

**Some Like It Warm:  
How Social Exclusion Affects Consumer Preference for Warm Brands**

by  
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## ABSTRACT

Social exclusion—defined as the deficiency of social connection and acceptance (Hobfoll and Sokes 1988; Hobfoll et al. 1990)—is a painful yet common life experience (Mead et al. 2011; Williams 2007). When socially excluded, consumers are motivated to restore social connection and display a wide range of coping behaviors. Although prior research has examined various consumption behaviors as a coping mechanism of social exclusion, little is known about how social exclusion affects the nature of consumer-brand relationships, and how the formation of such relationships affects consumer preference. In this research, I examine how social exclusion and brand warmth affect consumer-brand relationships and consumer preference. Across four studies, I find that when socially excluded, consumers prefer a warm brand and that this preference is due to an increased perception of the brand’s relationship partner quality. I also find that a warm brand reduces perceived loneliness among excluded consumers. This preference persists even when the brand is incompetent and even when consumers are equipped with high self-acceptance. The research opens the door to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of social exclusion, consumer-brand relationships, brand preference, and loneliness alleviation.

## **PREFACE**

This thesis is an original work by Soyoung Kim. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Social Exclusion and Product Evaluation,” No. Pro00049409, July 17, 2014.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Are people in modern societies becoming more isolated? A growing body of work supports the case that people are becoming less deeply connected to others and lonelier due to lifestyle changes (Pieters 2013) and technology advancement (Coget et al. 2002). For example, recent longitudinal studies show that the percentage of people who report chronic loneliness has increased over the past few decades, rising from 11% and 20% in the 1970s and 1980s to closer to 40% in 2010 (Mentalhealth org. 2010). People spend more time online and less time with significant others (Putnam 2000). Indeed, in the digital age, everything can be done online and through mobile applications (e.g., shopping, education, getting groceries, and even socialization), which contributes to a reduction in face-to-face human interactions and an increase in social isolation (Entis 2016).

The feeling of being socially excluded is a very painful experience (Eisenberger et al. 2003) because social exclusion deprives people of important social resources such as social connection, acceptance, and support that are required to satisfy the need to belong and to preserve physical and psychological health (Berkman et al. 2000; Dean and Lin 1977; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, and Layton 2010; Windsor, Gerstorf, and Luszcz 2015). As a result, when people experience social exclusion, they are motivated to restore those deprived social resources (Hobfoll 1988) and therefore engage in coping behaviors.

Previous research has focused on coping behaviors in response to social exclusion at the interpersonal level and the consumption level. Interpersonally, those who are socially excluded are more likely to show interest in building social bonds (Williams et al. 2000), display pro-social behaviors (Maner et al. 2007) and conform to others' opinions (Williams et al. 2000) to



restore social connection and acceptance. In the consumption context, a growing body of research has examined how people use consumption to cope with social exclusion (Levontin et al. 2015; Maner et al. 2007; Mead et al. 2007). For example, excluded consumers may use consumption strategically to regain social connection from groups or interacting partners (Mead et al. 2007), indulge in nostalgic brands (Loveland et al. 2010) to connect to close others in the past, or consume anthropomorphized brands (Chen et al. 2016; Mourey et al. 2017) to compensate for a lack of social connection.

However, despite the increasing prevalence of social exclusion and the use of various consumption strategies to deal with the social exclusion, we know little about how excluded consumers might relate to brands and directly build relationships with those brands. Instead, prior research has primarily focused on the instrumental use of brands, when brands are used to socially reconnect to people (Mead et al. 2007), to compensate for loss of social connection (Mourey et al. 2017), or to escape from socially painful situations (e.g., Lee and Shrum 2012). However, I argue that brands can serve more than instrumental functions in the face of social exclusion. In this dissertation, I examine whether and how socially excluded consumers can build meaningful relationships with brands and what the following consequences are.

Specifically, by utilizing a resource-based view of brands—conceptualizing brands as a social resource—and focusing on warmth as a fundamental dimension of brand perception (Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner 2010), I investigate the effect of social exclusion on the nature of consumer-brand relationships and on consumer preference for warm brands, and the resource-restorative function of warm brands. Across four studies, I provide evidence that when consumers are socially excluded, they exhibit an increased preference for warm brands because they perceive such brands as better relationship partners. I also find that warm brands reduce the

perceived loneliness of excluded consumers. This increased preference for warm brands holds even when brands are perceived as incompetent and even when consumers are high in self-acceptance.

This dissertation makes several theoretical and practical contributions. First, this work contributes to the literature on social exclusion. While prior work on social exclusion has centered on strategic aspects of consumption (e.g., product and brand choices) as a means of fulfilling the need for social connection (Lee and Shrum 2012; Loveland et al. 2010; Mead et al. 2007; Mourey et al. 2017) or of directing attention away from social exclusion (Lee and Shrum 2012; Wan et al. 2014), this dissertation delves into the underlying nature of consumer-brand relationships that can be created after social exclusion. The findings suggest that in the context of social exclusion, brands serve as more than an instrumental medium and can lead to more committed brand relationships. Comprehending the deeper nature of consumer-brand relationships in response to social exclusion is important because it increases the explanatory power of social exclusion in terms of various consumption behaviors. Given that social exclusion is becoming more prevalent (Entis 2016), understanding the underlying characteristics of brand relationships following social exclusion allows us to better explain and predict a wide range of consumer attitudes and behavior, such as brand loyalty, brand switching behaviors, long-term consumption, and consumers' responses to brand transgression.

Second, this dissertation research contributes to the consumer-brand relationship literature. Building strong consumer-brand relationships is critical for success in consumer markets (Smit et al. 2006), which are increasingly competitive and saturated with a variety of products (Bruhn et al. 2012). However, despite the importance of consumer-brand relationships, empirical work on what triggers committed consumer-brand relationships has been scarce

(Bruhn et al. 2012; O'Malley and Tynan 2001). By empirically testing the link between social exclusion and the formation of brand relationships, this research addresses this gap and shows when and how consumers develop partner relationships with brands.

Third, this research contributes to the literature on brand warmth and brand competence. Prior work has highlighted brand competence as a primary factor in influencing consumers' purchase intentions, one that is more important than brand warmth (Aaker et al. 2010; Aaker, Garbinsky, and Vohs 2012). Contrary to prior research findings, this research proposes that social exclusion can change the way consumers perceive brands and what they seek from brands. The findings suggest that excluded consumers put more weight on warmth than on competence and show an increased preference for warm brands than less warm brands. By doing so, this research sheds light on a motivational aspect of brand consumption and highlights the importance of brand warmth under social exclusion.

Fourth, this work contributes to the literature on the coping psychology. A large body of work in clinical and social psychology has focused on the important role of a single type of social resource—that is, supportive human relationships—in coping with adversity (Caplan 1974; Grinker and Spiegel 1945; Moos 1995; Pinqart and Sorensen 2000; Swindle et al. 1989). However, this needed social resource might be denied or not be readily available, as human social resources (e.g., social support) take time to develop and deplete as they are used (e.g., mothers of chronically ill children), and receipt of support may incur certain costs (e.g., fear of being a burden to close others and fear of being rejected; Hobfoll 2002). By showing that warm brands alleviate perceived loneliness of excluded consumers, this research portrays brands as another social resource that those who are under adversity can rely on, and complements the

psychology literature by enriching individuals' stress, coping, and resilience processes, over and above human relationships.

Lastly, the findings of this dissertation offer practical implications. Social exclusion and loneliness have become more common and more problematic in modern life. Thus, with the importance of warmth demonstrated in this work, firms may need to better understand and consider the psychological states of modern consumers, and take these states into consideration when developing and updating their marketing strategies (e.g., relationship marketing, advertising, brand/product development).

In the following two chapters, I review the relevant theoretical background to formulate basic hypotheses about consumer-brand relationships and consumer brand preference as a function of social exclusion. I also review potential moderators of this effect at the brand level (i.e., brand competence) and individual level (i.e., self-acceptance). I then test and report the results of four experiments testing these hypotheses as well as the roles of brand competence and self-acceptance in moderating this basic effect. In chapter 4, I summarize the findings and contributions and discuss limitations and future research directions.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND COPING BEHAVIORS

#### *Increasing Social Exclusion: Increasing Social Resource Scarcity*

As social beings, people need social resources such as connection, acceptance, and support, in order to satisfy their belonging needs (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Swindle, Cronkite, and Moos 1989; Williams 2007) and to preserve their health and well-being (Moos 1995; Swindle et al. 1989). A large body of work in psychology has shown that individuals with social resources are better able to cope with acute and chronic life stressors. For example, those who have social resources via having close friends, a spouse, or membership in social groups/communities are more resistant to negative life events such as the aftermath of disasters (e.g., Hurricane), combat-related psychopathology (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder), or physical disabilities (Grinker and Spiegel 1945; Pinqart and Sorensen 2000; Swindle et al. 1989). Similarly, Holahan and Moos (1990; 1991) show that having family support contributes to a reduction in depression over 1- and 4-year periods. Thus, individuals with social resources better maintain their physical and mental health compared to those with fewer social resources (Berkman et al. 2000; Caplan 1974; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, and Layton 2010).

Yet, people commonly experience social exclusion (Levontin, Ein-Gar, and Lee 2015; Roux, Goldsmith, and Bonezzi 2015). People often experience being excluded and isolated in their relationships with family members, friends, or colleagues (Baumeister et al. 2005), which creates hurt feelings, perceived loneliness, and lack of support (Mead et al. 2007; Williams 2007). Moreover, rapid technological advancement (e.g., the popularity of the Internet) and lifestyle change in modern society have expedited social exclusion (MentalHealth.org 2010).

Recent longitudinal studies across different countries bear out that loneliness is on the rise; suggesting chronic loneliness is a modern day epidemic (Entis 2016).

### *Negative Consequences of Social Exclusion*

A great body of research has demonstrated that social exclusion brings detrimental downstream consequences. First, social exclusion increases distress, negative emotions, and pain (Leary 2010; Williams 2007, Zadro et al. 2004). Research shows that the effect size of social exclusion on self-reported distress is high, between 1.0 and 2.0 (Williams et al. 2000), and that social exclusion increases sadness, anxiety, anger, and hurt feelings (Williams et al. 2000). Using the McGill pain inventory, Wilkie and her colleagues (1990) find that the intensity of pain by social exclusion is comparable to the pain levels reported for chronic back pain and even childbirth. Social exclusion also inhibits cognitive functioning. Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss (2002) suggest that social exclusion reduces performance on intelligence tasks and interrupts individuals' abilities to self-regulate, making them vulnerable to impulsive acts. For instance, socially excluded individuals are more likely to consume twice as many tasty but unhealthy cookies as non-socially excluded people and avoid less tasty but healthy beverage (Baumeister et al. 2005). Following social exclusion, people persist less in the face of failure and perform poorly on an attentional control test (Oaten et al. 2008).

Social exclusion has been known to accompany a series of dysfunctional physiological symptoms. When socially excluded, people's heart rates slow down (Gunther et al. 2010) and the stress hormone cortisol increases (Dickerson and Kemeny 2004; Stroud et al. 2000). Social exclusion also increases blood pressure and causes frequent sleep awakening that impairs immune systems (MentalHealth.org 2010). Social pain and distress caused by social exclusion

activates a brain that is related to physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, and Williams 2003), eventually putting the individuals at risk of mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015).

Taken together, social exclusion is an increasingly common yet very painful experience, bringing about destructive consequences for people. Thus, when facing social exclusion, people engage in a wide range of coping behaviors.

### *Conservation of Resource Theory and Coping Behaviors*

Conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll 1988) argues that people strive to acquire and protect their personal and social resources and experience stress when these resources are threatened or lost. Resources by definition are entities or objects that are either centrally valued in their own right (e.g., self-confidence, health) or that serve as a means to obtain valued ends (e.g., social support and acceptance, money; Hobfoll 2002). Under the circumstances that threaten a loss of resources, people are actively motivated to restore and protect their resources. If we apply the theory of conservation of resources to the context of social exclusion, people should thus be motivated to restore those deprived social resources, and exhibit restorative coping behaviors (DeWall and Richman 2011; Hobfoll 1988; Hobfoll et al. 1990; Levontin et al. 2015).

Prior research on social exclusion has focused on coping behaviors at the interpersonal and consumption levels. At the interpersonal level, literature in social psychology suggests that excluded people behave in ways that help them gain social connection and acceptance (DeWall and Richman 2011). For example, Maner and his colleagues (2007) demonstrate that socially excluded people show a greater interest in meeting new people and display pro-social behaviors. That is, in their experiments, excluded participants expressed a greater desire for making new

friends via a student club service and assigned significantly more money to their new potential partners in order to garner more favorable impressions, even when giving more money to their partners reduced the money they could take with them. Other research provides consistent evidence that excluded people are more likely to show helping behaviors and conformity to the opinions of others (Dunn, Aknin, and Norton 2008; Williams, Cheung, and Choi 2000) compared to non-excluded individuals. In addition, after being socially excluded, people are motivated to seek signs of positivity and social cues that signal the opportunities for social bonding and acceptance. Dewart and his colleagues (2009) show that excluded people are more likely to find smiling faces in a crowd more quickly and show more sensitivity to positive and genuine faces than those who are not excluded.

In a consumption setting, a growing body of work has investigated how people spend money and choose products and brands to cope with social exclusion. Mead and her colleagues (2011) show that socially excluded consumers are more likely to use consumption strategically in an effort to regain social connection. For example, in their studies, socially excluded participants spent more money on a product that symbolized their group membership and tailored their consumption preferences consistent with those of their interaction partners, even when their choices were not in line with their personal preferences. Excluded consumers may also indulge in nostalgic products, by choosing products that generate favorable childhood memories (Odiorne 2002) to help them get connected to their close others from the past (Loveland et al. 2010; Zhou et al. 2008). Researchers also found that excluded consumers show greater preferences for anthropomorphized or humanlike brands, to compensate for their thwarted need to connect (Chen et al. 2016; Mourey et al. 2017). However, when the likelihood of social acceptance is low or when the cause of social exclusion is rather perceived as stable



(e.g., when fixing the situation is difficult), excluded consumers may prefer distinctive products to be differentiated from a majority of others (Wan, Xu, and Ding 2014) or engage in conspicuous consumption to direct their attention away from socially painful situations (Lee and Shrum 2012).

Although prior research has shown a variety of consumption options to cope with social exclusion, it has mainly focused on the strategic side of consumption. In other words, prior studies have shown the use of brands as an instrumental tool to connect to others, to compensate for their hampered need for connection or otherwise to flee from socially painful situations (Lee and Shrum 2012; Mead et al. 2011; Mourey et al. 2017; Wan et al. 2014). Thus, we know little about how excluded consumers relate to brands and build relationships with them, in terms of the nature of these relationships, critical brand traits that promote these relationships, or the consequences of these relationships. Thus, the central questions addressed in the current research are: 1) How does social exclusion affect the nature of brand relationships? 2) What are the consequences of social exclusion in terms of consumer preference for brands and social resource restoration?; 3) What brand traits are considered important in building such relationships? In this dissertation, I explore these questions by building on a social resource perceptiveness and the importance of brand warmth (Aaker et al. 2010).

## **WARMTH, BRAND PARTNER QUALITY, AND CONSUMER PREFERENCE**

Prior to discussing brand warmth, I will review warmth in social relationships as a factor that influences the conceptualization of brand warmth (Fiske, Cuddy and Glick 2007; Fiske et al. 2002).

### *Warmth as a Key Dimension in Social Judgment*

Warmth is a fundamental dimension that guides individuals' social perceptions (Asch 1946; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007). Warmth judgments concern the perceived intentions of others. For example, when people encounter others, they assess whether those individuals have positive or negative intentions toward them (Fiske et al. 2006). Specifically, people who have characteristics related to positive intentions, such as being kind, friendly, helpful and caring are perceived to be warm.

Warmth judgment accounts for major variance in perceptions of daily social behaviors (Wojciszke et al. 1998). Research on social cognition shows that warmth plays a prominent role in affecting impression formation and on-going interpersonal relationships (Wojciszke 1994). For example, when forming impressions of others, people are more sensitive to warmth information and make quicker judgments about a person's warmth relative to other social dimensions (e.g., competence; Fiske et al. 2006).

For example, in testing the primacy of warmth judgments, Ybarra, Chan, and Park (2001) show that people identify warmth-related trait words much faster than competence-related words. Relatedly, Willis and Todorov (2006) demonstrate that in a task of forming first impressions from unfamiliar faces, the judgments of warmth show a highest reliability between the rapid judgments that were made after a 100-ms exposure and the judgments without such time constraints, suggesting that a 100-ms quick exposure is sufficient to form a reliable impression about warmth. From an evolutionary perspective, understanding another person's good or ill intention (e.g., friends or foes) makes sense and should be foremost because the ability to gauge others' intentions has a direct impact on human cooperation and survival (Fiske et al. 2006).

The literatures on intimate relationships in adults and on developmental psychology suggest that the trait of warmth has behavioral manifestations and is positively related to providing acceptance and emotional support as well as showing responsiveness and sensitivity to one's needs (Fletcher et al. 2004; Gangestad and Simpson 2000; MacDonald 1992). Given the critical qualities associated with warmth, people put the greatest weight on warmth when assessing their prospective long-term partners (Fletcher et al. 2004), and relationships characterized by warmth (e.g., parent-child relationships, romantic relationships) generate positive affection, the feeling of being cared for and being accepted, as well as feelings of commitment (MacDonald 1992).

#### *Similarities between Interpersonal Relationships and Brand Relationships*

A considerable amount of consumer research has supported the idea that people relate to and form relationships with brands similarly to the way they do with interpersonal others (Aggarwal 2004; Dunn and Hoegg 2014; Fournier 1998; Park et al. 2010; Sayin and Gürhan-Canli 2015; Thomson et al. 2005). For example, as different types of human relationships exist, consumers' relationships with brands vary, ranging from formal interactions (e.g., exchange relationships) to the much more personal relationships that are akin to close relationships (McCall 1970). Fournier's (1998) seminal work on brand relationships sheds light on similarities between human relationships and brand relationships, by identifying various types of brand relationships such as arranged marriages, committed partnership, secret affairs, and flings. Consumers may have flings with brands as they do in their interpersonal relationships. Similarly, in testing consumers' longitudinal relationships with brands, Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004) show that relationships with exciting brands (i.e., brands that invoke excitement and fun) have

similar characteristics to short-lived flings in interpersonal relationships. People also form emotional attachments to a variety of objects (e.g., places, blankets, teddy bear; Bowlby 1982; Mende and Bolton 2011; Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992) and have committed relationships with them. For instance, consumers can become emotionally attached to brands (Batra et al. 2012; Thomson et al. 2005) such as Coke and Hallmark, and experience feelings of love and warmth toward these brands (Slater 2000). When building relationships with brands, Aggarwal and Law (2005) show that consumers use norms of interpersonal relationships (e.g., exchange versus communal norms) as a guide in their brand assessment.

### *Warmth as a Key Dimension in Brand Judgment*

Given the similarities between human relationships and brand relationships, which have been supported in the literature, warmth also characterizes consumers' interactions with and perceptions of brands (Aaker et al. 2004; Bennett and Hill 2012; Fournier 1998). For example, when assessing brands, consumers consider a relational aspect of brands (Aaker et al. 2004) in addition to a functional aspect—by asking “what intentions does this brand have?” Brands seen as friendly, kind, and approachable are perceived as warm (Kervyn et al. 2012). For example, research shows that products of non-profit firms are perceived as warm (Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner 2004). Judgments of brand warmth affect the way consumers feel toward and engage with brands (Aaker, Garbinsky, and Vohs 2012). Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone (2012) show that when brands are low in warmth, that is, when brands are ill-intended (e.g., BP (formerly British Petroleum)), they elicit contempt, whereas when brands are high in warmth, that is, well-intended (e.g., veteran's hospital), they elicit admiration. Compared to warmth-lacking brands (ill-intended), well-intended warm brands lead to greater purchase intentions and loyalty. In this

regard, warmth is an important trait that affects consumers' perception of and interactions with brands.

### *Social Exclusion, Warm Brand Partner Quality, and Consumer Preference*

Social exclusion is a painful experience that deprives individuals of social connection and acceptance. Given the essentiality of such social resources for people's health and well-being, social exclusion activates a goal to restore those social resources, just as hunger motivates people to look for food (Baumeister and Leary 1995). That is, excluded individuals actively seek potential sources of positivity and social connection while avoiding the possibility of rejection (DeWall and Richman 2011; DeWall et al. 2009). For example, after social exclusion, people are more likely to attune to others' eye gaze (Willkowski, Robinson, and Friesen 2009) and give greater attention to positive emotional information (DeWall et al. 2011). Excluded people quickly identify smiling faces and fixate their attention toward potential sources of connection (DeWall, Maner, and Rouby 2009; Gardner et al. 2005); excluded people are particularly sensitive to finding genuine smiles because those authentic smiles indicate a reliable source of social acceptance (Bernstein et al. 2008).

Considering this heightened sensitivity to seek positive signs of acceptance and connection, I predict that socially excluded people will be drawn to warm brands and prefer those brands. The rationale is motivational. Because brand warmth is associated with providing acceptance, support, and sensitivity to one's needs (e.g., MacDonald 1992), warm brands are more suitable for replenishing deprived social resources than less warm brands. Given the suitability of warm brands for meeting the salient need for social resources, excluded consumers should be more likely to perceive warm brands as having higher relationship partner quality,

which refers to consumers' evaluation of a brand's performance in terms of its partnership role (Fournier 1998) and its treatment of consumers over time. In other words, excluded consumers should perceive a warm brand as a better relationship partner, making them feel wanted, listened to, and cared for (e.g., Fournier 1998; Smit, Bronner, and Tolboom 2005), relative to less warm brands. However, when people do not feel socially excluded, the need for social connection and acceptance will be weaker, and thus their attraction to warm brands will decrease. In other words, with the sufficiency of social resources, consumers may look for other qualities in building relationships with brands, such as fun, excitement, competence or high status (e.g., Fletcher et al. 1999; Fournier 1998; Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004).

I predict that perception of brand partner quality will increase consumers' preferences for that brand. Research in the domain of relationship marketing has shown that a strong bond between consumers and brands is an important predictor of favorable brand perceptions and behaviors (Blackston 2000; Dowling 2002; Roberts, Varki, and Brodie 2003). For example, strong consumer-brand relationships are positively associated with consumers' loyalty to brands (Smit et al. 2007), repurchase intentions, acceptance of brand extensions, (Huber et al. 2010) and consumers' willingness to engage in positive word-of-mouth behaviors (Harrison-Walker 2001).

Brand partner quality indicates the strength of consumer-brand relationship (Fournier 1998); thus, perceived brand partner quality will be likely to increase consumers' preference for that brand (e.g., choice, purchase intentions). Taken together, I hypothesize that:

**H1:** Social exclusion will increase consumer preference for warm brands.

**H2:** Perceived brand partner quality will mediate the effect of social exclusion on preference for warm brands.

### *Social Resource Restoration by Warm Brands: Loneliness Alleviation*

In explaining people's motivation to restore resources against resource loss or threat, conservation of resource theory introduces the idea of resource interrelations. That is, people use combinations of different resources (e.g., money, self-optimism, social resources) to counteract daily stressors or negative life events (Hobfoll and Leiberan 1987). In examining the important roles that social resources play during adversity, research in psychology has mainly paid attention to a single type of social resource—namely, supportive human relationships (Hobfoll 2002; Swindle, Cronkite, and Moos 1989). In this dissertation, I attempt to broaden the scope of social resources viewed in psychology and suggest that warm brands can serve as a social resource. As consistently supported in the literature in consumer behavior, people perceive and relate to brands similarly to how they do to interpersonal others; consumers gain relational benefits from brands and receive aid from brands that they feel close to in order to effectively cope with physical suffering and pain (Reimann, Nunez, and Castano 2017). Specifically, Reimann and his colleagues (2017) show that when consumers are exposed to their loved brands, ones that they have close relationships with, they feel a lower level of physical pain than do those in the control condition. This dissertation does not pre-require consumers' prior engagement/relationships with brands; rather it focuses on brand traits that facilitate the formation of new consumer-brand relationships after social exclusion, and the consequences for consumer brand preference and resource restoration.

If warm brands—which are associated with providing acceptance and support—successfully fulfill the need for social resources after social exclusion, the perception that social resources are deprived should decrease. Along these lines, DeWall and Richman (2011) also argue that satisfying the need for connection should reduce people's motivation to seek social

resources. Social exclusion is known to increase feelings of loneliness, which reflect deficient social needs (DeWall and Richman 2011; Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010; Leary 2010). Therefore, warm brands, which better fulfill the need for social connection and acceptance, will make excluded consumers feel less lonely and less deprived. Therefore,

**H3:** In the face of social exclusion, warm brands will be more likely to reduce perceived loneliness than less warm brands.

### **POTENTIAL MODERATORS**

Thus far, I have hypothesized about the positive effect of social exclusion on warm brand preference via brand partner quality, and on warm brands' ability to alleviate loneliness. However, moderator variable might exist that could change the strength of warm brand preference following social exclusion. In this section, I review two potential moderators, one at the brand level and one at the individual level. At the brand level, I focus on brand competence and examine the effect of competence relative to warmth on brand preference. At the individual level, I test whether individual differences in self-acceptance moderate preference for warm brands.

#### *Brand Competence vs. Brand Warmth*

Along with brand warmth, brand competence is another important factor that guides consumers' brand judgments (Asch 1946; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007). While brand warmth concerns perceived intentions of brands (whether positive or negative), brand competence reflects perceptions of brands' abilities to act on their intentions, such as effectiveness, capability, efficacy and intelligence (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008; Fiske et al. 2007). Brands that possess skills to execute their functions successfully (e.g., features and functional benefits)



are perceived as competent (Aaker et al. 2012; Bennett and Hill 2012). Research suggests that judgments of brand competence and brand warmth capture a large variance in consumers' perceptions of and responses to brands (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Asker, Vohs, and Mogilner 2010; Bennett and Hill 2012).

When it comes to the roles of competence and warmth in affecting consumer purchase behavior, previous research has regarded competence as a more important factor in purchase intentions than warmth (Aaker et al. 2010; Aaker, Garbinsky, and Vohs 2012). For example, research shows that consumers are more willing to buy a product when a brand is made by a for-profit company (i.e., a competent brand) than when a brand is made by a non-profit company (i.e., a warm brand; Aaker et al. 2010). Consistent with this finding, in a study testing the effects of warmth and competence on consumer purchase intentions across various product categories, Aaker and her colleagues (2012) find that competence is a more important factor that drives consumers' purchase intentions than warmth.

Thus, based on previous evidence, brand competence appears to be an important moderator to consider. However, in the face of social exclusion, I argue that warmth will matter more to consumers due to the increased motivation to seek connection and acceptance. Because brand warmth is associated with the provision of support and acceptance, excluded consumers will put greater weight on warmth that fulfills their need than on competence (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Thus, even if consumers have to compromise on competence of warm brands, when socially excluded, they will be more likely to be drawn to warmth and show an increased preference for warm brands than less warm brands.

**H4:** Social exclusion will lead to an increased preference for warm brands even at low levels of brand competence.

### *Individual Differences in Self-Acceptance*

In order to withstand stressors ranging from daily hassles to more threatening life crises, individuals use a combination of different resources (Hobfoll et al. 1990). For example, one may use money to protect against loss of health or use self-mastery (those who have a sense of successful control of life situations) or self-efficacy to deal with stressful life events. Given this exchange of resources, in coping with social exclusion, there might be a link between the need for external social acceptance (social resources) and an individual's acceptance of themselves (a personal resource).

Self-acceptance is defined as the detachment of one's self-worth from one's self-assessment (Chamberlain and Haggga 2001). High self-accepting individuals value themselves unconditionally, irrespective of whether or not they meet their ideal state of attractiveness, performance, or others' evaluations (Chamberlain and Haggga 2001; Grube, Klenhesselink, and Kearney 1982; Scott 2007). A growing body of research in clinical psychology has noted a positive relationship between self-acceptance and well-being and the therapeutic benefits of self-acceptance (Hayes 2004; Linehan 1994). For example, self-acceptance has been utilized as an effective cognitive behavioral therapy to reduce distress and enhance tolerance to frustrating situations (Linehan 1994; Williams and Lynn 2010). Those who are high in self-acceptance are less likely to fall into depression (Chamberlain and Haaga 2001) and are less inclined to feel the need to prove themselves to others (e.g., Ellis and Dryden 1997).

To the extent that a personal resource (i.e., self-acceptance in this context) meets or offsets the situational need triggered by a threat to or loss of social resources, conservation of resource theory argues that one may utilize their personal resources to effectively protect against

a loss of social resources (Hobfoll and Leiberan 1987). That is, if self-acceptance satisfies (as warm brands would) or reduces the motivation to seek social connection and acceptance following social exclusion (for example, by thinking “It is okay not to be approved of by others. I am a valuable person regardless”), individuals with high self-acceptance might rely on this personal resource to effectively to battle any negative effects of social exclusion, relative to those with low self-acceptance. Then those who are high in self-acceptance might be less affected by social exclusion as they separate their self-worth from others’ acceptance. If this is the case, they should show a weaker preference for warm brands compared to low self-accepting individuals. Therefore:

**H5:** Self-acceptance will moderate the effect of social exclusion on consumers’ preferences for warm brands; excluded consumers high in self-acceptance will have a lower preference for warm brands than excluded consumers low in self-acceptance.

## CHAPTER 3: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

### OVERVIEW OF STUDIES




In this chapter, I report four experiments that test the hypotheses. Experiment 1 examines the prediction that social exclusion increases consumer preference for warm brands (H1). Experiment 2 tests perceived brand partner quality as the mechanism underlying the effect of social exclusion on a warm brand preference (H2) as well as the effect of self-acceptance in moderating the main effect (H5). Experiment 3 replicates the main effect using different brands (H1) and tests loneliness alleviation by warm brands (H3). Experiment 4 tests the effect of competence relative to warmth on consumer brand preference (H4).

### PRETESTS OF WARM AND LESS WARM BRANDS

Three pretests were conducted to identify brands to be used in the studies. The first two pretests were conducted to identify real brands that vary in warmth, but not competence. The third pretest was conducted to create hypothetical brands that vary in warmth, but not competence.

In the first pretest, I examined two real laundry brands: Snuggle and Tide (see Appendix A). Participants on Amazon's Mechanical Turk ( $N = 101$ ,  $M_{age} = 36.9$ ,  $SD = 12.15$ ; 45.5% female) rated either Snuggle or Tide on the extent to which each brand was seen as warm and friendly and the extent to which each brand was competent and capable (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; Aaker et al. 2012). The t-test analysis showed that Snuggle was perceived as warmer ( $M_{Snuggle} = 6.12$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) than Tide ( $M_{Tide} = 5.37$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ;  $p < .01$ ) while the two brands did not differ in competence ( $M_{Snuggle} = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ;  $M_{Tide} = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ;  $p = .26$ ).

I also pretested Snuggle and Tide using an undergraduate population. Participants ( $N = 22$ ,  $M_{age} = 20.8$ ,  $SD = 2.11$ ; 45.5% female) rated both Snuggle and Tide in a counterbalanced order on the extent to which each brand was seen as warm and friendly and the extent to which each brand was competent and capable (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). The paired sample t-test analysis showed that Snuggle was perceived to be warmer ( $M_{Snuggle} = 6.27$ ,  $SD = .98$ ) than Tide ( $M_{Tide} = 5.09$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ;  $p < .001$ ), while the two brands did not differ on competence ( $M_{Snuggle} = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ,  $M_{Tide} = 5.86$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ;  $p = .10$ ).

In the third pretest, I created two hypothetical brands: “Sammy  Danny” as a warm brand and “SAMMY & DANNY” as a less warm brand using different logos and fonts (Aaker et al. 2004). Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants ( $N = 103$ ,  $M_{age} = 36.1$ ,  $SD = 12.03$ ) completed a clothing brand evaluation task, in which they evaluated either “Sammy  Danny” or “SAMMY & DANNY” in terms of warmth and competence on 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; Aaker et al. 2012). The independent t-test results showed that “Sammy  Danny” was perceived as warmer ( $M_{warmth} = 5.88$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) than “SAMMY & DANNY” ( $M_{warmth} = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ;  $p < .001$ ), while these brands did not differ in competence ( $M_{Sammy (heart) Danny} = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.06$  vs.  $M_{Sammy \& Danny} = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ;  $p = .80$ ).

## EXPERIMENT 1

In experiment 1, I tested the hypothesis that social exclusion increases consumer preference for a warm brand. I used real laundry brands (i.e., Snuggle and Tide) that were pretested to be warm and less warm, and participants made a consequential choice between these two brands at the end of the experiment. To manipulate social exclusion, I used a Cyberball game; Cyberball has been used as a quick and powerful method to manipulate social exclusion

(Williams, Forgas, and Hippel 2005). I predicted that socially excluded consumers would be more likely to choose a warm brand over a less warm brand. To test this prediction, I used a two-factor (social exclusion: exclusion vs. inclusion) between-subjects design.

## **Method**

One hundred thirty undergraduate students participated in the experiment for course credit. Upon arriving at the lab, participants were seated in front of a computer. Participants were told that they would be playing an Internet game called Cyberball (Williams, Forgas, and Hippel 2005) with two other students to test their visualization skills; however, the other players were actually generated by computer. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: exclusion or inclusion. In the beginning, one of two players threw a ball to a participant. After receiving a ball from one of the players, the participant had to decide to whom they would like to throw a ball by clicking on a button that indicated each player. In the exclusion condition, participants received a ball three times and then were completely excluded from the game. In other words, they did not receive the ball from the two players. In the inclusion condition, participants randomly received the ball 33% of the time. After finishing the game of 24 throws, participants completed a questionnaire that measured their perception of being excluded on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = extremely; Williams et al. 2002).

Upon completion of the game, participants were instructed to raise their hands to notify the experimenter. The experimenter told participants that as a token of appreciation for their participation, they could have a bag which contained several laundry detergent pods. Then participants were presented with two gift bags to choose between. One gift bag had a Snuggle logo printed on it, and the other had a Tide logo printed on it. After participants chose a gift bag, they were asked to record their choice on the computer screen in front of them (by checking the

box for either Snuggle or Tide), and to take the gift bag with them. Upon completion of the study, participants were thanked and debriefed.

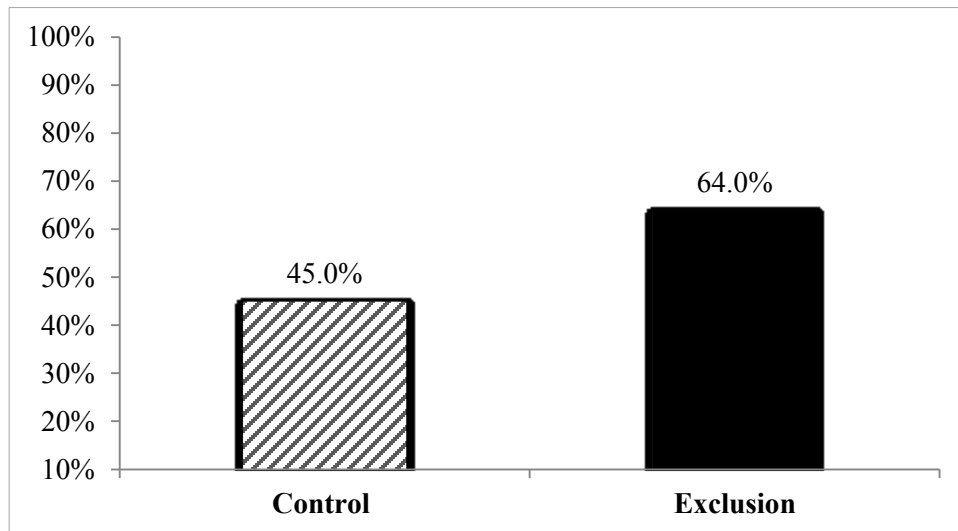
## Results

Three participants who failed to raise their hands and thus did not receive a gift bag, and one participant who refused to choose a gift bag due to environmental concerns, were excluded from the analyses, leaving a valid sample of a total of one hundred twenty-six ( $M_{age} = 21.6$ ,  $SD = 2.54$ ; 55.5% female).

*Manipulation Check.* ANOVA analysis showed that the exclusion manipulation worked as intended: participants in the social exclusion condition felt more excluded than those who were in the control condition ( $M_{exclusion} = 4.35$  vs.  $M_{inclusion} = 2.30$ ;  $F(1, 123) = 120.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*Brand Preference.* To test the effect of social exclusion on brand choice, logistic regression analysis was conducted. Regressing brand choice on social exclusion yielded a significant effect (Wald  $\chi^2 = 4.44$ ,  $p = .035$ ): excluded participants chose the Snuggle brand gift bag (i.e., the warm brand) to a greater extent than included participants (64% vs. 45%; see figure 1, see Table 1 for the correlation matrix).

**FIGURE 1**  
**EXPERIMENT 1 PERCENTAGE OF CHOOSING SNUGGLE GIFT BAG**  
**BY SOCIAL EXCLUSION**



**TABLE 1**  
**EXPERIMENT 1 CORRELATION MATRIX**

**Correlations**

	Excluded	Brand Choice	Gender
Excluded	1	.073	.191*
Brand Choice	.073	1	-.001
Gender	.191*	.001	1

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Discussion**

The results of experiment 1 provide evidence that social exclusion increases consumers' preference for a warm brand by using a real consequential choice. As predicted (H1), socially



excluded participants were more likely to choose a gift bag of Snuggle over that of Tide. However, why excluded participants chose Snuggle was not tested in this experiment. Thus, in the next experiment, I sought to examine the mediating mechanism underlying this warm brand preference effect. Specifically, I tested whether perceived brand partner quality would mediate the effect of social exclusion on a preference for a warm brand.

## **EXPERIMENT 2**

The main purpose of experiment 2 was to examine the role of perceived brand partner quality as a mediator of the effect of social exclusion on a warm brand preference (H2). In this experiment, instead of using Cyberball to manipulate exclusion, I manipulated social exclusion using a writing task based on prior work (Lee and Shrum 2012; Molden et al. 2009). In addition, at the end of the experiment, I measured individuals' self-acceptance to test whether individual differences in self-acceptance (Chamberlain and Haggis 2001; Ellis 2003) would moderate this basic effect (H5).

I predicted that social exclusion would increase a preference for a warm brand than a less warm brand due to a warm brand's higher brand partner quality. To test these predictions, I used a 2 social exclusion (exclusion vs. control) between-subjects design and measured individual self-acceptance level.

### **Method**

Two hundred eighty-two MTurk participants completed an online survey. Participants were told that they would engage in a series of unrelated studies. First, they were asked to write about their personal experiences for five minutes. Participants were randomly assigned to either

an exclusion or a control condition. In the social exclusion condition, participants were asked to recall and write in detail about a time in which they were socially excluded by groups or individuals (Lee and Shurm 2012; Molden et al. 2009; see Appendix B for the detailed writing instructions). In the no-exclusion condition, participants were asked to recall and write in detail about a time in which they had driven or walked to the grocery store. After writing their essay, participants indicated how excluded they had felt during the experience on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; Zadro et al. 2006).

Next, participants proceeded to a second ostensibly unrelated brand evaluation task in which they were asked to report their perceptions of brand partner quality of Snuggle and Tide; brands were presented in a randomized order. Using the measures by Park et al. (2002; eight items) and based on Smit et al. (2006) and conceptualization by Fournier (1998), I selected three items based on the following criteria—items that reflect brands' treatment of consumers which do not pre-require prior interactions and relationships with brands. Participants rated each brand as follows: "This brand would treat me as an important and valuable customer", "This brand would take good care of me, "I have a lot of respect for this brand" on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). As a manipulation check, participants rated the extent to which each brand was warm and friendly and competent and capable (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Then participants were asked to choose which brand they would prefer to buy: Snuggle or Tide (presented in a counterbalanced order). Lastly, participants answered twenty self-acceptance items by indicating how often they felt each item was true or untrue of them on a 7-point scale (e.g., "To feel like a worthwhile person, I must be loved by the people who are important to me" and "Being praised makes me feel more valuable as a person"; 1 = almost always untrue, 7 = almost always true; Chamberlain and Haaga 2001; full items in Appendix C).

## Results

Twenty-two participants who either failed the attention check or failed to follow the social exclusion writing instructions, such as no recall of exclusion experiences or writing about irrelevant topics were excluded from the analyses, leaving a valid sample of two hundred sixty ( $M_{age} = 37.2, SD = 12.19$ ; 54% female). To explain how the attention check was conducted, participants were instructed to check “none of the above” in response to the question. They were then asked the following: How are you currently feeling? Participants who checked how they were feeling rather than none of the above were not included in the analyses.

*Manipulation Checks.* A 2 (social exclusion: exclusion vs. control) ANOVA analysis revealed that participants in the social exclusion condition felt more excluded than those who were in the control condition ( $M_{exclusion} = 6.42, SD = 1.35$  vs.  $M_{inclusion} = 1.78, SD = .90$ ;  $F(1, 258) = 1005.64, p < .001$ ). Regarding the brand warmth and competence manipulations, paired samples t-test showed that Snuggle was perceived as warmer than Tide ( $M_{snuggle} = 5.67, SD = 1.02$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 4.22, SD = 1.36$ ;  $t(256) = 10.30, p < .001$ ), and the difference on competence between Snuggle and Tide was directionally significant ( $M_{snuggle} = 5.39, SD = 1.05$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.58, SD = 1.31$ ;  $t(256) = -1.70, p = .091$ ).

I also tested whether social exclusion affected individuals’ self-acceptance level. A one-way ANOVA analysis showed an insignificant main effect ( $M_{Exclusion} = 4.54, SD = .96$  vs.  $M_{Control} = 4.70, SD = .97$ ;  $p = .194$ , see Table 2 for all correlation matrix).

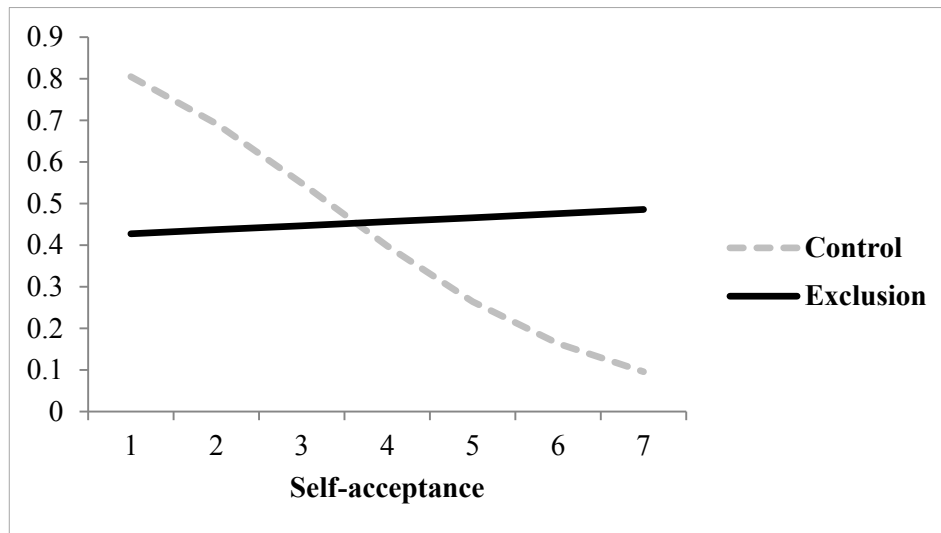
*Brand Preference.* Logistic regression was used to test the effect of social exclusion on brand choice. Regressing the choice of Snuggle versus Tide on social exclusion yielded a significant effect (Wald  $\chi^2 = 5.83, p = .016$ ): socially excluded participants were more likely to

choose Snuggle over Tide than non-excluded participants (46.2% vs. 31.5%), lending further support to H1. The effect of social exclusion on brand choice was significant after controlling for overall self-acceptance (Wald  $\chi^2 = 5.13, p = .024$ )

*Self-Acceptance.* To test the moderating effect of self-acceptance on the relationship between social exclusion and brand preference, I used a logistic regression analysis. Prior to conducting an analysis, the self-acceptance items were averaged to create an overall score ( $\alpha = .72$ ). Regressing brand choice on social exclusion, self-acceptance, and the self-acceptance and social exclusion interaction showed a marginal effect of social exclusion ( $\beta = -2.36, p = .072$ ) and a significant main effect of self-acceptance ( $\beta = -.61, p = .003$ ). Importantly, the results showed a significant two-way interaction between social exclusion and self-acceptance ( $\beta = .65, p = .033$ ); however, the interaction pattern was unexpected. Further analysis using the inverse logit function revealed that self-acceptance did not affect socially excluded participants, who preferred Snuggle regardless of their self-acceptance level. However, self-acceptance mattered when participants were not socially excluded. Those who were higher in self-acceptance showed a decreased preference for Snuggle whereas lower self-accepting participants exhibited an increased preference for Snuggle (see figure 2).

**FIGURE 2**

**EXPERIMENT 2 PROBABILITY OF CHOOSING SNUGGLE OVER TIDE  
AS A FUNCTION OF INDIVIDUAL SELF-ACCEPTANCE**



*Brand Partner Quality.* Prior to testing the role of brand partner quality, I averaged the three brand partner quality items to create an overall score ( $\alpha = .72$ ). To test the effect of social exclusion on brand partner quality of Snuggle and Tide, I conducted a repeated-measures ANOVA with the condition (exclusion vs. control) as a between-subjects independent variable, brand type (Snuggle vs. Tide) as a within-subjects independent variable, and brand partner quality as a dependent variable. The results showed a significant main effect of brand type on brand partner quality ( $M_{Snuggle} = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ;  $M_{Tide} = 5.43$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ;  $F(1, 258) = 120.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and a significant interaction effect between social exclusion and brand type ( $F(1, 258) = 8.46$ ,  $p = .004$ ). The contrasts showed that when participants were socially excluded, their perception of Snuggle's brand partner quality increased ( $M_{Snuggle-exclusion} = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.33$

vs.  $M_{Snuggle-control} = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ;  $t(258) = 1.02$ ,  $p = .30$ ), whereas excluded participants' perception of Tide's brand partner quality decreased ( $M_{Tide-exclusion} = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 1.33$  vs.  $M_{Tide-control} = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ;  $t(258) = -1.66$ ,  $p = .097$ ). There was a significant difference in brand partner quality between Snuggle and Tide in the control condition ( $M_{Snuggle} = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 1.29$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and in the exclusion condition ( $M_{Snuggle} = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.33$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Using Snuggle's relative brand partner quality to Tide as a dependent variable, a one-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of social exclusion ( $M_{Exclusion} = -.69$ ,  $SD = 1.58$  vs.  $M_{Control} = -1.21$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ;  $F(1, 258) = 8.51$ ,  $p = .004$ ); Snuggle's relative partner quality in the exclusion condition was significantly higher than in the control condition.

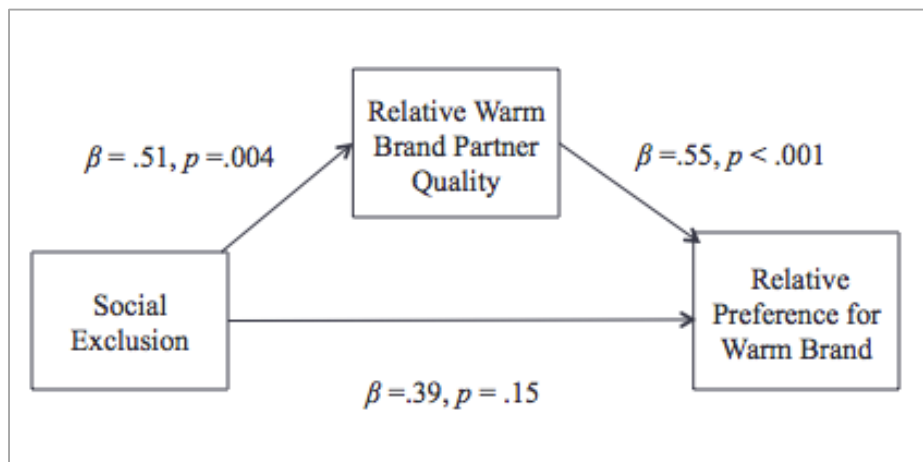
*Mediation.* As participants evaluated the brand partner quality of both Snuggle and Tide, I subtracted Tide brand partner quality from Snuggle brand partner quality (relative brand partner quality) in order to test for mediation using Process model 4 (Hayes 2013). A bootstrapping confidence interval for the indirect effect of social exclusion on brand choice revealed significant mediation by brand partner quality (indirect effect = .28, 95%, CI: .094, .548). Socially excluded participants perceived Snuggle as a relatively better relationship partner than Tide ( $\beta = .51$ ,  $p = .004$ , CI: .164, .847), which led to increased choice of Snuggle over Tide ( $\beta = .55$ ,  $p < .001$ , CI: .318, .792; see figure 3). After controlling for self-acceptance, a bootstrapping confidence interval for the indirect effect of social exclusion on brand choice also revealed significant mediation by brand partner quality (indirect effect = .27, 95%, CI: .076, .527). Excluded participants perceived Snuggle as a relatively better relationship partner than Tide ( $\beta = .49$ ,  $p$

= .005, CI: .146, .831), which resulted in increased choice of Snuggle over Tide ( $\beta = .55, p < .001, CI: .314, .793$ ).

A model using Snuggle brand partner quality as the sole mediator with Tide's brand partner quality as a covariate also showed a significant mediation effect (indirect effect = .22, 95%, CI: .036, .461); however, using Snuggle partner quality as a mediator without Tide partner quality as a covariate did not yield a significant effect (indirect effect = .04, 95%, CI: -.293, .192).

**FIGURE 3**

**EXPERIMENT 2 MEDIATION RESULTS (PROCESS MODEL 4)**



**TABLE 2**  
**EXPERIMENT 2 CORRELATION MATRIX**

<b>Correlations</b>								
	Excluded	Snuggle Warmth	Snuggle Competence	Tide Warmth	Tide Competence	Brand Partner Quality	Brand Choice	Gender
Excluded	1	.047	.026	-.043	-.160	.154*	.165**	-.008
Snuggle Warmth	.047	1	.553**	.053	.223**	.264**	.015	.039
Snuggle Competence	.026	.553**	1	.195*	.432**	.204*	-.011	-.058
Tide Warmth	-.043	.053	.195*	1	.489**	-.320**	-.140	.002
Tide Competence	-.160	.223**	.432**	.489**	1	-.543**	-.419**	.029
Brand Partner Quality	.154*	.264**	.204*	-.320**	-.543**	1	.326**	-.082
Brand Choice	.165**	.015	-.011	-.140	-.419**	.326**	1	.005
Gender	-.008	.039	-.058	.002	.029	-.082	.005	1

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## Discussion

Experiment 2 demonstrates that brand partner quality mediates the effect of social exclusion on consumer preference for a warm brand. When socially excluded, consumers perceived a warm brand as a superior relationship partner than a less warm brand and thus preferred the brand. This finding explains *why* warm brands matter more than less warm brands in the context of social exclusion and the underlying nature of consumer-brand relationship.

The findings of experiment 2 show a moderating role of self-acceptance in affecting consumer preference for warm brands. However, interestingly, self-acceptance only affected



non-excluded consumers: as self-acceptance increased, non-excluded consumers' preference for a warm brand decreased. In the face of social exclusion, self-acceptance did not seem to matter; excluded consumers preferred the warm brand whether or not they had high or low self-acceptance. This finding suggests that social exclusion is a powerful and challenging experience that supersedes protection by self-acceptance. Possibly self-acceptance does not meet the strong motivational demand to seek social connection and acceptance following social exclusion that possessing self-acceptance does not replace or decrease the importance of warmth. In contrast, in the context of no-exclusion, that is, when the need for social connection and acceptance is not salient, self-acceptance has an impact. Perhaps low self-accepting consumers are high in need for others' approval and acceptance as they are low in accepting themselves, which may lead to a greater preference for warm brands, whereas the opposite occurs for high self-accepting consumers who do not have a salient need for external acceptance.

While the first two experiments provide support for the effect of social exclusion on a warm brand preference, in order to increase the robustness of this effect, it is important to replicate this finding using different brands. Thus, in the next experiment, I aimed to replicate the basic effect using fictitious brands that belong to a different product category. In addition, I tested a social resource restorative function of warm brands to see whether warm brands could alleviate the perceived loneliness of excluded consumers.

### **EXPERIMENT 3**

The objectives of experiment 3 were to replicate the main effect using different brands and to test a resource restorative function of warm brands. Instead of using real brands, this


experiment used two fictitious clothing brands that differ in warmth, but not in competence, which were pretested.

To test these predictions, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (social exclusion: exclusion vs. no-exclusion) by 2 (brand warmth: warm vs. less warm) between-subjects design.

## **Method**


Two hundred eighty-nine MTurk participants completed an online survey. Upon consent, participants were told that they would be participating in a series of unrelated studies.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the social exclusion condition or the control condition; the writing task and instructions were the same as in experiment 2. After writing their essay, participants reported how ignored or excluded they had felt during the experience (Zadro et al. 2006), which served as a manipulation check (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

Next, as part of the ostensibly unrelated second study, participants were directed to a brand evaluation task, in which they viewed either Sammy  Danny or SAMMY & DANNY. Participants rated the extent to which they were interested in purchasing the brand (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Finally, participants answered two questions about whether currently they were feeling lonely or feeling deprived of social connections with people (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) and completed the attention check which was the same as the one used in Experiment 2 and demographic questions.

## **Results**

Thirteen participants who either failed the attention check or failed to follow the social exclusion writing instructions were excluded, leaving a valid sample of two hundred seventy-six ( $M_{age} = 35.7$ ,  $SD = 11.64$ ; 48.1% female).

*Manipulation Checks.* A one-way ANOVA showed that participants in the social exclusion condition felt more excluded than those in the control condition ( $M_{exclusion} = 6.38$  vs.  $M_{no-exclusion} = 1.73$ ;  $F(1, 374) = 1651.73, p < .001$ ). An independent t-test on brand perceptions revealed that Sammy  Danny was perceived to be warmer than SAMMY & DANNY ( $M_{Sammy (heart) Danny} = 5.79, SD = 1.06$  vs.  $M_{Sammy \& Danny} = 4.65, SD = 1.20$ ;  $t(374) = 9.73, p < .01$ ) whereas the difference in the competence rating between two brands was not significant ( $M_{Sammy (heart) Danny} = 4.86, SD = 1.27$  vs.  $M_{Sammy \& Danny} = 5.01, SD = 1.09$ ;  $p = .20$ ).

*Brand Preference.* A 2 (social exclusion: excluded vs. control) by 2 (brand warmth: warm vs. less warm) ANOVA on a brand purchase intention revealed a marginally significant main effect of social exclusion ( $F(1, 372) = 3.49, p = .06$ ): when participants were socially excluded, they were more likely to purchase a brand than those who were in the control condition (i.e., not excluded). The main effect of brand warmth on brand purchase intention was not significant ( $F(1, 372) = 2.15, p = .14$ ).


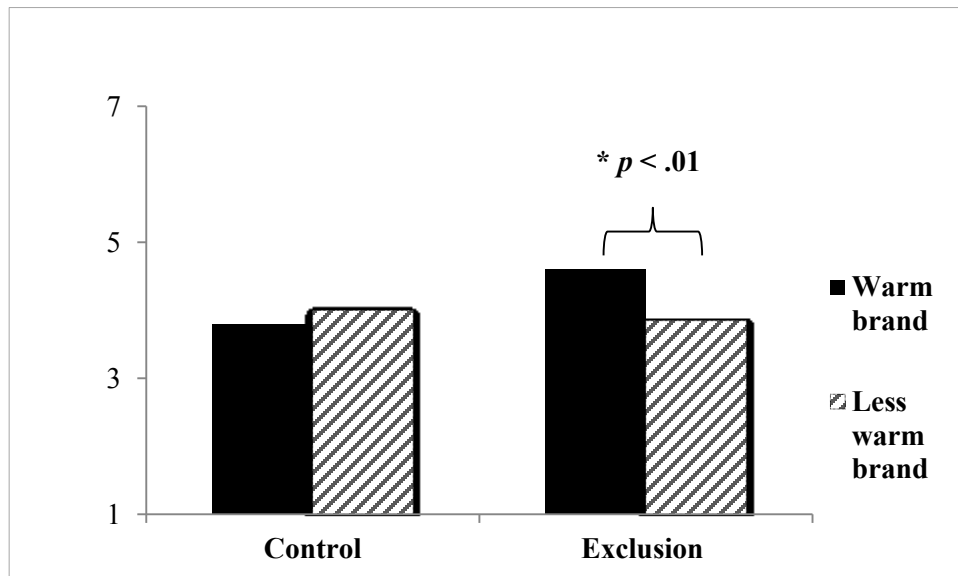
Importantly, the analysis showed a significant interaction of social exclusion and brand type ( $F(1, 372) = 7.54, p < .01$ ). When participants were socially excluded, they were more likely to purchase a warm brand (i.e., Sammy  Danny) than a less warm brand (i.e., SAMMY & DANNY;  $M_{Warm} = 4.59, SD = 1.54$  vs.  $M_{Less warm} = 3.86, SD = 1.77$ ;  $p < .01$ ). This difference was not significant in the control condition ( $M_{Warm} = 3.80, SD = 1.68$  vs.  $M_{Less warm} = 4.01, SD = 1.65$ ;  $p > .35$ ; see figure 4).

FIGURE 4

EXPERIMENT 3 PURCHASE INTENTIONS FOR WARM VS. LESS WARM BRAND  
BY SOCIAL EXCLUSION

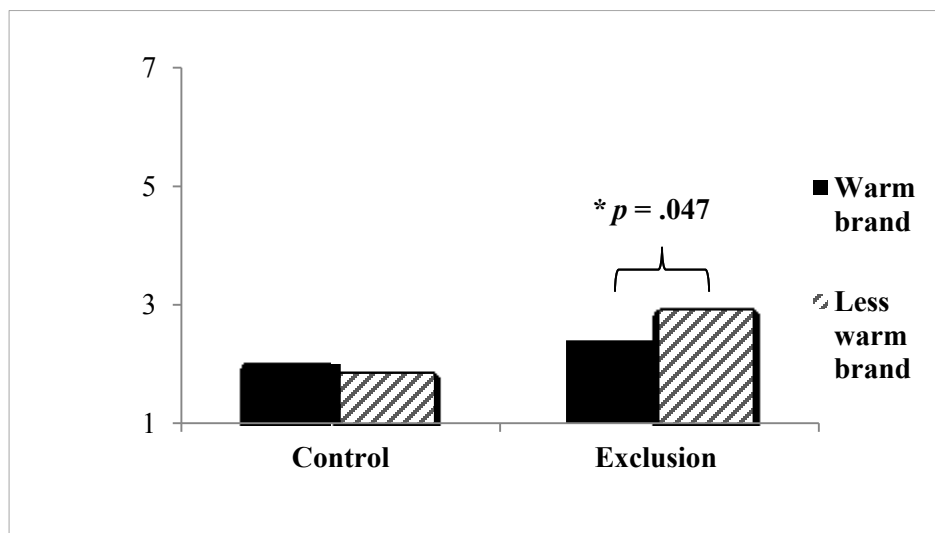


*Perceived Loneliness.* I averaged the two items (i.e., feeling lonely and feeling deprived of social connections with people) to create an overall perception of loneliness ( $\gamma = .81$ , DeWall and Richman 2011; Hawley and Cacioppo 2010). I conducted a 2 (social exclusion) by 2 (brand warmth) ANOVA on participants' overall perception of loneliness. The main effect of social exclusion on perceived loneliness was significant ( $F(1, 372) = 21.36, p < .001$ ): when socially excluded, participants felt lonelier than did participants who were not excluded; however, the main effect of brand warmth on perceived loneliness was not significant ( $F(1, 372) = .68, p = .41$ ).

Importantly, the analysis yielded a significant two-way interaction ( $F(1, 372) = 12.31, p = .022$ ). Specifically, when participants were socially excluded, those who were in the warm brand condition felt less lonely ( $M_{Warm} = 2.41, SD = 1.54$ ) than excluded participants in the less warm brand condition ( $M_{Less\ warm} = 2.91, SD = 1.71, p = .047$ ), while loneliness did not differ by brand warmth when participants were not excluded ( $M_{Warm} = 2.04, SD = 1.49, M_{Less\ warm} = 1.82, SD = 1.37; p > .25$ ; see figure 5; For the correlation matrix see Table 3). There was also a small positive correlation ( $\gamma = .276$ ) between a social exclusion manipulation check and overall perception of loneliness as a dependent variable, which is significantly different from zero: as the degree of feeling socially excluded increased, overall perceived loneliness increased.

**FIGURE 5**

**EXPERIMENT 3 LONELINESS PERCEPTION AS FUNCTIONS OF WARM BRAND  
(VS. LESS WARM BRAND) AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**



**TABLE 3**  
**EXPERIMENT 3 CORRELATION MATRIX**

<b>Correlations</b>						
	Excluded	Warmth	Competence	Purchase Intentions	Perceived Loneliness	Gender
Excluded	1	.119*	.006	.096	.276**	-.010
Warmth	.119*	1	.418**	.488**	-.094	.078
Competence	.006	.418**	1	.469**	-.084	.144**
Purchase Intentions	.096	.488**	.469**	1	-.028	.100
Perceived Loneliness	.276**	-.094	-.084	-.028	1	-.104*
Gender	-.010	.078	.144**	.100	-.104*	1

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## Discussion

These findings provide consistent support for the effect of social exclusion on a warm brand preference by replicating the effect using different brands. Socially excluded consumers showed greater purchase intentions toward a warm brand relative to a less warm brand, compared to non-excluded consumers. In addition, I found an indication of a resource restorative function of warm brands. When participants were socially excluded and exposed to a warm brand, they felt less lonely and felt less deprived of social connections with people, compared to those who were excluded but did not see a warm brand. The results indicate that warm brands might have restored some of deprived social connection and acceptance after social exclusion so that excluded people felt less deprived of social connection and less lonely afterwards. I also found a weak positive correlation between social exclusion perception and perceived loneliness;

as perceived social exclusion increased, overall perceptions of loneliness also increased.

Altogether, this finding suggests that warm brands have social resource restorative power, which leads to a reduction in the perceived loneliness of excluded participants.

## **EXPERIMENT 4**

The previous three experiments focused on the effect of warm brands, holding competence constant. In experiment 4, I manipulated brand competence as well as brand warmth to test whether a warm brand preference would persist at different competence levels. In other words, I varied the competence ratings of a warm brand and compared consumers' brand preferences for a warm brand to a less warm but competent brand.

If excluded consumers are strongly motivated to restore social connection and acceptance, they will be drawn to warm brands and show an increased preference for those warm brands relative to less warm brands even if warm brands are low in competence. To test these predictions, I used a 2 (social exclusion: exclusion vs. no-exclusion) by 3 (competence of a warm brand: high vs. moderate vs. low) between-subjects design.

### **Method**

Four hundred eight-two MTurk participants completed an online survey. Participants were told that they would take part in a series of separate studies. First, participants were instructed to write about their personal experiences and were randomly assigned to the exclusion or the control condition, as in prior studies. After writing their essay, participants indicated how excluded they had felt during the experience on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; Zadro et al. 2006).

Next, participants engaged in a second ostensibly unrelated task of evaluating laundry detergent brands (Snuggle and Tide). In this task, participants were told that they would see a brand logo as well as star ratings drawn from online consumer reviews that indicated how well each brand cleans clothes, where a five-star rating means the brand cleans clothes very well and a one-star rating indicates that the brand cleans clothes very poorly. After reading the instructions, participants were exposed to both Snuggle (as a warm brand) and Tide (as a less warm brand) in a counterbalanced order. Tide was presented with a five-star rating (less warm with high competence), which was constant across conditions, whereas the competence ratings of Snuggle varied by condition. When evaluating Snuggle, participants were randomly assigned to see one of three Snuggle ratings: 1) a one-star rating (warmth with low competence), 2) a three star-rating (warmth with moderate competence), or 3) a five-star rating (warmth with high competence). Participants reported the degree to which each brand was perceived as warm and friendly and competent and capable (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) and their intentions to buy each brand on 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

## Results

Fifteen participants who failed the attention check or did not follow the social exclusion writing instructions were excluded from analyses, leaving a valid sample of four hundred sixty-seven ( $M_{age} = 37.2$ ,  $SD = 12.19$ ; 54% female).

*Manipulation Checks.* A 2 (social exclusion: exclusion vs. no-exclusion) ANOVA showed that participants in the exclusion condition reported feeling more excluded than did those in the control condition ( $M_{exclusion} = 6.38$ ,  $SD = .82$  vs.  $M_{inclusion} = 1.78$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ;  $F(1, 465) = 2194.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

For the competence manipulation check, I dummy coded one-star, three-star, and five-



star rating variables (e.g., one star = 1, three star = 0, five star = 0) to compare the one-star and five-star conditions with the three-star condition as a reference. Using a regression analysis, the three-star Snuggle was perceived as significantly more competent than the one-star Snuggle ( $M_{three-star} = 4.84, SD = 1.18$  vs.  $M_{one-star} = 3.49, SD = 2.00; t(464) = -8.23, p < .001$ ), and the five-star Snuggle was perceived as more competent than the three-star Snuggle ( $M_{five-star} = 6.07, SD = .94$  vs.  $M_{three-star} = 4.84, SD = 1.18; t(465) = 7.28, p < .001$ ). In comparing competence perceptions of Snuggle to that of Tide, all star-ratings of Snuggle were perceived as less competent than the five-star rating of Tide (One-star condition:  $M_{Snuggle} = 3.49, SD = 2.00$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 6.26, SD = .96; t(164) = -14.74, p < .001$ ; Three-star condition:  $M_{Snuggle} = 4.84, SD = 1.18$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 6.27, SD = .94; t(142) = -12.39, p < .001$ ; Five-star condition:  $M_{Snuggle} = 6.07, SD = .94$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 6.32, SD = .90; t(158) = -3.49, p = .001$ ).

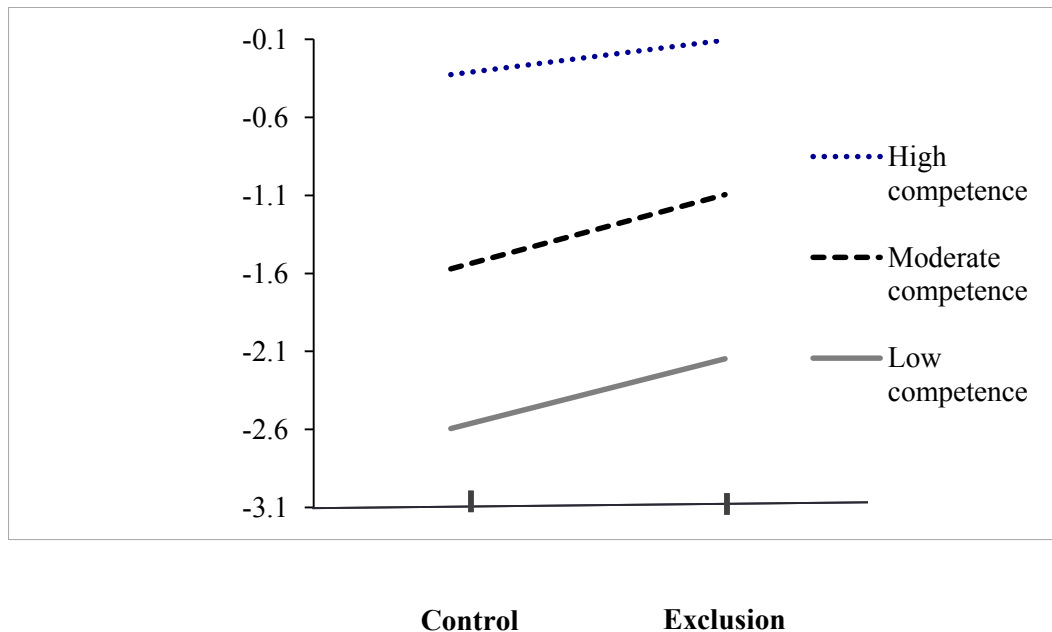
For the warmth manipulation check, paired samples t-test showed that Snuggle was perceived as warmer than Tide ( $M_{Snuggle} = 5.91, SD = 1.20$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.10, SD = 1.32; t(467) = 10.76, p < .001$ ), and the warmth perception of Snuggle held regardless of Snuggle star-ratings (One-star condition:  $M_{Snuggle} = 5.61, SD = 1.47$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.00, SD = 1.36; t(164) = 3.99, p < .001$ ; Three-star condition:  $M_{Snuggle} = 5.85, SD = 1.01$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.12, SD = 1.24; t(142) = 6.35, p < .001$ ; Five-star condition:  $M_{Snuggle} = 6.27, SD = .94$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.18, SD = 1.35; t(158) = 9.69, p < .001$ )

*Brand Preference.* Prior to conducting the analysis, as participants evaluated both Snuggle and Tide, I subtracted participants' purchase intentions of Tide from those of Snuggle to capture the relative preference for Snuggle over Tide, such that higher numbers indicate a stronger preference for Snuggle. I then ran a 2 (social exclusion: exclusion vs. no-exclusion) by 3

(Snuggle competence: high vs. moderate vs. low) ANOVA on the relative preference for Snuggle over Tide. The results showed a significant main effect of Snuggle competence ( $F(2, 461) = 51.91, p < .001$ ); as Snuggle's star-rating increased, participants exhibited greater preferences for Snuggle. The analysis also showed a significant effect of social exclusion on preferences for Snuggle over Tide ( $F(1, 461) = 4.69, p = .031$ ; for means see Table 4): relative to control participants, excluded participants exhibited a greater increase in preference for Snuggle over Tide regardless of which Snuggle star-rating was presented—a one-star ( $M_{exclusion} = -2.10, SD = 2.29$  vs.  $M_{control} = -2.60, SD = 2.35$ ), a three-star ( $M_{exclusion} = -1.10, SD = 1.64$  vs.  $M_{control} = -1.60, SD = 1.69$ ), or a five-star rating ( $M_{exclusion} = -.10, SD = 1.48$  vs.  $M_{control} = -.33, SD = 1.53$ ; see figure 6). Thus, the interaction of social exclusion and brand competence of Snuggle was not significant ( $F(2, 461) = .21, p = .81$ ).

FIGURE 6

EXPERIMENT 4 RELATIVE PREFERENCE FOR SNUGGLE OVER TIDE AS  
FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND SNUGGLE COMPETENCE



Using purchase intentions for Tide as a covariate, a 2 (social exclusion: exclusion vs. no-exclusion) by 3 (Snuggle competence: high vs. moderate vs. low) ANOVA on purchase intentions for Snuggle showed a marginally significant main effect of social exclusion ( $M_{exclusion} = 4.52, SD = 1.90$  vs.  $M_{control} = 4.27, SD = 1.74; F(1, 460) = 2.90, p = .089$ ), a significant effect of Snuggle competence ( $M_{one-star} = 3.38, SD = 1.96$  vs.  $M_{three-star} = 4.43, SD = 1.45$  vs.  $M_{five-star} = 5.39, SD = 1.44; F(2, 460) = 64.27, p < .001$ ), and no interaction between exclusion and Snuggle competence (Exclusion:  $M_{one-star} = 3.51, SD = 1.85$  vs.  $M_{three-star} = 4.66, SD = 1.26$  vs.  $M_{five-star} = 5.39, SD = 1.52$ ; Control:  $M_{one-star} = 3.24, SD = 2.00$  vs.  $M_{three-star} = 4.19, SD = 1.61$  vs.  $M_{five-star} = 5.39, SD = 1.38; F(2, 460) = .81, p = .44$ ). In a model without purchase intentions for Tide as a covariate, the main effect of social

exclusion on purchase intentions for Snuggle and the interaction between exclusion and Snuggle competence were not significant (exclusion main effect:  $M_{exclusion} = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 1.74$  vs.  $M_{control} = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ;  $F(1, 461) = 1.78$ ,  $p = .18$ ; Interaction effect: Exclusion:  $M_{one-star} = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.85$  vs.  $M_{three-star} = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.25$  vs.  $M_{five-star} = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ; Control:  $M_{one-star} = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 2.06$  vs.  $M_{three-star} = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.61$  vs.  $M_{five-star} = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ;  $F(2, 461) = .98$ ,  $p = .37$ ); only the effect of Snuggle competence was significant ( $M_{one-star} = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 1.94$  vs.  $M_{three-star} = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 1.45$  vs.  $M_{five-star} = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ;  $F(2, 461) = 57.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

I also conducted a repeated-measures ANOVA with social exclusion condition (exclusion vs. control) as a between-subjects independent variable, Snuggle competence rating (low vs. moderate vs. high) as a between-subjects independent variable, brand type (Snuggle vs. Tide) as a within-subjects independent variable, and purchase intentions as a dependent variable. The results showed a significant main effect of brand type ( $M_{Snuggle} = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 1.83$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.70$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ;  $F(1, 461) = 220.1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and a significant interaction effect of brand type and the competence rating of Snuggle ( $M_{one-star Snuggle} = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.96$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ;  $M_{three-star Snuggle} = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 1.45$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ;  $M_{five-star Snuggle} = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 1.44$  vs.  $M_{Tide} = 5.56$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ;  $F(2, 460) = 64.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). That is, overall participants showed greater purchase intentions for Tide than for Snuggle; however, as the competence rating of Snuggle increased, purchase intentions for Snuggle increased.

Importantly, this analysis showed a significant two-way interaction between social exclusion and brand type ( $F(2, 461) = 4.69$ ,  $p = .031$ ). Contrasts showed that excluded

participants exhibited an increased purchase intention for Snuggle, relative to control participants ( $M_{Exclusion} = 4.49, SD = 1.74$  vs.  $M_{Control} = 4.30, SD = 1.91, p = .58$ ), whereas they showed a decreased purchase intention for Tide compared to those in the control condition ( $M_{Exclusion} = 5.60, SD = 1.38$  vs.  $M_{Control} = 5.80, SD = 1.34, p = .15$ ). Further purchase intentions for Snuggle and Tide differed significantly in both the exclusion condition ( $M_{Exclusion-Snuggle} = 4.49$  vs.  $M_{Exclusion-Tide} = 5.60, p < .001$ ) and control condition ( $M_{Control-Snuggle} = 4.30$  vs.  $M_{Control-Tide} = 5.80, p < .001$ ). Thus, the three-way interaction between exclusion, Snuggle competence rating, and brand type was not significant ( $F(2, 461) = .20, p = .81$ ; for all correlations see Table 5).

**TABLE 4**

**EXPERIMENT 4 KEY CONTRAST FINDINGS**  
(Relative Preference for Snuggle over Tide, 7-point scales)

<b>Competence Ratings of Snuggle</b>	<b>Social Exclusion</b>	<b>Control</b>	<b>Significance Testing</b>
One star	-2.10	-2.60	$p = .071$
Three stars	-1.10	-1.60	$p = .067$
Five stars	-0.10	-0.33	$p = .20$

**TABLE 5**  
**EXPERIMENT 4 CORRELATION MATRIX**

<b>Correlations</b>								
	Excluded	Snuggle Warmth	Snuggle Competence	Tide Warmth	Tide Competence	Snuggle Purchase	Tide Purchase	Gender
Excluded	1	-.005	-.002	.032	.040	.057	-.078	.006
Snuggle Warmth	-.005	1	.415**	.183**	.236**	.408**	.107*	.219**
Snuggle Competence	-.002	.415**	1	.156**	.047	.758**	-.015	.043
Tide Warmth	.032	.183**	.156**	1	.378**	.153**	.344**	.048
Tide Competence	.040	.236**	.047	.378**	1	.040	.521**	.172**
Snuggle Purchase	.057	.408**	.758**	.153**	.040	1	.170**	.053
Tide Purchase	-.078	.107*	-.015	.344**	.521**	.170**	1	.067
Gender	.006	.219**	.043	.048	.172**	.053	.067	1

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## Discussion

This experiment demonstrated that the relationship between social exclusion and consumers' preferences for warm brands over less warm brands still held when warm brands were associated with different levels of competence. The results reveal preferences of excluded consumers for a warm brand versus a less warm brand. Regardless of Snuggle's competence ratings, when socially excluded, participants increased their preference for Snuggle (warm brand) compared to control participants, whereas they decreased their preference for Tide even though Tide was competent (less warm but competent brand). Thus, a relative preference for Snuggle to Tide of excluded participants was significantly greater than that of control

participants. These findings suggest that warmth matters more to excluded consumers than competence. That is, if a brand has warmth, even though it lacks competence, excluded consumers still prefer the warm brand to a greater extent to non-excluded consumers. However, if a brand lacks warmth, even if the brand is equipped with high competence, excluded consumers decrease their preference for that brand. In consumer market, consumers face situations where they need to make a choice among multiple brands. These findings show how excluded consumers evaluate warm brands versus less warm brands and what brand traits are relatively more important to them in making their purchase intentions. Warmth is what excluded consumers look for after being socially excluded; this experiment lends support for the importance of warmth when facing social exclusion.

## CHAPTER 4: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Social exclusion, which indicates the deficiency of social resources, has become more prevalent in modern society, threatening people's health and well-being. A growing number of studies have examined the use of consumption as a coping mechanism for social exclusion. However, little is known about the nature of brand relationships that consumers might develop after experiencing social exclusion and the following consequences. Instead of focusing on an instrumental function of brand consumption, which previous research has mainly demonstrated, this dissertation explores the deeper nature of brand relationships that can be created following social exclusion and the consumption and loneliness consequences. Based on a motivational ground for resource restoration and warmth as a key brand perception criterion, four studies were conducted to test the effects of social exclusion on consumer preference for a warm brand, the mediating role of brand partner quality, and the loneliness alleviation by warm brands. Moreover, in testing the strength warm brands have under social exclusion, I tested the effects of brand competence and individual self-acceptance as potential moderators.

In experiment 1, I tested the effect of social exclusion on a warm brand preference. Using consequential choice behaviors, I showed that when socially excluded, participants chose a gift bag of a warm brand (i.e., Snuggle) over a gift bag of a less warm brand (i.e., Tide) to a greater extent than included participants. This finding supports the importance of warm brands to socially excluded consumers.

Experiment 2 primarily tested *why* this main effect occurred and replicated the finding of experiment 1. I found that excluded participants chose a warm brand over a less warm brand because they perceived a warm brand as a better quality relationship partner. By showing *when* and *how* consumers develop strong relationships with brands, this finding suggests that brands



can serve more than an instrumental function and adds to a better understanding of consumer-brand relationship.

In experiment 3, I replicated the effect of social exclusion on a warm brand preference using different fictitious clothing brands. Consistent with the results of previous experiments, I found that socially excluded participants were more willing to purchase a warm brand compared to non-excluded participants; this finding increases the robustness of the warm brand effect in the social exclusion context. Moreover, I found an indication of a social resource restorative role of a warm brand: a reduction in felt loneliness and deprivation among socially excluded participants. This finding is interesting and important because it expands our understanding of individuals' coping and resilience processes during adversity. Research in the domain of social and clinical psychology has examined the roles of human relationships as an important social resource in helping individuals cope with hardship. By showing warm brands can reduce loneliness, this finding newly proposes that brands can be part of a social resource reservoir that people can use in counteracting social adversity and alleviating hurt feelings.

In addition to testing the effect of social exclusion on a warm brand preference, I examined the roles of two potential moderators: brand competence and individual self-acceptance. In experiment 4, I tested how competence would play a role in its interaction with brand warmth. Previous literature has shown that competence is more important in affecting consumers' purchase intentions than warmth. By manipulating different levels of brand competence, I found that socially excluded participants still exhibited an increased preference for a warm brand even when the warm brand was low in competence. This finding sheds light on a strong motivational aspect of humans to protect and restore social resources. As much as hunger and thirst drive people to work for food and water, the deprivation of social resources motivate


people to primarily seek warmth and acceptance; in such contexts, other brand traits may be deemed secondary.

As continuation of experiment 2, I investigated whether individual differences in self-acceptance would affect the effect of social exclusion on a warm brand preference. The finding suggests that self-acceptance moderates this basic effect only when there is no social exclusion. In other words, when participants were not socially excluded, self-acceptance affected the extent to which they preferred a warm brand; as self-acceptance increased, a preference of a warm brand decreased. However, self-acceptance did not seem to matter to socially excluded people. Irrespective of self-acceptance, when socially excluded, people turned to a warm brand and preferred that warm brand. This finding illustrates that social exclusion is so powerful that the intensity of pain and the motivation to restore connection and support can countervail potential protection that self-acceptance could offer. In addition, this finding adds to a new understanding of the link between personal and social resources in coping with social exclusion. High self-acceptance is a valuable personal resource; however, it may not serve as an alternative social resource or may not be strong enough to offset the demand for social connection triggered by social exclusion.

Taken together, by utilizing a resource perspective to people and brands, at a macro level this work enriches our understanding of the modern consumer psychology and of their coping and resiliency processes under social exclusion. Supportive human relationships are absolutely critical and essential social resources; however as examined in psychology, social support depletes as it is used (Hobfoll et al. 1990). This dissertation expands a scope of social resources and shows how warm brands can serve as quality relationship partners that provide acceptance and support and reduce loneliness. By doing so, this research leads us to think about the

interconnection between different resources—for example, the relation between humans and brands within social resource reserves and the link between personal (e.g., self-acceptance) and social resources. At a micro level, by demonstrating the underlying nature of brand relationships and the importance of warm brands following social exclusion, this dissertation adds to a better understanding of the dynamics of social exclusion and brand consumption via consumer-brand relationships, the importance of brand warmth relative to competence, as well as provides practical implications in the domains of brand relationships and relationship marketing.

### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

In this dissertation, I demonstrated the important role that warm brands play in the context of social exclusion. To do so, I manipulated warm brands using real brands (i.e., Snuggle vs. Tide) and fictitious brands based on different fonts, logos, and a heart (i.e., Sammy  Danny) and compared warm brands relative to less warm brands. However, one limitation of using real brands, Snuggle and Tide, is that there might be other differences than warmth between the two brands. In addition, in this dissertation, I looked at the effect of warm brands compared to that of less warm brands. Future studies might test the role of warm brands using a wider range of warmth (e.g., comparing brands high in warmth to brands very low in warmth). In manipulating brand warmth, there might be other ways of creating warm brands, for example, using different colors (e.g., warm colors), brand descriptions about brand warmth, or by including information about brand activities that involve charity or pro-social aspects. It would be also interesting to investigate which information or stimuli (e.g., using a heart in a brand) would suffice to make brands warm.

In testing why social exclusion leads to a preference for a warm brand, I showed that excluded consumers chose a warm brand because they perceived the warm brand as a quality relationship partner. However, it would be also interesting to test the long-term aspects of consumer-brand relationships. For example, using longitudinal studies or diary studies, one direction for future research is to investigate the continuous brand relationships and brand consumption. In addition, it would be interesting to test how the formation of consumer-brand relationships after social exclusion would play a role in different contexts. For example, how would excluded consumers who have built relationships with warm brands respond to transgressions of warm brands? (e.g., service failure, moral transgression) and whether or not the relationships would survive (leading to forgiveness) or get undermined. How would excluded consumers respond to competitive price promotions of other alternative appealing brands? I believe that exploring consumer-brand relationship in different contexts will lead to a fuller understanding of consumer-warm brands relationship dynamics.

In this dissertation, I tested the effects of brand competence and individual self-acceptance as potential moderators and found that even when brand competence was low and even when individuals' self-acceptance was high, excluded consumers showed an increased preference for a warm brand. However, at a situational level persuasion knowledge might negatively moderate the relationship between social exclusion and a warm brand preference. Persuasion knowledge refers to personal knowledge or belief about persuasion attempts and their reaction to these attempts (Friestad and Wright 1994). It entails information about marketers' motives, strategies, and tactics. Research suggests that persuasion knowledge invokes consumer skepticism (Schindler, Morrin, and Bechwati 2005), which leads to disbelief in companies' claims (Darke and Ritchie 2007), mistrust in marketers' motives (Bobinski, Cox, and Cox 1996;

Boush, Friestad, and Rose 1994), and less favorable perceptions and evaluations of the companies and the actors that make such persuasion attempts. Thus, in the context of social exclusion, activating consumer persuasion knowledge might undermine the preference for warm brands. That is, if consumers are primed with persuasion knowledge and become skeptical about warm brands' true motives (e.g., "It is all part of the act to sell more brands and make profit from me"), persuasion knowledge would create a misalignment of intentions between warm brands and excluded consumers and thus damage the sincerity and a warm brand preference.

This dissertation mainly focused on the context of social exclusion; however, an additional direction for future research would be to examine other socially adverse contexts such as bullying, and/or explicit rejection by others. Depending on the deprivation intensity of social resources caused by bullying and rejection by others (e.g., hurt feelings and social pain), those situations may increase a preference for warm brands. However, it would also be possible that depending on the explicit reasons why bullying or rejection occurs, preferences for warm brands might decrease. For example, if bullying and social rejection are clearly caused by lack of individuals' competence, the need for competence might be more salient than the need for social acceptance and support; then those affected individuals may engage in competent brand consumption to compensate for their lack of competence.

In addition to the effect of social exclusion on a preference for a warm brand, I explored the social resource restorative function of warm brands. I found some indication of the resource restoration by warm brands, such that warm brands reduced the perceived loneliness and deprivation among excluded people. Taking this step further, one direction for future research is to directly test the dynamics of warm brands and human relationships. If warm brands serve as a social resource and satisfy the heightened demand made by loss of social resources (social

exclusion, for example), warm brands might create relative abundance of social resources and decrease the need for building social relationships—brands as a substitute for human relationships (substitute hypothesis, Hobfoll and Leiberan 1987). On the other hand, the competing prediction is also possible. If excluded consumers receive all needed comfort and support from warm brands and ameliorate their hurt feelings, they might recuperate quickly from a socially painful situation and become more adaptive to the stressful situation. Then excluded consumers might become more comfortable with and confident in fixing the situation and building social relationships—that is, brands as an enabler of human relationships.

### *Conclusions*

While prior research on social exclusion has primarily focused on the strategic and compensatory use of brands, this dissertation focuses on the relationship aspect of brand consumption and shows the process by which warm brands serve as quality relationship partners, thereby moving consumers' preferences towards warm brands. In an increasingly isolated society, this dissertation demonstrates the importance of warmth. In the end, the findings of this dissertation are in line with a quote by Lily Fairchilde, “Deep down even the most hardened criminal is starving for the same thing that motivates the innocent baby: Love and acceptance” (DeWall and Bushman 2011). By examining the roles of warm brands in the context of social exclusion, this dissertation opens a new door to the dynamic coping processes under social resource scarcity.

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## APPENDIX A

### Brands Used in Pretests

- Snuggle®

Sample brand logo: [https://twitter.com/Snuggle\\_Bear](https://twitter.com/Snuggle_Bear)

- Tide®

Sample brand logo: <https://tide.com/en-us/about-tide>

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Writing Instructions on Social Exclusion**

Think back to a time in which you feel intensely ignored, isolated, or excluded by groups or individuals in some way. It was a time when you were clearly ignored, but no one said that they did not want you or like you.

Please spend a moment to think about the time. Then spend five minutes writing about in detail 1) the circumstances of the experience, 2) what people in this experience did to you, and 3) how you felt in the text box.

## APPENDIX C

### Self-Acceptance Scale

Almost Always Untrue	Usually Untrue	More Often Untrue Than True	Equally Often True And Untrue	More Often True Than Untrue	Usually True	Almost Always True
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- \_\_\_ 1. Being praised makes me feel more valuable as a person.
- \_\_\_ 2. I feel worthwhile even if I am not successful in meeting certain goals that are important to me.
- \_\_\_ 3. When I receive negative feedback, I take it as an opportunity to improve my behavior or performance.
  
- \_\_\_ 4. I feel that some people have more value than others.
- \_\_\_ 5. Making a big mistake may be disappointing, but it doesn't change how I feel about myself overall.
- \_\_\_ 6. Sometimes I find myself thinking about whether I am a good or bad person.
- \_\_\_ 7. To feel like a worthwhile person, I must be loved by the people who are important to me.
- \_\_\_ 8. I set goals for myself with the hope that they will make me happy (or happier).
- \_\_\_ 9. I think that being good at many things makes someone a good person overall.
- \_\_\_ 10. My sense of self-worth depends a lot on how I compare with other people.
  
- \_\_\_ 11. I believe that I am worthwhile simply because I am a human being.
- \_\_\_ 12. When I receive negative feedback, I often find it hard to be open to what the person is saying about me.
  
- \_\_\_ 13. I set goals for myself that I hope will prove my worth.
- \_\_\_ 14. Being bad at certain things makes me value myself less.

- \_\_\_ 15. I think that people who are successful in what they do are especially worthwhile people.
- \_\_\_ 16. I feel that the best part about being praised is that it helps me to know what my strengths are.
- \_\_\_ 17. I feel I am a valuable person even when other people disapprove of me.
- \_\_\_ 18. I avoid comparing myself to others to decide if I am a worthwhile person.
- \_\_\_ 19. When I am criticized or when I fail at something, I feel worse about myself as a person.
- \_\_\_ 20. I don't think it's a good idea to judge my worth as a person.