relational needs. Our research contributes to this theorizing by providing the first systematic test of the differential needs hypothesis, and it does so by showing that different types of social exclusion may threaten different social needs for most people, as opposed to one type of social exclusion threatening different social needs for different people.

The differential needs hypothesis also has the potential to explain some contradictory findings in social exclusion research. For example, a number of studies have shown that social exclusion lowers self-esteem. However, a recent meta-analysis found no significant effect of social exclusion on self-esteem when compared to neutral conditions (Blackhart et al. 2009). Although a number of studies did find self-esteem effects, it was primarily when excluded conditions were compared to accepted conditions that a difference in self-esteem was noted, suggesting that acceptance boosts self-esteem but exclusion does not reduce it. Our research is relevant to these conflicting findings in two ways. First, it may be that some social exclusion manipulations threatened self-esteem (as our being rejected manipulations did)

but others did not (as our being ignored manipulations did not). Second, it may be that detecting drops in self-esteem through measurement may be difficult. Thus, using manipulations of self-esteem (such as the self-esteem boosts we employed) may be a useful way to address this possibility.

Finally, our research contributes to understanding the motivations that appear to underlie two different consumer behaviors, conspicuous consumption and helping behavior. Our findings suggest that threats to particular (but different) needs can motivate both behaviors. For conspicuous consumption, threats to efficacy needs such as power and meaningful existence may cause consumers to seek ways to bolster these needs, and using consumption to gain attention and signal importance is one way to accomplish this. For donation and other helping behaviors, threats to relational needs such as self-esteem and belonging may lead people to bolster those needs through social reconnection, and one way to achieve this is to help others through charitable donations and other helping behaviors.

Our findings also suggest what does not appear to motivate conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption is often associated with materialism and low self-esteem (Wong 1997). However, in both experiments 3 and 4, boosting self-esteem had no effect on reducing conspicuous consumption (but boosting efficacy needs did), which suggests that low self-esteem may not necessarily be a motivator of conspicuous consumption. For helping behavior, threats to relational needs such as self-esteem may cause people to act in a more prosocial manner, and donating time or money may be one way to do so. However, threats to efficacy needs do not appear to be related to helping inclinations. A fruitful area for future research would be to pinpoint precisely which needs (or combination of needs) may induce both types of behavior.

## Limitations and Future Research

As we noted in the introduction, social exclusion has been shown to produce a variety of effects, many of which appear to be contradictory. Some types of exclusion produce antisocial and aggressive responses, whereas others produce prosocial and helpful responses. Sometimes the same type of exclusion (e.g., ostracism) has been shown to produce both. Although one limitation of our research is its limited ability to fully reconcile these findings, it does offer a clear pathway forward. First, it may be that the different manipulations threatened different needs, even though they may seem similar. Being told one is destined to spend the future alone may threaten meaningful existence or control (efficacy needs), whereas being explicitly rejected from a group may threaten self-esteem or belongingness (relational needs). Our research suggests that the former would produce more antisocial responses, the latter more prosocial.

Second, it may be that the same manipulation threatens more than one need, and in particular, both an efficacy need and a relational one. If so, the dominant response may depend on which need is most threatened (Warburton and Williams 2005), which may be a function of the person (which

needs are most vulnerable) or the situation (nature of the manipulation).

Third, a particular type of exclusion may threaten multiple needs equally. In these instances, which response results may be a function of what need-bolstering opportunities a person has at the moment. In the lab, this implies that if both efficacy and relational needs are threatened by a single manipulation, then people may respond antisocially if given the opportunity, or they may respond prosocially if given the opportunity.

Social exclusion is a phenomenon that has received particular scrutiny in the last 10–15 years from social psychologists, but only very recently has received the attention of consumer researchers. However, as our research shows, consumer behavior may be a perfect context within which

to investigate social exclusion effects, not only for its ability to shed light on exclusion effects themselves, but also to better articulate the processes underlying very fundamental consumer behaviors. The concepts of conspicuous consumption and helping behavior are well represented in consumer research, but their underlying processes are not all that well understood. Our research suggests that the motivations that underlie these behaviors may be varied, and in fact those motivations may be difficult to separate, particularly in nonexperimental contexts. Moreover, our research suggests that investigating both situational (state) and trait aspects of needs, as well as their interactions, may be necessary to completely understand the extent to which person or situation variables influence these behaviors.

## APPENDIX

### STIMULI FOR CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION PREFERENCES

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SMALL SWOOSH LOGO VERSUS BIG SWOOSH LOGO (EXPERIMENT 2)

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NON-VISIBLE BRAND LOGO VERSUS VISIBLE BRAND LOGO (EXPERIMENT 3)

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SMALL SWOOSH LOGO VERSUS BIG SWOOSH LOGO (EXPERIMENT 4)

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NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

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