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How Workplace Ostracism Influences Interpersonal Deviance: The Mediating Role of Defensive Silence and Emotional Exhaustion

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Abstract

This study investigated the mediating effects of defensive silence and emotional exhaustion between ostracism and interpersonal deviance, explained through transactional theory of stress and coping. Time-lagged and multi-source data was collected at two measurement points from 320 employees, working in service sector organizations of Pakistan. Employees appraise ostracism as an uncontrollable interpersonal stressor that threatens their relational and efficacy needs. They try to deal with this threat through an avoidant coping approach and resort to interpersonal deviance, via a cognitive path and an emotional route, namely defensive silence and emotional exhaustion. Our results show that workplace ostracism, defensive silence, and emotional exhaustion contribute to the prevalence of interpersonal deviance, and offer several direct as well as indirect options. One path involves actions that discourage ostracism through various human resource functions. Another step pertains to defensive silence which could be put off by a suggestion system that offers psychological safety to employees. The last measure relates to emotional exhaustion, prevented by emotional mentoring and employee assistance plans. The present study explains the underlying cognitive and emotional mechanisms between ostracism and interpersonal deviance. It extends research on defensive silence to demonstrate its theoretical as well as empirical effect on interpersonal deviance. It further explains how employees use interpersonal deviance, to reduce the negative effect of ostracism. Lastly, it describes ostracism and deviance in the context of collectivist culture of Pakistan, which underscores close interpersonal relationships.

Keywords Defensive silence · Workplace ostracism · Mediation analysis · Emotional exhaustion · Interpersonal deviance

The human need for social bonding can be fulfilled when individuals feel accepted by others, but it can remain unfulfilled when individuals feel rejected (DeWall & Bushman, 2011). Workplace ostracism, also known as social exclusion, "refers to the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others in workplace" (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008, p. 220). It refers to instances wherein work colleagues may ignore their coworkers' suggestions at meetings or fail to return greetings or salutations. Such social exclusion is harmful as it frustrates employees' needs for belongingness, self-esteem, control, and meaningful

existence and subsequently compromises their emotions, cognitive well-being, and behavior (Williams, 2007).

Workplace ostracism limits opportunities for social interaction and discourages employees from forming lasting and meaningful relationships in an organization. As it involves isolating and neglecting employees, ostracized employees respond with negative outcomes by developing severe levels of anxiety or depression and maladaptive behaviors. Prominent among these responses is interpersonal deviance, a maladaptive behavior that employees engage in when using gossip or verbal abuse to harm the legitimate interests of their coworkers (Hershcovis, Reich, Parker, & Bozeman, 2012). Interpersonal deviance violates workplace norms for mutual respect and harms both targeted individuals and organizations.

Research studies generally note the positive association between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviance through principles of reciprocity, displaced aggression theory, or an absence of self-control (Yan, Zhou, Long, & Ji, 2014). However, we highlight that ostracism acts as an uncontrollable stressor that not only excludes employees but also harms,

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threatens, and challenges their well-being (Latack & Havlovic, 1992). It causes targeted employees to feel less in control than their included counterparts. We rationalize that ostracism in collectivist cultures is likely to have different emotional and cognitive meanings than in cultures that are less collectivist. Collectivism refers to "a set of feelings, beliefs, behavioral intentions, and behaviors related to solidarity and concern for others," and collectivistic cultures emphasize the establishment of close and harmonious interpersonal relationships (Hui, 1988, p. 17). As a result, the effects of ostracism may be amplified in a collectivist culture. In other words, what it means to be ostracized in a collectivist culture may differ from what it means to be ostracized in a more individualistic culture.

Likewise, employees' responses to ostracism may also be culturally bound. Pakistani culture is marked by power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, which implies an overall unquestioning respect for authority (Hofstede, 1991; Khilji, 1995). Given this background, it would be rude to confront someone who has engaged in any form of social exclusion. However, excluded employees would still sense a lack of respect from their system or organization. Such employees may react with an avoidance coping approach and may not disclose difficult truths, alternative views, or negative feedback. Employees may choose to observe defensive silence to save themselves from incurring materialistic losses (e.g., career damage, additional burdens, or a loss of employment) (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003).

The choice to engage in defensive silence may be a cultural artifact, which on the one hand should protect employees from external threats and insecurities, while on the other hand, overstretching their psychological resources and causing emotional exhaustion (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Emotional exhaustion may compromise the cognitive, psychological, and emotional resources of employees, making it more difficult to address interpersonal work demands and eventually causing deviant behaviors (Van Der Linden, Keijsers, Eling, & Van Schaijk, 2005).

Extant research has supported the notion that ostracism, when perceived as an overpowering negative occurrence, evokes the use of defensive silence, which then leads to the experience of emotional exhaustion (Whiteside & Barclay, 2013). One study shows that emotional exhaustion, defined as a "chronic state of emotional and physical depletion," mediates social undermining and workplace deviance (Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, Kacmar 2007, p. 266; Yoo & Frankwick, 2013). However, to the best of our knowledge, no research has identified the serial mediation of defensive silence and emotional exhaustion between ostracism and interpersonal deviance.

We propose that ostracism is positively associated with the use of defensive silence, which then influences emotional exhaustion and finally leads to engagement in interpersonal deviance. Based on the logic presented in existing literature, we propose a model that depicts an indirect connection between ostracism and employee intentions to engage in interpersonal deviance, using defensive silence and emotional exhaustion (Fig. 1). This study makes several contributions. First, it focuses on the ways in which individuals engage in interpersonal deviance (Bowling & Eschleman, 2010). It empirically suggests the serial mediation of defensive silence and emotional exhaustion between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviance (Yan et al., 2014). This is a unique contribution, as few studies have explored effects of defensive silence on emotional exhaustion while others have highlighted the role of emotional exhaustion as an antecedent of interpersonal deviance. Interestingly, this research combines both perspectives in arguing that ostracism has the capacity to impact organizations through two avenues: limited information sharing (Morrison & Milliken, 2000) and exhausted emotions (Yoo & Frankwick, 2013).

Second, we extend the research on defensive silence to demonstrate its effects on interpersonal deviance (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). This could represent an interesting contribution, as defensive silence has typically been associated with organizational learning (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), emotional exhaustion, and psychological and physical withdrawal (Whiteside & Barclay, 2013). Third, we explain cultural aspects involved, which not only elaborate on variations in conceptions of ostracism but also describe employees' unique responses in eastern and western cultures. We believe that the inclusion of cultural contexts could help us test the applicability of western theories to the distinct organizational context of Pakistan.

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

This study suggests that ostracism, defensive silence, and emotional exhaustion influence employee intentions to engage in interpersonal deviance. The authors base their research propositions on the transactional model of coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This theory promotes a process-oriented model and states that a person finds a transaction to be stressful when he/she appraises it as harmful, threatening, or challenging to his or her well-being (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Alternatively, employees view stress as a perceived disparity between the challenges of their environment and accessible resources (Aldwin, 1994).

The central idea of the theory revolves around the notion of primary and secondary appraisal (Scherer, 2000). Employees use primary appraisal to perceive threats; they apply secondary appraisal to determine a potential response and they

Fig. 1 Sequential mediation model with defensive silence and emotional exhaustion as proposed mediators of ostracism to interpersonal deviance
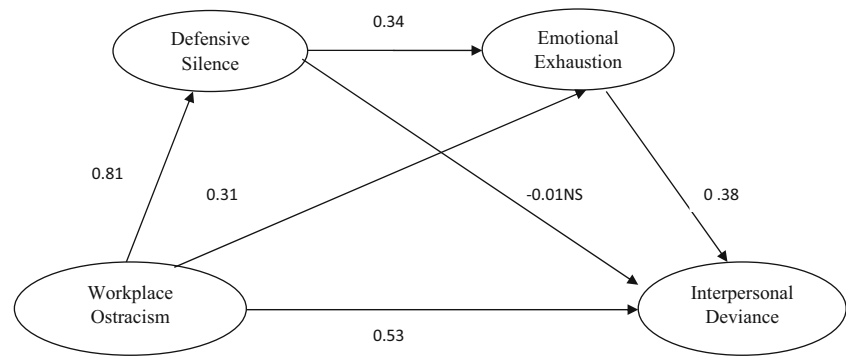
employ coping to execute a response. For instance, a person may first evaluate an encounter as harmful, threatening, or challenging (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). He/she may then apply "a judgment concerning what might and can be done" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 53) and then ultimately determine a specific coping response that would result in psychosocial adjustments in a crisis (Green & Pomeroy, 2007). Some coping responses that may reduce stress or alleviate negative emotions involve taking action, regulating emotional distress, or engaging in avoidant behaviors (Inman & Yeh, 2007). In other words, such responses may typically involve the use of problem-focused, emotion-focused, or avoidance-oriented approaches. Problem-solving coping is designed to alter troubled person-environment relationships causing distress, emotion-focused strategy aims to regulate emotional distress, and avoidance-focused coping aspires to direct attention away from stressful experiences (Folkman et al., 1986).

Ostracism and Interpersonal Deviance

Workplace ostracism is a commonplace phenomenon that many employees experience in the workplace (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). It involves the exclusion of individuals or groups by individuals or groups in subtle or blatant ways, both of which cause social pain to the target (Williams, 2007). Studies indicate that workplace ostracism results in social isolation and prevents the fulfillment of relational and efficacy needs that cater to a sense of belongingness, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence (Williams, 2009). It is a unilateral and ambiguous act that not only alienates employees but also makes them feel unappreciated and unrecognized.

As per the transactional theory of stress, employees may employ primary appraisal to recognize ostracism as a cognitively taxing behavior that affects them at an interpersonal level (Bowling & Eschleman, 2010). They may then use secondary appraisal to evaluate potential coping strategies that could protect against threats to their well-being. Employees may first perceive ostracism as an uncontainable stressor and then direct their efforts toward the use of a cognitive avoidant coping approach and employ interpersonal deviance for two main reasons. First, they may use this approach to allow

initially strong negative emotions to subside (Spector & Fox, 2002). For instance, they may take longer breaks than is allowed, may work slowly, or may ignore coworkers' emails to regulate their exposure to a stressful situation and to foil subsequent strain. Second, employees may use an avoidance approach to achieve emotional satisfaction without necessarily addressing the impending stressor. For instance, they may opt to engage in interpersonal deviance to regain the control that they have lost through social exclusion (Whitman, Halbesleben, & Holmes, 2014). Hence, in view of the above-mentioned justifications, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 1: Ostracism is positively related to employees' intentions to engage in interpersonal deviance.*

Mediating Effects of Defensive Silence

As per the primary appraisal process carried out according to the transaction theory of stress, employees perceive ostracism as an unavoidable stressor relative to insufficient resources (lacking ability, required equipment, etc.) or high stakes. It threatens social ties with peers, supervisors, or organizations and leads to the development of anxiety, depression, and distress (Ferris et al., 2008). Employees thus carry out a secondary appraisal and opt for the use of behavioral disengagement (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). While using this coping strategy, employees observe defensive silence and withhold critical knowledge, concepts, queries, concerns, or ideas on issues related to their job or organization (Brinsfield, Edwards, & Greenberg, 2009).

Defensive silence involves "withholding relevant ideas, information, or opinions as a form of self-protection, based on fear" (Van Dyne et al., 2003, p. 1367). It is negatively associated with psychological safety and is regarded as a conscious attitude adopted to protect oneself from possible disadvantages (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). Employees try to hide information when they feel that sharing such information could be unsafe, uncertain, or threatening (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Based on the above-mentioned conclusions, we posit that employees may find ostracism to be

psychologically uncomfortable to experience and that they may choose to address ostracism by employing an avoidance coping approach and defensive silence (Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007). We thus hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 2: Workplace ostracism is positively associated to defensive silence.*

Defensive silence as an avoidance behavior is widely used in organizations with significant consequences for organizational functioning (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Employees engage in such forms of silence to express implicit opposition, disagreement, or disfavor against required organizational objectives and outcomes. This form of silence promotes the development of an unhealthy work environment that gives way to gossip (Van Dyne et al., 2003). We thus propose the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 3: Defensive silence mediates the association between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviance.*

Mediating Effects of Emotional Exhaustion

Workplace ostracism acts as an interpersonal stressor that threatens cognitive, psychological, and emotional resources. It affects employee self-worth, control, sense of belongingness, and purpose and, in turn, challenges employees' capacities to handle potentially hostile conditions (Kish-Gephart et al. 2009). Employees engage in cognitive avoidant coping behaviors "to alleviate the discomfort associated with threatening people and situations" (Tepper et al., 2007, p. 1171). This coping approach involves "accepting a situation as it is and deciding that the basic circumstances cannot be altered" (Cronkite & Moos, 1995, p. 578). It applies cognitive, emotional, or behavioral demands and relates to high levels of exhaustion and cynicism and to all three burnout symptoms (Chen & Cunradi, 2008). Emotional exhaustion is defined as "feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work" (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998, p. 489). It manifests when employees believe that they lack suitable emotional reserves to manage incessant stressors (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Considering the above-mentioned statements, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 4: Workplace ostracism is positively associated with emotional exhaustion.*

Emotionally exhausted employees have reduced cognitive, psychological, and emotional resources, which makes it difficult for them to manage interpersonal and work demands. For instance, they may make an intentional effort to slow down their pace of work, to damage company property, to tarnish their reputations, to incur financial costs, and to share confidential company information. Such employees use an avoidance coping approach to distance themselves from job demands and engage in deviant behavior (Van der Linden et al., 2005). Extant research also indicates that the presence of emotional exhaustion leads to interpersonal dysfunction in the workplace (e.g., workplace interpersonal deviance and counterproductive work behaviors) (Van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010). We thus propose the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 5: Emotional exhaustion mediates the link between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviance.*

Serial Mediating Effects of Defensive Silence and Emotional Exhaustion

When employees feel socially excluded in the workplace, they feel reluctant to speak up, as this involves subjecting oneself to potential consequences and risking one's perceived safety of voice. Employees thus choose to engage in intentional and proactive behaviors designed to protect themselves from external threats referred to as defensive silence (Schlenker & Weigold, 1989). This involves thinking about and deliberating on alternatives followed by making a mindful choice to hold back ideas, information, and opinions as the best personal tactic to apply at a given moment.

However, employees find themselves in a predicament as workplace norms require them to share information; however, safety concerns cause them to engage in defensive silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). The presence of defensive silence signifies that employees' needs for safety and belongingness are not being satisfied. Such behavior is a great source of strain, as it involves the use of active inhibition that is designed to protect oneself from harmful consequences. It thus consumes valuable psychological and emotional resources and ultimately leads to feelings of overextension, namely, emotional exhaustion (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Finally, in maintaining an avoidant stance, emotionally exhausted employees strive to distance themselves from job demands and engage in interpersonal deviance (Van der Linden et al., 2005). We thus hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 6: Defensive silence and emotional exhaustion serially mediate the association between ostracism and interpersonal deviance.*

Method

Participants and Procedure

We collected time-lagged (i.e., two waves) and multi-source (i.e., peer and self-report) data on full-time and contractual employees working in the service sector in Pakistan. We employed non-probability convenient sampling as we did not have access to the list of the population studied. We distributed a survey to employees of ten different organizations that included three telecommunication companies, three banks, and four higher education organizations. We believed that our selection of such organizations would offer us opportunities to study relevant variables. Several well-cited research papers have used similar samples that comprise of a range of institutions in the public and private sectors across varied industries (Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckenooghe, 2014; Abbas & Raja, 2015).

We distributed 600 questionnaires in the first wave, but received back only 400. For the next and last wave, we again distributed 400 questionnaires but got back only 335 matched responses, of which 15 were incomplete and were discarded. We matched the responses of time 1 and time 2 with the key generated by each respondent according to instructions given in the questionnaires. Participants were asked to provide their initials followed by the month of their birth. For the peer reports, they were asked to list the first and last name of the peer to whom they had provided a response. In this way, the two-waved data were matched between peers. In total, 320 usable questionnaires were collected with a response rate of 56%. Our response rate is not very high due to our use of time-lagged and multi-sourced data, which made it difficult to retrieve responses from the same participants a second time.

We used adapted scales to gather data relevant to the study variables. We selected organizations on the recommendation of personal contacts who had helped collect data at two points in time. We used a cover letter to explain the importance of our research and to provide assurance on the confidentiality of our data usage. Moreover, we requested that each respondent generate a primary key of his/her choices (one's initials followed by one's month of birth) to match the two-time lagged responses. We then generated a key to verify the paired responses and peer reports. We also ensured that each responding peer had worked with the focal respondent for at least six months and that each peer had only reported for a maximum of three colleagues to avoid potential nested data limitations.

We collected data in two waves and from multiple sources to avoid common method bias and social desirability issues (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). For the first wave, we attempted to determine respondents' perceptions on the independent variable of ostracism and on the mediator variable of defensive silence and their demographic profiles. Three months later, for the second and last waves, we collected data related to other mediators, emotional exhaustion and

outcome variable of interpersonal deviance. We used self-reported responses to examine the independent variable and mediators such as workplace ostracism, defensive silence, and emotional exhaustion. Finally, we used peer-rated responses to examine the outcome variable of interpersonal deviance.

Our sample includes male respondents (53%), 55% of whom are married and who have an average age of 33 years (SD = 5.70), a mean professional tenure of 9.50 years (SD = 6.50), and work experience with at least two organizations. Some participants are upper-level (5%), mid-level (73%), and low-level (22%) managers. Our results show that a considerable portion of the respondents are graduates (53%) who have worked for a diverse range of departments (i.e., business intelligence, customer service, human resource management, administration, and finance). A large number of the participants are employed in the private sector (76%), whereas others work for semi-government (13%) and government organizations (11%).

Measures

We offered the measurement scales in English as English is used as the main business language among white-collar workers in Pakistan. Moreover, all of the respondents hold degrees from universities where instruction is given in English. Unless otherwise noted, all measures were anchored on a 5-point rating scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Workplace Ostracism Workplace ostracism was gauged on a ten-item Workplace Ostracism Scale (Ferris et al., 2008). Some sample items used are as follows: "Others ignore you at work," "Others leave the area when you arrive," and "Your greetings have gone unanswered at work." A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.93 was retrieved. Convergent validity was established by obtaining all factor loadings ranging between 0.45 and 0.85 with an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.60. The CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analyis) values also show that all ten items fit a unidimensional model (χ^2 = 1.91, DF (Degree of Freedom) = 33, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = 0.99, NFI (Normed Fit Index) = 0.97, GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) = 0.96, AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index) = 0.94, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error ofApproximation) = 0.05).

Defensive Silence This form of silence was assessed on the five-item scale proposed by Van Dyne et al. (2003). Some items used include the following: "I withhold relevant information out of fear" and "I avoid expressing ideas for improvements, due to self-protection." A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.91 was retrieved for defensive silence. Convergent validity was established by obtaining all factor loadings ranging between 0.75 and 0.88 with an AVE of 0.70. CFA values also

showed that all five items fit a unidimensional model (χ^2 = 1.81, DF = 37, CFI = 0.96, NFI = 0.97, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.04).

Emotional Exhaustion Emotional exhaustion was computed on the seven-item Emotional Exhaustion Scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). Sample items used are as follows: "I feel emotionally drained from my work," "I feel used up at the end of the workday," and "I feel burned out from my work." A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.79 was retrieved. Convergent validity was established by obtaining all factor loadings ranging between 0.42 and 0.81 with an AVE of 0.50. CFAs retrieved show that all seven items fit a unidimensional model (χ^2 = 1.81, DF = 13, CFI = 0.99, NFI = 0.97, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.05).

Interpersonal Deviance This measure was tapped through a six-item scale (Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999). The following sample items for interpersonal deviance were used: "He/she uses bad language about a co-worker" and "He/she refuses to speak to a co-worker." The Cronbach's alpha for interpersonal deviance is 0.95. Convergent validity was established by obtaining all factor loadings ranging between 0.73 and 0.88 with an AVE of 0.80. CFA values retrieved show that all six items fit a unidimensional model (χ^2 = 1.17, DF = 7, CFI = 0.99, NFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.02).

Control Variables For our analyses, we statistically controlled for organizations by applying a one-way ANOVA that compared interpersonal deviance across gender distinctions, education levels, departments, tenure levels, and organizations. Corresponding results show significant variations in interpersonal deviance ($F = 20.57$, $p < .001$) across organizations. Additional post-hoc analyses reveal significant disparities between organizations of the telecommunication and education sectors ($p = 0.00$), between organizations of the education and banking sectors ($p = 0.00$), and between organizations of the education sector and those of other sectors ($p = 0.00$).

Results

We explored interrelationships between core variables of this study by applying structural equation modeling and by adopting a two-step approach (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). We first carried out CFAs to evaluate the measurement model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). We then used the structural model procedure to observe hypothesized associations between latent constructs of the proposed research model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In addition to using SEM to test our hypotheses, we employed

bootstrapping as an additional test for sequential mediation (Hayes, 2013).

We conducted different tests to ensure the construct and discriminant validity of all measures adopted. We assessed convergent validity levels from factor loadings of constructs and measured discriminant validity levels by contrasting the AVE with the maximum shared variance (MSV) of each construct (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991). We found the average variance extracted from all constructs to be greater than corresponding MSV values, which demonstrate satisfactory levels of discriminant validity (AVE) (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, and reliability estimates for all the measures. A closer inspection of bivariate correlations between focal variables examined in this study shows that workplace ostracism is strongly positively correlated with mediators defensive silence ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$) and emotional exhaustion ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$) and with the outcome variable of interpersonal deviance ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$). One of the mediators, defensive silence, is strongly correlated with the other mediators, emotional exhaustion ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$) and outcome, interpersonal deviance ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, the other mediator, emotional exhaustion, is strongly positively associated with interpersonal deviance ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$).

One may observe that correlations found between peer reports of interpersonal deviance (ID) and self-reports for the other data are stronger than was expected (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007). We believe that this strong correlation can be attributed to three main reasons. First, the employees felt more comfortable with reporting the interpersonal deviance of their peers (ID) as they felt assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their reports and did not anticipate experiencing any vindictiveness from their coworkers. Second, they exhibited an especially valid view of interpersonal deviance (e.g., cursing or being rude to others), which is generally considered a more public behavior than organizational deviance (e.g., theft of organizational property) (Berry, Carpenter, & Barratt, 2012). Third, employees in collectivist cultures are more intrusive and tend to keep track of others' behaviors (Cho, Rivera-Sánchez, & Lim, 2009).

The CFA results for all four constructs show that the measurement model yielded an improved fit to the data. Absolute fit index results of GFI = 0.83 and RMSEA = 0.05 were found. Incremental fit indices were NFI = 0.87 and CFI = 0.96, and the AGFI parsimony fit measure was 0.79. In addition to these indices, the ratio of χ^2/df was 1.39, which was within the acceptable threshold ($1 < \chi^2$/df < 3.0). These goodness-of-fit indices confirm that the model adequately fits the data and that no further refinement is required. The fit of this four-factor model is superior to that of several other measurement models (see Table 2).

We tested two structural models, i.e., one partially mediated and one fully mediated (see Table 3). The first model (i.e.,

Table 1 Mean, standard deviations, and correlations

	Mean	Standard deviation	Ostracism	Defensive silence	Emotional exhaustion	Interpersonal deviance
Ostracism (T1)	2.14	0.91	(0.93)			
Defensive silence (T1)	2.43	1.03	0.72**	(0.91)		
Emotional exhaustion (T2)	2.65	0.97	0.55**	0.58**	(0.79)	
Interpersonal deviance (T2)	2.44	1.04	0.65**	0.52**	0.59**	(0.95)

$N = 320$; alpha reliabilities are presented in parentheses

T1 time 1, *T2* time 2

$*p < 0.05$

$**p < 0.01$

partial mediator) was run on direct and indirect paths between ostracism, defensive silence, emotional exhaustion, and interpersonal deviance. Its alternative, the full mediation model, considers indirect paths between ostracism and interpersonal deviance through defensive silence and emotional exhaustion.

The results show that the partially mediated model with an indirect path through defensive silence and emotional exhaustion is the better fitting model ($\chi^2 = 467.04$, df = 334, χ^2/df = 1.39, CFI = 0.96, NFI = 0.87, GFI = 0.83, TLI = 0.96, RMR = 0.10, and RMSEA = 0.05).

Table 2 Model fit indices for CFAs

Model test	χ^2	df	χ^2/ df	CFI	NFI	GFI	TLI (Tucker Lewis Index)	RMR	RMSEA
Self-report									
1 factor (OS, EE combined)	703.03	118	5.96	0.81	0.79	0.75	0.79	0.16	0.13
2 factors (OS, EE)	244.53	117	2.09	0.96	0.93	0.92	0.95	0.07	0.06
3 factors (OS, EE, DS)	*301.41*	*201*	*1.50*	*0.96*	*0.88*	*0.85*	*0.95*	*0.09*	*0.06*
T2: mediator and dependent variable									
1 factor (DS, EE, ID combined)	694.77	131	5.30	0.70	0.66	0.58	0.65	0.19	0.17
2 factors (DS and EE, ID)	422.77	130	3.25	0.85	0.79	0.70	0.82	0.19	0.12
2 factors (DS, EE and ID)	400.41	130	3.08	0.86	0.81	0.73	0.83	0.16	0.12
3 factors (DS, EE, ID)	*178.53*	*128*	*1.39*	*0.97*	*0.91*	*0.89*	*0.97*	*0.13*	*0.05*
All variables of the proposed model									
1 factor (OS, DS, EE, ID combined)	1204.09	340	3.54	0.74	0.67	0.59	0.71	0.16	0.13
2 factors (OS and DS, EE and ID)	871.33	339	2.57	0.84	0.76	0.67	0.82	0.13	0.10
2 factors (OS and EE, DS and ID)	1074.98	339	3.17	0.78	0.71	0.59	0.75	0.19	0.12
3 factors (OS and DS, EE, ID)	651.977	337	1.94	0.91	0.82	0.74	0.89	0.12	0.08
3 factors (OS and EE, DS, ID)	716.96	337	2.13	0.86	0.81	0.72	0.87	0.15	0.09
3 factors (OS and ID, DS, EE)	815.51	337	2.42	0.86	0.78	0.70	0.84	0.15	0.09
4 factors (OS, DS, EE, ID)	*467.04*	*334*	*1.39*	*0.96*	*0.87*	*0.83*	*0.96*	*0.10*	*0.05*

$N = 320$

OS ostracism, *DS* defensive silence, *EE* emotional exhaustion, *ID* interpersonal deviance

Table 3 Results for main effects and mediation analysis

Model test	χ^2	df	$\chi^2/$ df	CFI	NFI	GFI	TLI	RMR	RMSEA
Model 1: direct as well as indirect path from ostracism to interpersonal deviance (indirect path through defensive silence and emotional exhaustion) Partial mediation model	467.04	334	1.39	0.96	0.87	0.83	0.96	0.10	0.05
Model 2: removed direct path from ostracism to interpersonal deviance (only indirect path through defensive silence and emotional exhaustion) Full mediation model	517.71	337	1.54	0.95	0.86	0.82	0.94	0.19	0.06

$N = 320$

We also performed sequential mediation analyses (Model 6 as described in PROCESS) using bootstrap methods (Hayes, 2013) to test the hypothesis on whether defensive silence and emotional exhaustion serially mediate impacts of ostracism on employee interpersonal deviation. Figure 1 describes all paths of the full process model, and related coefficients are shown in Table 4. Consistent with hypothesis 1, the total effect (C1) of ostracism on interpersonal deviance was significant ($b = 0.74$, $t = 15.30$, $p < 0.001$) and the total direct effect (C1′) without the effect of mediators was also found to be significant ($b = 0.53$, $t = 7.87$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, in line with hypotheses 2 and 4, ostracism had significant direct effect on defensive silence ($b = 0.81$; 95% CI = 0.72 and 0.89) and emotional exhaustion ($b = 0.31$; 95% CI = 0.19 and 0.43). The total indirect effect, i.e., the sum of specific indirect effects, was significant ($b = 0.21$) with a 95% confidence interval between 0.10 and 0.33. Further, the specific indirect effects through defensive silence, alone, were not significant (-0.01; CI = -0.12 and 0.11), which does not support hypothesis 3. However, in line

with hypothesis 5, specific indirect effects through emotional exhaustion, alone, were significant (0.12; CI = 0.06 and 0.21). Similarly, as suggested in hypothesis 6, the specific indirect effect of ostracism on employee intentions for interpersonal deviance through defensive silence and emotional exhaustion was significant with a point estimate of 0.10 and at a 95% confidence interval (CI = 0.06 and 0.18).

Discussion

This study aimed at exploring ostracism, a concept that has recently attracted considerable interest, and its effects on a significant organizational outcome, i.e., interpersonal deviance. It capitalized on the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and explored defensive silence and emotional exhaustion as two essential mediating mechanisms explaining the relationship between ostracism and interpersonal deviance. Ostracism in collectivist cultures

Table 4 Tests of direct and indirect effects

Effect	Coefficient	95% confidence interval (CI)
Direct effects		
Ostracism → defensive silence	0.81	(0.72, 0.89)
Ostracism → emotional exhaustion	0.31	(0.19, 0.43)
Ostracism → interpersonal deviance	0.53	(0.39, 0.66)
Defensive silence → emotional exhaustion	0.34	(0.23, 0.44)
Defensive silence → interpersonal deviance	-0.01	(-0.13, 0.11)
Emotional exhaustion → interpersonal deviance	0.38	(0.27, 0.50)
Indirect effects		
Ostracism → interpersonal deviance via defensive silence	-0.01	(-0.12, 0.11)
Ostracism → interpersonal deviance via emotional exhaustion		
Independent of defensive silence	0.12	(0.06, 0.21)
Mediated by defensive silence	0.10	(0.06, 0.18)

$N = 320$

is likely to have different emotional and cognitive meanings than it does in cultures that are less collectivist. In a collectivist culture, individuals' identities are tied to their membership to various collective groups such as families or work organizations. Thus, when individuals are ostracized in such cultures, they avoid any form of direct confrontation. Instead, they prefer to experience indirect and covert interpersonal mistreatment to maintain a sense of interpersonal harmony. In contrast, their individualist counterparts may respond to social exclusion with engagement in retaliatory ostracism because of favoring self-interest over interpersonal harmony (Zhao, Xia, He, Sheard, & Wan, 2016).

The results of this study show that employees appraise ostracism as an uncontrollable interpersonal stressor that threatens their need for self-esteem, belonging, control, and meaningful existence (Oaten, Williams, Jones, & Zadro, 2008). Per the transactional theory of stress, employees try to mitigate threats to their well-being by applying a cognitive avoidant coping response for two main reasons. First, they experience ostracism as an uncontrollable stressor and avoid any direct confrontation with this source of stress. Instead, they choose to engage in person-directed deviance to gain a symbolic sense of control (Whitman et al., 2014). This finding is verified by our first hypothesis and by previous research findings showing that ostracized employees exhibit negative outcomes such as counterproductive work behaviors and high turnover intentions to reclaim a sense of control over their surroundings (Bowling & Eschleman, 2010).

Second, employees use avoidance coping to allow initially experienced strong negative emotions to subside. The results of our study show that employees engage in this behavior through two avenues—through an emotional route and via a cognitive path. Our results show that employees view ostracism as a source of strain that spurs high levels of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, or all three burnout symptoms (Chen & Cunradi, 2008). We also find that emotionally exhausted employees have reduced cognitive, psychological, and emotional resources, which causes them to engage in deviant behavior at the interpersonal level. This result is supported by numerous research findings that demonstrate that emotional exhaustion is positively related to interpersonal dysfunction in the workplace (e.g., workplace interpersonal deviance and counterproductive work behaviors) (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). Hence, our study demonstrates the mediating link of emotional exhaustion between ostracism and interpersonal deviance.

In addition to employing this emotional strategy, employees also address ostracism through a cognitive path. Accordingly, per our second hypothesis, we observed that employees respond to ostracism by engaging in cognitive avoidance, namely, defensive silence. In Pakistani culture, it is considered rude to confront someone who has made a perceived slight (e.g., ostracism). Thus, employees may engage in defensive silence as a cultural artifact that helps illustrate

their implicit opposition to or disagreement with required organizational objectives and outcomes (Greenberg & Edwards, 2009). However, contrary to our third hypothesis, we found that defensive silence does not promote interpersonal deviance. We argue that employees use defensive silence as an intentional and proactive behavior, based upon fear, so they may avoid interpersonal deviance, which involves another person and can be noticeable as well as hostile (e.g., political behavior, aggression) (Morrison & Milliken, 2003; Van Dyne et al., 2003). Hence, our study fails to observe defensive silence as a significant mediating mechanism between ostracism and interpersonal deviance.

Instead, we found that defensive silence consumes valuable psychological and emotional resources and ultimately results in emotional exhaustion (Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011; Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Employees experience emotional exhaustion when they feel that they lack the emotional resources to manage continuous stressors (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). They experience "compassion fatigue that coexists with feelings of frustration and tension as they realize they cannot continue to give of themselves or be as responsible for clients as they have been in the past" (Cordes & Doughterty, 1993). Emotionally exhausted employees experience more turnover intentions, lower levels of commitment (Alarcon, 2011), low job performance (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010), reduced engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors, counterproductive work behaviors, depression, and family difficulties (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003).

The positive association found between emotional exhaustion and interpersonal deviance could be explained by the transaction theory of stress, which proposes that emotionally exhausted employees lack access to psychological and emotional resources and thus employ an avoidance-focused coping approach and engage in interpersonal deviance (Penney & Spector, 2008). Hence, our findings indicate that ostracism is positively associated with engagement in defensive silence, which then leads to the experience of emotional exhaustion. Taken together, these mediators suggest an indirect relationship between ostracism and interpersonal deviance.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes four significant contributions. First, it describes underlying cognitive and emotional mechanisms between ostracism and interpersonal deviance, namely, defensive silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000) and exhausted emotions (Yoo & Frankwick, 2013). Second, it extends the research on defensive silence to demonstrate its effect on interpersonal deviance (Van Dyne et al., 2003; Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). This is an interesting contribution, as most studies on outcomes of defensive silence have focused on facets of organizational learning (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), emotional exhaustion, and psychological and physical withdrawal

(Whiteside & Barclay, 2013). Further, extant research has theorized that the implications of employee silence extend beyond the constraints of information flows to employee outcomes, and our study is one of the few to offer empirical evidence on this issue (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Third, it integrates research on coping and interpersonal deviance and utilizes Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model to explain how employees use an avoidance-focused coping approach and show interpersonal deviance to reduce the negative effect of ostracism (Penney & Spector, 2008). Hence, this study stands apart with its projection of interpersonal deviance as a coping response that aims for emotional benefits. Finally, and most importantly, this study helps explain social constructs such as ostracism and deviance in the context of the collectivistic culture of Pakistan. It highlights that effects of ostracism are likely to be amplified in a collectivist culture that emphasizes the maintenance of close and harmonious interpersonal relationships. It further signifies that employees working in such cultures may prefer to use some form of indirect and covert interpersonal mistreatment such as defensive silence and interpersonal deviance to regain personal control over their surroundings (Chen, 1995).

Managerial Implications

In real-world terms, we trust that our conclusions will be vital to organizations, as they develop our understanding of predictors of interpersonal deviance. Our results show that workplace ostracism, defensive silence, and emotional exhaustion contribute to the prevalence of interpersonal deviance. Our work offers several direct and indirect avenues through which an organization can limit the occurrence of interpersonal deviance among employees. A first direct path involves the use of actions that discourage workplace ostracism, as it is counterproductive for employees, groups, and organizations (Williams, 2007; Ferris et al., 2008). In this regard, managers may try to be alert to and identify incidents of exclusion as soon as they appear. Managers may try to support an organizational culture that values the maintenance of high-quality relationships and that encourages fair competition, formal and informal interaction, and teamwork. For instance, managers may promote an inclusive climate by providing each new employee with a "mentor buddy" who can brief him or her on task-related skills and organizational expectations (Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007). Managers may even re-train old employees and warn them of the negative effects of ostracism, not only for themselves but also for their organizations. In addition, managers may alter job designs and introduce procedures that are highly interdependent. They may initiate common tasks and endorse a sense of group identity and shared rewards to emphasize cooperative goals (Li, Xin, Tsui, & Hambrick, 1999).

Despite these measures, we still cannot rule out the pervasiveness of ostracism, as surveys indicate that 96% of employees have experienced this phenomenon and that 99% have witnessed it. Hence, we believe that at least some level of workplace ostracism is expected to remain over the foreseeable future and that managers may rather focus on its control (Porath & Pearson, 2010). For instance, they may use a 360-degree performance appraisal method to highlight cases of employee exclusion as these are commonly used organizational practices that heighten the instrumental value of strong relationships between coworkers (Peng & Zeng, 2017). The application of such a performance appraisal system may help employees remain vigilant of any sort of ostracism experience as strong relationships between coworkers are instrumental to attaining material benefits such as job security, work rewards, and growth. Moreover, managers may develop and improve regulations that limit exclusive behavior in accordance with conventional standards of interpersonal behavior.

Another approach that is indirect but that still discourages interpersonal deviance pertains to defensive silence. Most managers would advise employees of the harmful effects of defensive silence but are limited by tools that help them assess and understand this form of inconspicuous silence in the workplace. However, instances in which managers anticipate the various motives behind defensive silence could lead them to plan targeted and effective strategies. For example, managers may try to create a benign organizational atmosphere and may introduce a suggestion system, which would not only create a sense of psychological safety but also mitigate fears of reprisal among employees (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

In light of existing research, the third and last measure that can directly spur interpersonal deviance is emotional exhaustion. Numerous studies have revealed a strong positive association between ostracism and experiences of individual burnout, and managers may aim to increase levels of emotional support through the use of several initiatives (Le Blanc, Hox, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2007). First, they may increase levels of group cohesion and facilitate collaboration among team members (Wong & Lin, 2007). Through such collaboration, they may promote interactions not only among employees but also between employees and supervisors (Van de Ven, van den Tooren, & Vlerick, 2013). Second, they may encourage "emotional mentoring" among colleagues to support the development of adaptive management skills (Kinman & Grant, 2011). Third, they may increase levels of emotional support through the application of an employee assistance plan that advances emotional management training and counseling.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study presents several limitations that must be considered when generalizing its results. As a first limitation, we observed only one form of silence, i.e., defensive silence. We recommend

that researchers explore other forms of silence such as acquiescent, prosocial, deviant, relational, and opportunistic silence (Knoll & Van Dick, 2013). Second, the generalizability of our results may be limited as we conducted our survey in a single country: Pakistan. Pakistan is ranked relatively high on collectivist norms as manifested through key roles played by family and kinship structures (Hofstede, 1991; Khilji, 1995). Such norms should convince subordinates to depend on their superiors or to form close in-groups to address individual or social needs (Khilji, 2013). It may thus be argued that if we conducted a second study on another collectivist culture, then we would see very similar results; however, if we conducted a similar study on an individualistic culture, then we would observe very different results. Third, the RMSEA values of our models range from 0.05 to 0.06 and are valued along the boundaries of standard convention. This implies that while some of our models are statistically significant, they may not explain much of the variance. Finally, our survey response rate of 56% is not optimal. Some recently published top-tier research articles employing two-time lagged data with peer report achieve an average value of 59%, which is quite close to our 56% response rate (Raja, Johns, & Bilgrami, 2011; Bouckenooghe, Zafar, & Raja, 2015; Donia, Raja, Panaccio, & Wang, 2016). While we acknowledge that our response rate is not strong, it can be justified based on our use of time-lagged and multi-sourced data, which made retrieving responses from the same respondents, a second time, difficult to achieve.

Strengths

The present study has several strong points. First, we collected two waves of data, which lend some support to the model explaining the effects of workplace ostracism on defensive silence, emotional exhaustion, and interpersonal deviance. Second, we gathered data from individuals and peer sources, which limited potential drawbacks associated with common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Third, we overcame limitations of deviance research, which typically relies on the examination of approach-oriented responses such as retaliatory behaviors. The study thus offers a versatile perspective and accounts for avoidance-oriented cognitive and affective reactions such as defensive silence and emotional exhaustion. Finally, we focused on a specific form of silence (defensive silence as a self-defensive behavior rooted in fear) and explored its different effects on employee outcomes (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2003).

Conclusion

This study observes important concerns related to issues of ostracism, defensive silence, emotional exhaustion, and interpersonal deviance in the context of a collectivistic culture,

Pakistan. It draws support from transaction theories of stress and shows that defensive silence and emotional exhaustion serially mediate the link between ostracism and interpersonal deviance. While previous studies cover the role of ostracism in instigating employee interpersonal deviance, the underlying processes supporting these relationships have not been widely explored. In recognizing that ostracism creates stressful situations, which first lead to defensive silence and then to emotional exhaustion, managers can make efforts to prevent the use of social exclusion in the workplace. Precisely, this study offers guidelines on ways in which to promote socially inclusive climates using human resource functions pertaining to recruitment, training and development, job design, and performance management.

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