

A new way out of the cycle of rejection

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Have you ever hosted a party, but as the day approaches, your closest friends say they won't be able to attend? Or maybe you sent a friend request to someone on Facebook who never responded, or weren't invited to an event that most of your friends are attending.

People in these situations usually feel socially excluded, which often leads to antisocial and self-defeating responses. What would it take to persuade people to counteract this spiral toward isolation and instead re-engage in healthy relationships?

Jayati Sinha, PhD, a professor of marketing at Florida International University, suspected that messages that appeal to emotion—rather than rationality—would be more successful in motivating people in these situations to pursue social activities again.

"When people feel excluded, they keep thinking about that negative experience, and this depletes mental resources," Sinha says. "This makes it harder to process rational details, so an emotional message is more appealing."

To test this hypothesis, Sinha's team asked participants in one group to write about details of an experience when they felt excluded, and another group to write about an event when they felt included. The third group wrote about a neutral event (the experience of waking up the previous day). Then they showed groups different types of blood donation advertisements. The emotional ad emphasized that [blood donation](#) was the gift of life, while the other ad emphasized the number of lives saved.

The group that had written about feeling socially excluded was much more likely to prefer the emotional ad, while the other groups preferred the rational ad.

To test whether the messages would translate into action, the researchers conducted another experiment in which the participants viewed different messages about recycling. The emotional ad stated that "The plastic bottles you recycle today will become a new carpet in the future," while the rational ad presented facts about the number of recycled bottles needed to make a carpet. The participants who were primed to feel socially excluded were much more likely to recycle the plastic juice bottles they received during the experiment if they had seen the emotional message, but the rational ad was more effective for the other groups.

These findings offer hope to groups that are at risk of feeling isolated, such as the elderly, disabled, widowed, divorced or [people](#) living alone, Sinha says. Policy makers and businesses might have more success helping these groups participate in positive activities if messages focus on visual images and words that arouse emotions, rather than highlighting product benefits, deals and convincing arguments.

"People who feel excluded may be struggling to take care of themselves, so the goal is to communicate to them in ways that persuade them to make changes that improve their quality of life," Sinha says.

This study will appear in the October issue of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.

More information: Speaking to the Heart: Social Exclusion and Reliance on Feelings versus Reasons in Persuasion, [www.journals.elsevier.com/jour ... clusion-and-reliance](http://www.journals.elsevier.com/jour...clusion-and-reliance)

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