# Workplace Ostracism: A Literature Review, Comparative Analysis of Negative Workplace Behaviors, and Theoretical Perspectives

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| KEYWORDS | ABSTRACT |
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| *workplace ostracism, workplace incivility, workplace discrimination, systematic literature review* | Workplace ostracism is increasingly recognized as a significant social phenomenon that can have a detrimental impact on individuals. A growing body of literature by scholars worldwide highlights its widespread prevalence and impact across organizational settings. Considering the contribution of various scholars in the area of ostracism, a comprehensive review is attempted here. Towards this, the present study aims to achieve three main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to consolidate and analyze existing research, examining various definitions of workplace ostracism and based on this, proposing an all-encompassing definition of workplace ostracism. Secondly, it assesses how current theories are applied to investigate workplace ostracism. Lastly, it outlines the limitations of this study and suggests potential avenues for future research on ostracism within organizational settings, pinpointing the most robust and frequently examined connections related to workplace ostracism. Additionally, this study explores various forms of negative workplace behaviors and draws comparisons with workplace ostracism. |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

While there were a few isolated experiments examining exclusion or neglect in social psychology literature during the 1960s and 1970s, it wasn't until the late 1980s that researchers actively started examining the effects of ostracism and similar occurrences. Since then, there has been a notable increase in understanding the psychological and behavioral consequences of social exclusion, rejection, and ostracism. Encountering these situations where one feels disregarded or overlooked by peers or social groups was found to be a common occurrence within diverse social contexts, including the professional environment (Williams, 1997; Hitlan et al., 2006; Fox & Stallworth, 2005). However, it was after 2008 when the number of studies increased substantially, and a lot of papers appeared in research journals.

Prior research has highlighted that ostracism can be an exceptionally distressing encounter; the emotional pain arising from seclusion has been equated to physical pain (Riva et al., 2011; Eisenberger, 2012). Moreover, these experiences of ostracism are not only highly distressing, but under specific circumstances, they can have an even more harmful impact compared to other negative workplace behaviors such as harassment and aggression (Williams & Zadro, 2001; O'Reilly et al., 2014). It is a major social phenomenon that has an impact on how people behave and are treated by others at work (Williams, 2007) and it goes completely against human nature, and as a result, victims of ostracism try to get rid of it (Over and Carpenter, 2009).

Ostracism can take various forms, such as excluding someone from conversations or social events, giving them the silent treatment, or intentionally avoiding interactions with them. It entails the willful act of preventing specific people from engaging in social interaction, communication, or employment-related activities. Additionally, it refers to how much a person feels their coworkers are ignoring them (Ferris et al., 2015). The silent treatment, exclusion from social interactions and conversations, and a general lack of acknowledgment or recognition are common for ostracised employees.

Ostracism at workplace can have severe detrimental effects on the people who are subjected to it (Haldorai et al., 2020). It fosters feelings of loneliness, isolation, and emotional anguish, which lowers one's self-esteem and negatively affects one's psychological well-being. Its negative effects on workers include psychological anguish, feelings of inadequacy, demotivation along with a diminished sense of belonging within the organisation. It also causes unhappiness at work and increased intent to leave the job turnover intentions (Wu et al., 2012; Ferris et al., 2015).

Extensive research conducted in different regions around the world has consistently demonstrated the prevalence of workplace ostracism (Wesselmann et al., 2009). This detrimental phenomenon exerts profound negative effects across various dimensions (Gonsalkorale and Williams, 2007) and can manifest in various forms (O'Reilly et al., 2015) at various organizational levels. It can manifest in interpersonal relationships, where individuals are deliberately ignored or excluded by their colleagues. It can also occur within teams, where certain team members are marginalized or left out of important discussions and decision-making processes. In some cases, organizational culture or policies may perpetuate a climate of exclusion, making certain individuals feel unwelcome or invisible within the workplace. This significantly diminishes opportunities for social engagement within the workplace, ultimately leading to the unfulfilled satisfaction of the majority of social and emotional needs (Wu et al., 2012).

Understanding workplace ostracism is crucial for organizations to foster a healthy and inclusive work environment. By recognizing and addressing the issue, organizations can promote positive interpersonal relationships, enhance teamwork and collaboration, and improve overall employee well-being and job performance. Raising awareness, implementing explicit anti-ostracism policies, and offering training in effective communication and inclusivity can help mitigate workplace ostracism.

Considering the scholarly interest in this area, some attempts have been made in the past to review the literature. A literature review by Robinson et al.'s (2013) represents a seminal work in the area and examines the antecedents, outcomes and moderators of workplace ostracism. Building on this, Mao et al. (2017) clarify insights into the underlying mechanisms through which ostracism affects individuals and emphasize cultural implications that influence these dynamic. The most recent review by Banerjee, & Shinde (2025) advances the literature by analyzing the impact of workplace ostracism on both individual and organizational outcomes while also exploring management and HR interventions aimed at mitigating its adverse effects. Given its significant adverse impact on four fundamental psychological needs—social needs, autonomy, self-esteem, and a sense of meaningful existence (Mao et al., 2018) —workplace ostracism has emerged as a powerful predictor of various critical work-related outcomes. Building on the solid foundation laid by previous scholars, we intend to systematically review this large body of literature and integrate the most recent empirical developments in the field.

Unlike earlier reviews, the present study adopts a distinct focus and seeks to accomplish three objectives: First, we intend to track the theoretical and empirical advancements within the domain of workplace ostracism and provide an all-encompassing definition. The second objective is to compare and contrast workplace ostracism with other forms of negative workplace behavior – specifically, workplace discrimination, incivility and abuse. While these constructs often share overlapping characteristics, it is essential to delineate their unique features to enhance conceptual clarity and guide targeted interventions. Third, we seek to examine the theoretical underpinnings of workplace ostracism by exploring the range of psychological and organizational theories that explain its occurrence and outcomes. In particular, this review draws upon Social Exchange Theory, Social Identity Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, Victim Precipitation Theory, and Self-Esteem Theory to propose an integrative conceptual model. Lastly, this review endeavors to identify and establish gaps in the existing research, thereby offering meaningful directions for future scholarly inquiry. In doing so, this study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the sequential dynamics and mechanisms through which ostracism unfolds in organizational settings.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study relies on an integrative literature review, which is a process of amalgamating and harmonizing literature that constitutes "a unique form of research that yields novel insights" (Torraco, 2005). The integrative review is considered a pertinent technique for consolidating existing literature in the context of real-life emerging topics marked by incongruous findings. These topics transcend disciplinary boundaries and apply to diverse scenarios (Torraco, 2004). Given that ostracism extends beyond confined situations, encompassing sociology, psychology, and management science, it has emerged as a concept of significance over the last decade, demonstrating relevance to real-life behaviors (Williams, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013). Consequently, the concept of workplace ostracism lends itself well to integration and synthesis because it has a limited theoretical foundation and lacks well-defined conceptual frameworks. It is a multidisciplinary phenomenon, and its expression depends on contextual factors.

Utilizing this method, the review's examination was steered by the following inquiries:

(1) What insights regarding workplace ostracism can be extracted from existing literature?

(2) How is workplace ostracism conceptualized and characterized in this body of literature?

(3) How does workplace ostracism compare with other forms of negative workplace behavior, such as discrimination, incivility, and abuse?

(4) What theoretical frameworks have been applied to understand workplace ostracism, and how do they inform our understanding of its antecedents and outcomes?

(5) What prospects lie ahead for the study of workplace ostracism?

## Research Method

In order to capture recent development in this area, we conducted a systematic literature search from the period 2013 to 2025. The year 2013 was deliberately chosen as Robinson et al. (2013) published a comprehensive review in 2013, which effectively synthesized research conducted prior to that year. Keywords of ostracism, workplace ostracism, social exclusion, rejection, deviant workplace behavior, counterproductive workplace behavior, workplace misconduct and misbehavior were used in the literature search in major management and social psychology journals. For this review study, empirical, original, and review articles or papers focusing on all these areas were selected. The selection process for articles on deviant workplace behavior comprised four phases. The first phase involved identification, followed by screening based on title and abstract reading. In the third phase, eligibility was evaluated through full-text readings, and in the fourth phase, articles were included in the study based on their empirical study or review pertaining to workplace ostracism.

*Database.* The study employed electronic databases, including JStor, ProQuest, Elsevier, Science Direct, Emerald, Sage, Wiley Blackwell, as well as Google Scholar, to locate pertinent research papers. The primary search parameters were "workplace ostracism", "ostracization". In addition to these terms, "Co-worker exclusion, workplace incivility, Defensive silence and Unethical pro-organizational behaviour" were also used to enhance the search. The suitability of articles was verified by assessing their abstracts in accordance with the guidelines outlined by Torraco (2005). Subsequently, key insights and contributions from the selected articles were documented, and they were categorized into consecutive phases. Following a thorough examination of the literature, these findings were amalgamated into a cohesive model, which is presented in the research's concluding section.

*Screening of studies.* Using the search parameters mentioned above, we found 691 studies that were then thoroughly screened. At the first level, duplication was eliminated (n = 156) resulting in reduction of articles to 535. In the next step, screening method as advised by VonVille (2015) using an Excel spreadsheet to screen all 691 titles and abstracts, remaining blind to authors and journal names. All studies that did not fulfil these criteria (n = 78) were excluded after verifying that all eligibility requirements had been met leaving 457 articles within the consideration zone. Next a full text reading was carried out which resulted in exclusion of articles (n = 103) that did not address workplace related ostracism, rejection or discrimination criteria or if the journal articles were not published in peer-reviewed journals, or the required data was not readily accessible. This reduced the number of studies to 354 studies in the final analysis based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria. In Fig. 1, the selection procedure is shown.
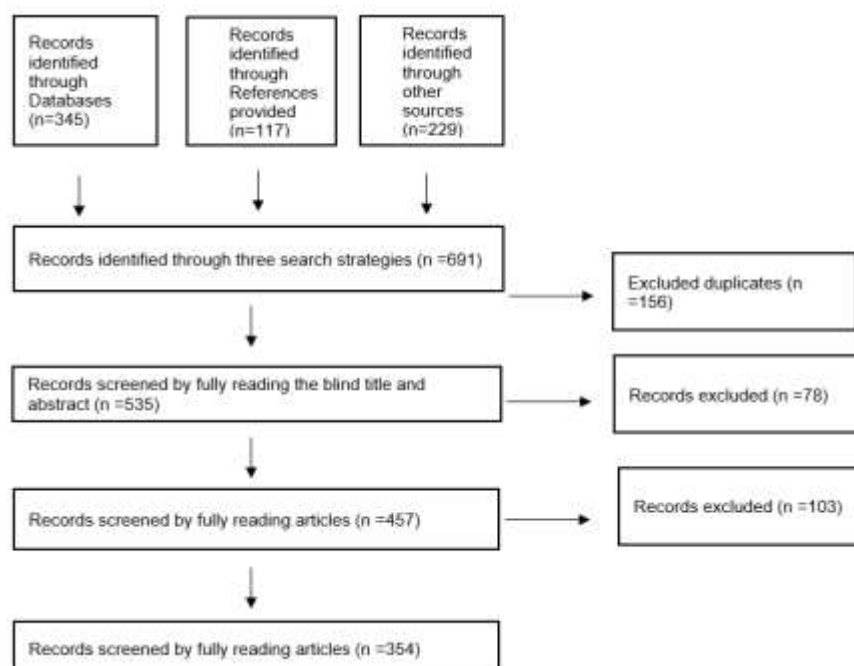


*(Modified from: Page MJ et al,. PRISMA 2020)*

**FIGURE 1 | The literature research procedure.**

***Nature of studies*** In addition to the 310 published articles available in electronic databases, 44 unpublished publications/dissertations (total=354) that explored workplace ostracism were also examined. There were 221 empirical publications, 86 conceptual papers, and 47 literature reviews included in the sample.

## 3. DEFINING WORKPLACE OSTRACISM

Given that ostracism is prevalent in workplaces, researchers in organizational psychology began studying it through the business and management lens, coining the term "workplace ostracism." Workplace ostracism constitutes a form of conduct that adversely impacts both organizations and their members. Research underscores the significance of workplace ostracism, emphasizing its impact as more pronounced than cases of bullying and harassment (Robinson et al., 2013). Research indicates that experiencing ostracism or neglect can trigger a distinct type of distress like physical discomfort (Eisenberger, 2012; Riva et al., 2011, Ng, 2017). Ostracism can manifest in various ways, such as, ignoring or avoiding an individual, exclusion from discussions and decision-making, information withholding, social isolation and discrediting or belittling the person's contributions. Workplace ostracism is characterized by the failure of an individual or group to initiate interactions with another member of the organization when such interactions are socially appropriate (Ferris et al., 2015). Robinson et al. (2013) offer a definition that describes it as "the extent to which an individual believes they are being disregarded or left out by their colleagues at work." When taken together, these two definitions demonstrate how ostracism can result from both exclusion and inclusion and how it can also be influenced by perceptions or actions in both cases. Workplace ostracism not only causes significant psychological distress but also results in unfavorable attitudes and reduced performance among those who experience ostracism in terms of their assigned tasks and organizational citizenship behaviors (Robinson et al., 2013). Recent studies have also supported these conclusions (De Clercq et al., 2019; Yang & Treadway, 2018; Zhao & Xia, 2017, Sharma & Dhar, 2022).

In other words, workplace ostracism is a form of non-physical conduct, and its categorization as ostracism can be somewhat subjective, relying on individuals' perceptions. Moreover, workplace ostracism tends to evoke negative emotions and may lead those who experience it to engage in undesirable behaviors like withdrawal, a desire to leave, and reduced engagement. Based on our review of literature and a need to have an all-encompassing definition of Workplace ostracism which addresses a person's perception and a co-worker's negative actions, we suggest a definition of workplace ostracism as follows:

*"Workplace ostracism is a form of non-physical conduct, and its classification as ostracism can be influenced by individuals' personal interpretations to some degree. This behavior often triggers negative emotions and can lead those who experience it to engage in inappropriate actions, including withdrawal, considering leaving their job, and reduced commitment".*

## 4. COMPARING NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS AT THE WORKPLACE

In the realm of organizational literature, scholars often employ a wide array of terms to characterize adverse behaviors in workplace settings (Einarsen et al., 2003). Commonly used terms to describe the organized ill-treatment of individuals in a workplace context include victimization, harassment, and psychological terror/violence (Einarsen et al., 2003). Lutgen-Sandvik (2003) introduces the term "employee emotional abuse," defining it as targeted, repetitive workplace communication that is unwelcome, violates standards of appropriate conduct, results in emotional harm, and occurs in relationships characterized by unequal power dynamics. She argues that this term encompasses what others have referred to as workplace mistreatment, aggression, harassment, bullying, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, and psychological violence. Einarsen (1999) and Einarsen et al. (2003) also consider terms like mobbing, emotional abuse, harassment, bullying, and victimization as referring to the same phenomenon.

Given the diversity in terminology and definitions, variations in the academic community's perceptions and understandings of these behaviors, and the challenges noted earlier, the research in question opts for the inclusive term "negative behaviors." This all-encompassing term includes various behaviors and is chosen deliberately to avoid making assumptions about how these behaviors are perceived, particularly the examination of workplace incivility, bullying, discrimination and their comparison with the perception of ostracism. This choice aligns with Robinson's (2008) recognition of the evident conceptual complexity inherent in the study of dysfunctional workplace behaviors.

***Workplace Incivility:*** Workplace incivility refers to relatively minor, rude, disrespectful, or inconsiderate behaviors that occur in the workplace (Han at al., 2022). Unlike more severe forms of mistreatment, incivility often unintentional, involves subtle actions that may seem minor individually but collectively contribute to a negative work atmosphere. It involves behaviours such as interrupting others, using dismissive tone, not responding to emails, a lack of consideration for others, etc. Despite its seemingly minor nature, workplace incivility can have significant negative effects on individuals and the organization including, decreased morale, reduced productivity, increased turnover, communication breakdown and conflict escalation (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Workplace ostracism can be viewed as a particular form of workplace incivility. Incivility encompasses a range of rude, disrespectful, or inconsiderate behaviors. Ostracism, within the realm of incivility, focuses on the act of excluding or ignoring an individual. Other forms of incivility can include belittling remarks, interrupting, or disregarding opinions (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Burnfield et al, 2004; Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

***Workplace Discrimination:*** Workplace discrimination happens when individuals are subjected to unjust treatment due to factors like their race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or other protected attributes (Okechukwu et al., 2014; Arumugham, 2017). This prejudicial treatment is usually intentional and can manifest as explicit actions that influence decision-making processes (Rospenda et al., 2009; Chou & Choi, 2011). A form of negative exclusion, discrimination targets individuals due to their specific characteristics or identities. It can manifest in various ways, such as biased hiring, pay disparities, or denial of advancement opportunities. Workplace discrimination plays a substantial role in affecting the mental health and job performance of employees within an organization (Cheung et al., 2016).

While workplace ostracism involves exclusion or ignoring, often on a social level, it is not necessarily based on protected characteristics like race, gender, or religion. On the other hand, it is often exhibited as a non-confrontation form of interpersonal mistreatment.

***Workplace Bullying:*** Workplace bullying can be defined as ongoing and recurrent negative conduct marked by an imbalance of power, creating a hostile environment where the targeted person is unable to respond or defend themselves on an equal footing (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). It involves repeated, intentional mistreatment of an individual by one or more colleagues. It includes behaviors such as verbal abuse, humiliation, intimidation, sabotage, taunting, spreading rumors, and engaging in playful but demeaning pranks (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001; Hoel et al., 2020). Bullying is more overt and direct compared to ostracism. This behavior entails direct aggression and can happen in the presence of others, leading to emotional distress and humiliation for the victim.

While workplace ostracism involves intentionally excluding, ignoring, or overlooking an individual, it is a more subtle form of mistreatment that may involve social isolation. On the other hand, workplace bullying is more aggressive and involves repetitive harmful behaviors, often aimed at causing psychological or physical harm.

***Workplace mistreatment*** refers to negative behaviors or actions that employees experience from their colleagues, supervisors, or other individuals in their work (Cortina et al., 2018). These behaviors are harmful, disrespectful, and can create a hostile work atmosphere. Workplace mistreatment can take various forms, ranging from subtle actions to more overt and aggressive behaviors (Vranjes & Lyubykh, 2021). Understanding workplace mistreatment involves considering its nature, motives behind it, and its impacts on both individuals and the overall work environment (Leiter, 2013). Workplace mistreatment can be a need for power and control, jealousy, personal rivalry, competition or organizational factors (Yang et al., 2014). Other forms of mistreatment can include verbal abuse, sabotage, overloading with work, and more.

Workplace ostracism is distinguished as a type of ill-treatment characterized by exclusion or isolation, whereas workplace bullying, discrimination, mistreatment, and incivility encompass broader ranges of negative behaviors with varying motivations and consequences (Hodgins et al., 2014; Mackey et al., 2015; Schilpzand et al., 2016; Halim & Riding, 2018; Howard et al., 2019). Each concept represents a distinct facet of negative workplace interactions, affecting both individuals and the overall work environment differently. While ostracism involves exclusion and isolation, bullying entails direct aggression, and discrimination targets individuals based on their characteristics. Addressing and preventing all forms of negative exclusion is essential for fostering a healthy and inclusive work environment.

## 5. CLASSIFYING MOTIVES

Workplace ostracism can be categorized into two types based on motives: purposeful and non-purposeful. These categories describe whether the act of ostracism is intentional or unintentional. Here's a breakdown of each type:

***Purposeful Ostracism***

Purposeful workplace ostracism refers to situations where individuals deliberately choose to exclude or ignore others to intentionally punish the target. The motives behind purposeful ostracism can align with the motives mentioned earlier, such as asserting power, retaliation, jealousy, conformity, or personal dislike (Sherratt, 2021). In purposeful ostracism, individuals actively engage in behaviors to intentionally exclude or marginalize others. The costs associated with practicing ostracism are minimal when there is low task interdependence (Mackey et al., 2015).

This type of workplace ostracism can take various forms (Robinson et al., 2013), including exclusionary tactics where individuals deliberately leave out targeted individuals from work-related activities, meetings, or social events. Ignoring or dismissing their ideas and contributions is another form of purposeful ostracism. Spreading rumors, gossip, or negative information about targeted individuals is also common, as is intentionally withholding important information or resources from them. Public humiliation, ridicule, excessive monitoring, and forming exclusive social cliques are additional tactics employed in purposeful ostracism.

It is essential to recognize that these forms of purposeful workplace ostracism can overlap, and individuals engaging in such behavior may use multiple tactics simultaneously. The cumulative effect of these actions can have a significant impact on the well-being, job satisfaction, and performance of those who are targeted.

***Non-Purposeful Ostracism***

Non-purposeful workplace ostracism, also known as unintentional or passive ostracism, occurs when individuals unknowingly or inadvertently exclude or ignore others (Robinson et al, 2013). The motives behind non-purposeful ostracism are typically not driven by conscious intent to harm or exclude. Instead, it may stem from a lack of awareness, social awkwardness, or other factors that prevent individuals from including or engaging with others. Non-purposeful workplace ostracism, also known as unintentional or passive ostracism, refers to situations where individuals unknowingly or inadvertently exclude or ignore others without intending to harm or marginalize them (Al-Atwi et al., 2024).

These factors are influenced by organizational diversity and dissimilarity, as well as the inherent tendency for people to gravitate towards individuals who share similarities with them (Robinson et al., 2013). In high-stress work settings, employees may unintentionally neglect others, resulting in inadvertent ostracism (Robinson et al., 2013). Some ways the non-purposeful ostracism is manifested include, unawareness of social cues, inadvertent oversights, workload imbalances, communication barriers, unintentional cliques and lack of awareness of individual needs.

Although ostracism may not be intentional, individuals who experience exclusion or being ignored can still feel isolated, hurt, and psychologically affected. It is also important to note that while non-purposeful workplace ostracism may not involve malicious intent, it can still have significant negative effects on the individuals who experience it. The impact may include feelings of isolation, reduced motivation, lower job satisfaction, and hindered professional growth. Addressing non-purposeful ostracism requires raising awareness, promoting inclusivity, and fostering open communication and understanding in the workplace (Al-Atwi et al., 2024).

In some cases, workplace ostracism can be a combination of purposeful and non-purposeful actions, where individuals may engage in intentional exclusion while others may unknowingly contribute to the ostracism through passive behavior.

## 6. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WORKPLACE OSTRACISM

Studies exploring the antecedents and consequences of workplace ostracism have drawn upon various theoretical frameworks to establish their conceptual foundations. It is important to note that workplace ostracism is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors, including individual, interpersonal, and organizational dynamics. The application of these theories provides a framework for exploring and analyzing the role of individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships, and organizational factors on workplace ostracism. Here are a few commonly used theories in the study of workplace ostracism: Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Scott et al., 2013), Social Identity Theory (Penhaligon et al., 2009; Schilpzand & Huang, 2018), Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) , Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Kim et al., 2017) , Victim Precipitation Theory (Wolfgang, 1967; Amir, 1967) and Self-Esteem Theory (Baumeister 1993; Mruk 1995).

*Social Exchange Theory*: Social exchange theory (SET), a widely influential conceptual framework, offers valuable insights into comprehending workplace conduct (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This theory is highly applicable to the study of workplace ostracism and its repercussions on individuals. Conceived by Blau (2017), SET posits that individuals initiate social interactions with the anticipation of receiving reciprocal advantages. It proposes that individuals establish social connections and exchange resources like support, information, and rewards with others. In the context of workplace ostracism, SET explains how employees who experience ostracism may perceive an inequity in the social exchange, as they are not receiving the social and emotional support they expect from their colleagues (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This perception can affect their attitudes and behaviors within the organization.

Firstly, social exchange encompasses adherence to established rules and norms, encompassing both reciprocated and negotiated regulations. Reciprocity, a component of interdependent exchange, involves bidirectional interpersonal transactions. In this dynamic, an individual offers a benefit, and the recipient reciprocates in a similar fashion (Gergen, 1969). Negotiated rules seek to establish mutually beneficial arrangements, such as group members engaging in discussions and reaching agreements on their respective tasks and responsibilities. Secondly, social exchange involves the swapping of resources, which can take on either an economic or a socio-emotional character (Foa and Foa, 1974, 1980). Economic resources pertain to tangible assets that can be bartered to meet financial requirements, whereas socio-emotional resources are symbolic and context-specific, traded to satisfy personal and social needs. Thirdly, social exchange relationships evolve over time, especially when individuals genuinely care about each other, resulting in the formation of mutually advantageous interpersonal connections (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

In the context of workplace ostracism, SET offers insights into the dynamics of social interactions and the consequences of ostracism. Within the framework of this study, social exchange perspectives emphasize the role of felt obligation as a significant mediator in the connection between workplace ostracism and job engagement. This concept of obligations stemming from reciprocal interactions among individuals who share mutual interdependence has been a subject of discussion among several scholars (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Emerson, 1976; Saks, 2006). It's important to recognize that the presence of such obligations can also heighten the likelihood of resources being exchanged for specific, goal-oriented actions, as previously proposed (Adler and Kwon, 2000).

However, when individuals encounter ostracism, characterized by behaviors like receiving "silent treatment" or intentional exclusion, as opposed to experiencing signs of trust, loyalty, and a shared commitment within their relationships, it disrupts

the equilibrium within these relationships. Consequently, the development of emotions associated with personal obligation, gratitude, and trust becomes less likely, a phenomenon described in the work of Blau (1964). This, in turn, results in reduced engagement with one's work, as evidenced in the study conducted by Green et al. (2017).

***Social Identity Theory***: In the context of workplace ostracism, Social Identity Theory (SIT) offers insights into how individuals' group identities and perceptions of inclusion or exclusion influence their responses to ostracism (Castano et al., 2003). This theory is highly relevant to understanding workplace ostracism and its impact on individuals (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986). It helps to explain how individuals who experience ostracism may feel a diminished sense of self-worth and identify less with their work group or organization. This theory suggests that individuals obtain a portion of their self-identity from their affiliations with various groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Workplace ostracism has the potential to undermine an individual's sense of belonging and identity within their workplace team or organization. The immediate consequence of workplace ostracism, as perceived by employees, is that they proactively distance themselves from those they believe cause them unhappiness. This results in short-term behaviors at work that can be seen as disruptive and detrimental to the organization's long-term progress (Liu et al., 2019).

By applying SIT to workplace ostracism, researchers and practitioners can gain insights into the psychological processes underlying ostracism experiences, group dynamics, and the importance of group identity for individuals. This comprehension can guide the development of interventions and tactics aimed at enhancing inclusivity, nurturing favorable group dynamics, and alleviating the adverse repercussions of workplace ostracism on the well-being of individuals and the overall outcomes of the organization, employing a collectivist approach (Wu et al., 2016).

Attribution and identity, which involve the acceptance and recognition of employees by their colleagues in the workplace, stand in contrast to ostracism. Hence, workplace ostracism's consequences can be elucidated through the lens of SIT (Li and Zhang, 2019).

***Self-Determination Theory***. Self-determination theory (SDT) has been a longstanding framework that examines the connections between motivation and the intertwined aspects of performance and well-being within organizational contexts. Its emphasis has been on identifying the factors that encourage robust and enduring motivation eliciting voluntary engagement from both employees and customers. According to this theory, the fundamental way to boost work motivation is by harmonizing external conditions with the three essential psychological needs of employees: autonomy, competence, and connectedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

When these three fundamental psychological needs are satisfied, an individual's motivation for work is enhanced, resulting in a heightened sense of importance of their job and increased confidence in their career prospects (Shi et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2022). Consequently, this encourages positive workplace behaviors (Guo and Cheng, 2021). Conversely, when these essential psychological needs remain unmet, the perceived significance of one's work diminishes. This, in turn, triggers negative work-related attitudes and behaviors, such as disengagement from work, as evidenced by the research conducted by Li et al. (2021).

Amid a challenging external environment like workplace ostracism, the satisfaction of employees' fundamental psychological needs is hindered, giving rise to the occurrence of deviant workplace behavior. This suggests that basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000), could serve as a mediating factor in the relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant behavior. If any of these three needs remain unfulfilled, it leads to a deterioration in an individual's mental well-being, contributing to feelings of dissatisfaction.

When employees undergo exclusion or disregard from their colleagues or supervisors, their psychological needs remain unaddressed, resulting in a decline in their mental well-being and the emergence of negative emotions like stress, emotional fatigue, and depression (Choi, 2021). Workplace ostracism is evident in behaviors like reluctance to cooperate, avoidance of communication, and intentional indifference towards others. These actions sever social connections between ostracized individuals and their colleagues. Through these acts of negation and disregard, workplace ostracism indirectly communicates punitive information to organizations, signifying that ostracized employees feel unwelcomed, insignificant, and disrespected. Consequently, this obstructs these individuals from forming equitable and trustworthy interpersonal relationships with their peers.

Viewed through the lens of self-determination theory, research revealed that workplace ostracism had a notable influence on both organizational counterproductive work behavior (CWB) and interpersonal CWB. Furthermore, the workplace ostracism experienced by individuals who are competent, independent, and have their three fundamental psychological needs satisfied was significantly lower than that of those who were included (Liu et al., 2013).

***Conservation of Resources Theory***: The Conservation of Resources Theory posits that individuals have a natural inclination to acquire, safeguard, and retain resources they find valuable. In the context of workplace ostracism, it can be viewed as a threat to an individual's social resources, which include elements like social support, inclusion, and access to information. This threat depletes the essential resources individuals rely on in their work environment (Leung et al., 2011). When organizations foster environments that facilitate resource conservation and protection, employees become better equipped to manage work-related demands, thus averting negative outcomes (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). According to this theory,

individuals who experience ostracism may adopt self-protective behaviors to conserve their remaining resources, potentially resulting in withdrawal from work or diminished performance (Hobfoll, 1989, 1998).

The Conservation of Resources theory's explanation of the consequences of workplace ostracism shares similarities with Williams' (2001) need-threat model of ostracism. Williams' model suggests that prolonged exposure to ostracism can deplete the resources needed to sustain individuals' motivation.

*Victim Precipitation Theory*: The Victim Precipitation Theory proposes that individuals who become victims of negative social interactions may, in some way, contribute to or influence the behaviors that result in their victimization. According to this theory (Curtis, 1974), perpetrators of ostracism do not select their victims randomly. Instead, a victim's personality traits or behaviors serve as significant factors that lead to their ostracism. In line with the victim precipitation theory, we anticipate that, compared to individuals with moderate performance levels, both low and high performers are more susceptible to being ostracized by their supervisors because they deviate from the performance norms (Liu et al., 2022).

In the context of workplace ostracism, this theory suggests that specific individual traits or behaviors might trigger or invite ostracism from others (Scott and Duffy, 2015). For instance, individuals who perform poorly, often referred to as negative deviates, can hinder the group's progress toward achieving its performance objectives. In response, supervisors may use ostracism to penalize poor performers. Conversely, high performers, known as positive deviates, establish exceptionally high-performance standards that can lead those around them to make upward social comparisons (Festinger, 1954). It is important to emphasize that this theory does not attribute blame to the victim but rather aims to comprehend how individual factors contribute to instances of workplace mistreatment.

*Self-Esteem Theory*: The Self-Esteem Theory suggests that individuals have a fundamental need for positive self-regard and that their self-esteem is influenced by their social interactions and feedback from others (Korman, 1970; Pyszczynski, 2004). Workplace ostracism can have a detrimental effect on an individual's self-esteem, as it conveys exclusion, rejection, and a lack of validation. When individuals are consistently ostracized in the workplace, their self-esteem may suffer, leading to negative psychological outcomes, decreased motivation, and diminished performance.

Aligned with the self-esteem theory and prior ostracism research, the act of being excluded or disregarded by one's peers or colleagues is well-documented to put an individual's self-esteem at risk, as evident in numerous studies (Ferris et al., 2015; Williams, 2001). Consequently, it is highly likely that workplace ostracism contributes to various work-related outcomes for employees, in part due to its detrimental impact on their self-esteem. The self-esteem theory, thus, elucidates the mediating role of organization-based self-esteem on the relationship between workplace ostracism and work-related consequences like job performance among employees.

## 7. DISCUSSION

Workplace ostracism has garnered increased attention in academic circles over the past decade. There are still significant gaps in our understanding of workplace ostracism, which necessitates further investigation. Unlike previous research in this area, this study takes a unique narrative approach. Instead of delving deeply into specific facets of workplace ostracism, it adopts a broader perspective of comparing and contrasting workplace ostracism with other forms of negative workplace behavior and examines the theoretical underpinnings of workplace ostracism.

This study enhances our comprehension of workplace ostracism as a phenomenon and introduces fresh avenues for researchers to investigate and substantiate novel causes and repercussions of workplace ostracism. Between 2013 and 2025, research on workplace ostracism has notably expanded. The accumulated body of literature has contributed to a deeper comprehension of the conditions that influence individuals' responses to ostracism. This research has explored the range of psychological and organizational theories adopted by various studies to explain the occurrence and outcomes of workplace ostracism.

**Theoretical Implications**

The antecedents and consequences of workplace ostracism have been extensively examined in prior systematic literature reviews (Mao et al., 2018; Kaushal et al., 2020; Banerjee & Shinde, 2025). Therefore, this study intentionally refrains from duplicating those efforts. Instead, it aims to make four distinct and valuable contributions to existing literature. First, after a thorough review of all available definitions of workplace ostracism, the study proposes a synergized definition. It defines workplace ostracism as a form of non-physical conduct and is seen both from the perspective of actual isolation and perceived exclusion of an individual at the workplace. This definition could provide researchers with a base on which to carry out research on workplace ostracism in the future.

Second, it extends research to compare and contrast workplace ostracism with workplace bullying, workplace incivility, workplace discrimination and workplace mistreatment. This can also form a subject for research as ostracism involves exclusion and isolation, bullying entails direct aggression, and discrimination targets individuals based on their characteristics.

Finally, it integrates the research on organization behavior theories that have been utilized to explain workplace ostracism. Social Exchange Theory, Social Identity Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, Victim

precipitation theory and Self-esteem theory, were all discussed with their study of workplace ostracism. Each of these theories can be individually or in combination discussed in various studies. Exploring the theoretical implications of workplace ostracism allows researchers, practitioners, and organizations to enhance their comprehension of its underlying mechanisms and broader consequences.

**Limitations**

While this study has made substantial contributions to our understanding of workplace ostracism, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. One noteworthy limitation is the lack of separate analysis for significant antecedents, including demographic characteristics such as gender, education, and employment status, as well as personality traits like extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness. These factors can play a crucial role in influencing how individuals perceive and respond to workplace ostracism. Future research should explore how these variables interact with workplace ostracism, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on different segments of the workforce. Another area that warrants attention is the absence of research into the leadership construct within the context of workplace ostracism. Leadership styles and behaviors can either mitigate or exacerbate instances of ostracism within teams and organizations. Investigating how leaders influence or respond to ostracism could offer valuable insights into leadership development and organizational culture.

While this study provides valuable insights into workplace ostracism, these limitations suggest promising avenues for future research. Addressing these gaps in knowledge will contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding workplace ostracism and its effects on employees and organizations.

**Future Research**

Future research directions may encompass various aspects. It would be valuable to investigate how varying degrees of workplace ostracism impact on employees' behavioral outcomes. By examining varying degrees of workplace ostracism, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of how it influences the behaviors of employees. This approach would involve categorizing workplace ostracism experiences into different levels, such as low, moderate, and high, and then analyzing how individuals' reactions and behaviors differ across these levels. This would help organizations better understand how to address and mitigate the negative consequences of ostracism in the workplace.

Another avenue for future research is to examine workplace ostracism at multiple levels: individual, interpersonal, group, and organizational. Each of these levels presents unique dynamics and implications that warrant in-depth investigation. Workplace ostracism comprises both perceived and actual elements, making it an intriguing subject for future research. Another promising area of study is the distinction between situations where individuals perceive ostracism despite not experiencing it in reality, and cases where leaders or colleagues intentionally exclude individuals. This relatively unexplored territory holds substantial potential for further investigation.

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