

Money, drugs and chicken feet? What consumers will do for social acceptance

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People who feel excluded will go to any length to try to become part of a group, even if it involves spending large sums of cash, eating something dicey, or doing illicit drugs, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Social exclusion prompts people to use money and consumption in the service of affiliation," write authors Nicole L. Mead (Tilburg University), Roy F. Baumeister (Florida State University), Tyler F. Stillman (Southern Utah University), Catherine D. Rawn (University of British Columbia), and Kathleen D. Vohs (University of Minnesota).

"An elderly man loses his life savings to a fraudulent telemarketer, who obtained access to the man's bank account information by preying on the man's [social isolation](#). After transferring to a new university where she doesn't know anyone, a young woman goes into debt when she goes on a wildly lavish vacation with a popular group of girls. An unpopular girl uses [illicit drugs](#) in hopes of gaining entrance into a seemingly exclusive social club. What do these situations have in common?" the authors ask.

Excluded people look to the [social environment](#) for cues on how to fit in, and then they flexibly and strategically use consumption to help them commence new [social relationships](#), the authors explain.

In their experiments, the authors induced participants to feel socially accepted or excluded and then assessed how their spending and consumption patterns changed. In one study, people were paired with

partners who left the study. People who thought their partners left because they disliked them were more willing to spend money on school spirit wristbands than people who thought their partners left for an appointment.

People who feel left out are willing to engage in personally distasteful (or even harmful) consumption in order to fit in. "In one experiment, excluded individuals were willing to pay more than others for chicken feet, an unappealing food item liked by their Asian partner," the authors write. "In a subsequent experiment, participants who recalled an experience of social exclusion expressed an increased willingness to snort cocaine."

More information: Nicole L. Mead, Roy F. Baumeister, Tyler F. Stillman, Catherine D. Rawn, and Kathleen D. Vohs. "Social Exclusion Causes People to Spend and Consume in the Service of Affiliation." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2011 (officially published online September 9, 2010).

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