Ostracism, Bullying and Psychological Safety

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Organisations appear to be witnessing a resurgence in ostracism (see Peng & Zeng, 2017; Wu, Liu, Kwan & Lee, 2016; Yang & Treadway, 2018) and bullying (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2017; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012; Thirlwall, 2015; Standen Paull & Omari, 2014). Simply, ostracism can be defined as the extent to which individuals or groups perceive that they are ignored or excluded by other individuals or groups (Ferris et. al., 2008; Williams & Zadro 2001; Williams, 2007). Ostracism may also be seen as an umbrella term that includes rejection (an explicit declaration that an individual or group is not wanted) or social exclusion (being kept apart from others, alone or isolated, Williams, 2007). Studies show that ostracism is linked with sadness and anger (Williams & Zadro, 2005), impairment of logical reasoning (Baumeister, Twenge and Nuss, 2002), deviance, well-being, voice, performance, job satisfaction (Howard, Cogswell & Smith, 2020) and abusive leadership (Ferris et al. 2008).

While it is not a behaviour, ostracism elicits a painful and aversive experience (Ferris, Brown, Berry and Lian, 2008). Additionally, the consequences of ostracism are many and varied including "social pain" (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; MacDonald & Leary, 2005), affective experience of pain (as seen in medical imaging) that can be relived over and again (Chen, Williams, Fitness, & Newton, 2008) and social death if prolonged (Williams & Nida, 2011, Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, & Baumeister, 2001). In this regard, scholars have shown that people suffer psychologically and physically when the four basic needs connected with ostracism (belonging, self-esteem, sense of control and sense of meaningful existence) are threatened (see Williams & Nida, 2011; Williams, 2007). It can also trigger aggressive behaviours both toward those who excluded them and towards others that are not involved (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001).

It is this important organizational concept that Issue 28.2 addresses. In this issue, the authors reflect on differing aspects of ostracism, bullying and psychological safety including employee discretionary efforts, voice, performance, organizational learning, cyberbullying, harassment, and psychological safety climate.

In the first article, "*Workplace Ostracism and Discretionary Work Effort: A Conditional Process Analysis*", Anjum, Liang, Durrani and Ahmed draw on affective events theory (AET) and workplace incivility spiral to explain when and how, workplace ostracism and workplace incivility impact employees' emotions and work effort. They collected online data from 251 employees at three public sector universities in Pakistan to show that both ostracism and incivility hinder work effort, and especially through via targets' negative affect (NA). Also, workplace incivility exacerbated the positive relationship of ostracism and NA such that this relationship was stronger when incivility was high and weaker when incivility was low. Anjum and co-authors conclude that uncivil behaviour spread and spiral into more severe behavioural outcomes in the workplace that may trigger an incivility climate.

Still on ostracism, Jahanzeb and Newell in the next paper, "*Co-Worker Ostracism and Promotive Voice: A Self-Consistency Motivation Analysis*" utilize self-consistency motivational theory to investigate the association between employees' experience of co-worker ostracism and their promotive voice. They also examined the mediating role of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) and the

moderating effect of emotional stability. The analysis of their data revealed that social exclusion by their co-workers hampers employees' expression of constructive views about work-related matters as it dampens their OBSE. Additionally, OBSE mediated the relationship between co-worker ostracism and employees' promotive voice while emotional stability significantly moderated the positive relationship between co-worker ostracism and promotive voice. Overall, the authors reported that emotional stability mitigated the negative indirect effect of perceived co-worker exclusion on promotive voice, through OBSE. The results are discussed in terms of their theoretical and practical implications for researchers and practitioners.

The theme of ostracism is taken a step further when Imran, Iqbal, Fatima, Nawaz asked an important question in their paper "*Why do I contribute to organizational learning when I am ostracized? A moderated mediation analysis*". Using social exchange and emotional regulation perspectives as theoretical anchors, the authors investigated the role of emotional suppression in reducing the detrimental effects of workplace ostracism on organizational learning. The data from a sample of 162 participants from the financial industry showed that workplace ostracism was mediated by employee silence that has a negative effect on organizational learning. However, emotional suppression was found to be a buffer between workplace ostracism, employee silence and organizational learning. The authors conclude that the silent employees, who experience workplace ostracism, but are proficient in suppressing their emotions may still contribute to organizational learning. They further suggested that emotional suppression may be able to reduce the injurious outcomes of workplace ostracism on organisational learning.

Core to ostracism are the concepts of inclusion and exclusion. The next two papers investigate exclusion and inclusion respectively. Specifically, Cruz, Zagenczyk, Scott and Purvis examined the "*Perceptions of Co-Worker Exclusion and Performance Outcomes: Are Different Forms of Support Helpful or Hurtful?*". The authors argue paper that social support for employees experiencing co-worker exclusion may be helpful or hurtful for performance. They further contend that employees' perceptions of co-worker exclusion are negatively associated with task performance and citizenship, but positively associated with interpersonal deviance and that whether social support strengthens or weakens the negative performance outcomes of co-worker exclusion depends on the source of social support co-workers or family and friends. Using data from 135 supervisor–subordinate dyads across various occupational positions, the study reveals that co-worker support is hurtful, whereas family and friends support is helpful. Furthermore, the three-way interaction showed that task performance suffers most when employees who feel highly excluded also perceive higher co-worker support and lower family and friends support. The authors conclude that there is a need for a more nuanced view of social exchange/support and our knowledge about ambivalent relationships.

In the next paper, "*Exploring barriers to social inclusion for disabled people: Perspectives from the performing arts*", Collins, Rentschler, Williams and Azmat explore qualitatively the barriers to social inclusion for disabled people in the arts. The authors collected 34 semi-structured interviews from people with disability and those without disability from four arts organisations in Australia to identify barriers for social inclusion for people with disability with the performing arts sector. The authors reported barriers across four dimensions: access; participation; representation and empowerment that are interdependent and intertwined while supporting the social model of disability. Collins and co-author conclude that their findings have implications beyond social inclusion of disabled people within the arts, demonstrating how the arts can empower disabled people and enable them to access, participate and represent themselves and have a voice.

Ostracism and Bullying

Our next two papers deal with another counterproductive situation at work namely bullying or incivility. Both ostracism and incivility have been studied within the workplace mistreatment literature (Ferris, Chen, & Lim, 2017). Ferris and colleagues (2008) argue that ostracism and

incivility are similar in that they are both focused on low-intensity counter normative behaviour (See Andersson & Pearson 1999, Ferris et al. 2008) and both relate negatively to outcomes (Robinson, O'Reilly & Wang 2013, Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016). Moreso, both are prevalent in the workplace (O'Reilly et al. 2015). In this regard, bullying literature has conceptualised ostracism as a passive form of bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2005) and counterproductive behaviours (Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001; Robinson, et al., 2013). Additionally, both constructs are so similar that Ferris and colleagues (2017) suggest that most operationalizations of incivility include "the silent treatment" (like being ignored in ostracism) as a specific type of incivility Nevertheless, some studies have been able to delineate the differences between ostracism and bullying noting that ostracism is an act of omission rather than commission as with bullying (see Robinson et al., 2013).

While scholars define bullying variously (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012), there is a consensus that bullying is associated with repeated and persistent hostile acts that are harmful to the victim (Einarsen, 1999; Thirlwall, 2011). It involves behaviours ranging from shouting, belittling, rudeness, aggressive eye contact, angry outbursts, aggression to more subtle behaviours such as ostracism and exclusion (see Ayoko, Härtel & Callan, 2003; Keashly, 1998;) and may culminate into social, physical, and psychological harm for the victim (Lee, 2000). Like bullying, incivility (subtype of workplace mistreatment that is characterized by low-intensity social interactions that violate workplace norms of respect), may trigger harm for the victim whether these behaviours are intentional or unintentional (Andersson & Pearson 1999; Ferris et al., 2017). In sum, both ostracism, bullying and incivility have many characteristics in common.

Given increased technological advancement and the rise of internet, bullying moved beyond face-to-face interactions to interactions online namely cyber bullying. The concept of cyber bullying is investigated in our next paper, "*You Live and Breathe it…: Exploring Experiences of Workplace Cyberbullying Among New Zealand Nurses*" In this paper, authors, D'Souza, Catley, Tappin and Forsyth argue that cyberbullying presents a new workplace issue with initial research demonstrating strong links to negative outcomes for individuals and organisations across a range of sectors. Nevertheless, they further argue that the detailed accounts of targets' experiences of cyberbullying remain largely unexamined. To address this crucial research gap, their study examined nurses' experiences of workplace cyberbullying especially providing an in-depth examination of eight cases of workplace cyberbullying. A new typology of cyberbullying based on the source of perpetration was uncovered that contributes to the growing understanding of the issue while extending the knowledge base for the effective management of workplace cyberbullying.

Also, in a related concept to ostracism and bullying, Farr-Wharton, Brunetto, Xerri, Shriberg, Newman and Dienger in their paper, "*Work Harassment in UK and USA Context*" compared data from the UK and USA on work harassment. Their paper examines work harassment, using two theoretical frameworks: Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Similarity-Attraction (SA). The authors employed latent mean and path model comparison analysis using structural equation modelling of data from 189 nurses in the UK and 401 nurses in the USA. The findings indicated a significant path from Leader Member Exchange (LMX) to work harassment, wellbeing, and subsequent turnover intentions. Moreover, LMX fully mediated the path from LMX to wellbeing for UK nurses, but only partially mediating the same path for nurses in the USA. The authors conclude that SET provides a better explanation for work harassment for UK nurses, whereas SA theory better explains the US nurse experience.

Psychological safety

We now turn our attention to psychological safety, defined as shared belief that the individual or team is safe for interpersonal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999). At the centre of psychological safety is the need to create a workplace in which perceptions of interpersonal risk are largely reduced to induce employees' willingness to contribute ideas and actions to a shared group

and or organisation (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). In the light of the definition above, psychological safety appears to be critical to the reduction of ostracism, bullying, harassment and conflict in groups and organisations.

With this backdrop, we present our next two articles on psychological safety. In the first one, "*Psychosocial safety climate, safety compliance and safety participation: The mediating role of psychological distress*" Mirza, Isha, Memon, Azeem and Zahid propose that psychosocial safety climate (PSC) has a positive effect on employees' safety behavior by reducing their psychological distress. To test their proposal, they collected data from 190 production workers in the oil and gas industry in Malaysia. They found that PSC was negatively linked with psychological distress. Also, psychological distress predicted safety compliance and participation and mediated the relationship between PSC and safety compliance/participation. Results also indicated that to improve safety compliance and participation, management in safety-sensitive industries should pay attention to psychosocial factors in the work environment.

The second paper on psychological safety, "*How discretionary behaviors promote customer engagement: The role of psychosocial safety climate and psychological capital*" by Siami, Martin, Gorji and Grimmer examines the effect of psychosocial safety climate (PSC) and psychological capital (PsyCap) on customer engagement through discretionary service behaviors (adaptive and proactive; ASB and PSB respectively). Using hierarchical linear modelling (HLM7), data from 56 managers, 513 service employees, and 560 customers in 56 branches of insurance companies demonstrated that PsyCap and PSC were both positively associated with ASB and PSB at the individual level. The results also showed that an interaction between PsyCap and PSC was related to ASB but not PSB. At the branch level, ASB was not associated with customer engagement behavior, but PSB was. Furthermore, PSB mediated the relationship between PSC and customer engagement behavior, although ASB did not. From the results from the psychological safety climate articles above, it can be inferred that psychological safety may be able to buffer the link between ostracism (and bullying) and negative outcomes on the individuals, teams, and organisations.

In the last paper in this issue, "*Work environment and work-to-family conflict: Examining the mediating role of heavy work investment*", Babic, Stinglhamber, Barbier and Hansez examine the relationships between work environment (i.e., workload and development opportunities), heavy work investment (i.e., work engagement and workaholism) and work-to-family conflict (WFC) over time. They collected a three-wave longitudinal study among 464 employees from Belgium. Workload and opportunities for development at Time 1 were found to be respectively negatively and positively associated with work engagement at Time 2, which in turn was negatively associated with WFC at Time 3. Only workload at Time 1 was positively associated with workaholism at Time 2 which, in turn, was positively associated with WFC at Time 3. In the interests of both organizational effectiveness and employees' well-being, Babic and co-authors suggest that it is important to identify the work-related variables that influence perceptions of WFC and understand the mechanisms by which the work environment influences WFC.

Conclusion

The articles presented in this issue investigate ostracism, bullying and psychological safety. While these articles are not exhaustive, they help to increase our understanding about ostracism and bullying in the workplace. More studies are needed to explore the nexus between ostracism and the physical environment of work especially the role of office configurations on ostracism and bullying. Also, contemporary organizations are experience a high volume of hybrid work, it would be useful to know the connection between hybrid work, ostracism, and bullying. Studies exploring the impact of workspace configurations and hybrid work on these constructs are welcome in JMO.

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