**Proposal**

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# Introduction and theory

Ostracism in general has been subject to an increasing amount of research in the last two decades (Fayant et al., 2014; Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007; Poon et al., 2020; Sacco et al., 2011; van Beest & Williams, 2006; Warburton et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2000). One topic in this pile of research is the influence of ostracism on an affected individuals' perception of the world and people in particular. People generally have a need to belong, which is satisfied through social contact (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Ostracism reduces the satisfaction of this need (Williams, 2007). The theory of the social monitoring system suggests that due to this need deficiency, socially excluded people are better at perceiving social cues. And indeed, it has been found that social exclusion has a beneficial impact on the ability to identify facial expressions (Pickett et al., 2004), encode social cues (Kawamoto et al., 2014), concentrate on them (DeWall et al., 2009; Golubickis et al., 2018) and judge the authenticity of smiles (Bernstein et al., 2008). Socially excluded, according to theory, have a heightened perception because they need to reintegrate themselves into a new group to satisfy their need to belong (Pickett & Gardner, 2005), and the heightened perception helps them in doing so. One aspect that certainly matters in this context are the personality traits of the person being approached by our excluded individual. Can ostracism also enhance the ability to infer typical personality trait just from a face? And what personality traits do ostracized prefer in their interaction partner when seeking reintegration?

Personality traits in form of the big fives have already been studied in relation to ostracism. In the particular study, a description of a person was given to participants, and the person described had a low or high expression of the trait agreeableness or conscientiousness. These traits had an influence on the participants’ intension to ostracize the fictitious person (Rudert et al., 2021). This shows the relevance of personality traits on ostracism conditions.

When only facial cues are available, people are relatively accurate in inferring the personality traits of the person they see (Ambady et al., 2000). It has been found that low satisfaction of the need to belong is related to a preference for more extraverted faces (Brown & Sacco, 2017). In another paper, social exclusion increased the categorical perception of social information (Sacco et al., 2011). Accordingly, personality traits inferred through facial cues should also be judged more extremely by socially excluded.

In a study by Walker et al. (2018) photographs of subjects were manipulated in a way that they show a high or low expression of each big five personality trait, respectively. This sample allows to test the preferences of socially excluded people for the Big Five personality traits and their accuracy in inferring these traits from prototypical photographs. This has never been fully examined in other studies. Extraversion is the only trait of the Big Five that has been examined in a study in conjunction with social exclusion and personality assessment.

# Hypotheses

Based on the theory outlined above, two hypotheses are stated. The first involves the preferences of socially excluded for personality traits. I expect socially excluded to have a preference for more extraverted, more agreeable, less conscientious, and less neurotic faces, as these general preferences were already found in a previous study (Sacco & Brown, 2018). No general preference emerged for openness; rather, the subject's openness partially predicted his preference for openness in other faces. Thus, high openness conditioned a preference for more open faces and vice versa. However, for the socially excluded, I expect a preference for more open faces, as this could convey a signal of responsiveness and, in theory, these people should be more open to new interactions.

The resulting hypothesis is split up into five similar hypotheses that are as follows:

*H1A: Socially excluded people prefer faces with high scores in extraversion.*

*H1B: Socially excluded people prefer faces with high scores in agreeableness.*

*H1C: Socially excluded people prefer faces with high scores in openness.*

*H1D: Socially excluded people prefer faces with low scores in conscientiousness.*

*H1E: Socially excluded people prefer faces with low scores in neuroticism.*

Further, I expect socially excluded to make more extreme and thereby more accurate estimations when judging facially communicated traits, because the correct answer, meaning the trait expression a face shows, is always one of two extremes, eighter enhanced or reduced. This expectation mainly emerges from the more categorical perception of social information when the need to belong is thwarted, as well as the heightened ability of socially excluded to identify facial expressions (Pickett et al., 2004), encode social cues (Kawamoto et al., 2014), concentrate on them (DeWall et al., 2009; Golubickis et al., 2018) and judge the authenticity of smiles (Bernstein et al., 2008).

The second hypothesis is as follows:

*H2: Socially excluded individuals make more extreme inferences toward the personality manipulation than included individuals when assessing them from a photograph.*

# Methods

## Design and participants

To compare the effects of social exclusion on preferences for personality traits and their inference from photographs, participants will be assigned to one of two groups, an exclusion and an inclusion group. Both groups are introduced to the study and asked for their consent as well as their age, which is required to be 18 years. Then, they play cyberball, an online game that manipulates the need to belong (Williams & Jarvis, 2006). The exclusion group experiences social exclusion by other players during the game, while the inclusion group gets to interact normal and is included by the other players. Right after, they have to fill out a short questionnaire to check whether the manipulation was successful. To this end, the Moving on, participants will be presented with two photographs of the same person, but they’re oppositely manipulated to show enhanced and reduced amounts of one of the five big traits, respectively. Participants will have to choose the face that they would prefer to interact with. After making 20 decisions, they continue with the next task, in which they see a photograph of a face that shows either enhanced or reduced characteristics of one of the big five traits. They are asked to rate on a 7-point Likert-type scale (e.g., *not at all neurotic – extremely neurotic*) how they would rate the person they see in respect to the trait the photo is manipulated in. Also, this task will be terminated after 20 answers. The photos presented in both tasks will be shown randomized. The preference task is chosen to come first because there is no mention of personality traits in it, which could otherwise influence the answers in the following task.

Finally, participants answer a short questionnaire with ten items to record their own trait expressions of the Big Five (Rammsted). This makes it possible to check whether their own traits have an influence on their preferences for the facially communicated traits.

# Analysis

For the analysis of preferences, a t-test will be calculated to compare the preferences of the inclusion group to the exclusion group. If the parameter of a normal distribution is not given, a Welch-test will be chosen as alternative.

To compare the personality inferences of the exclusion and the inclusion group, the items are first inverted to be comparable. Then, a t-test is conducted to calculate if the difference between the groups is significant. Again, if a normal distribution is missing, a Welch-test is applied to account for a non-parametric distribution.

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