Cultural Differences in Response to Social Exclusion

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ABSTRACT

Two experiments tested the hypothesis that subtly different types of social exclusion (being ignored vs. being rejected) produce very different consumer responses and these responses are moderated by cultural orientations. For people from individualistic cultures, inducing feelings of being ignored produced a greater preference for conspicuous consumption than did being rejected, whereas being rejected produced a greater preference for helping behavior than did being ignored. However, these findings were reversed when it comes to people from collectivistic cultures. For them, feelings of being ignored produced a greater preference for helping behavior than did being rejected, whereas feelings of being rejected produced a greater preference for conspicuous consumption than did being ignored.

It is well-established that most people have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Forming and maintaining relationships likely have survival benefits through resource sharing and mutual protection (Buss 1990). For this reason, the need to belong is considered by some to be nearly universal across cultures, and in fact cultures themselves may be considered manifestations of the need to belong. And marketers certainly seem well-aware of this fundamental human tendency toward affiliation. One need only look at the clothing of college students—much of which displays affiliation through school logos and colors—to see its magnitude. There are also affiliation credit cards that can show one's school (or any group) logo, membership in exclusive clubs is often a major selling point for products (credit cards, airline lounges), and even brand communities that are member-driven serve as good examples of affiliative needs (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

But what happens when this need to belong is threatened or thwarted, a situation most people experience from time to time? Social exclusion may occur in consumer contexts (turned back by the doorman at an exclusive club, or not even able to get his attention, having a credit card application rejected) and non-consumer contexts (rejected for a date, denied membership in a sorority or fraternity, not invited to a party). Research on the effects of social exclusion has shown that exclusion can produce a number of responses, many (but not all) of which can be detrimental to both the individual and society. However, with only a few recent exceptions (Loveland, Smeesters, and Mandel 2010; Mead et al. 2010), the effects of social exclusion on consumer behavior has received little attention.

The purpose of the research presented here is to investigate the effects of social exclusion on consumer behavior. Specifically, our focus is on conspicuous consumption and charitable behavior within the social exclusion context. In doing so, we take a more nuanced approach to

social exclusion than is usually observed. For example, consider the situation mentioned earlier of being turned back at the velvet rope of an exclusive nightclub, versus not even being able to get the doorman's attention to ask for entry. Although both are clearly instances of social exclusion, there are actually subtle but important differences between the two. The former is an example of being rejected, a more explicit form of social exclusion in which the exclusion is active and direct, whereas the latter is an example of being ignored, a more implicit form of social exclusion in which the exclusion is more passive and indirect (Molden et al. 2009). One might intuitively expect that these two forms of exclusion would produce the same general types of effects that perhaps differ only in magnitude. However, we propose and demonstrate that these seemingly subtle differences in social exclusion produce very different effects. Furthermore, we show that the effects are moderated by cultural orientations. We demonstrate this moderating effect of cultural orientation by contrasting the effects of social exclusion on Koreans and Americans.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION, HUMAN NEEDS, AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES

Social exclusion has been shown to produce a wide variety of behavioral responses. Some studies have found that exclusion increases aggressive, antisocial behaviors. For example, socially excluded people gave a more negative job evaluation of someone who insulted them (Twenge et al. 2001), exhibited less volunteer behavior (Twenge et al. 2007), and allocated more hot sauce to others who they thought disliked spicy food (Ayduk, Gyurak, and Luerssen 2008; Warburton, Williams, and Cairns 2006). In contrast, other studies have found that exclusion can increase affiliative, prosocial behaviors. For example, socially excluded people expressed greater

interest in meeting new people via a student connection service and an increased desire to work with others (Maner, Gailliot, and DeWall 2007), engaged in nonconscious behavioral mimicry (Lakin, Chartrand, and Arkin 2008), which has been shown to increase affiliation and rapport (Lakin and Chartrand 2003), tended to conform to a unanimous incorrect majority on a perceptual judgment task (Williams, Cheung, and Choi 2000), and became more socially attentive (Gardner, Pickett, and Brewer 2000; Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles 2004). In the consumer behavior domain, social exclusion increased spending that promoted affiliation (Mead et al. 2010) and increased preferences for nostalgic products (Loveland et al. 2010).

Social Exclusion and Threats to Needs

Social exclusion threatens four fundamental human needs: belongingness, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence (Williams 2001; Zadro, Williams, and Richardson 2004, 2005). The belongingness hypothesis suggests that people have a desire to form and maintain positive interpersonal relationships (Baumeister and Leary 1995). As a fundamental interpersonal need, a need to belong facilitates reconnection with others (Bernstein et al. 2010; Pickett et al. 2004). For example, people with a need to belong tend to seek out interpersonal contacts and cultivate interpersonal relationships, at least until they have reached a minimum level of social contact and relatedness (Baumeister and Leary 1995), and they seek to cultivate a public good image (Williams 2001).

Social exclusion also threatens self-esteem needs. The sociometer hypothesis suggests that the self-esteem system functions as a sociometer that monitors the degree to which a person is being included versus excluded by other people, and motivates the person to behave in ways

that minimize the possibility of social exclusion (Leary et al. 1995). It also suggests that self-esteem is highly sensitive to changes in perceived inclusionary status. The sociometer perspective can explain why people with low self-esteem are more sensitive to socially relevant cues than are those with high self-esteem (Brockner 1983). The sociometer system responds to social exclusion by motivating behavior to restore relational appreciation.

A third need that social exclusion threatens is perceived control and power. A perceived loss of control is linked to aggression, which is viewed as a coercive action used to control others' behavior (Tedeschi and Felson 1994). Individuals may aggress in attempts to restore a generalized sense of personal power or control over others (Dépret and Fiske 1993; Frieze and Boneva 2001). For example, those who experience a loss of control in response to social exclusion are more aggressive than those who have their sense of control restored (Warburton et al. 2006). In addition, aggression need not be direct. Symbolic status or superiority may be used as an indirect aggression to restore a sense of personal control or power, thus achieving a sense of superiority over others (Baumeister et al. 1996; Raskin, Novacek, and Hogan 1991; Wink 1991).

The fourth need that social exclusion threatens is one's sense of a meaningful existence. Individuals have a need to maintain beliefs in a meaningful existence (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 2004), and meaning exists within social interactions. Social exclusion symbolizes social death because it involves cutting off individuals from social interactions (Warburton and Williams 2005). As a result, individuals feel socially invisible (Sweeting and Gilhooly 1992), nonexistent (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003; Williams 2001), and view themselves as less human (Bastian and Haslam 2010) when excluded from interactions. This reduced sense of

meaningful existence is associated with antisocial motivations to be recognized (Warburton and Williams 2005).

Differential Impact of Being Ignored Versus Rejected

Recent research suggests that all types of social exclusion are not the same (Leary 2005; Molden et al. 2009; Williams 2007). Molden et al. in particular propose a specific distinction in types of social exclusion: being ignored versus being rejected. This distinction is based on whether social exclusion is communicated in an implicit, passive, and indirect manner or an explicit, active, and direct manner. When ignored, people receive passive, indirect indicators of their lack of social connection, whereas when rejected, people receive active, direct feedback concerning their poor standing within a relationship or a group. Molden et al. further demonstrate that experiences of being ignored and being rejected threaten different needs. Being ignored results in greater threats to efficacy needs such as a meaningful existence than does being rejected, whereas being rejected results in greater threats to relational needs such as self-esteem than does being ignored. Being ignored also induces a promotion focus that seeks to maximize gains, whereas being rejected induces a prevention focus that seeks to minimize losses.

We propose that being ignored and being rejected can produce very different behavioral responses because they threatened different needs. Being ignored threatens efficacy needs such as power and control, and meaningful existence. When these needs are threatened, individuals will seek to gain power and control, and reinforce their existence. However, the way of accomplishing this may depend on cultural orientations. Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh (2001) demonstrated that the concept of power is mentally associated with different goals for

individuals with a communal versus an exchange relationship orientation and that communals, who mainly focus on the general concern for the other person, associate power with social-responsibility goals, whereas exchangers, who mainly focus on the expectations of receiving a comparable benefit in return, link power with self-interest goals. Torelli and Shavitt (2010) suggest that the meaning of power can become self-centered or benevolent, depending on different cultural beliefs. Thus, we predict that being ignored, which threatens efficacy needs, will produce attention-getting behavior such as conspicuous consumption by showing off to others for individuals from individualistic cultures, but charitable behavior for individuals from collectivistic cultures.

In contrast, being rejected threatens relational needs such as self-esteem and belonging. When these needs are threatened, individuals may seek ways to gain self-esteem and belonging. However, the way of accomplishing this may depend on cultural orientations. Individuals from individualistic cultures emphasize an inner private self, as opposed to a public self (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Thus, when they feel threats to relational needs, they are likely to reconnect with others through more affiliative, prosocial responses. However, individuals from collectivistic cultures emphasize public perceptions as central to social identity, saving face (Wong and Ahuvia 1998). The concept of face underlies the human need for social acceptance (Brown and Levinson 1987; Hwang, Francesco, and Kessler 2003) and individuals with high face consciousness tend to pursue and purchase name-brand products or to display their wealth (Liao and Wang 2009; Wong and Ahuvia 1998). Thus, when they feel threats to relational needs individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to reconnect with others through attention-getting behavior such as conspicuous consumption.

OVERVIEW OF EXPERIMENTS

Two experiments investigated the differential effects of being ignored versus being rejected on conspicuous consumption and helping preferences. In two experiments, we experimentally manipulated the participants' feelings of either being ignored or being rejected, and then measured their preferences for conspicuous consumption and helping through hypothetical scenarios.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Participants, Design and Procedure. Fifty-nine undergraduate business students (26 men, 33 women) participated in the study for partial course credit. All participants provided informed consent. To reduce suspicion about the purpose of the study, participants were told that they would be participating in two separate studies. They were told that the purpose of the first study (which manipulated social exclusion) was to develop counseling techniques for college students in conjunction with Department of Psychology. For the second study, they were told they would be participating in a study that investigated consumer preferences across many different situations.

Upon arrival to the lab, participants were randomly assigned to either being ignored or rejected conditions. To manipulate these conditions, we used a recall and writing task adapted from Molden et al. (2009). Participants were asked to recall a time in which they had been either

passively ignored or actively rejected, and then to write about that incident for five minutes. Participants assigned to ignored (rejected) conditions were instructed "write about a time in which you felt intensely ignored (rejected) in some way . . . it must be a time that you were clearly ignored (rejected), but no one actually said that they did not want or like you (where you were told you were not accepted because you were not wanted or liked)." Following this task, participants were asked to indicate how implicitly ignored and explicitly rejected they had felt at the time (7-point scales, 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). These measures were included as manipulation checks.

Next, ostensibly as part of the second study, all participants were given two hypothetical scenarios designed to assess their preferences for conspicuous consumption and helping. Following that, participants provided demographic information, and were then asked to provide their thoughts on the study's purpose. They were then debriefed. No one correctly guessed the research purpose.

Measures. For the conspicuous consumption measure, participants were asked to consider a scenario in which Calvin Klein was ready to launch a newly designed T-shirt, but before the launch, the company wanted to pilot-test the college students' preferences. Participants were asked to imagine they were going to buy a new T-shirt at that moment. All participants were then shown two images of a Calvin Klein T-shirt, one with a prominent, visible logo and one without a logo (see appendix). The stimuli were created from the same image of a T-shirt, which was digitally altered to either have no visible logo or a visible logo. Both were clearly labeled as Calvin Klein T-shirts in the instructions. We selected clothing because clothing and other appearance-related products and services provide some direct control over the physical

appearance and may provide greater power and personal efficacy in social relationships (Schouten 1991). Consumers also use clothing to communicate who they are (Banister and Hogg 2004). Participants' preferences for the conspicuous versus nonconspicuous logos were measured with four items (e.g., which one is most appealing to you, attractive to you, would you spend more on, would you choose, right now) using 9-point scales (1 = definitely one with no logo, 9 = definitely one with a logo). The four items were averaged to form a composite measure of conspicuous consumption preferences ($\alpha = .95$).

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Insert figure 1 about here

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Helping preferences were measured with a procedure adapted from Fennis, Janssen, and Vohs (2008). Participants were told that professors in the College of Business were looking for students who would volunteer their time to work as an experimenter during future research projects. They were then asked to indicate how much time they would be willing to volunteer for a semester if they were asked to do so. Participants indicated their answers on an 8-point scale, which ranged from 0 to 240 minutes in 30-minute intervals.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks and Demographics. As expected, participants in ignored conditions reported feeling more ignored than rejected (5.97 vs. 5.29; $F(1, 30) = 5.71$, $p < .05$, $d = .58$),

whereas participants in rejected conditions reported feeling significantly more rejected than ignored (6.36 vs. 4.50; $F(1, 27) = 24.73$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.28$). We next tested for effects of gender and age. Neither was related to any of the focal variables for this or subsequent studies, and thus demographic effects are not discussed further.

Tests of Hypotheses. We expected that participants would express greater preferences for conspicuous consumption when ignored than when rejected, whereas participants would express more helpfulness when rejected than when ignored.

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Insert figure 1 about here

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To test these possibilities, we conducted one-way ANOVAs for each preference measure. As expected, participants in ignored conditions expressed greater preferences for the T-shirt with the conspicuous brand logo than did those in rejected conditions (5.61 vs. 3.84; $F(1, 55) = 4.60$, $p < .05$, $d = .57$). In contrast, participants in rejected conditions expressed a greater willingness to volunteer their time than did those in ignored conditions (4.50 vs. 3.21; $F(1, 55) = 4.46$, $p < .05$, $d = .56$).

The results of experiment 1 support our hypothesis that different types of social exclusion produce different behavioral preferences. In experiment 2, we tested our hypotheses with Korean data to examine the cultural differences in response to social exclusion.

EXPERIMENT 2

Method

Participants, Design, and Procedure. Ninety-eight undergraduate Korean students (49

men, 49 women) participated in the study in return for $10 for their participation. All participants

provided informed consent. The cover story and social exclusion manipulations were the same as

those used in the previous experiment, and participants were randomly assigned to experimental

conditions.

Translation of Instruments. The English versions of all the questionnaires were adapted

and translated. One bilingual translator in Korea blindly translated the questionnaire from the

original language (English) to the second language (Korean), and another bilingual translator in

the U.S. translated it back to the original language (Korean back to English). Differences in the

original and the back-translated versions were discussed and resolved by joint agreement of both

translators.

Measures. The measure for conspicuous consumption preferences was the same as

experiment 1 (Calvin Klein logo vs. no logo; $\alpha = .96$). A preference for helping others was

measured with six hypothetical scenarios, adapted from DeWall et al. (2008), (giving money to a

homeless person, donating money for a fund for terminally ill children, offering a ride to a

stranded classmate, giving directions to a stranger who was lost, allowing a classmate to use

one's cell phone, giving food to a homeless person). The six items were measured with 9-point

scales (1 = not at all likely, 9 = very likely), and were averaged to form a composite score (α

= .55).

Results and Discussion

Because our manipulation was subtle and therefore easily ignored, we took a measure to

eliminate participants who were likely to have completed the questionnaire without reading it

fully. To accomplish this, we added one scale item designed for this purpose (Oppenheimer,

Meyvis, and Davidenko 2006). This item begins with a paragraph of wordy instructions that

eventually tells participants to ignored the item that appears in the middle of a page and to

instead write on the page, "I have read these instructions." For our study, we included the 77

people (out of 98; 78.6%) who successfully completed this reading checker. As a result, the

analyses described below include the remaining 77 participants.

Manipulation Checks. Participants who were asked to describe experiences of being

ignored reported feeling more ignored than rejected (5.56 vs. 4.64; $F(1, 38) = 22.2$, $p < .01$),

whereas participants who were asked to describe experiences of being rejected reported feeling

more rejected than ignored (5.97 vs. 5.50; $F(1, 37) = 4.82$, $p < .05$). These results indicate the

manipulations were successful.

Tests of Hypotheses. We expected that being ignored would increase preferences for

helping relative to being rejected, and that being rejected would increase preferences for

conspicuous consumption relative to being ignored.

Insert figure 2 about here

To test these possibilities, we conducted one-way ANOVAs for each preference measure. As expected, participants in ignored conditions expressed greater preferences for helping than did those in rejected conditions (5.93 vs. 5.46; $F(1, 75) = 3.72$, $p = .058$). In contrast, participants in rejected conditions expressed a greater preference for conspicuous consumption than did those in ignored conditions (7.91 vs. 7.17; $F(1, 75) = 3.12$, $p = .08$). The results of experiment 2 support our hypothesis that people in collectivistic cultures respond differently from those in individualistic cultures, such that when ignored, they expressed a greater preference for helping than when rejected, whereas when rejected, they expressed a greater preference for conspicuous consumption than when ignored.

CONCLUSION

Previous research on the effects of social exclusion has clearly established that exclusion produces quite a number of outcomes. However, what is less clear is the precise nature of these effects, including when they occur and why. Social exclusion has at times been shown to increase prosocial attitudes and behaviors (Lakin et al. 2008; Maner et al. 2007; Mead et al. 2010; Pickett et al. 2004), but has at other times been shown to decrease prosocial behavior (Twenge et al. 2007) and increase anti-social behavior, including aggression (Twenge et al. 2001,

Warburton et al. 2006). Certain types of exclusion seem to threaten four particular needs simultaneously (belongingness, self-esteem, control, meaningful existence; Williams 2007; Zadro et al. 2005), whereas other types of exclusion seem to threaten some needs but not others (Molden et al. 2009). Some researchers have suggested that threats to certain needs (e.g., relational needs such as self-esteem and need to belong) may produce affiliative responses, whereas threats to other needs may produce anti-social responses (Williams 2007; Williams and Zadro 2005), although this proposition has not been fully tested.

In the research presented here, we combine these somewhat disparate findings into a comprehensive framework to derive some novel hypotheses regarding the effects of social exclusion on two constructs fundamental to consumer research, conspicuous consumption and helping behavior. We show that what seem to be subtly different types of social exclusion— being ignored and being rejected—actually produce very different outcomes. Furthermore, we show that cultural orientations may moderate these different outcomes. In experiment 1, by recruiting the U.S. participants, we show that being ignored increases conspicuous consumption preferences but being rejected does not, whereas being rejected increases helping preferences but being ignored does not. In experiment 2, by recruiting the Korean participants, we show the opposite outcomes in response to two types of social exclusion such that being ignored increases helping preferences but being rejected does not, whereas being rejected increased conspicuous consumption but being ignored does not.

APPENDIX

CONSPICUOUS BRAND LOGOS STIMULI (EXPERIMENTS 1 AND 2)

Calvin Klein t-shirt without a visible logo   Calvin Klein t-shirt with a visible logo

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FIGURE 1

PREFERENCE FOR CONSPICUOUS BRAND LOGOS AS A FUNCTION OF BEING

IGNORED AND BEING REJECTED (EXPERIMENT 1: U.S. DATA)
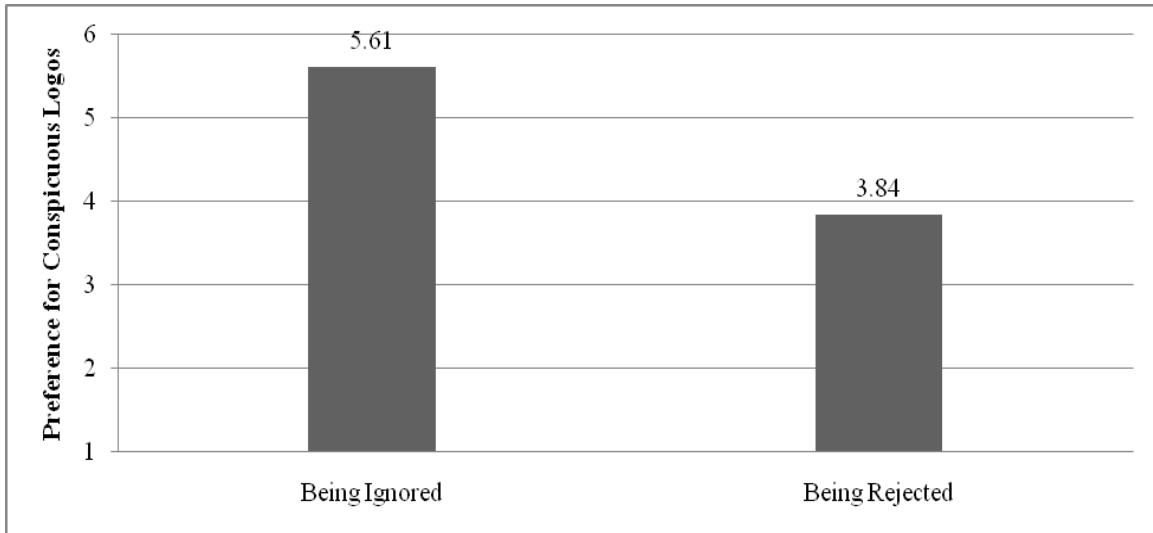
PREFERENCE FOR HELPING AS A FUNCTION OF BEING IGNORED AND BEING
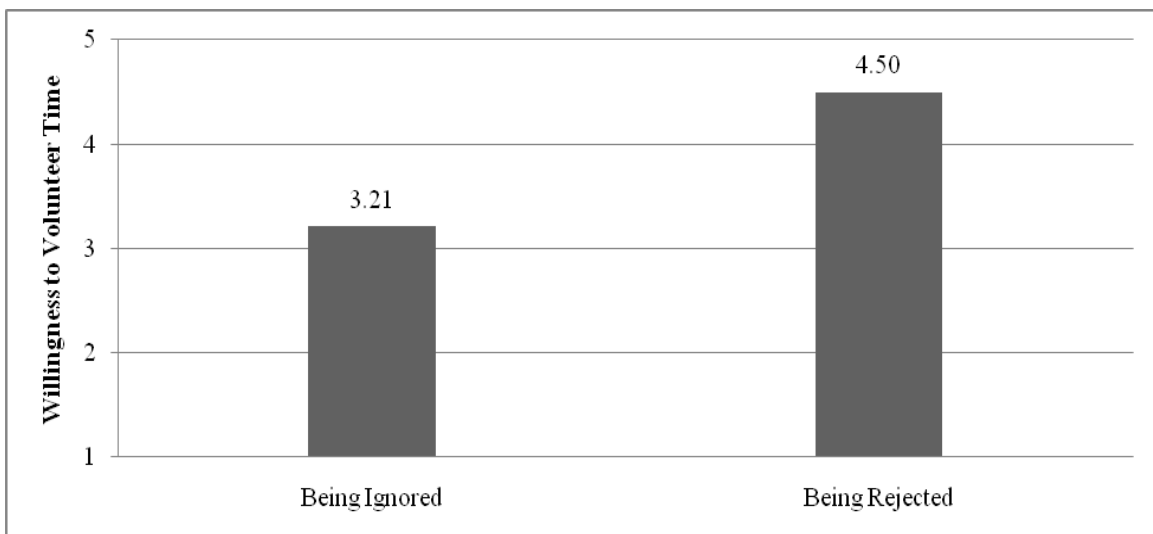
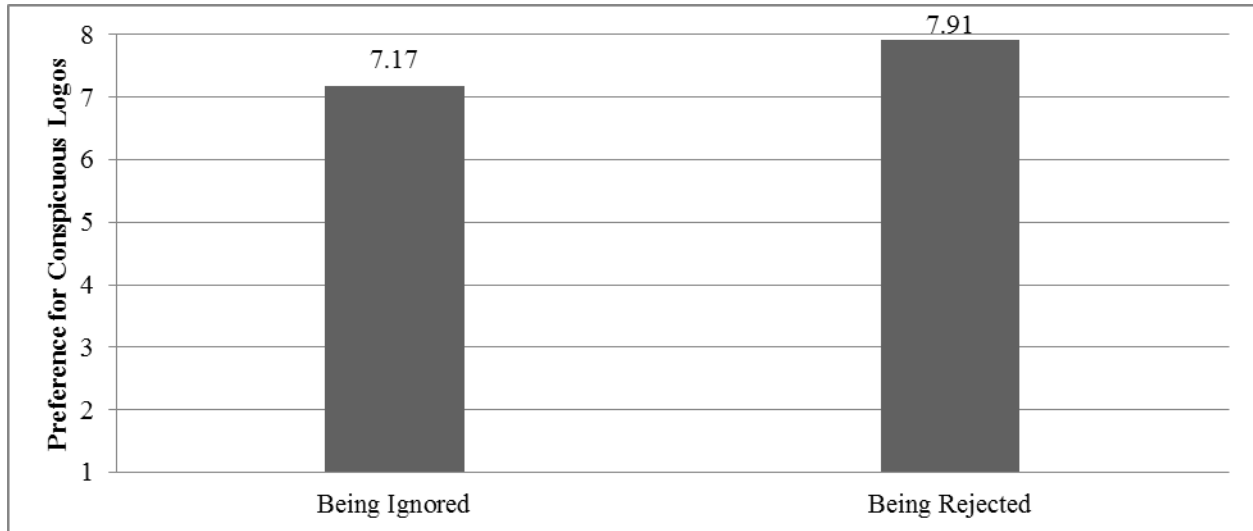REJECTED (EXPERIMENT 1: U.S. DATA)

FIGURE 2

PREFERENCE FOR CONSPICUOUS BRAND LOGOS AS A FUNCTION OF BEING

IGNORED AND BEING REJECTED (EXPERIMENT 2: KOREAN DATA)

PREFERENCE FOR HELPING AS A FUNCTION OF BEING IGNORED AND BEING

REJECTED (EXPERIMENT 2: KOREAN DATA)