

When do consumers react to social exclusion with charitable behavior?

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People who feel ignored tend to engage in conspicuous consumption, whereas consumers who are rejected are more likely to volunteer or donate to a worthy cause, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"The need to belong is considered to be universal across [cultures](#), and in fact, cultures themselves may reflect the need to belong," write authors Jaehoon Lee (University of Houston–Clear Lake) and L.J. Shrum (University of Texas at San Antonio). "One need only look at the clothing of college students—much of which displays affiliation through school logos and colors—to see its magnitude."

But what happens when [consumers](#) experience social exclusion? The authors examined different types of [social exclusion](#) and consumer responses to them. "We propose that when relational needs, such as self-esteem and belonging, are primarily threatened, people attempt to fortify those needs by feeling, thinking, and behaving in a prosocial, affiliative manner, because prosocial acts such as helping other increase interpersonal attractiveness and help reconnect with society," the authors write. But when their need for control and a meaningful existence is threatened, people act out in provocative and attention-getting ways.

The authors conducted four experiments where people either felt ignored or rejected. The researchers asked people to recall actual experiences or they simulated exclusion by arranging for participants to feel left out or antagonized in online exchanges. Afterward, the

participants took purportedly separate surveys on behavioral intentions and actual behavior. For conspicuous consumption, the researchers asked about preferences for brand logos. For prosocial behavior, they asked about willingness to donate money or volunteer.

"Being ignored increased preferences for clothing with conspicuous brand logos, but it had no effect on prosocial behavior," the authors write. "In contrast, being rejected increased prosocial [behavior](#), but had no effect for clothing with conspicuous brand logos."

More information: Jaehoon Lee and L.J. Shrum. "Conspicuous Consumption versus Charitable Behavior in Response to Social Exclusion: A Differential Needs Explanation." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2012. ejcr.org/

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