

Rejection for \$500, please: Money and its symbolic powers

15 July 2009

When we are feeling blue we are told to count our blessings, but according to a study recently published in *Psychological Science*, counting our money might be a more useful activity.

Psychologists Xinyue Zhou, Sun Yat-Sen University, Kathleen D. Vohs, University of Minnesota, and Roy F. Baumeister, Florida State University, investigated the psychological, physical and social impact of money.

reported greater pain from the hot water.

As the psychologists concluded, "The mere idea of money has considerable psychological power, enough to alter reactions to social exclusion and even to physical pain."

Source: Association for [Psychological Science](#) ([news](#) : [web](#))

To examine this, the researchers asked one group of participants to count out eighty \$100 bills and another group to count eighty worthless pieces of paper. They then played a computerized ball-tossing game called Cyberball. The participants were led to believe that they were playing with three other gamers when the other players in fact were computer generated. Some participants received the ball an equal amount of times while other participants were excluded. Out of the participants excluded in the Cyberball game, those who had counted the [money](#) rated lower social distress than those who only counted paper.

In another experiment, the scientists asked participants to immerse their fingers in hot water for 30 seconds after they counted either money or paper. Surprisingly, those counting money rated a lower intensity of the hot water and physical pain than those who counted paper. In addition, the researchers found that participants who counted out the bills rated themselves as feeling "strong" more often than the paper counting group.

Adding a twist to the experiment, the scientists asked a group of participants to list their monetary expenditures from the past month and another group to list weather conditions in the past month. Both groups were then put through the Cyberball game and the physical pain test. Those who thought about the weather rated normal amounts of social distress or pain; those thinking about their finances experienced higher social distress when they were left out of the Cyberball game and

APA citation: Rejection for \$500, please: Money and its symbolic powers (2009, July 15) retrieved 18 October 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-07-money-powers.html>

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