

Social rejection can boost creativity, researchers find

October 18 2012, by Mary Catt

(Medical Xpress)—Social misfits, rejoice. You might be more like Steve Jobs, Lady Gaga and Albert Einstein than you realize, if rejection boosts your creativity, reports a new Cornell study.

Being an outcast can lead to heightened creativity—even commercial success, according to research by Lynne Vincent, M.S./Ph.D. '12, an ILR visiting lecturer; Sharon Kim, M.S./Ph.D. '11, an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins University; and Jack Goncalo, ILR associate professor.

"We show that's possible ... if you have the right way of managing rejection," Goncalo said in an interview. "Feeling different can help you reach creative solutions."

Unlike people who have a strong need to belong, some socially rejected people shrug off rejection with an attitude of "normal people don't get me and I am meant for something better," he said. "Our paper is the first to show how that works."

"Outside Advantage: Can [Social Rejection](#) Fuel Creative Thought?" was named a best paper by the [Academy of Management](#) Managerial and Organizational Cognition Division.

Kim, Vincent and Goncalo accepted the award in Boston in early August at the annual conference of the Academy of Management, the world's largest and oldest scholarly management association.

The research will be published in the [Journal of Experimental Psychology: General](#).

The three reached their conclusions after a series of experiments in which rejection was manipulated; participants were told that everyone in the study could choose whom they would work with on a team project and later told "nobody picked them," Goncalo said.

That kind of exclusion—in the workplace or elsewhere—stimulated creativity for people with an independent sense of self.

Goncalo and his colleagues don't dismiss the [negative consequences](#) rejection has on many individuals.

But, for some, it has a golden lining, researchers said.

In short, "For the socially rejected, creativity may be the best revenge."

Provided by Cornell University

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