

CHAPTER 7

SOCIAL OSTRACISM

KIPLING D. WILLIAMS

*You hesitate to stab me with a word, and know not silence is
the sharper sword.*

—Anonymous

INTRODUCTION

If we asked people to generate a list of aversive interpersonal behaviors, we might expect them to include various examples of verbal and physical abuse. After all, insults and punches are observable, measurable behaviors that we find aversive. This chapter, however, focuses on what many may overlook when constructing such a list, perhaps because it is not considered to be a behavior at all, but rather a “nonbehavior.” I refer to the pervasive and universal phenomenon of *ostracism*—the general process of exclusion and rejection. As we shall see, ostracism is not only an aversive interpersonal behavior, but also a response to aversive interpersonal behaviors. I review briefly experimental, observational, and case studies from anthropology, sociology, animal behavior, and psychology that pertain to ostracism. I then present a taxonomy and model of ostracism that I hope to be inclusive enough to cover its various forms, as well as specific

KIPLING D. WILLIAMS • School of Psychology, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052 Australia. kip.williams@unsw.edu.au; <http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/~kipw>

enough to generate testable hypotheses. The general framework of the model is depicted in Figure 1. Next, I present a new experimental ostracism paradigm that we have employed in our laboratory to test a few hypotheses derived from this model. I also summarize ongoing qualitative interviews with long-term users and victims of the "silent treatment," a form of ostracism commonly used in close dyadic relationships. Finally, directions for future research are discussed.

One way to evaluate the merits of studying any particular social phenomenon is to gauge its frequency and its impact in real life. How often does it happen? How long has it been happening? How many individuals and groups does it affect? What kind of effects does it have? In short, does it happen often enough and are its effects strong enough to warrant scientific scrutiny? I believe that on these two criteria, ostracism is arguably one of the most important social phenomena we could choose to study.

UBIQUITY OF OSTRACISM

We have many names for ostracism: we call it being ignored, avoided, excluded, rejected, shunned, exiled, banished, cut off, frozen out, given the "cold shoulder" or "silent treatment," feeling invisible, or, for the British, being "sent off to Coventry." Regardless of what we call ostracism, its use on individuals and groups by individuals and groups can be documented from the time of early Greek civilization (Zippelius, 1986) to present-day societies. It is practiced by governments, cultures, religions, military institutions, tribes, small groups, and even individuals, as a response to individuals or groups who deviate, either in the way they look or act, from acceptable expectations. It occurs in organizations, in the workplace, and in the home. Sometimes, the decision to ostracize is formal and explicit. The South African government, for instance, exiled outspoken anti-Apartheid newspaper editor Donald Woods within his own country, preventing him from speaking to those within and without his country. Other times, ostracism occurs spontaneously without laws, explicit rules, or public proclamation. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. was the first black cadet at West Point in the 20th century. For four years, his fellow cadets "silenced" him, never talking to him except in the line of duty. Davis believed (no doubt, accurately) that he was silenced because he was black (Davis, 1991). According to Gruter and Masters (1986b), ostracism has been "observed in virtually all known human societies" (p. 150). We recently conducted a survey of a representative sample of over 2,000 men and women in the United States. When asked about their experiences with the "silent treatment," over 75% admitted that it had been used on them by a loved one; and almost 70% say that they used it themselves on a loved one (Williams,

Sherman-Williams, & Faulkner, 1996). Indeed, humans are not alone in their widespread use of ostracism: many species of animals have been found to employ ostracism on conspecifics as well (Goodall, 1986; Kling, 1986; Lancaster, 1986; McGuire & Raleigh, 1986). Yet, despite its universality, psychologists have devoted little attention to understanding why we use it or examining its consequences.

STRONG IMPACT

It is clear that social and biological scientists agree that ostracism has an enormous impact on its victims. The effects on the perpetrators of ostracism are less clear. Although experimental social psychologists have given little attention to ostracism *per se*, they implicitly recognize the behavioral and emotional consequences of anticipated social exclusion. In order to avoid exclusion from others, we conform, obey, comply, inhibit our socially undesirable or idiosyncratic behaviors, change our attitudes, work harder, and generally try to present ourselves in a favorable manner (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Biologists and physiologists claim ostracism causes general "physiological deregulation": it interferes with our immunological functioning and hypothalamic reactions that are related to aggression and depression. Case studies report stomach ulcers (Gruter, 1986), fear of public gatherings, and loss of tribal leadership (Boehm, 1986) as a result of ostracism. Psychotic behaviors are more likely to occur in prisoners who are subjected to solitary confinement (as reported in McGuire & Raleigh, 1986). On the positive side, ostracism is believed to be an effective means to control counternormative behaviors, punish deviance, and increase in-group cohesion (Alexander, 1986; Barner-Barry, 1986; Basso, 1972; Boehm, 1986; Mahdi, 1986). One of the most widely recommended and successful forms of disciplining children by teachers and parents is to remove a child from social attention by issuing a "time-out" (Brooks, Perry, & Hingerty, 1992), and some therapists are now advocating using time-outs within families to ward off family violence (Veenstra & Scott, 1993).

REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

There are numerous articles written in a variety of disciplines about ostracism. In fact, a special issue of *Ethology and Sociobiology*, edited by Gruter and Masters (1986a), was devoted exclusively to social and biological analyses of ostracism. In that volume, ethologists, physiologists, medical researchers, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, legal experts, and zoologists (apparently, no psychologists) presented an im-

pressive array of treatises documenting the existence, importance, and complexities of ostracism. Although the working definition of ostracism in that special issue was exclusion and rejection from others, definitions from one article to another ranged from derisive comments to the termination of life (Boehm, 1986)! Clearly, rejection is an important component (but not the only component) of ostracism. But, at least for my purposes, all forms of rejection are not examples of ostracism. For instance, rejection includes other psychologically distinct concepts, such as verbal and physical abuse, and these forms of aversive behavior can be studied in their own right. Likewise, whereas execution may be viewed as both an extreme form of rejection and exclusion, attempting to assess the psychological impact of ostracism on a dead person presents difficulties.

One clear message of the Gruter and Masters' special issue is that the term "ostracism" has many definitions, some of which I will not include in this chapter. I will restrict my review of the literature primarily to instances in which individuals or groups are socially or physically excluded (but are not physically assaulted or killed) from interacting with others. Interestingly, except for a few animal studies examining social isolation from mothers or peers, no examples of ostracism experiments were included in the special issue. Outside this volume, there are only a handful of social psychological experiments that have been published in which ostracism is experimentally manipulated. I will review briefly the research from the special issue and the scattering of articles found elsewhere.

IN ETHOLOGY AND BIOLOGY

The ethological orientation to ostracism is that it serves an adaptive function: to weed out undesirables from the group, resulting in increased reproductive competitiveness in the remaining members (see also, Goodall, 1986; Lancaster, 1986; de Waal, 1986), as well as to promote cohesion among the remaining members of the group. Kling (1986) suggests that tendencies toward social isolation in three nonhuman primates lead to their being ostracized. This is an interesting notion because it places the blame on the victim. He further suggests that these tendencies could be related to specific structures of the brain. McGuire and Raleigh (1986; Raleigh & McGuire, 1986) propose that, eventually, physiological research will assist in identifying persons who may be genetically predisposed to engage in ostracism and those persons who are physiologically vulnerable to being ostracized. McGuire and Raleigh's research on monkeys shows that short-term isolation from mothers or peers causes changes in the limbic system, increasing the whole blood serotonin levels which are associated with aggression and suicide.

It is worth noting that these animal studies tend to group together, both conceptually and behaviorally, animals who are ostracized and animals who are violent or aggressive. As such, the assumption is that those who are ostracized deserve to be ostracized. Once ostracized, further deterioration in physiology and behavior occur, including altered immune functioning, and decrements in problem-solving capabilities.

IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

Several accounts of ostracism in humans show striking resemblances to the observations and assumptions behind its use in nonhuman primates. Mahdi (1986) analyzed the ostracism of members of the Pathan Hill tribes in Afghanistan. Ostracism is the form of punishment that is observed by these tribespeople, but is liberally defined as ranging from insult to exile to execution. As with the primates, the purpose of ostracism was to deter deviant behavior that threatened the group, to punish the offending member, and to unify the remaining members. Even Alexander's (1986) analysis of humor as ostracism suggests that humor serves to exclude outgroup members (the target of the jokes) and promote ingroup cohesiveness. In some cases, this literally occurs, as with certain Greenland Eskimos who resolve their quarrels through joke telling contests, with the one getting the least laughs going into exile.

Gruter (1986) discussed the practice of Meidung among the Amish. Meidung is a commandment from the church established in 1632 in Article 17 of the Dordrecht Confession of Faith, which establishes shunning as the means of disciplining group members. In one example of Meidung, an Amish man (Yoder) violated church doctrine by purchasing a car so that he could transport his polio-stricken one-year-old daughter to frequent doctor's appointments. The community's Amish Bishop and two preachers punished Yoder by invoking a declaration of Meidung. Neighbors, close friends, and even family members could not speak to him or eat with him, for fear of being shunned themselves. Meidung continues until the offending member agrees to comply with the elders' wishes (or, in this specific and apparently unusual case, until a court-order demanded payment to the plaintiff and a cessation of the Meidung. Payment was made, but informal Meidung continued).

Barner-Barry (1986) analyzed an instance of an informal, spontaneous emergence of ostracism. In the process of conducting a participant-observation study of 33 children on a playground, she noted a specific boy who was bullying other children around. The bullied children avoided playing with him, probably to protect themselves, and other children modeled this avoidance. Soon, he was ostracized by all the children and

was verbally rejected when he tried to join others in play. Within a few days his bullying behaviors diminished.

IN PSYCHOLOGY

There are many areas of research in psychology that study phenomena that are related to ostracism, although few actually focus on the causes, consequences, or psychological experience of ostracism itself. Developmental psychologists have documented the use of shunning and exclusion behaviors in children, used among other techniques as a form of peer-rejection (Asher & Coie, 1990; Asher & Parker, 1989; Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey, & Brown, 1986). Cairns and her colleagues found that over one-third of the same-gender conflicts among seventh grade girls involved the manipulation of group acceptance through ostracism, alienation, or character defamation (Cairns & Cairns, 1991). In a longitudinal study of fourth graders (through to the tenth grade), they found an increase in social aggression and ostracism in female-female conflicts (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, & Ferguson, 1989). These themes were rarely reported in boys, who were more likely to use physical styles of aggression.

Likewise, the efficacy of using time-outs in the schools and in special education programs has received considerable attention. Despite the fact that there is no thorough narrative or meta-analytic review of the time-out literature, individual studies (case studies, quasi-experiments, and a few experiments) have examined a large variety of time-out techniques (cf. Heron, 1987). Although time-outs vary from physical exclusion to social exclusion, and with respect to the feedback and personal control given to the child, these variations are not considered from a theoretical perspective. Clearly, it is assumed that being given a time-out is a punishment, either by administering an aversive stimulus (e.g., inattention) or taking away a rewarding stimulus (e.g., attention). Researchers in this area appear to restrict their interest in time-out only to a practical concern for the technique's short-term effectiveness in controlling undesired behaviors.

With adults, Miceli and Near (1992) have presented an excellent and programmatic analysis of the phenomenon of "whistleblowing," in which employees disclosed illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices that took place within their organizations. Although Miceli and Near report that whistleblowers frequently mention being shunned by their coworkers and supervisors as a consequence of whistleblowing, the researchers do not refer to this form of coworker punishment as retaliation. Rather, retaliation is operationally defined in terms of denied promotions, involuntary transfers, demotions, and other (more easy to document) forms of punishment.

Research in the use of power tactics to achieve compliance has produced a theoretically useful taxonomy of tactics, their likelihood and frequency of being used by specific groups (i.e., males versus females, low power versus high power individuals, etc.), and their use and effectiveness in organizations and interpersonal relationships (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980). In this taxonomy, they mention the silent treatment and categorize it as "disengagement" or "withdrawal." Falbo (1977) refers to explicit announcements of withdrawing verbal interaction if compliance is not forthcoming as "threats." The silent treatment is operationally defined as withdrawing from the setting or breaking off the interaction (for a review, see Forsyth, 1990). Using the terminology of power researchers, ostracism would be regarded as "indirect" (Falbo & Peplau, 1980—or "weak," Kipnis, 1984) or "direct" if it was a threat (Falbo, 1977), "nonrational," and "unilateral" (Falbo & Peplau, 1980). Falbo and Peplau (1980) found that nonrational, unilateral power tactics are more commonly used by the individual who has less power in the relationship, and this was found in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. For their heterosexual sample, withdrawal was much more likely to be used by females. Relatively little attention has been given in this literature, however, to the effectiveness or consequences of ostracism, including possible negative side-effects for the individuals involved.

Relevant research in interpersonal attraction and close relationships research can be found as well. Insko and Wilson (1977) instructed triads to engage in a round-robin sequence of consecutive dyadic conversations. During each dyadic conversation, the remaining member was excluded from social interaction, but was still physically present. Because of an ostensible time constraint, the sequence was truncated after two rounds, resulting in one member having interacted once with each of the other two, whereas the other two had not interacted with each other. Because the exclusion was clearly not punitive, nor even under the control of the participants, it might be regarded as minimal and unlikely to have much impact. Nevertheless, compared with ratings of the members with whom they interacted, participants rated the group member who did not interact with them (and vice versa) as less likable and less interpersonally attractive on a variety of dimensions. Participants also surmised that that individual would not like them, either.

Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, and Lipkus (1991) employ a response typology in their model of accommodation (inhibiting destructive reactions and engaging constructive reactions to bad behavior by one's partner). This typology, similar to Hirschman's (1970) typology for responses to declining organizations and governments, refers to two orthogonal dimensions (destructive-constructive and active-passive) producing a matrix with four resulting classes of responses: "exit"—sepa-

rating, moving out of the relationship (but also actively destroying the relationship with verbal or physical abuse), "voice"—actively and constructively attempting to improve conditions, "loyalty"—passively staying in the relationship and hoping for improvement, and "neglect"—ignoring the partner or spending less time together (but also including destructive criticisms and treatment). According to this typology, ostracism could be classified primarily as "neglect" (but not incorporating the destructive criticisms and treatment beyond being ignored). It could only apply to "exit" with respect to physical separation, but would not include verbal and physical abuse. Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow (1986) found that the primary marker for good functioning couples was avoiding destructive acts (exit or neglect) rather than maximizing constructive responses. This research did not extract the solely exclusionary forms of ostracism for the analyses, so questions regarding its frequency of use in functioning versus nonfunctioning couples, or its impact on the couple, were not addressed.

Buss, Gomes, Higgins, and Lauterbach (1987) asked couples to answer the question, "When you want to get your partner to do something (or to stop doing something), what do you do?" Factor analysis revealed six factors, one of which was the silent treatment. The silent treatment was found to be fifth in frequency of use, not more likely to be used by males or females, more often used to terminate behaviors than to elicit them, and positively correlated with measures of neuroticism.

Two areas where one might expect to see recognition of and attention to the use of the silent treatment are clinical and counseling psychology. Given our survey results (Williams et al., 1996) indicating nearly three-quarters of the people using the silent treatment on their loved ones (and having it used on them), it would be expected that the use of the silent treatment in families and marriage would have been documented, examined, and discussed, perhaps even warranting its own special therapy, yet little or no mention has been given to the silent treatment in these fields. Self-help books offer much advice to couples as to what to say and what not to say when they are arguing, but, surprisingly, nothing is said about saying nothing. One exception to the silent treatment being overlooked is in the research on communication interaction patterns in marriages (particularly "at-risk" marriages) by John Gottman and his colleagues (Gottman, 1979, 1980; Gottman & Krokoff, 1992). Gottman categorizes silence as withdrawal, notes its importance in triggering violence, and sees it as symptomatic in deteriorating relationships. It is interesting that withdrawal included both physical and social withdrawal, and distinctions between the two are not considered.

The few studies in social psychology that have explicitly examined ostracism, shunning, or being ignored indicate a general conclusion that

being excluded or ignored results in negative psychological consequences. Geller, Goodstein, Silver, and Sternberg (1974) found that females ignored by two female confederates during a conversation reported feeling more alone, withdrawn, shy, dull, frustrated, anxious, nervous, and bored compared to included participants. They found also that ignored females were less likely than included females to reward the confederates later. Craighead, Kimball, and Rehak (1979) found that participants who imagined the act of being ignored (also in conversations) generated significantly fewer positive self-referent statements than participants who imagined successful attempts at social interaction. Specifically, ostracized individuals imagined that they would experience more sadness, frustration, anger, disengagement, passivity, puzzlement, rejection, loneliness, and feelings of unworthiness than included individuals.

Some evidence suggests that excluded individuals, particularly those low in self-esteem (Dittes, 1959) or high in public self-consciousness (Fenigstein, 1979), are less likely to want to work with the rejecting group in the future (Pepitone & Wilpizeski, 1960). Other evidence suggests that the desire for group membership does not decrease when the rejecting group is viewed as highly attractive (Jackson & Saltzstein, 1957). Snoek (1962) had groups reject individuals by not talking to them, either because ostensibly they were not worthy of group membership (personal) or because the group was too large (impersonal). He found that, when people were rejected for impersonal reasons, their desire to affiliate with the group decreased. But when they were rejected for personal reasons, people maintained their desire to belong. Snoek concluded that personally rejected individuals possessed a "need for social reassurance" that could be fulfilled only by remaining in the group. These results suggest that the causal attributions for the ostracism play an important role in determining the impact it has on the individual. Snoek provided participants with an attribution; in other situations, however, ostracized individuals may have to generate their own attributions, and these may mediate the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral impact of ostracism.

In summary, research from a number of disciplines has documented the frequent and ubiquitous use of social ostracism. A systematic, theory-based program of research into the causes and consequences of ostracism is clearly needed. Because definitions of ostracism are far ranging, even within the general domain of exclusion from interaction, it is worth noting important dimensions on which they vary, especially when it is plausible that these different forms or types of ostracism may be used for different purposes, interpreted differently by victims, and, consequently, have different effects. What follows is a taxonomic structure of dimensions along which forms of ostracism vary.

A TAXONOMIC STRUCTURE OF OSTRACISM

Ostracism is a broadly used term referring generally to the exclusion of an individual or group from other individuals or groups. There are, however, several types of ostracism. Boehm's (1986) analysis of ostracism in tribal Montenegro led him to articulate 20 levels of ostracism. They ranged from "slight coolness in tone of voice, denial of eye contact, obvious reticence to speak to someone" through to "physical avoidance, exclusion from social or ritual activities, denial of all social intercourse, temporary and permanent expulsion from groups, and finally, execution" (p. 308). Other levels included gossiping behind one's back, laying on curses, making witchcraft accusations, and using sorcery. In the taxonomic structure presented here, as shown in Figure 1, I suggest four dimensions of ostracism that describe many of its complex variations. These dimensions are intended to assist the understanding of these variations, although they are not necessarily exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. The development of this taxonomic structure represents work in progress, and, as such, reflects variations that I believe ought to be psychologically consequential. With more research, some distinctions may be unnecessary, and will, in future versions, be removed; likewise, it is also possible that future research will indicate that additional or finer distinctions be made.

All of these dimensions allude to, directly or indirectly, a particular feature of ostracism: it is inherently ambiguous. I believe it is chosen by so many people as the initial (or even habitual) response to hurt feelings, anger, or fear precisely because it is ambiguous — it is not clear to the victim *if* it is occurring or *why* it is occurring. There is always the possibility that ostracism is not occurring, but resides only in the mind of the victim. Realizing this possibility undoubtedly causes them to pause, speculate, doubt, worry, and anguish. In other types of punishments (verbal and physical abuse), the aversive behaviors are clearly occurring, and, even though aversive, are unlikely to produce the additional anxiety associated with ostracism's ambiguity.

VISIBILITY OF THE VICTIM/USER

Some forms of ostracism involve exclusion of the victim to the extent of being removed from the sight of others, whereas other forms involve exclusion while still being visible. The two essentially dichotomous levels of this dimension are *physical* versus *social* ostracism. Physical ostracism describes the invisibility inherent in physical separation, which includes expulsion, banishment, exile, solitary confinement, "time-out" in a separate room, or, at an interpersonal level, spending less time with an individ-

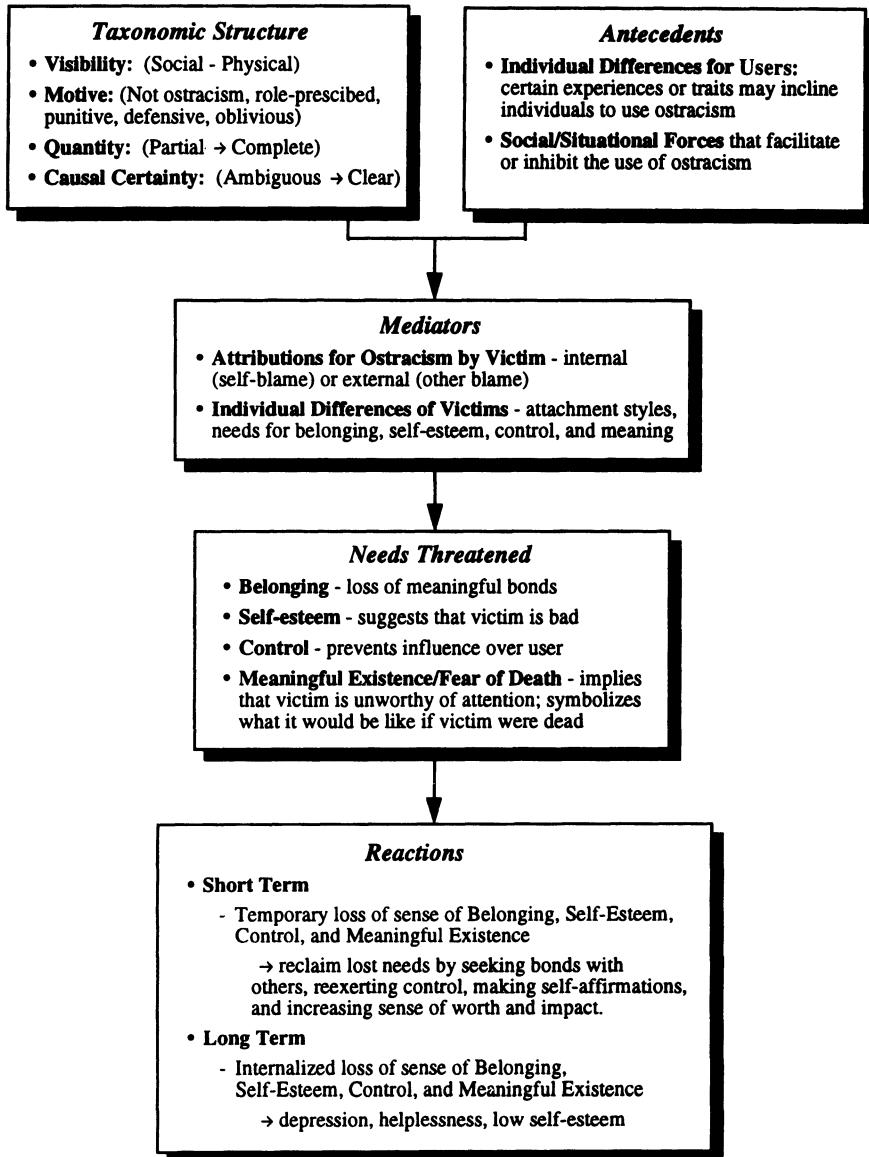


FIGURE 1. Model of ostracism.

ual or leaving his or her presence. Relatively speaking, physical ostracism is less ambiguous, although even physical ostracism can occur without notice or warning. Imagine, for example, people who, because of anger or hurt feelings, choose not to visit or spend time with their friends without giving notice. Conversely, social ostracism describes instances in which ostracized individuals remain visible to others; they are being ignored while still in the physical presence of the others. Phrases such as "silent treatment," "cold shoulder," and "freezing out" refer to social ostracism. Ironically, even though victims are visible during social ostracism, it is with this type of ostracism that people may actually *feel* invisible; victims of physical ostracism who are, in fact, not seen probably do not feel invisible.

From the user's perspective, choosing to physically ostracize someone might reflect several factors. In his analysis of exit, voice, and loyalty, Hirschman (1970) proposed that exit (akin to physical ostracism) is more likely to occur if loyalty (i.e., commitment to the relationship) is absent, or voice (active discussion and working out of problems to arrive at solutions) is perceived to be ineffective. However, it might also be employed as a short-term response to "cool down" before engaging in discussion in order to prevent escalating conflict. From both the user's and the victim's perspective, physical ostracism signals disapproval and an unwillingness to engage in bilateral conflict resolution. But, it might also permit thoughtful reflection of behaviors that caused the ostracism in the first place. This type of introspection might be more difficult to engage in while being socially ostracized. During social ostracism, one is continuously reminded about being ignored. As Boehm (1986) states, "To inflict such exclusionary treatment on a living person who has nowhere else to go is an ultimate punishment — in some ways worse than solitary confinement or death, since the person is reminded continually of the active and total rejection that is taking place" (pp. 313–314). Instead of allowing the individual to reflect upon whatever instigated the conflict, social ostracism might result in increasing anger or hurt, persistent attempts to recapture the attention of the ostracizer (e.g., apology, or escalating verbal or physical abuse), or retaliating by also using ostracism.

THE PERCEIVED/INTENDED MOTIVE FOR THE OSTRACISM

A second distinction involves the intended or perceived motives behind the ostracism. Based upon the review of the literature and response protocols of participants in my laboratory work, five categories of motives are considered: the behavior is *not ostracism*, *role prescribed*, *punitive*, *defensive*, or *oblivious*. The first two types are instances that help create the overall ambiguity of ostracism. In many instances, what may be perceived as ostracism may *not be ostracism*. While we anguish over why our friend

or spouse or coworker did not look at us or speak to us this morning, we also consider the possibility that it was not intentional, that their minds were on other issues, and that we are blowing things out of perspective. *Role prescribed* ostracism is another excusing condition, one in which intentions to hurt or express superiority are not intended or perceived. Such would be the case in instances for which temporary roles dictate that a person playing one role does not acknowledge or speak to someone playing the other role, such as the inattention we give wait staff at restaurants. (It is possible that this sort of inattention is not perceived to be appropriate and is, instead, a manifestation of power. Once again we see the possibility of ambiguity. If this is the perception, then it would be regarded by the target as indicative of the user's self-perception of superiority, even though this might not be intended by the user. I will refer to this as oblivious ostracism and will discuss it shortly.)

Punitive ostracism refers to acts of ignoring that are perceived to be or are intended to be deliberate and aversive. Exile, banishment, shunning, and the silent treatment are examples of this. Ironically, as the "object of inattention," the target of punitive social ostracism may become highly self-aware, a psychological state often experienced by people who are the object of attention. This form of ostracism is the most widely discussed and is the assumed purpose in many accounts that I have reviewed already. The assumed purpose of punitive ostracism is either temporarily or permanently to exclude an offending individual. If temporary, the punishment is intended to modify the behavior of the offending party to be once again appropriate. It is also a means to resolidify the remaining members of the group, apparently by reminding them of what behaviors define the group and by giving them an outgroup member with whom to compare themselves.

Defensive ostracism is preemptive in nature, and may be used in anticipation of negative, threatening feedback from another, or even to expected ostracism by others; it is meant more as ego-protection or as a means to suspend vanishing control over the situation, rather than as an offensive weapon. Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that when people do not believe that they will be regarded in ways that will lead to acceptance, they might avoid absolute rejection by disaffiliating. By doing this, they "reduce the risk of saying or doing something that others might regard negatively...giving others few reasons to reject..." (p. 520). In Basso's (1972) examination of a Western Apache tribe, he noted several prescribed occasions in which community and family members ostracized individuals. These included not talking to recently widowed women or to adolescents who recently returned from "white man's world." The interesting pattern was that, in all such occasions, it was anticipated by those who employed the silent treatment that they would be derogated by the tar-

geted individual. Widows were feared to be possessed and returning adolescents were feared to hold condemning attitudes of their tribe and family. So, to preempt the derogation, they chose to ostracize first and wait for the victim to come to them and speak (in a civil manner).

Oblivious ostracism refers to those occasions when the ostracizer has no intention to be punitive, in fact, the target of oblivious ostracism is not worth being punished. Punishment implies that the user cares enough about the victims to invest the time and energy to punish them. But oblivious ostracism occurs when the users' attitudes or beliefs are, or are perceived to be, that the victim is unworthy of their attention. It is simply not worth the time or energy of the user to recognize the existence of the target, or so it may be interpreted by the victim. Examples of oblivious ostracism include how people regard individuals who occupy lower social classes (such as seen between different members of caste systems, races, or religions). In Ralph Ellison's (1952) *Invisible Man*, the unnamed protagonist claims, "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (p. 3). Rather than being the object of inattention, the obliviously ostracized person feels invisible or unworthy of attention. Ellison's invisible man goes on to say, "...you often doubt if you really exist" (p. 3).

THE QUANTITY OF OSTRACISM PERCEIVED OR INTENDED

A third distinction refers to the quantity of ostracism, a continuum running from *partial* to *complete* ostracism. Partial ostracism could be short, barely sufficient replies to queries, or could include a minimum concession to social norms (e.g., saying "excuse me" when passing by, or "pass the salt" at the dinner table). Similarly, in Boehm's (1986) hierarchy of ostracism, the lowest degrees of ostracism include coolness in tone of voice and denial of eye contact. Complete ostracism would be the total absence of verbal address, eye contact, and attention to verbalizations of the victim. (It could be argued that the most complete form of ostracism would be physical ostracism, because then there would be the additional absence of any form of social stimulation. However, I prefer not to confound the two dimensions, because I anticipate qualitatively different reactions to complete social ostracism compared with complete physical ostracism.) From the user's perspective, the choice to employ partial ostracism may reflect the desire to avoid escalation of conflict or retaliation, or it may be an opportunistic exploitation of ostracism's ambiguity. One can maintain deniability ("I wasn't ignoring you, I said 'excuse me!' "), thereby not being held accountable for its use. Choosing complete ostracism would probably reflect intense anger, lack of concern for immediate consequences, and no desire to disguise these feelings. From the victim's perspective, partial ostracism creates greater attributional ambiguity as to

whether he or she is really being ostracized, and makes it difficult to render clear interpretations and appropriate reactions. Whereas complete ostracism may be perceived by the victim as more extreme, it is also easier to detect, evaluate as punishment, and retaliate.

THE DEGREE OF CAUSAL CERTAINTY

Finally, another dimension pertains to the perceived reasons for ostracism. These can vary from causally ambiguous to causally certain. Ostracism that is high in *causal ambiguity* occurs when the target is completely baffled as to why it is happening to him or her. In Franz Kafka's sketch entitled, *Gemeinschaft*, he writes of five men excluding a sixth for no reason (inapparent even to themselves) other than he is not one of the five (reprinted in Rehbinder, 1986). Although purposely absurd, there are similar occasions when we find ourselves ostracized by friends, coworkers, or family, but we do not know why.

Ostracism that is high in *causal certainty* occurs when an explicit declaration is made that ostracism will occur for a specific reason. For the Amish, everyone is aware that the punishment for disobeying the elders is Meidung (shunning), so, for them, ostracism has high causal certainty. The dimension of causal certainty is important because it can influence the impact of the ostracism and the means with which we cope with it. Undoubtedly, the sixth man must have devoted considerable thought as to why the others were excluding him, just as we all would when confronted with unexplained silent treatment. I propose that ostracism that is highly ambiguous, although not explicitly punitive, may actually threaten someone's self-concept more, because its victims may be highly motivated to manufacture myriad self-deprecating internal attributions to account for the ostracism (e.g., "It's because I was late for dinner," "The last time I saw him I must have insulted him," "They don't like me because I'm different from them"). It may even trigger doubts of one's existence (e.g., "Am I here?") if one attributes the cause to oblivious, rather than punitive, reasons.

A NEED-THREAT MODEL OF OSTRACISM

I propose that social ostracism can prevent individuals from fulfilling four fundamental needs (Williams, 1993), as shown in Figure 1. I will refer to these as needs, rather than desires or wants, because there is substantial evidence that when any of them are lacking, people "exhibit pathological consequences beyond mere temporary distress" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 498). These needs are not exclusively threatened by ostracism; in

fact, they represent a synthesis of fundamental motivational needs assumed to underlie most human social behavior (see, for example, Smith & Mackie, 1995). I believe, however, that these needs are peculiarly and immediately triggered by even short-term exposure to ostracism. I am also not arguing that these needs are necessarily mutually exclusive; indeed, the authors who champion each need often indicate that the other needs are subordinate to, and serve in the maintenance of, their particular need (cf. Greenberg et al., 1992). I will leave to others the task of debating which of these needs envelopes the others. It is sufficient for my purposes merely to recognize the importance of these needs, particularly as they relate to ostracism.

First, ostracism deprives people of a sense of *belongingness* to others (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Baumeister & Tice, 1990), a need that is argued to be not only emotionally desirable, but evolutionarily adaptive (Buss, 1990). Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that the need to belong, defined as the desire for frequent, positive, and stable interactions with others, is a fundamental human motivation that guides cognitive processing and leads to positive affect. Studies show that the absence of affiliation and intimacy with others produces a host of negative psychological consequences, including depression, anxiety, stress, and physical and mental illness. Theories of social identity (Brewer, 1991, 1993; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and group level social comparison (Goethals & Darley, 1987) also postulate that feelings of belongingness strengthened by ingroup distinctiveness are central to the maintenance of self-esteem and a positive self-concept. Being ostracized may be one of the clearest methods of attacking a sense of belonging. People can be criticized or chastised for any number of behaviors, and can feel bad about themselves with respect to those behaviors, but may still feel attached to the individual or group who is punishing them. The humanistic approach to reproof tries to indicate to the individual, "I love (or like) you, but I don't like your behavior." This message implies continued belonging and connectedness despite disapproval. Yet, when the silent treatment or some other form of ostracism is meted out, then the explicit or symbolic message is that the offending person risks losing the attachment to the other individual or group. Whereas Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that all forms of disapproval may trigger fears of rejection, ostracism would seem to be the clearest and most direct method of evoking such a fear.

Second, people are ostracized often because someone dislikes who they are or what they have done. For either reason, it poses a threat to its victims' *self-esteem*, the belief that they are good and worthy people. Many theorists argue that the need for maintaining high self-esteem is pervasive and adaptive (e.g., Greenwald, 1980; Steele, 1988; Tesser, 1988) and is central to many theories as a primary determinant of self-efficacy and

mental health (e.g., Bandura, 1995; Barnett & Gotlib, 1988; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). As has been discussed, ostracism is most commonly regarded as a response to deviant or inappropriate behavior, or, in some instances, to one or more physical characteristics of the individual that sets him or her apart from the rest (i.e., physical handicap, different color, carrier of a disease, etc.). As such, it carries with it the message that something about the individual is bad or unwanted. This message directly threatens an individual's sense of being good and worthy to others and can lead to an internalized belief in one's undesirable nature and shortcomings. In the short run, research has found that individuals are rather resilient to attacks on their self-esteem, and they either use defense mechanisms, or redeem themselves in the specific domain of attack, or even affirm their goodness in other domains (Steele, 1988). In the long run, however, continued diminution of their self-esteem can lead to negative expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies resulting in a downward spiral toward lower self-esteem and undesirable behaviors.

Third, ostracism also robs individuals of a sense of *control* over their understanding of their social environment and interactions with others (Bruneau, 1973; see also Skinner, 1996), and over desired outcomes (i.e., low self-efficacy), all of which control theorists argue are necessary to one's psychological well-being and self-efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1995; Seligman, 1975; Taylor & Brown, 1988; Taylor et al., 1992). Unlike most other forms of aversive behavior, ostracism involves a unilateral stance by one person (or group) over another. There is no give and take. In a verbal argument, regardless of the intensity and insulting nature of the verbal barbs, it is still the case that each person is responsive to the other. I call you a name and you call me one back. Despite its negativity, it continues to provide a sense of control. What one person says affects (has control over) what the other person says. The same thing can be said for physical aggression. Although unpleasant and potentially dangerous, there is still the opportunity for a responsive exchange. A person who is physically threatened can escape, or cover himself or herself, in an attempt to avoid future attack, or can attack back, all involving control. But someone who is ostracized is deprived of the bilateral nature of conflict. No matter what is said or done, the other person appears unaffected, as though the victim of ostracism did not exist. The story of the tar baby in the Uncle Remus (Harris, 1948) classic comes to mind. To catch Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox dresses up a baby made of tar along a path that Brer Rabbit travels. Being the gregarious fellow that Brer Rabbit is, he attempts to engage the tar baby in a conversation. For reasons obvious to the reader (but not to Brer Rabbit), the tar baby does not respond. The outcome of this frustrating nonexchange is that Brer Rabbit resorts to physical aggression to try to achieve some response from the tar baby. Kicking and punching the tar baby, Brer Rabbit becomes stuck,

allowing Brer Fox to capture him. I have two reasons for bringing up this story: one is to illustrate the frustration that the silent treatment causes...a frustration resulting from losing any feeling of social control; the second is the frightening message that the silent treatment may encourage escalating aggression, possibly in the form of physical violence.

Fourth, because ostracism involves a withdrawal of attention or recognition by others, individuals exposed to it may be reminded of their fragile and temporary existence, and its lack of meaning and worth. They may even be reminded of their own death. Theory and research indicates we have a need to maintain our beliefs in a *meaningful existence* (e.g., Cooley, 1902; James, 1890; Mead 1934) and to avoid thoughts of our own death (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). In fact, it could be argued that ostracism symbolizes (or is a metaphor for) death. While being ostracized, it could occur to us that this is what it would be like if we were dead, the sort of realization Dickens instilled in Scrooge in *The Christmas Carol* (1880). In terror management theory, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1986; Solomon et al., 1991) argue that a fundamental human anxiety that drives social behavior is our fear of our own mortality and meaningless existence. The terror management position claims that "...people need self-esteem because it is the central psychological mechanism for protecting individuals from the anxiety that awareness of their vulnerability and mortality would otherwise create" (Greenberg et al., 1992, p. 913). Interestingly, other authors allude either metaphorically or literally to the similarity between ostracism and death. William James (1890) likened the phenomenological horror of being socially ostracized to feeling as though "every person we met cut us dead" (p.294). Mahdi (1986) argues that the most severe form of ostracism is the "termination of life" (p. 295). Service (1975) writes that the usual punishment by any society is some amount of disapproval or withdrawal, the most extreme being ostracism, which he describes as, "...in primitive society a fate practically equivalent to death" (p. 54). In writing about the ostracism used by primates, Lancaster (1986) states, "...the 'cold shoulder' is only a step along the way to execution" (p. 216). In Gruter's (1986) account of Amish Meidung, she writes, "Meidung [in this rural community] means slow death" (p. 274). Finally, Boehm (1986) considers the connection between death by execution and social ostracism: "The act of execution is not much more than the strongest manifestation of the 'silent treatment' itself when this [treatment] persists for a long time. Either involves what amounts to the social death of the individual" (pp. 313-314). Based on these accounts of ostracism, it does not seem such an enormous leap to suggest that ostracism (perhaps particularly social ostracism) threatens both a sense of meaningful existence, and a glimpse of what things would be like if one were dead. Both of these reactions ought to bring us closer to the terror

that Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski believe we fight so diligently to buffer.

REACTIONS TO THREATENED NEEDS

There are two overriding hypotheses that derive from this model. One considers reactions to isolated or short-term incidences of ostracism; the other considers reactions to long-term exposure to ostracism. Depending upon which need or needs have been threatened or activated by the ostracism, the individual will, in the short-run, react in such a way to regain or strengthen that need. This homeostatic notion of a direct causal link between need deprivation and need fulfillment has been suggested or demonstrated for studies on belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), control (e.g., Friedland, Keinan, & Regev, 1992; Pittman & D'Agostino, 1989; Pittman & Pittman, 1980; Wortman & Brehm, 1975), self-esteem (Steele, 1988), and meaningful existence (Greenberg et al., 1990). If, however, an individual endures long-term ostracism, attempts to regain these needs may give way to despair and helplessness. This is consistent with research and theory on long-term loss of control (Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993; Seligman, 1975) and rejection (Leary, 1990).

As mentioned earlier, the needs are not necessarily mutually exclusive. An increased sense of belongingness may raise self-esteem (Baumeister & Leary, 1995); increased self-esteem might provide one with a greater feeling of control and efficacy (Bandura, 1995) or buffer the fear of meaningless existence and death (Greenberg et al., 1986). However, depending upon the type of ostracism that is used or perceived, threats to one of these needs may be more salient, causing corrective action to focus on ameliorating that particular threat.

Types of ostracism that emerge from the taxonomic structure above may threaten different needs, and, as a consequence, have a different impact on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of its victims. For instance, punitive ostracism may cause a person to seek self-affirmation, or, if it threatens feelings of connectedness or a sense of belonging, it may cause a desire to seek out others with whom to associate and belong. This can also augment self-esteem (Leary et al., 1995). I would venture to speculate that oblivious ostracism might be the worst type of ostracism in that it is likely to threaten all four needs: one would simultaneously feel a loss of belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. Each type might also provide its users different strategic value. Partial ostracism may provide its user with a "safe sanctuary" from accountability (e.g., "You must be paranoid, I wasn't ignoring you"), whereas complete ostracism may be a more clear and demonstrative statement of punishment and exclusion.

AN EXPERIMENTAL PARADIGM TO STUDY EFFECTS OF SHORT-TERM SOCIAL OSTRACISM

My aim was to capture the psychological drama of being socially ostracized in a laboratory setting. I was hoping to create a procedure that was fairly simple and uncomplicated by extraneous context, but that caused individuals to notice and feel, in a relatively short period of time, that they were being ostracized. The eventual procedure stemmed from an event that actually happened to me several years ago when I was relaxing in a park with my dog. A Frisbee rolled by me, and I picked it up and saw two men who had obviously been playing with it. I threw it back to them, and they began to include me in their Frisbee exchange. They were strangers to me, but I felt as though I belonged to their group. After a minute or so, I noticed that they had not thrown me the Frisbee on the last several tosses. Almost immediately, I felt ostracized. I wondered what I had done to cause it. I thought I was throwing the Frisbee pretty well, but I figured I had done something wrong. They still did not throw me the Frisbee, so I sheepishly withdrew from them and went back to my dog (who, I was happy to see, was willing to accept me). This episode led to a laboratory analogue of social ostracism.

BALL-TOSSING

I have developed a "minimal ostracism" paradigm in which individuals are either included or ostracized in a ball-throwing session between two other participants (who are actually accomplices of the experimenter). One participant and two confederates arrive for an experiment. The participant and confederates enter a room that contains three chairs arranged in a triangular formation, approximately five feet apart from one another. The confederates occupy the two chairs placed against the walls, leaving the participant to sit in the remaining chair, allowing us a clear view to observe and videotape the participant through an observation mirror. Next to one confederate is a small crate filled with toys, a ball, and books. Above the crate hangs a sign reading "Child Play Behavior." Similar signs reading "Child Observation" were hung in the hallway next to the laboratory, all to create the illusion that the same laboratory was used for conducting another study (for which the toys and observation mirror were necessary).

All participants are asked to give their written consent for the research, and to allow us to videotape them. The experimenter then administers a "Pre-Experimental Questionnaire," which assesses such background information as class rank, age, and major. The purpose of the

questionnaire is to prevent participants from initiating conversation with the confederates. The experimenter then announces that, for various reasons depending upon the specific experiment, the participants are to wait quietly because it is important for the upcoming task that no one talks. The experimenter then leaves the room for five minutes and observes the participant and confederates through the one-way mirror. During this period, some of the participants experience social inclusion and some experience social ostracism.

When the participant completed the questionnaire, one confederate began rummaging through the crate, ostensibly to pass the time. After looking through a book and examining a few toys, the confederate "noticed" a racquetball and began bouncing the racquetball, first by himself/herself, then to the other group members (i.e., the other confederate and participant). The confederates include the participant, both by bouncing him or her the ball and by smiling and making eye contact.

The procedure for ostracized participants is exactly the same as in the inclusion condition, except that, after approximately one minute passes, the confederates begin bouncing and tossing the ball only to each other. They neither look nor smile at the participant for the remaining four minutes. When the confederates hear the experimenter walking toward the room, they quickly toss the ball back into the crate.

Measures of nonverbal behavior, attributions, self-reported mood, subsequent choices or behaviors in various social contexts, and autobiographical accounts of past experiences of ostracism comprise the dependent variables.

Afterwards, great care is taken to re-establish the individual's feelings of acceptance and self-worth. Debriefing lasts for up to 20 minutes. They are reintroduced to the accomplices and debriefed regarding the necessity of deception and the purposes of the research program. Often, great relief is expressed by participants when they find out that the other two participants were instructed to ostracize them. Also frequently, participants disclose similar incidents that have happened to them in the past, with friends, family members or significant others. In many cases, debriefing appears to take on the feeling of catharsis for the participants and it seems as though they appreciate being able to discuss these experiences and feelings.

This paradigm is indeed engaging. Responses vary, but typically follow a pattern of looking at the other two, smiling, looking around, frowning, withdrawing, and sometimes initiating some other activity (e.g., looking in one's wallet). During this time, they were no doubt thinking about what was happening and why it was occurring. The confederates, although willing and able to carry out their research assignments, nevertheless indicated that it was difficult to engage in social ostracism. And

from our own perspectives, it was uncomfortable to watch the ostracism take place. When participants were asked to recall episodes of the silent treatment from their past, they wrote more words and were more personally disclosing than what we have become accustomed to in other post-experimental questionnaires. Several participants used curse words to describe episodes in their lives when others had ostracized them. A male admitted beating up his girlfriend in response to her silent treatment, and one female admitted to "poking" her boyfriend continually until he yelled back at her. Almost all reported that they had been given the silent treatment at some point in their lives and that it was memorable and unpleasant. Yet, almost all also reported that they used the silent treatment on friends, loved ones, or relatives as an effective means of punishing or dealing with those people. Usually, they claimed it was the only means that would work in their particular circumstances. These reports strengthen my belief that social ostracism is a widespread and powerful tactic of social influence.

CONVERSATION, IMAGING PARADIGMS

Although the ball-tossing paradigm appears to work quite well, we also recognize that it is useful to employ several paradigms when studying a phenomenon, and that some paradigms may have certain advantages over others, depending upon the specific issues being examined. For this reason, we have also used a conversational paradigm, in which three individuals (again, one participant and two confederates) are discussing various topics for five minutes. For those participants randomly assigned to be ostracized, after the first minute, confederates are instructed to look only at each other, not make any eye contact with the participant, and respond only to each other. This requires them to interrupt and "speak over" the participant if the participant chooses to speak. We have also begun using three actual participants, giving ostracism instructions to two of them prior to the group setting, although the efficacy of this technique is still under investigation.

Finally, on some occasions, we have employed imagery techniques, asking individuals to imagine that they are being ostracized (given the silent treatment), and then asking them to respond to various questions. Although not as engaging, this procedure can be useful in assessing what people think they would do under such circumstances.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

We have conducted several experiments in our laboratories some are still in progress and some are in the planning stages. As will be noticed,

the data are less than definitive at this point. Some studies show mild support for the hypotheses, and others show qualified support. I will review briefly these studies, and the results when available, as they pertain to the need-threat model.

Two studies examined the control deprivation hypothesis, with mixed success. Williams (1993) tested whether ostracism by two individuals (whom the male participant perceived as either friends or strangers to each other) caused the participant to assert higher levels of social control over a third "participant" who had not been involved in the ostracizing interaction. From an attributional perspective, we might expect that being ostracized by two people who are friends to each other would be less threatening than being ostracized by two people who are strangers to each other. We could perhaps dismiss the ostracism by friends as due to their friendship rather than a personal shortcoming in ourselves. On the other hand, Buss (1990) theorized that exclusion ought not be that threatening unless it is by a perceptibly desirable group. If this is true, then a group of friends would look more attractive than an aggregate of strangers. After the ostracism manipulation in the ball-tossing paradigm, the participant was asked to participate in a study on "mind reading." He was told that studies on hemispheric laterality suggest that individuals perceived different types of nonverbal messages from others depending upon which side of the person's face they focused on. The participant was told that he could, therefore, request of the new participant unlimited "head turns" in an effort to guess what that person was viewing on a card. Exerting social control was measured by the number of head turns the victim requested of the third accomplice. Tendencies for increased social control occurred only when participants were ostracized by two individuals who were perceived to be friends with each other. Perhaps, for males, being ostracized by a desirable intact group poses a greater threat to loss of control, causing them to reassert social control when the opportunity presents itself.

Amy Kaylor (1993) attempted to test the control deprivation hypothesis of social ostracism another way in her honors thesis. Kaylor relied on research by Pittman and his colleagues that indicated that individuals who were deprived of control would engage in deeper cognitive processing as a means to regain control. In one study, control-deprived individuals were more likely to engage in attributional thinking (Pittman & Pittman, 1980), and, in another, Pittman and D'Agostino (1989) found that control-deprived participants attempt to regain control by outperforming baseline standards on a non-ego-threatening cognitive task. Kaylor reasoned that, if being ostracized deprived individuals of a sense of control, then they ought to be more likely to engage in cognitive processing, particularly in non-ego-threatening tasks, than included participants. Using study time

as an indicator of cognitive effort, her results were consistent with the predictions, although not statistically significant.

Williams and Sommer (in press) examined aspects of the belongingness hypothesis. The ball-tossing paradigm was used to investigate the effects of social ostracism on individuals' subsequent contributions to a group task. Much research has found a reduction of individual effort when one's contributions are pooled with others on collective tasks (for a review, see Karau & Williams, 1993). Although group cohesiveness lessens the likelihood of social loafing, the other side of the coin has not received attention: What happens when people work with others in noncohesive groups, specifically, those in which the individual has been socially ostracized? For these people, it was predicted that, in order to regain their sense of belonging to the group, ostracized individuals would socially compensate (Williams & Karau, 1991), working harder collectively than coercively. Participants were asked to generate as many uses as they could for an object, either coercively (in which their contributions were individually tabulated) or collectively (in which their contributions were combined with the others') with two others who had earlier either ostracized or included them in a ball-tossing exchange. Ostracized females did socially compensate, whereas non-ostracized females showed neither loafing nor compensation. Yet, both ostracized and non-ostracized males socially loafed. This was interpreted to support other research on sex differences in groups. Females tend to be more concerned with establishing and maintaining group harmony. Thus, when ostracized, they apparently try to reestablish their sense of belonging to the group by working extra hard, even when their contributions to the group task are unidentifiable. Males, however, tend to be more task oriented and agentic in group settings. Ostracized males apparently felt less attraction to the group and less responsible for making group contributions. Attributional measures supported this interpretation in that females tended to attribute the ostracism to their own personal shortcomings, whereas males attributed the ostracism to shortcomings of the other two group members.

Similarly, Predmore and Williams (1983) found that socially ostracized males, when asked whom they would like to work with on an upcoming task, were more likely to want to work with a different group of people, rather than work with the same group who ostracized them, or work alone. In this study, however, participants were instructed to engage in the ball-tossing task so that they could "warm-up" for a subsequent task requiring good hand-eye coordination. When the two confederates stopped throwing the ball to the participant, it is unclear whether the effect was because of ostracism, or was because they thought they were improperly prepared for the upcoming task.

Ko (1994) used the ball-tossing paradigm with high school males invited to participate in research at the University of Toledo. After being either included or socially ostracized, they were asked to take part in a study on perceptions of sporting events at their high school. Asked to recall the outcomes of specific football games from their high school's schedule that fall, ostracized students tended (but not significantly) to use the pronoun "we" more often (44%) than included students (31%), regardless of the team's defeat or victory. This was taken as mild support for the belongingness hypothesis, in that attempts to attach oneself to a group were somewhat greater after ostracism.

Bogle (1994; Sommer, Bogle, Grahe, & Williams, 1995) analyzed the nonverbal reactions of participants from studies just mentioned and found several interesting effects. Ostracized males and females disengaged more from social interaction than their included counterparts, looking away and smiling less often. Furthermore, ostracized females disengaged more than ostracized males. Males were more likely to exhibit object manipulation during the ostracism, interpreted as a face-saving strategy. They would often stand up, look around the room or out a window, take out a comb, or open and examine a book or their wallet. In effect, the message seemed to indicate that they, rather than the other two, had chosen to stop throwing the ball, because they had better things to do.

With respect to the self-esteem hypothesis, Samolis (1994) found that participants who imagined being ignored (in a conversational context at a party) generated significantly fewer positive self-referent statements than did participants who imagined successful attempts at social interaction. And, as mentioned above, Williams and Sommer (in press) found that ostracized females made more negative attributions to self than included females, or males in either condition.

As can be seen, we have conducted a variety of studies that have yielded promising, if not definitive, conclusions for the hypotheses regarding threats against feelings of control, belonging, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. Certainly, more research needs to be conducted before any firm conclusions can be reached.

INTERVIEW METHODOLOGIES TO STUDY EFFECTS OF LONG-TERM OSTRACISM

The theoretical predictions for reactions to ostracism are essentially reversed when we consider individuals who have experienced long-term exposure to ostracism. As has been shown in research on learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), chronic exposure to events over which people

perceive no control no longer causes reactance, but instead leads to resignation and feelings of depression and worthlessness (Wortman & Brehm, 1975). For obvious reasons, it would be neither practical nor ethical to subject participants in the laboratory to long-term ostracism. Experimental work on this question is severely constrained. Perhaps the only way to examine questions on long-term effects will be to use qualitative approaches with populations who have had such experiences. The disadvantages of such research methods involve the inability to determine cause and effect. One may just as easily conclude that individuals who have suffered long-term ostracism are affected as they are because of the ostracism, or that, because they behave as they do, they caused people to ostracize them. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, ethologists' orientation to studying ostracism begins with the premise that ostracized individuals (people or animals) are anti-social and deviant, and the group chooses to ostracize them in order to punish the offending individuals, and to recapture group cohesiveness. On the other hand, the experimental research suggests that normal individuals who are ostracized experience negative effects, and it is likely that enduring these negative effects over a long period of time will undoubtedly result in pathological consequences. In any case, it will be informative to interview long-term victims (and users) of ostracism to at least provide some information about chronic effects. The model suggests that reactions to long-term social ostracism, however, would include persistent feelings of isolation, disengagement, helplessness, giving up, lowered self-esteem, and the questioning of one's existence (or at least the importance of one's existence).

Sonja Faulkner and I have begun an interview program in which we advertise in a local newspaper for "long time victims and users of the silent treatment." Individuals who answer the advertisement are informed that they will not be paid, nor is any therapy provided. Nevertheless, we have interviewed 32 people over the last year. More women participated in the study than men (69% versus 31%), and most participants ranged in age between 23 and 75 years old ($M = 42.2$ years). Of the 10 men who were interviewed, four described themselves as victims of the silent treatment, four said that they were users, and two characterized themselves as both users and victims of ostracism. Of the 22 women, 13 claimed to be victims, five said that they were users, and four described themselves as both users and victims of the silent treatment.

Almost all of the victims we interviewed reported that the effects of long-term ostracism have been devastating. Many interviewees used words illustrative of the hypothesized threatened needs. Interviewees reported that chronic or repeated exposure to the silent treatment elicited many negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, sadness, and despair. A 45-year-old woman said, "I was deprived of my childhood because of

this. I'm hurt, bitter, and resentful. I don't *belong* anywhere! I'm still trying to find a family. It's so hard to talk about, even now. How would I sum up the silent treatment? It's the second most awful thing you can do to someone. Murder is first." There were also individuals claiming that the silent treatment caused them psychological distress, such as depression and paranoia. "Lee" was silenced for over 40 years by her now-deceased husband. She doesn't have an explanation for his extreme behavior, but says, "I wish he would've beaten me instead of giving me the silent treatment, because at least it would have been a response. This has ruined my life—I have no chance for happiness now." Many suggested that they would have preferred to have been beaten than to have had the silent treatment (interestingly, this statement was even found in the post-experimental questionnaires from our laboratory studies). "Lea" was ostracized by her mother and grandmother, who silenced her frequently as a child and teenager. Most episodes would last six to eight weeks, and, as she explains, "the bottom line is that it's the meanest thing you can do to someone, especially if you know they can't fight back. I never should have been born."

Others reported that the silent treatment precipitated various behavioral outcomes. For example, a female victim of ostracism by her mother since the age of thirteen said, "I coped with the situation by developing anorexia. I dropped to 80 pounds and almost died four years ago. I saw it as the only way to maintain some sort of *control* over my life." Others mentioned promiscuity and attempted suicides. Most of the victims explained that their experiences with the silent treatment have psychologically scarred them for life. Indeed, many reported that their lives were not meaningful, that they would never be completely happy, and some questioned whether they should have been born.

Several interviewees described themselves as users of the silent treatment, and our goal was to determine why someone would choose ostracism over other communication techniques such as yelling, hitting, or throwing things. Also, we were interested in how users justified their behavior and whether they have changed their minds about its use over the years. It is interesting to note that the reasons for employing the silent treatment in a professional setting may be strategically different than when using it in on a significant other, family member, or friend. Specifically, the silent treatment is (presently) legal, so employees may give each other the silent treatment without facing imminent termination or even disciplinary consequences that would follow verbal or physical abuse. In personal relationships, respondents reasoned that the silent treatment was an appropriate strategy to employ, for it prevented physical or verbal abuse. Some described silencing as a "time-out" or cooling-down period after someone upset them, whereas others explained that their ostracism was

clearly punitive ("I'll show him how important I really am, and then he'll be sorry when I won't speak to him"). Others used the silent treatment defensively ("I won't let him hurt me, so I just go into my comfort zone, where I can block people out"), and most described the ostracism as a way to control interactions.

Glandry, 42, explained that he uses the silent treatment in both professional and personal settings. "The impact of the silent treatment is always beneficial in a professional setting. It shows the courage of conviction and creates an awareness as to the sincerity and seriousness of the issue at hand. I'm able to maintain a distance, but still have my presence felt. It creates a degree of autonomy, and it feels good to be in control of a situation. Any other alternative would decrease my level of control. As far as my kids, I would rather 'put them on ice' than give them the corporal punishment, because I'm afraid of child abuse. Now all three appreciate the rules and give me begrudging respect. Had I physically punished them, I fear that they would now hate me." Barbara, 62, was another proponent of the silent treatment. She explained that she uses ostracism to control situations and punish people. "I'm not quick-witted and can't debate, nor do I have snappy, sassy comebacks, so when people want to argue, ostracism is my defense. It's like with the Amish. They are non-violent people and they always use the silent treatment. Well, that's like me — I use the silent treatment whenever there may be a fight or confrontation. The silent treatment accomplishes for me all the things that fighting accomplishes for other people: control, power, and punishment. It gives me pleasure, and I'm in control. I also think it's funny how people grovel. I never feel guilty or ashamed, because it's always justifiable. Hey, I can't hurt you, I can't run you out of town, I can't run you out of business, but I can do this. The Rolling Stones talk about satisfaction. This is how I get mine."

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

At this point, it is far easier to ask questions about ostracism than to provide answers. Although it would be desirable to suggest solutions or alternatives to using ostracism, especially at the interpersonal level, it is too early to do so. Instead, more research needs to be done that demonstrates the impact of ostracism on individuals: Are initial reactions aimed at recovering losses in belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaning needs? When people experience long-term ostracism, do they essentially give up and suffer permanent damage to conceptions of self and beliefs in worth and personal efficacy? Are there important individual differences in how people react to ostracism? From the users' perspective, what situational

and personality factors contribute to people choosing to use ostracism on others, rather than more direct, bilateral, and rational means of expressing hostility?

Currently, several studies are in progress or are planned.

1. Social ostracism is hypothesized to threaten an individual's sense of belonging. In the short term, this ought to increase the likelihood that one will do what one can to reassert one's feeling of belonging. Specifically, a person who is ostracized ought to think of himself or herself more readily as a member of other groups than one who is not being ostracized. Thinking of oneself as a member of a group could serve two purposes: (a) to re-establish a feeling of connectedness to someone else, thus making ostracized individuals feel as though they "belong" to some important others, and (b) if ostracized individuals picture ostracism as a group level event, (e.g., "those two people who are ostracizing me really represent the fact that the group to which they belong is rejecting the group to which I belong"), then the personal impact (and self-blame) of the ostracism can be diffused. If individuals are prevented from shifting the explanation for the ostracism to a group level event, then they are less able to deflect the negative impact, and are more likely to make an internal attribution for the ostracism (e.g., "there must be something wrong with me.").

Using a new "email paradigm" in which the ostracism takes place among members of a laboratory chat group, the primary dependent variables will be verbal aggression (called "flaming" on internet communications) and attributions. It should pose more threat to be ostracized than included. Those who are ostracized should: (a) send more messages right after being ostracized (attempt to regain control and belonging), but (b) fewer messages thereafter (subsequent disengagement), than those who are not ostracized. The greater the negative impact of the ostracism (i.e., self-blaming would cause greater threat to one's ego than external or group-level blame), the more likely flaming will be used in electronic mail interactions. Therefore, (c) negative reactions to being ostracized should be greatest for those ostracized by one ingroup and one outgroup member because the individual will be less able to deflect the ostracism to either group level attributions, or to external attributions of the ostracizing individuals; somewhat less when being ostracized by ingroup members because the ostracism can be attributed externally and at a group level if one chooses to reject and devalue the group; and should

be least threatening when ostracized by outgroup members because it is easiest to attribute externally and at a group level. Numbers of messages and a measure of the degree of verbal aggression (i.e., through blind-coders ratings of "flaming") should reflect a similar pattern.

2. Differences are likely to exist with respect to the magnitude and meaning of being ignored by one person compared to being ignored by a group. According to Latané's (1981) social impact theory, negative impact should increase multiplicatively with increasing sources. Also, status within the group has been shown to affect a member's intragroup behavior. Moreland (1985) and Moreland and Levine (1982; 1988) have shown that relative length of membership within a group is highly predictive of normative behaviors by and toward the individual group members. "Newcomers" are less likely to lead, to take initiative, to speak out, or to do other behaviors that draw attention to themselves. "Oldtimers" (even if they have been in the group for only a short time, just as long as there are newer members) are more likely to set policy, take active roles in discussions, get in arguments, and state feelings and beliefs that may differ from others.

Ostracism by larger sized groups should result in stronger aversive reactions. Attributions for social ostracism may also change accordingly. It would be easier to discount being ostracized by one person, particularly a stranger, by externalizing the attribution (e.g., "something is wrong with that person who is ignoring me"). It would be more difficult to assuage the impact of being ostracized, however, by a group of people. Not only will an individual being ostracized by a group find it more difficult to believe that all members of that group have something wrong with him or her, but he or she must also contend with the possibility that the others *conspired* to ignore him or her. The effects of being a newcomer versus an oldtimer of a group that ostracizes an individual should also cause different reactions. Newcomers assume that they will be ignored initially (Moreland & Levine, 1988); therefore, if one joins a group after it has already been formed, being ostracized ought to have less negative impact on the individual than if one is an oldtimer in a group.

3. Perhaps certain people are less able to cope than others, or certain people who are ostracized are more likely to feel deprived of one particular need (e.g., affirmation), whereas other people feel deprived of other needs (e.g., belonging, or control). One individual difference that may interact with reactions to social ostracism is attachment style. People differ on the degree to which they make

strong affectional bonds to particular others (Bowlby, 1977).

The effect of one's attachment style as it relates to ongoing relationships may dictate the strength of the threat imposed by ostracism, as well as the need and style with which to cope with it. From preliminary work, it is apparent that parent/child- and adult- relationships are salient to our participants following ostracism. On open-ended questionnaires, many write (in surprisingly hostile language) about their parents' use of ostracism on them when they were children, or their boy/girlfriends' use of it on them in their current relationships. For this reason, we hope to conduct research on the interaction between attachment styles and reactions to social ostracism. Nonverbal responses, mood, and attributions for the ostracism will be measured. Secure individuals should be least bothered by the ostracism, and will search for situational explanations for the interaction when ostracized. Dismissive individuals will show greater evidence of object manipulation and will blame the others for the ostracism. Preoccupied individuals will make more attempts to be included in the group, and will blame themselves for their exclusion. Fearful individuals should blame themselves and others, and should withdraw more quickly.

4. Another experiment will examine whether social ostracism denies fulfillment of needs for belongingness, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence, with an old, yet rarely used projective technique. Self-reports of reactions to ostracism have been problematic. Participants often deny any effects of ostracism (even though behavioral and nonverbal data would say otherwise). They may not want to admit to being threatened psychologically, or they may have already coped successfully with it (outwardly, with nonverbal reactions; inwardly, by attributing it to external causes). The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT, Murray, 1971) is an involving method that is less prone to problems with impression management than are self-reports. With regard to ostracism, several of Murray's (1938) needs may be subsumed under my model. Therefore, participants' responses to the TAT provide the main dependent measures. The TAT, which consists of a set of picture cards, is a projective test designed to expose needs that may or may not be acknowledged by the test taker at a conscious level. Murray purported that the type and frequency of needs are influenced largely by situational factors. That is, when the environment deprives individuals of fulfillment of a particular need, that need will more likely emerge during administration of the TAT. Furthermore, other personality traits may play a particularly

vital role in predicting how people will react to being ignored.

The second goal of this present study is to advance our understanding of the role of personality in predicting reactions to ostracism. Subjects' individual needs for *affiliation*, *aggression*, *dominance*, *social recognition*, and *exhibition* will be assessed. First, it is predicted that the TAT will elicit a significantly higher number of *belonging* and *control* needs/presses in ostracized subjects compared to included subjects. Personality variables may moderate these differences; following ostracism, needs/press for *belonging* should be strongest for subjects high in chronic needs for affiliation, and needs/press for *control* should be strongest for subjects high in stable needs for aggression and dominance. Needs and presses (i.e., situational forces) related to *self-esteem* and *meaningful existence* also are expected to increase for ostracized subjects. Needs/presses for *self-esteem* should be most prevalent in subjects high in needs for social recognition, and needs/presses for *meaningful existence* should prevail in subjects high in needs for exhibition. For ostracized subjects, generally the themes should reflect a preoccupation with the act of ostracism, or related concepts of general rejection.

5. The laboratory paradigm used thus far has examined aspects of social (as opposed to physical) ostracism — being ignored by people who are present. Furthermore, although left ambiguous, it is probably interpreted as punitive (rather than as not happening at all, defensive, oblivious, or role-prescribed), complete (as opposed to partial), and attributionally ambiguous (what victims did to cause it is unclear). The goal of future research will be to manipulate these dimensions experimentally and to determine how they may (a) threaten different needs in the hypothesized model, (b) produce different attributions, and (c) have different consequences on people's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

SUMMARY

Ostracism is a ubiquitous and impactful phenomenon. It exists in the animal kingdom in a variety of species. With humans, it occurs at societal, institutional, and small group levels, including the use of the silent treatment in dyadic relationships. It is set apart from other forms of aversive interpersonal behavior because of its invisibility and its ambiguity, which can be exploited by its users and can confound and psychologically cripple its victims. A taxonomic structure has been offered that illustrates the rich and complex variations that ostracism can take, with specific hypotheses

regarding how each type may have different causes and consequences. A model was proposed that ostracism directly threatens four fundamental human needs: to belong, to control, to maintain high self-esteem, and to buffer the terror of conceiving of one's existence as meaningless and temporary. A new experimental paradigm was designed to study social ostracism. In order to explore adequately the phenomenology of being ostracized, the procedure had to be behaviorally and emotionally engaging. Participants were first enticed into spur-of-the-moment free-play by tossing a ball around with two other people while awaiting the return of an experimenter. After about a minute, some of the participants found themselves in an odd situation — suddenly, and for the remainder of the waiting period, they were no longer thrown the ball. Several studies have shown promising, yet inconclusive support for the model. Interviews with long-term users and victims have also been undertaken indicating severe and far-reaching negative consequences for the victims, and strategically acknowledged advantages for the users. Future research is needed to understand more fully the effects that ostracism can have in order to determine if there are alternative methods for resolving conflict available that are more likely to promote, rather than destroy, fundamental human needs.

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