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Being rejected by others can lead to anxiety, depression, and other negative psychological effects. Theories of embodied cognition suggest that these thoughts and feelings may also be related to people’s physical sensations. For example, when people held a warm cup in one study, they rated another person as warmer than did people holding a cold cup. People often refer to rejection as being “cold.” In two studies, the researchers examined whether thinking about or experiencing social exclusion would lead people to physically feel colder.

In the first study, the researchers randomly assigned Canadian college students to write about either a time they felt excluded or a time they felt included. Afterwards, the participants estimated how warm the room they were in was. Participants who wrote about being excluded rated the room as colder on average than did those who wrote about being included.

In the second study, college students played a computer ball tossing game in which other “players” (actually a computer) either included or excluded them. They then rated how much they would like each of five products that were either warm (i.e., hot coffee, hot soup), cold (i.e., icy Coke), or neither (i.e., apple, crackers). Excluded participants rated hot coffee and soup as more desirable than did included participants, but there were no differences in how they rated the other foods and drink.

Across two studies, participants who thought about or felt rejection reported feeling colder or desiring more warm food and drink. These results support theories of embodied cognition and suggest that feeling rejection or loneliness may actually lead people to feel colder.