Reappraising Social Exclusion Moderates Subsequent Self-Regulation Impairment

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The need to belong is a fundamental psychological motive. Fulfilling this need often requires one’s willingness to self-regulate. Indeed, Baumeister and colleagues (2005) demonstrated that when socially excluded, individuals were less willing to self-regulate than comparison groups, unless provided an incentive. Previous work (Kitchens, Baly, & Gohm, 2007) showed that reappraising social exclusion events attenuates their emotional impact; therefore, the present work investigated whether this strategy also moderates self-regulation impairment caused by social exclusion. To examine this, participants were led to believe their personality profile indicated either they will have a few poor quality future relationships or many quality future relationships. Participants reappraised the feedback by writing why they believed their personality profiles were poor predictors of their future relationships or they were assigned to a control condition. Participants were then required to cross out all instances of the letter e in a block of text for three-minutes. They engaged in self-regulation by not crossing out this letter when it appeared next to or one letter away from another vowel. In the control condition, the proportion of correctly crossed out instances of e was significantly less when participants were led to believe they will have poor quality relationships than when they were led to believe they will have quality relationships, replicating that social exclusion impairs self-regulation. However, when participants reappraised the future relationship feedback, there was no difference in excluded and accepted participants’ performance. These data further indicate that reappraising social exclusion attenuates personal costs associated with these events.

1 Poster to be presented at the 2008 Meeting for the Society of Personality and Social Psychology, Albuquerque, NM.