

# Social Consequences of Interpersonal Expectations: Emotion, Experience & Behaviour

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## Introduction

Social rejection is a painful experience [1]. The pain of rejection *should* motivate prosocial behaviour [2-5]. For example, rejected individuals show:

- Greater willingness to work
- Improved perceptions of others
- Increased desire to be sociable

However, anticipating social rejection seems to promote *reduced* prosocial behaviour [6-9].

- High rejection sensitivity alters social relationships for the worse
- Increases willingness to punish an opponent
- Reduces self-control
- Increases negative perceptions of others

Together, this work seems to make competing predictions about the effects of social rejection. To resolve these conflicting findings, we examined social rejection in a context that closely resembles the context within which it naturally occurs: face-to-face interaction. We asked two questions:

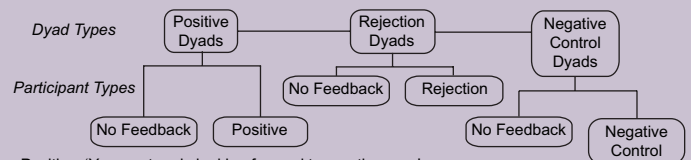
- 1) How does expecting social rejection change interpersonal behaviour?
- 2) How do these behavior changes affect partner perceptions?

## Methods

- 72 dyads (36 male pairs, 36 female pairs)
- Completed a study of "personality characteristics and first impressions"
- Completed an online personality inventory and saw a personality profile, ostensibly of the partner
- Rated how much they looked forward to meeting the partner (based on this questionnaire, participants received false feedback about the partner's desire to meet them)
- Engaged in a five-minute interaction
- Completed the PANAS [10] to measure affect immediately before and after the interaction
- Completed a measure of partner liking [11] after the interaction

### Feedback Conditions

To learn how 1 participant's expectations alter partner experience, participants who received active feedback were always paired with participants who received no feedback.



Positive: 'Your partner is looking forward to meeting you.'  
 Rejection: 'Your partner is not expecting to like you.'  
 Negative Control: 'Your partner is not feeling sociable today.'

## Coding

- 6 coders (interrater agreement for all behaviours: alpha > 0.75)
- Films recorded at 25 frames/second - coded frame by frame

### Verbal Coding



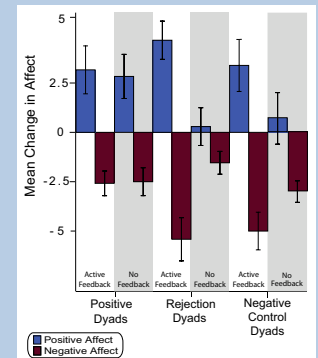
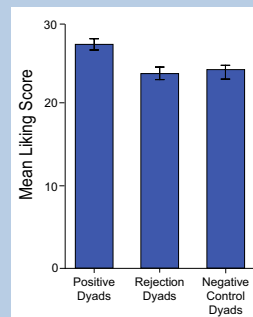
- Coded for statements about positive or negative topics
  - Positive: 'I really like the Uni.'
  - Negative: 'I hate one of the lecturers this semester.'
- Modesty: 'I'm not very good at this.'
- Empathy/support: 'Aw, sorry to hear that.'

### Non-Verbal Coding



- Coded genuine and polite smiles
- Examined reciprocity - how participants exchange nonverbal behaviours such as smiles

## Interaction Outcomes

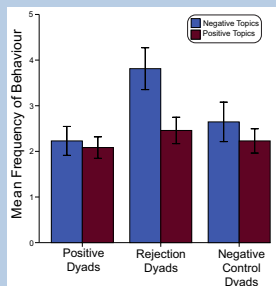


Expectations reduced liking of partner in rejection & negative control dyads,  $F(2,69)=5.04$ ,  $p=0.009$ .

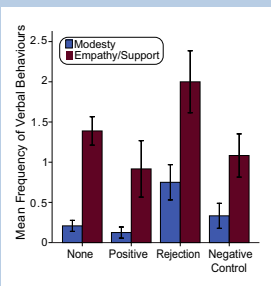
- All participants show reductions in negative affect during the interaction,  $F(3,68)=4.56$ ,  $p=0.006$ .

- Partners of rejected & control participants report attenuated experience of positive affect during interaction,  $F(3,68)=5.15$ ,  $p=0.002$ .

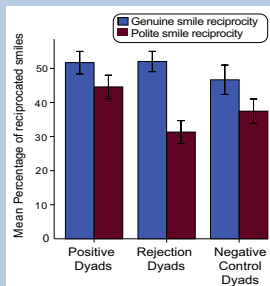
## Behaviour



More negative topics in rejection dyads,  $F(3,69)=2.71$ ,  $p=0.07$   
 No positive topic differences  $F(3,69)=1.06$ ,  $p=0.37$

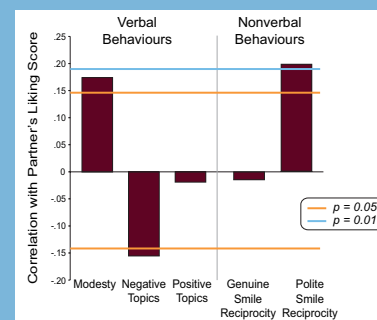


Rejected participants showed more modest behaviour,  $F(3,69)=3.84$ ,  $p=0.01$ , and more supportive behaviour,  $F(3,69)=2.78$ ,  $p=0.05$



Rejected participants showed reduced polite smile reciprocity,  $F(2,65)=3.48$ ,  $p=0.04$ , but not genuine smile reciprocity,  $F(2,65)=0.54$ ,  $p=0.58$ .

## Partner Ratings



Participants' behaviour affected how much their partners liked them.

Modesty and polite smile reciprocity were positively correlated with partners' liking ratings.

Time spent discussing negative topics was negatively correlated with partners' liking ratings.

## Conclusions

Holding negative expectations of an interaction alters behaviour which affects both participants' and their partners' experiences of the interaction.

Expectation of social rejection led to:

- *increased* prosocial behaviour - rejected participants were more modest and more supportive of their partners
- However, participants in rejection dyads were less likely to reciprocate polite smiles perhaps showing a decreased engagement in the interaction
- *increased* negativity in conversation topics
- Participants in both rejection and control dyads reported *liking their partners less* than those in positive dyads
- Partners of rejected participants reported less of an increase in positive affect from pre- to post interaction than those in positive dyads

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