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Does Suspicion of Motives Mediate the Relationship Between
Social Exclusion and Smile Discrimination?

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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In

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Abstract

Individuals who are socially excluded or suspicious of other's motives show increased sensitivity to social cues signalling positive affect. Facial expressions such as smiles are cues that signal affiliative intent. They may occur in the presence or absence of positive felt emotion, creating uncertainty for perceivers about affiliative motives underlying the expression. Excluded or suspicious individuals are better able to determine authenticity of such expressions and use the information to guide their social interactions with others. Despite shared theoretical frameworks, no research has examined a potential relationship between social exclusion and suspicion of motives themselves. Sample frames used have also lacked cultural diversity, inhibiting ability to generalise findings beyond Western European or American populations. The current study seeks to address both issues. This study predicted that feelings of social exclusion would make a person more suspicious of others' social motives and that changes in levels of suspicion would mediate the relationship between a person's feelings of exclusion and their ability to differentiate the social content of smiles. One hundred and eleven students of East and Southeast Asian origin, aged 18 to 50 years, were recruited to participate in the study from Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand. They completed an online survey where they were randomly assigned to one of two experimental social pain conditions (exclusion or inclusion). Cyberball was used to manipulate feelings of social pain, before participants were administered the Suspicion of Motive Index, a smile discrimination task, and the Needs Threat Scale. Results indicated that Cyberball reliably elicited feelings of exclusion and inclusion but found no significant evidence to support the hypothesised relationships between social exclusion, suspicion of motive and smile discrimination. The findings indicate that

effects measured in previous research cannot be generalised to the present sample frame in the New Zealand context. The current study raises questions about the theoretical and methodological universality of the constructs and how they may be influenced by underlying cultural differences in intergroup relations, situational context, emotion expression, perception and recognition.

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