

Ostracism in Everyday Life

John B. Nezlek
College of William & Mary

Eric D. Wesselmann
Purdue University

Ladd Wheeler
Macquarie University

Kipling D. Williams
Purdue University

Ostracism is a negative interpersonal experience that has been studied primarily in laboratory settings in which people have been ostracized by strangers and the motives for being ostracized have been ambiguous. This study extended this research by investigating ostracism as it occurs in daily life, focusing on people's reflective reactions to being ostracized in their daily lives and on the nature of the ostracism they experience. For 2 weeks, 40 participants (adults residing in the community) described what happened each time they felt ostracized using a diary method modeled after the Rochester Interaction Record (RIR; Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). The questions in the diary were based on Williams's (2007) need-threat model of ostracism. Most ostracism episodes were from persons of equal status, and participants reported lower levels of belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence after being ostracized. Participants' needs were threatened more when friends or close others had ostracized them than when they had been ostracized by acquaintance and strangers, and they reacted more negatively to punitive, defensive, and oblivious ostracism as opposed to role based or ambiguous ostracism. This research suggests that the reflective effects of ostracism can vary as a function of who ostracizes someone and why people feel they have been ostracized.

Keywords: ostracism, event-contingent diary, social exclusion

Since the mid-1990s, interest in the consequences of social exclusion, rejection, and ostracism has grown considerably, and it is easy to conclude from this research that ostracism, seemingly irrespective of its source or rationale, is aversive. People have all sorts of negative reactions, ranging from a loss of self-esteem to increased existential angst, to being rejected or ostracized by virtually anyone (Williams, 2007). It is unfortunate that in terms of understanding ostracism as it exists in people's day-to-day lives, virtually all of the research on ostracism and its variants has been done in the

laboratory, and the vast majority of the studies have examined ostracism among college students. In such studies, by definition, the nature and types of ostracism are carefully controlled as are the sources of the ostracism. Moreover, despite researcher's best efforts to maximize the external validity of their studies (see Williams, 2009, for review), it is not clear just how well the conditions created in laboratory studies resemble those in real life, outside of the laboratory. Is being left out of computer game the same as being shunned by members of a social group from which you derive your identity? Moreover, it is difficult to study some types of processes in the lab such as comparing being ostracized by family members and being ostracized by strangers.

This study moves beyond the laboratory and investigates ostracism as it occurs in daily life, focusing particularly on who ostracizes people and why people believe they have been ostracized. Participants in the study, adults living in Sydney, Australia, described what happened

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John B. Nezlek, Department of Psychology, College of William & Mary; Eric D. Wesselmann and Kipling D. Williams, Department of Psychological Sciences, Purdue University; Ladd Wheeler, Department of Psychology, Macquarie University, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to John B. Nezlek, Department of Psychology, College of William & Mary, P.O. Box 8795, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795. E-mail: jbnezl@wm.edu

each time they felt ostracized over a 2-week period. These descriptions included the nature and source of the ostracism and how they reacted to being ostracized. These data allowed us to understand more about ostracism as it occurs in vivo and to examine differences in peoples' reactions to being ostracized as a function of how they were ostracized and who ostracized them.

Findings From Laboratory Research

Individuals who have been rejected report hurt feelings (Leary & Springer, 2001), are more aggressive (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), and are less prosocial (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007). Compared with included individuals, those who are ostracized report lower levels of belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence, and these negative outcomes are an important part of Williams's (2007) need threat model of ostracism. This has been found when people have been ostracized by not being thrown a ball in a triadic ball-toss game (Williams & Sommer, 1997) and by not being included in a chat room conversation (Williams et al., 2002). These negative reactions occur even when the ostracizers are despised (e.g., the KKK; Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007) or when being ostracized is financially beneficial (van Beest & Williams, 2006).

Williams (2009) has suggested that reactions to ostracism should be distinguished in terms of the amount of time that has passed between the ostracizing event, per se, and when people describe their reactions to having been ostracized. More immediate reactions have been referred to as *reflexive*, and delayed reactions have been referred to as *reflective*. Individual differences do not seem to moderate the reflexive impact of such experiences of ostracism (see Wirth, Lynam, & Williams, 2010, for an exception). State self-esteem did not moderate the immediate impact of ostracism (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000), nor did collectivism-individualism (Smith & Williams, 2004), extraversion (Nadasi & Williams, reported in Williams, 2001), or social anxiety (Boland, Richardson, & Zadro, 2003; Oaten, Williams, Jones, & Zadro, 2008). In contrast, reflective reactions have been found to be influenced by individual differences such

as social anxiety (Oaten et al., 2008; Zadro, Boland, & Richardson, 2006).

Though there is a considerable amount of evidence from laboratory studies, suggesting that ostracism has powerful effects, both immediate and delayed, there is a dearth of research on real-life ostracism. Have we created a phenomenon in the laboratory that bears no resemblance to phenomena that exist in the real world? To what types of ostracism and ostracizers are people exposed? How does ostracism make people feel? Guided by Williams's ostracism model (2007), these questions guided our investigation.

Ostracism in Everyday Life

When deciding how to study ostracism in daily life, we thought in terms of two strategies—a broad questionnaire-survey instrument and an intensive repeated measures (aka diary) method. We chose the latter. Studies that use intensive repeated measures methods provide numerous advantages over studies that rely on single assessments that may require retrospection over an extended period of time (e.g., Reis & Gable, 2000). These advantages include reducing the undue influence single events may have on global retrospective assessments, minimizing the influence of people's general inability to recall temporally distant events accurately, and reducing the greater influence dispositional factors may have on long- versus short-term recall. Moreover, we thought that the problems associated with one-time assessment methods or methods that required retrospection over lengthy periods of time would be particularly pronounced for ostracism, which might be a "stand-out" event in people's lives.

In terms of selecting among different types of intensive repeated measures designs, we chose what has been called an "event-contingent" method. The term "event-contingent" refers to the fact that data collection is triggered by the occurrence of a specific type of event (Wheeler & Reis, 1991). This differs from interval contingent methods in which the passage of time triggers data collection (e.g., a daily diary). We modeled our ostracism record after the social interaction diary known as the Rochester Interaction Record (RIR), which was introduced by Wheeler and Nezlek (1977). In RIR studies, the

triggering event is a social interaction, whereas in this study, the triggering event was being ostracized. We thought that an event-contingent method was well-suited to studying ostracism because we thought that people would have little difficulty recognizing when they had been ostracized (particularly following a brief training period) and would be able to describe such events with sufficient detail and accuracy to provide the basis for a well-informed and valid study.

Expectations and Hypotheses

On the basis of existing theory and research, we expected that daily events of ostracism would be unpleasant; they would reduce individuals' state levels of feelings of belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. We also expected that reflective reactions to ostracism would vary as a function of how, why, and by whom people were ostracized. We felt that ostracism would be more painful and threaten psychological need states more when important others were doing the ostracism and when the ostracism was seen as punitive or intentional.

Williams's model (2007) specified five possible motives for ostracism that targets may infer after they think about having been ostracized. The first is *not ostracism*, meaning that on reflection, a person decides he or she was mistaken. This might happen when someone doesn't answer a question you ask, but then you notice later he was wearing earplugs and was listening to music. The initial pain of ostracism is reflexively felt, but it dissipates quickly because you come to believe that, in fact, you had not been ostracized although it appeared as such initially (a reflective reaction). The second is *role-prescribed* ostracism, when the ostracism is attributed to role requirements within a situation. This might happen when a waitress is totally ignored when pouring water for patrons. The role expectations for patrons and wait staff tacitly approve such instances of ostracism. *Defensive* ostracism refers to instances in which individuals ostracize a target to defend against being punished themselves. Expecting an argument for having broken a promise, an individual may make a preemptive move and ostracize another person to avoid confronting the issue of the broken promise. Employees of a company

may ostracize a whistleblower, not because they are angry but because they are afraid that they too will be ostracized if they associate with the whistleblower. *Punitive* ostracism describes those instances in which targets are ostracized because they or something they did is disliked and meets disapproval. Finally, *oblivious* ostracism refers to a lack of interest by the source in attending to or recognizing the individual. Often this occurs when there are status differences that render some people unworthy of attention (or so it is felt).

To date, no research has examined differences in the reflective impact of ostracism as a function of why people felt they had been ostracized. By asking respondents to attribute the ostracism to one of these five motives, we predict that not ostracism and role-prescribed ostracism would have the least impact, followed by defensive ostracism, punitive ostracism, and then oblivious ostracism. Both not ostracism and role-prescribed ostracism are easily dismissed as unintended or excusable. If ostracism is viewed as defensive, it also offers some excuse or rationale for the source's behavior. Punitive ostracism is unpleasant, but at least it requires effort by the source. Oblivious ostracism requires no effort on the part of the source, and it most directly threatens one's sense of existence and worth.

As mentioned previously, existing laboratory based research has failed to find meaningful individual differences in reactions to ostracism. The research suggests that people uniformly react negatively to being ostracized. Nevertheless, some research in which people have had time to reflect following the initial pain of ostracism suggests that individual differences can moderate recovery from the initial distress created by ostracism. Two studies have revealed that socially anxious participants take longer to recover from ostracism in terms of need threat (Zadro et al., 2006) and in terms of return to successful self-regulation (Oaten, Williams, Jones, & Zadro, 2008).

In this study, we measured peoples' reactions to having been ostracized some time after they had been ostracized, reactions we have discussed as reflective responses, and so we expected to find correlates of individual differences in responses to being ostracized. Moreover, diary methods, such as the one we used, provide more powerful tests of such relation-

ships than most laboratory-based studies because of the repeated measures that they produce. Dispositional measures are intended to describe how people behave or feel in general or on average; yet, in the typical laboratory study, measures are collected only once or at most, a few times. In contrast, in a diary study, participants provide data on numerous occasions, and such data provide a much better basis for describing how a person feels or behaves on average or in general than the single measures collected in most laboratory studies.

Given the importance of the five-factor model (FFM) of personality, we examined relationships between the factors of the model and how people reacted to ostracism. These analyses were guided by the general hypothesis that there would be a positive relationship between neuroticism and the strength of people's reactions to ostracism. Neuroticism reflects, in part, emotional instability, for example, remaining calm in tense situations, not being easily upset, handling stress well, and so forth. The available data indicate that being ostracized is stressful, and therefore neuroticism should be positively related to how strongly people react to being ostracized. We had no hypotheses about the other personality factors, but we included measures of them on an exploratory basis.

Finally, we also examined sex differences in reactions to being ostracized. A considerable body of research (e.g., Mills & Clark, 1982) suggests that women are more socially oriented than are men. Meta-analyses have found that female individuals are more accurate at decoding nonverbal communication than are male individuals, regardless of various moderating factors (Hall, 1978; McClure, 2000). Female individuals are also better than male individuals at remembering information about others' appearance (Mast & Hall, 2006).

Nevertheless, research has not found differences between men and women in how they react to being ostracized (Williams, 2007). It is important to note however, that these studies have focused on the immediate effects of ostracism rather than on the effects after reflection (cf. Williams & Sommer, 1997), and these studies have examined ostracism by strangers in laboratory settings. It is possible that gender differences may exist when people have been ostracized by a friend or other close relation and when people have a chance to reflect on having

been ostracized. Given this, we examined gender differences in how individuals were affected when reflecting on being ostracized, while taking into account the source of the ostracism.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 40 participants (14 men and 26 women; age, $M = 25.0$, $SD = 7.7$) who answered an advertisement in a Sydney, Australia newspaper. Participants were paid \$40. Participants recorded 736 ostracism episodes ($M = 34.8$, $SD = 17.9$) across an average of 10.8 days ($SD = 3.2$). No participant was dropped from the analyses.

Procedure

The procedure and instructions for the study were modeled after those introduced by Wheeler and Nezlek (1977). Participants were told that the study was about ostracism, which was described as being ignored and excluded. They were told that people might overlook instances of ostracism in their daily lives because in some instances, being ignored and excluded may be normative or appropriate. For example, people who sit next to each other on a train or bus may not acknowledge another's existence. We told them that even though these instances may not be important, we wanted them to record them. Examples of different types of ostracism were given, and participants were encouraged to generate examples from their own life experience. Written scenarios representing different aspects of ostracism were provided, and participants were taught how to code these examples.

Participants were told to describe when each episode occurred (time, date) and who were the ostracizers. Descriptions of the ostracizers included their relationship with the participant: stranger, acquaintance, ordinary friend, close friend, partner, or relative; and the relative social status of the ostracizer: inferior, equal, or superior. It also included how the ostracism was accomplished: (a) socially, in the presence of others; (b) physical separation, being ignored by others or when people physically removed themselves; and (c) cyber ostracism, being ignored over the telephone, mail, e-mail, chat rooms, and so forth.

Participants also described why they thought they had been ostracized:

1. Not clear: ambiguous—it's possible ostracism had not occurred;
2. Role prescribed the norms and roles within the situation dictated the ostracism, for example, a waiter is ignored by a diner;
3. Punitive: the ostracism occurred to punish or to indicate disapproval;
4. Ego defensive: the ostracism occurred to protect the ego of the ostracizer; and
5. Oblivious—the ostracizer did not notice them.

Changes in the ostracizer's behavior and the clarity of the reasons for the ostracism were rated on 1–5 scales. For changes in behavior, the scale labels were Barely, Slight, Moderate, Substantial, and Complete, and for clarity of reasons, there were Totally unclear, Pretty unclear, Moderate, Pretty clear, and Totally clear. Participants indicated how they felt about being ostracized by responding to the question, "Compared to how you felt prior to being ostracized, how have your feelings changed as a result of being ostracized?" They provided these ratings on –3 to +3 scales, with –3 representing lower or less, the midpoint (0) representing no change, and +3 representing higher or more. These ratings were belonging, control, self-esteem, meaningful existence, angry, and apologetic. The training sessions took about 90 min.

Participants were told to maintain the diary for 2 weeks, and they were told to complete forms as soon as possible after being ostracized. They were required to return their completed records every 2 to 3 days. After they completed the diary, participants completed the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1991), and they answered questions about how they had maintained the diary. Their responses indicated that they found it fairly easy to keep the diary and they thought their diaries were accurate.

Results

The present data comprised what is referred to as a multilevel data structure in that observations at one level of analysis (ostracizing events) were nested within another level of analysis (people). Accordingly, the data were

analyzed with a series of multilevel random coefficient models using the program HLM (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2000). Using multilevel modeling to analyze data such as we collected is discussed in Nezlek (2011).

Descriptive Statistics: An Overview of Ostracism in Everyday Life

Because this is the first study to examine ostracism in daily life, we felt that it would be appropriate to provide a broad description of ostracism as reported by our participants. The description is organized around the nature of the measure, either continuous or categorical, and the two types of measures required slightly different analyses and provide slightly different descriptions.

Continuous measures were analyzed series of unconditional models.

$$\text{Level 1 (within-person): } y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + r_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2 (between-person): } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$$

In this Level 1 model, y_{ij} is a measure for person j for event i , β_{0j} is a random coefficient representing the mean of y for person j (across the i events for which each person provided data), r_{ij} represents the error associated with each measure, and the variance of r_{ij} constitutes the within-person residual (or error) variance. At Level 2, γ_{00} represents the mean of the β_{0j} , and the variance of u_{0j} represents the between-persons variance.

A summary of the results of these analyses is presented in Table 1. For the belonging, control, self-esteem, meaningful existence, angry, and apologetic ratings, the midpoint for each of the scales was 0, representing no change. Therefore, negative numbers represent diminished or weaker feelings and evaluations, and positive numbers represent enhanced or stronger feelings and evaluations. For these ratings, all means were significantly different from 0 ($ps < .001$), and from the means presented in Table 1 it can be seen that people reacted negatively to being ostracized. They felt as if they belonged less, had less control, had lower self-esteem, their existence was less meaningful, and they felt less apologetic and angrier. They also re-

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Measures

Variable	<i>M</i>	Between-persons variance	Within-person variance	<i>t</i> ratio
Change	2.79	.37	1.28	
Clear [unambiguous]	2.98	.31	1.38	
Belong	-0.83	.21	0.63	10.51
Control	-0.74	.26	0.83	8.43
Self-esteem	-0.65	.22	0.63	8.28
Meaning	-0.36	.18	0.38	5.07
Anger	0.58	.22	1.05	6.91
Apology	-0.38	.23	1.25	4.34

ported that, on average, ostracizers' behavior changed moderately and that the reasons for their ostracism were moderately clear.

The next set of analyses concerned the categorical measures participants used to describe the ostracism they experienced. For each event, participants described how they had been ostracized, the status of and the relationship they had with the ostracizer, and the reason they were ostracized. In these analyses, the dependent measure was a dummy-coded variable representing whether an ostracizing event was of a certain type or not (e.g., ostracizer was superior status or not), and the coefficients from this model are the log-odds of a particular type of event occurring (Raudenbush et al., 2000). The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 2.

The majority of the time people were ostracized it was by persons of equal status (80%) and it was social in nature (70%). Type of ostracism was distributed relatively equally across the five types, although defensive ostracism occurred somewhat less frequently (12%) than the other types. Approximately one third of ostracizers were strangers, one third were acquaintances, one sixth were ordinary friends,

13% were close friends, 4% were partners, and 5% were relatives. Situational factors were cited as the reason for being ostracized 46% of the time, and something about the ostracizer was cited as the reason 42% of the time. In contrast, participants felt that something about themselves was responsible for the ostracism only 12% of the time.

Differences Among Ostracizing Events

Differences in reactions to different types of ostracism were examined with a series of analyses that compared reactions to being ostracized as a function of the categorical measures participants used to classify ostracizing events (relationship, type, status, method, and reason). Unfortunately, it was not possible to analyze combinations of these classificatory variables (e.g., role-based ostracism from a stranger vs. role-based ostracism from a friend) because not enough participants had enough events representing combinations of categorical variables.

Each of these analyses used a Level 1 model in which different types of ostracizing events were distinguished using series of dummy-coded variables with one dummy-coded vari-

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Categorical Measures

Relationship	Pct	Type	Pct	Status	Pct	Method	Pct	Reason	Pct
Stranger	32	Not Clear	25	Inferior	6	Social	71	Me	12
Acquaintance	30	Role	24	Equal	80	Cyber	19	Them	42
Ordinary friend	16	Punitive	18	Superior	14	Physical	10	Situation	46
Close friend	13	Defensive	12						
Partner	4	Oblivious	21						
Relative	5								

Pct = Percent of events falling into a category.

able representing each type of event within a mutually exclusive system (e.g., relationship of ostracizer to participant). These no-intercept models generate coefficients that represent the mean response for each type of event. See Nezlek (2011) for a description. For example, the relationships participants had with the ostracizers were represented with four dummy-coded variables each representing a relationship: stranger, acquaintance, ordinary friend, and close other (the close friend, partner, and relative categories were combined into the category "close other" because of the low frequencies of partner and relative). These dummy-coded variables were then included in a no-intercept Level 1 model:

$$y_{ij} = \beta_{1j}(\text{Stranger}) + \beta_{2j}(\text{Acquaintance}) \\ + \beta_{3j}(\text{Ordinary Friend}) \\ + \beta_{4j}(\text{Close Other}) + r_{ij}.$$

In these models, β_{1j} , β_{2j} , β_{3j} , and β_{4j} were random coefficients representing the mean of y_{ij} across events in which participants had been ostracized by strangers, acquaintances, ordinary friends, and close others respectively. For the analyses of type of ostracism, five dummy-coded variables were used, each representing a type: not clear (i.e., ambiguous), role, punitive, defensive, or oblivious. The analyses of status, reason, and method each used three dummy-coded variables, corresponding to the three different statuses, reasons, and methods. Means for each type of event were compared, using chi-square tests of fixed effects (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Unless otherwise noted, all paired comparisons were significant at $p < .05$.

A summary of the analyses examining reactions to being ostracized as a function of the relationship participants had with those who ostracized them is presented in Table 3. Participants tended to react more strongly (in terms of belonging, control, self-esteem, and life meaning) when they had been ostracized by ordinary friends and close others than when they had been ostracized by acquaintance and strangers. In contrast, feeling angry and apologetic did not vary as a function of relationship.

A summary of the analyses examining reactions to being ostracized as function of type of

Table 3
Reactions to Being Ostracized as a Function of Relationship With Ostracizer

Variable	Relationship			
	Stranger	Acquaintance	Ordinary friend	Close other
Change	2.82 _{a,c}	2.59 _b	2.59 _{b,c}	3.12 _a
Clear	2.86 _b	2.82 _b	2.95 _{a,b}	3.26 _a
Belong	-0.59 _c	-0.84 _b	-0.93 _{a,b}	-1.11 _a
Control	-0.61 _b	-0.64 _b	-0.76 _{a,b}	-1.00 _a
Self-esteem	-0.49 _c	-0.66 _b	-0.56 _{b,c}	-0.97 _a
Meaning	-0.33 _{a,b}	-0.30 _b	-0.37 _{a,b}	-0.47 _a
Apology	-0.50	-0.37	-0.20	-0.31
Anger	-0.57	-0.54	-0.46	-0.75

Note. All means were significantly different from 0 (all $ps < .005$ and beyond). Within rows, means sharing a subscript were not significantly different ($p < .05$). In rows without any subscripts no pair of means was different.

ostracism is presented in Table 4. Across the different measures, these results suggest that participants reacted more strongly to punitive, defensive, and oblivious ostracism than to role or ambiguous ostracism, with defensive ostracism having somewhat less of an impact for a sense of belonging, control, and self-esteem than punitive or oblivious ostracism.

Some reactions to being ostracized varied as a function of the reason for being ostracized (me, them, or situation). Participants felt a lower sense of belonging and self-esteem when they thought something about themselves was responsible for being ostracized ($Ms = -1.15$ and -0.94 , respectively) than when they thought it was something about the ostracizer ($Ms = -0.90$ and -0.70), and they felt a lower sense of belonging and self-esteem when they thought it was something about the ostracizer than when they thought the ostracism was situational (-0.67 and -0.54). Participants felt the least apologetic when ostracism was due to the ostracizer (-0.62) then when the ostracism was situational (-0.24) or the result of something about themselves (-0.13).

Some reactions to ostracism also varied as a function of how people had been ostracized. Participants felt a smaller decrease in control and self-esteem and a smaller increase in anger when they had been socially ostracized (-0.66 , -0.60 , and 0.49 , respectively) then when they had been physically ostracized (-1.02 , -0.93 ,

Table 4
Reactions to Being Ostracized as a Function of Type of Ostracism

Variable	Type of ostracism				
	Not clear	Role	Punitive	Defensive	Oblivious
Change	2.28 _d	2.60 _c	3.43 _a	2.95 _b	2.93 _{b,c}
Clear	2.98 _b	3.00 _b	3.49 _c	3.04 _b	2.53 _a
Belong	-0.63 _c	-0.61 _c	-1.21 _a	-0.84 _{b,c}	-1.07 _{a,b}
Control	-0.57 _b	-0.56 _b	-1.07 _a	-0.42 _b	-1.03 _a
Self-esteem	-0.56 _b	-0.47 _b	-0.86 _a	-0.52 _b	-0.85 _a
Meaning	-0.24 _{b,c}	-0.26 _{b,c}	-0.47 _a	-0.31 _{a,b,c}	-0.43 _{a,b}
Apology	-0.17 _c	-0.30 _{a,b,c}	-0.49 _{a,b,c}	-0.54 _{a,b}	-0.56 _a
Anger	0.36 _b	0.42 _b	0.96 _a	0.68 _{a,b}	0.72 _a

Within rows, means sharing a subscript were not significantly different ($p < .05$). In rows without any subscripts no pair of means was different.

and 1.00). Across these measures, reactions to cyber ostracism tended to be between the reactions to social and physical ostracism (-0.99 , -0.70 , and 0.71 for control, self-esteem, and anger, respectively).

The status of ostracizer (inferior, equal, and superior) was the least informative categorical variable. There was only one significant difference in reactions to ostracism as a function of the status of the ostracizer. Participants felt less apologetic when they had been ostracized by an inferior (-0.94) than when they had been ostracized by an equal (-0.35), and they felt less apologetic when they had been ostracized by an equal than when they had been ostracized by an inferior (-0.11).

Sex and Individual Differences in Reactions to Being Ostracized

We explored the possibility that women would react more strongly than men to being ostracized, but we did not find such a difference. There were no significant differences between men's and women's reactions to being ostracized when all types of ostracism were considered together. Moreover, the few sex differences that occurred when the relationship of the ostracizer and the type of ostracism were taken into account did not follow a discernible pattern.

In terms of personality measures, we expected that higher scores on neuroticism would be associated with stronger reactions to being ostracized. A series of analyses that included the five FFM factors at Level 2 (standardized prior to analysis) revealed that, as expected,

more neurotic people reacted more negatively to ostracism than less neurotic people. Neuroticism scores were negatively related to how much people felt they belonged ($\gamma_{01} = -.17$, $p < .02$), their self-esteem ($\gamma_{01} = -.19$, $p < .01$), their sense of control ($\gamma_{01} = -.16$, $p < .09$), and the meaning of their lives ($\gamma_{01} = -.11$, $p < .05$). Because FFM scores were standardized, these coefficients can be interpreted to represent the change in the dependent measure associated with a 1 *SD* change in neuroticism. The only other significant relationship between a FFM score and reactions to ostracism was a negative relationship between control and openness ($\gamma_{03} = -.17$, $p < .02$).

Follow-up analyses that examined sex differences in these relationships found only one such difference, which we deemed to be an isolated effect. Another series of analyses examined the extent to which relationships between neuroticism varied as a function of the nature of the relationship participants had with those who had ostracized them. These analyses did not find that the main effects reported above were qualified by the nature of the relationship nor by the type of ostracism. The associations between neuroticism and belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaning reported above were the same regardless of the nature of the relationship people had with those who had ostracized them or the type of ostracism that occurred.

Discussion

This was the first study of which we are aware to examine the impact of ostracism in

everyday life. Although some might consider ostracism an unlikely event for the average person, something extreme but memorable, we found that respondents recorded about an ostracism episode a day, making ostracism a part of everyday life. Over 700 entries were recorded in which participants described ostracism episodes that ranged from the seemingly mundane (e.g., cotravelers on the bus or train) to being quite serious (e.g., receiving the silent treatment for days from one's relationship partner). Episodes occurred in formal and informal face-to-face social situations, over e-mail and chat rooms, with strangers, and relatives, for reasons deemed to be oblivious, accidental, defensive, and punitive.¹

Thus, we felt that we accumulated a rich database. Of course, many of the ostracism episodes were mundane (i.e., role prescribed), and the layperson might suspect these to be easily sloughed off as expected or meaningless. Nevertheless, we know from laboratory research that a 3-min ostracism episode in which one is tossing an imaginary ball with strangers who are not seen is sufficient to be painful (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003), can threaten multiple fundamental needs, and can increase sadness and anger (Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004). Further, simply watching another person being ostracized is enough to induce vicarious need threat (Wesselmann, Bagg, & Williams, 2009), and even failing to receive eye contact can result in feelings of ostracism or social disconnection (Wesselmann, Cardoso, Slater, & Williams, 2012; Wirth, Sacco, Hugenberg, & Williams, 2010).

Laboratory research has primarily concerned *reflexive* responses to ostracism—responses that occur prior to attribution or appraisal (Williams, 2007). In contrast, this study examined more *reflective* responses—those occurring a meaningful time after a person had been ostracized.² Nevertheless, in a general sense, our findings were similar to the results of laboratory research. Overall, ostracism was an unpleasant experience that negatively influenced mood and that lowered levels of belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence compared to the levels they were experiencing prior to the ostracism episode.

We also found new evidence as yet uncovered in laboratory studies. Participants reported feeling worse and feeling greater need threats

when they had been ostracized by closer others than when they had been ostracized by strangers. Although this finding may not be startling, it differs from the results of laboratory research that has found that the initial pain of ostracism (reflexive effects) does not vary as function of the source of ostracism. The reflective effects engendered by ostracism appear to be greater when the source is psychologically closer to the target versus more distant, and when the ostracism is intended as punishment and consists of ignoring the person versus being ostracized for other reasons.

These results also suggest that individual differences play an important role in how people respond to being ostracized. In particular, more neurotic people were more distressed by being ostracized than those who were less neurotic. Such a finding is consistent with some previous research on reactions to inclusion and exclusion (e.g., Denissen & Penke, 2008), although it should be noted that laboratory studies of ostracism, per se (which have focused on immediate reactions), have not revealed relationships between neuroticism and how people react to being ostracized.

¹ In this article, we discuss only results of analyses of participants' descriptions of being ostracized. We do not consider the frequency with which they were ostracized, for example, the number of times they were ostracized each day. We did not analyze how often people were ostracized because there was some ambiguity about this measure. Although on average, participants returned their completed forms to a member of the research team every 2–3 days, due to an oversight, when they did this, they were not asked why there were some days for which they described no events. A missing day could mean that they were not ostracized on that day or that they did not maintain the record (for whatever reason). Regardless of the assumptions made about this aspect of the data, our data suggest that being ostracized is a regular occurrence. If days for which no event was described are assumed to be days that the record was not maintained, the average number of ostracizing events each day was 1.7 ($SD = 1.15$). Depending on the assumptions made about why days were missing, the mean per day is lower but is always 1.0 or more. See Nezlek (2012) for a discussion of such issues.

² Participants recorded the time that they provided each individual report. Only 5% of reports were provided within 5 min of the ostracizing event. Moreover, half of participants had no reflexive reports, 25% had only one reflexive report, and 15% had only two reflexive reports. Wirth and Williams (2009) found that reflective processes began occurring within 2 min of the ostracizing event. Thus, we will assume that all responses on our measures are reflective in nature.

Nevertheless, some laboratory-based research has revealed relationships between individual differences and delayed (reflective) reactions to ostracism. For example, Zadro et al. (2006) found that social anxiety was positively related to how long some of the negative effects of ostracism lasted, and Oaten et al. (2008) found that social anxiety was positively related to the negative effects of ostracism had on self-regulation. Our results add further evidence that individual differences moderate the recovery from ostracism. Although we do not have process data to explain why neuroticism moderates the recovery from ostracism, we suspect that rumination underlies this effect.

We also found that participants felt worse when they attributed being ostracized to something about themselves, compared with when they attributed the ostracism to something about those who ostracized them. Such results are consistent with the suggestion that a good way to cope with stress may be to make an external attribution regarding its source rather than to make an internal attribution (e.g., Seligman, 1998).

One curious finding in our data is that people were more likely to be ostracized by acquaintances or strangers, compared with friends or family members. There is little experimental research on ostracism within close relationships, but considerable survey data suggests ostracism does occur in close relationships (i.e., “the silent treatment”; Williams, 2001; Williams et al., 1998; Zadro, Williams, & Arriaga, 2008). A survey of over 2,000 Americans revealed that 67% reported using ostracism in their relationships and that 75% reported having been ostracized by a relational partner (Faulkner, Williams, Sherman, & Williams, 1997). Ostracism appears to be used primarily to manipulate one’s relationship partner, often to force the partner to terminate unwanted behavior (Buss, Gomes, Higgins, & Lauterbach, 1987; Williams & Zadro, 1999). Although ostracism may be an effective tactic in the short term, survey research suggests that if used regularly, the ostracized partner may develop feelings of resentment and withdrawal (Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, & Baumeister, 2001). These feelings are probably one of the reasons that the silent treatment facilitates marital deterioration (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Zadro et al., 2008). It seems that ostracism is a social

weapon that is used sparingly in close relationships. Such a rationale is consistent with our finding that people reported being ostracized by acquaintances and strangers more often than they were ostracized by close others (i.e., friends and family members).

Ostracism and Interpersonal Stress

It is quite clear that being ostracized is aversive, and although this term has not been used frequently in discussions of ostracism, per se, ostracism is also stressful. Moreover, conceptualizing ostracism as a form of interpersonal stress provides a link between research on ostracism (much of which is laboratory based and de-emphasizes individual differences) and research on daily stress (much of which relies on various types of diaries and emphasizes individual differences). Such a link is particularly important to understanding the relation we found between neuroticism and negative reactions to being ostracized. One of the dominant models guiding research on daily stress is Eysenck’s model of personality (e.g., Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985). This model suggests that more neurotic people will react more strongly to negative events than less neurotic people. Although empirical support for this proposition is somewhat mixed (see Nezlek & Plesko, 2003, for a brief discussion), the proposition and underlying theory remain important parts of the rationale for much contemporary research.

These results support this model and its predictions. Some time after being ostracized, more neurotic people, compared with their less neurotic counterparts, felt that they belonged less, their self-esteem and sense of control decreased more, and they felt that their lives were less meaningful. Although Eysenck’s model emphasized affective reactions to stress, our results are consistent with the thrust of the model. Moreover, the results of additional analyses of the present data that were not previously described, suggest that these relationships with neuroticism are fairly specific. That is, there were no significant (or near significant) relationships between reactions to being ostracized and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) or secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

One critical question our study leaves unanswered is the extent to which relationships between neuroticism and reactions to ostracism reflect differences in how people react to ostracism, per se; differences between neurotic and nonneurotic people in how they are ostracized; or some combination of these two. To examine this possibility, we examined relationships between neuroticism and the various categorical descriptions people provided of being ostracized (relationship, type, status, method, and reason), and we found only one significant relationship. Neuroticism was negatively related to the percent of being ostracized by friends ($\gamma_{01} = -.33, t = 2.11, p < .05$). For those high in neuroticism, 10% of the time they had been ostracized by a friend, whereas for those low in ostracism, the corresponding figure was 19%. These results suggest that it is individual differences in how people react to being ostracized rather than differences in how people are ostracized that accounts for our findings involving neuroticism. Nevertheless, we cannot be certain whether the ostracizing events people experienced somehow differed as a function of how neurotic they were.

Thinking of ostracism as a type of stressor also suggests that researchers need to consider the roles social support may have in coping with the negative reactions created by ostracism. Although some of the distress caused by being ostracized may be immediate and short lived, the distress created by some types of ostracism may endure meaningfully beyond the situation in which the ostracism occurred. If so, people may seek social support to help cope with this distress. Recent research has found that within-person relationships between daily negative events (including interpersonal problems) and daily self-esteem, depressogenic adjustment, and mood were weaker for people who had greater perceived social support from friends than they were for people with less support (Nezlek & Allen, 2006). It seems reasonable to assume that an interpersonal asset (social support) might be an effective antidote for distress that had an interpersonal source (ostracism). Nevertheless, such a possibility needs to be examined explicitly.

One of the motivating forces behind the growth of research on daily stress is that stress has a cumulative characteristic. Small amounts of stress experienced on a regular basis over an

extended period of time can be just as important as infrequent, major life events. Our data suggest that ostracism is a common occurrence, and as such, it is possible that it may have the same type of cumulative effect. Such a possibility is discussed by Williams's (2009), who proposed a *resignation* stage of ostracism. Williams (2009) argued that if individuals are persistently ostracized, they face chronic need threat and may eventually resign themselves to their fate and experience strong negative outcomes. Such a possibility also recalls research on learned helplessness. Although this possibility has not received much study, interviews with individuals who have reported experiencing chronic ostracism suggest that they experience the types of negative outcomes suggested by Williams's model (Zadro, 2004; Williams, 2007). Future research should use diary-based methods and collect measures of Williams's proposed outcomes for chronic need threat.

Implications for Diary Research

In addition to increasing our understanding of ostracism, per se, this study also suggests that ostracism is a topic that can be studied using diary style methods. Diary style research has become quite popular over the last 2 decades or so, and much of this research uses variations of what Wheeler and Reis (1991) described as interval- and signal-contingent techniques. In the former, data are collected following some fixed period of time (e.g., daily), and in the latter, data collection is triggered by some type of signal, often random or semirandom (e.g., beeper-style studies). As noted above, such techniques have frequently been used to study reactions to stress, including interpersonal stressors. Meaningfully fewer studies have used event-contingent methods, the type of technique we used, in which data are collected in response to the occurrence of a specific type of event. Moreover, in the majority (if not most) of event-contingent diary studies, the event that triggers data collection has been the social interaction. See Nezlek (2012) for descriptions of studies using these different techniques.

These results suggest that being ostracized is an event that is sufficiently distinct to serve as the basis for an event-contingent data collection protocol. Being ostracized or excluded is a salient occurrence, and people appear to be able to

describe such occurrences in ways that provide a basis for answering meaningful questions about ostracism. Similar to the RIR on which it is based, the present research method (which we have tentatively named the Sydney Ostracism Record) exists more as a template or guide than as a fixed, etched-in-stone protocol. This study is the first of its kind, and researchers in the future may want to modify the record we used to reflect other interests such as including more measures of affective reactions. Regardless, our study provides the basis for future research on naturally occurring ostracism, an important contribution considering the present lack of research on ostracism in real life.

Summary

This first study of reactions to everyday ostracism yielded several important findings. Although some may think that ostracism is an extreme and infrequent event (based on the linguistic origin of the word—the formal exclusion from society in ancient Greece), it is in fact something that people face frequently. Moreover, laboratory research suggests that even trivial or unimportant episodes of ostracism lead to pain, leaving open the possibility that there may be some type of cumulative effect. Third, real-life episodes of ostracism increase sadness and anger and decrease feelings of belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence just as they do in the laboratory, providing convergent and external validity to Williams's (2007) need-threat model of ostracism. Fourth, our findings raise interesting hypotheses that can be further investigated in the laboratory, such as whether greater distress occurs when being ostracized by close others rather than by strangers, when socially present rather than when socially isolated, and for individuals who score higher on neuroticism. Finally, to round out our understanding of this phenomenon, we hope to use this event-contingent diary approach to assess the frequency and impact of ostracizing (vs. being ostracized) in daily life.

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