

Workplace ostracism and its negative outcomes: Psychological capital as a moderator

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Zheng, XM, Yang, J., Ngo, H., Liu, X., & Jiao, W. (2016). Workplace ostracism and its negative outcomes: Psychological capital as a moderator. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 15(4), 143-151. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000147>

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Abstract:

Workplace ostracism, conceived as to being ignored or excluded by others, has attracted the attention of researchers in recent years. One essential topic in this area is how to reduce or even eliminate the negative consequences of workplace ostracism. Based on conservation of resources (COR) theory, the current study assesses the relationship between workplace ostracism and its negative outcomes, as well as the moderating role played by psychological capital, using data collected from 256 employees in three companies in the northern part of China. The study yields two important findings: (1) workplace ostracism is positively related to intention to leave and (2) psychological capital moderates the effect of workplace ostracism on affective commitment and intention to leave. This paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for organizations and employees, along with recommendations for future research.

Keywords: workplace ostracism | psychological capital | conservation of resources | Chinese employees

Article:

Ostracism refers to the process of being excluded and ignored by others (Williams, 2007). It is a powerful phenomenon in social interactions (Williams, 2001) that has attracted the interest of numerous researchers. Social psychologists, for example, have done extensive studies on the mechanisms of ostracism in laboratory settings (e.g., Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). A recent survey revealed that, over a five-year period, 66% of the respondents had received “silent treatment” from others, and 29% reported that other people had intentionally left the area when they entered (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). While much attention has been paid to the main effect of workplace ostracism on employee and organizational outcomes (e.g., Leung, Wu, Chen, & Young, 2011; Wu, Wei, & Hui, 2011), it is obvious that not every individual who experiences workplace ostracism will suffer at the same level (Williams, 2007). Williams (2001, 2007) proposed a need-threat/need fortification theoretical framework for examining this phenomenon, arguing that ostracism as an interpersonal stressor is likely to threaten its victims’ social resources.

According to conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), individuals will strive to retain, protect, and establish their necessary resources. As workplace ostracism leads to a depletion of personal resources, however, if employees have other resources with which to compensate for the loss caused by ostracism, they are likely to suffer less from workplace ostracism. Psychological capital, defined as “an individual’s positive psychological state of development” (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007, p. 3), is an important form of personal resources (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009; Luthans et al., 2007). We argue that psychological capital serves as a compensatory resource in the face of ostracism and helps mitigate the negative effects of ostracism on employee outcomes.

By proposing and investigating this model, we make three key contributions to the literature. First, by examining the moderating effect of psychological capital, our study extends the scope of workplace ostracism research, particularly regarding the coping strategies employed to deal with workplace ostracism. Second, our study highlights a resource-based theoretical perspective for examining the complex mechanism of workplace ostracism, as a complement to the previously proposed need-based theoretical perspective (Williams, 2001, 2007). Third, our study, which was conducted in China, contributes to the research into ostracism in the context of the Chinese workplace.

Theory and Hypotheses

Workplace Ostracism

Workplace ostracism has been defined as “the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others in workplace” (Williams, 2001). Withholding needed information, giving “silent treatment,” avoiding conversations or eye contact, and giving “the cold shoulder” are some typical examples of ostracism behaviors observed in the workplace. A series of studies in the fields of psychology, sociology, and pedagogy (e.g., Gruter & Masters, 1986; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; Twenge et al., 2001) have converged to confirm the notion that ostracism is a powerful, distinct, and regular occurrence. For example, psychologists have found that ostracism activates the same areas of the brain that physical pain does (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003).

Although in the past two decades researchers in the fields of psychology, sociology, and pedagogy have focused on how ostracism affects people’s attitudes and behaviors, ostracism in the workplace has not attracted as much scrutiny (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008). Its omission from this line of research has arisen in part because ostracism at work has been studied under other labels. For example, bullying research conceptualizes ostracism as a passive form of bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). Similarly, workplace ostracism has been studied under labels such as deviant behavior (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), organizational undermining behavior (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), and counterproductive work behavior (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001). Research also has found a distinct impact of ostracism as compared to other forms of aggressive behaviors. For example, Williams and Nida (2009) found that ostracism has a worse impact on the victims’ self-esteem than bullying does; that is, the victims of bullying are at least satisfied that others think they are important enough to exert an effort to bully them. In contrast,

ostracism may be differentiated from other forms of aggression as an act of omission rather than commission (Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013).

Conservation of Resources Theory and the Outcomes of Workplace Ostracism

Conservation of Resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) theory proposes that individuals link themselves with different types of resources, including physical objects that are perceived as valuable, conditions (e.g., hierarchical work status, marital status), personal resources that offer resilience to stress (e.g., perceptual orientation, self-esteem, psychological capital), and energies (e.g., money, time). When these resources are lost, threatened by potential loss, or not regained after expenditure, individuals will experience stress. Hobfoll (1989, 2002) assumes that individuals are naturally motivated to accrue resources. Thus, when they experience stress, they will act in ways to conserve their present resources and ensure their capacity to generate resources in the future.

In its role as an interpersonal stressor, workplace ostracism can deplete its victims' personal resources. According to Williams' (2001, 2007) need-threat/need fortification theoretical framework, ostracism threatens four fundamental needs of individuals: the need to belong, the need to maintain self-esteem, the need to perceive personal control, and the need for a meaningful existence. Among these four needs, self-esteem and perceived personal control are forms of personal resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). Following this logic, employees who experience workplace ostracism are likely to lose or be threatened by potential loss of their personal resources. As suggested by COR theory, individuals strive to protect their resources and prevent further depletion of those assets. Employees who experience workplace ostracism, therefore, are motivated to protect their personal resources and prevent further depletion. We argue that employees who face ostracism from their workplace colleagues are likely to emotionally detach from the organization and develop withdrawal cognition in an effort to prevent further depletion of their personal resources. Specifically, we assume two criteria – affective commitment and intention to leave – represent the affective and cognitive aspects of attitudinal outcomes of workplace ostracism, respectively. We believe these two criteria can capture a complete picture of attitudinal outcomes of ostracism.

Affective commitment is defined as “the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization” (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). It represents a person’s positive evaluation of, and engagement in, his or her work. To date, affective commitment has been the primary form of organizational commitment studied in the literature dealing with stress (for a relevant meta-analysis, see Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002), and it is the central component of organizational commitment. Research has consistently found a negative link between workplace stressors and affective commitment (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000), such that employees who experience workplace stressor (i.e., workplace ostracism) are prone to detach their values and motives from those of the organization.

From a COR perspective, emotionally detaching from the organization would theoretically prevent resource depletion. By personally disengaging from their organization, employees reduce their dependence on the organization and suffer less of a resource loss due to workplace ostracism, because the organization matters less to them. In addition, by reducing attachment and

loyalty to their organization, employees can more easily redirect their resource accrual and regulation efforts toward sources that do not drain them as excessively as the organizational environment. By doing so, they can protect their resources and invest their energy somewhere else outside the organization – that is, in an investment from which where they can expect a better return. Therefore, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1a. Workplace ostracism is negatively related with employees' affective commitment.

Workplace stress is a very strong predictor of turnover (Meyer et al., 2002) and withdrawal cognitions (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). From a COR perspective, employees who experience workplace ostracism are driven to stop this resource drain, and leaving the organization is a natural choice to prevent further harm. Intention to leave, then, is a cognitive strategy that reduces the importance of work for employees, so that they naturally seek to invest their remaining resources elsewhere. As such, we expect the following relationship to hold:

Hypothesis 1b. Workplace ostracism is positively related with employees' intention to leave.

Moderating Role of Psychological Capital

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a construct that has emerged from research into positive psychology. This higher-order constellation of positive psychological components consists of efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). Unlike other trait-like constructs, such as the “Big Five” personality dimensions (Barrick & Mount, 1991) or core self-evaluations (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003), psychological capital is conceptualized as a hybrid form between state and trait in the current study. In particular, we used psychological capital as a “state-like” construct that is malleable and open to development (Luthans et al., 2007). In previous research, it has demonstrated discriminant validity compared to both the Big Five personality dimensions and core self-evaluations (Luthans et al., 2007).

PsyCap can be considered a psychological resource that can replace or reinforce other resources that have been lacking when individuals face the prospect of workplace ostracism (Avey et al., 2009). High PsyCap implies high self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. Individuals high in PsyCap are more prone to sustain and preserve their personal resources when beset by problems and adversity, and they tend to be optimistic about the future (Luthans et al., 2007). Consequently, they are likely to focus on work-oriented goals rather than interpersonal conflicts. As a result of the convergence of all of these factors, individuals with high PsyCap have more resources for dealing with workplace ostracism, and hence ostracism will have fewer adverse effects on their job attitudes. In contrast, low-PsyCap individuals who possess insufficient resources to cope with workplace ostracism are more likely to demonstrate significant negative changes in their job-related attitudes – specifically, decreased affective commitment and increased intention to leave.

Our argument here is grounded in the literature discussed previously and is supported by empirical evidence. For example, researchers in occupational health and health psychology have demonstrated that the four components of PsyCap represent valued personal resources that can enhance individuals' well-being: hope (see Snyder, Lehman, Kluck, & Monsson, 2006, for a review), resilience (e.g., Britt, Adler, & Bartone, 2001; Ferris, Sinclair, & Kline, 2005; Williams & Cooper, 1998), self-efficacy (e.g., Axtell et al., 2000; Bandura, 1997; Meier, Semmer, Elfering, & Jacobshagen, 2008), and optimism (e.g., Carver et al., 2005). In view of these arguments, we suggest the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a. PsyCap moderates the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and affective commitment such that the relationship is weaker when PsyCap is higher.

Hypothesis 2b. PsyCap moderates the positive relationship between workplace ostracism and intention to leave such that the relationship is weaker when PsyCap is higher.

Our complete theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

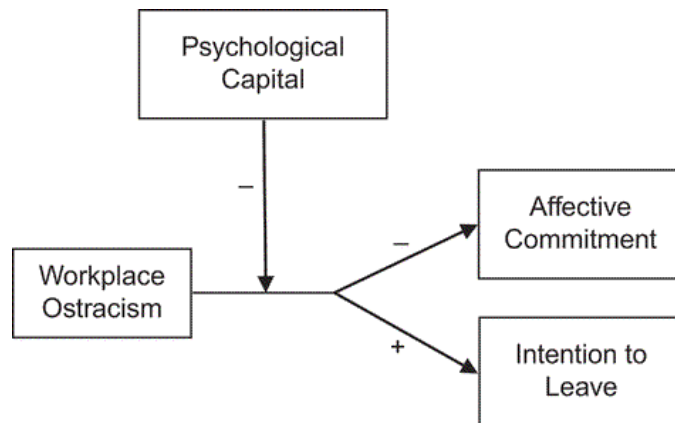


Figure 1. Model of the current research.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The setting for this research study was three large companies in northern China. These companies are in different industries – namely, manufacturing of multimedia electronics, telecommunication, and energy. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to the employees of these companies, and 256 questionnaires were finally returned, yielding a response rate of 85.3%. The high response rate was achieved because we directly distributed these questionnaires to the respondents and collected them immediately after they were completed.

In our sample, 52.7% of the respondents were males and 47.3% were females. Some 86.3% of these individuals were in the age range of 21–40 years. The average organizational tenure was 9.38 years, with a standard deviation of 6.87 years. In terms of respondents' educational attainment, 52.2% had a university degree.

Measures

Our data were collected via survey questionnaires that were distributed by the researchers on site after the human resources staff assisted with the task of gathering the employees. The cover page of the questionnaire explained the purpose of the study and assured the confidentiality of responses. We further protected the respondents' anonymity by asking them to return the completed questionnaire directly to us in a sealed envelope.

The questionnaire consisted of well-established scales from published studies in English, which were then translated and administered in Chinese. Back-translation was conducted where the original English version was translated into Chinese and then translated back into English to ensure proper and accurate translation. Respondents used a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 6 = "strongly agree") to respond to the items related to the following measures, except for the control variables.

Workplace Ostracism

Workplace ostracism ($\alpha = .90$) was measured with a modified four-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). A sample item was "Others at work treat you as if you weren't there."

Psychological Capital

PsyCap was measured by a 20-item scale following Luthans et al.'s (2007) procedure. This scale consisted of four dimensions, including self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. Self-efficacy was measured by the eight-item scale developed by Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001). A sample item for self-efficacy was "When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them." Hope was measured by four items selected from the scale developed by Snyder et al. (1996). A sample item for hope was "At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my work goals." Resilience was measured by a four-item scale developed by Wagnild and Young (1993). A sample item for resilience was "I can get through difficult times at work because I have experienced difficulty before." Optimism was measured by a four-item scale developed by Scheier and Carver (1985). A sample item for optimism was "I am optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to work." Additionally, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis with the four dimensions of psychological capital and a higher-order general factor, and the results suggested the scale yielded a satisfactory validity ($\chi^2 = 275.98, p < .001, df = 166, GFI = .90, NFI = .95, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .04$).

Affective Organizational Commitment

Considering the limited space on the survey form, we followed the pattern established by previous studies (e.g., Ngo, Loi, Foley, Zheng, & Zhang, 2013) and measured the construct of affective organizational commitment with a shorter version of the instrument, consisting of four items selected from the original affective organizational commitment scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). A sample item was "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me." The coefficient alpha of this scale in this study was .83. We also conducted a

confirmatory factor analysis to examine the validity of the scale, and it yielded satisfactory results: $\chi^2 = 2.21$ ($p = .33$), $df = 2$, GFI = .99, NFI = .99, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .02, SRMR = .01.

Intention to Leave

The intention to leave ($\alpha = .88$) variable was measured with a four-item scale developed by Rosin and Korabik (1991). A sample item was “I have thought about leaving this organization.”

Control Variables

Several demographic and organizational factors that could affect the outcome variables were included as control variables. Gender was dummy coded as “1” for female and “0” for male. The respondents’ ages were classified into six categories: 20 years and younger, 21–30 years, 31–40 years, 41–50 years, 51–60 years, and 60 years and older. Organizational tenure was measured by the number of years that the respondent was employed by the company. Because our respondents came from three different firms, we included two dummy variables, firm A (i.e., energy firm) and firm B (i.e., telecommunications firm), to capture the effect of firm-specific differences.

Analysis

In testing the hypotheses, we simultaneously entered the data for workplace ostracism, psychological capital, the interaction term (we centered the variables before we computed the interaction term), affective commitment, and intention to leave in the structural equation model (SEM) (AMOS 17.0). In addition, we entered the data for the respondents’ age, gender, education, organizational tenure, firm A, and firm B as control variables.

Results

Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables, as well as the Cronbach’s alpha of each scale. As shown in the table, workplace ostracism was positively correlated with intention to leave ($r = .34$, $p = .00$), while the correlation between workplace ostracism and affective commitment was not significant.

The results of path analysis are presented in Figure 2. We used the scale scores to conduct the path analysis because we have a small sample ($N = 256$), and that gave us limited power, which was not adequate to use latent variables with measurement items in the current model. The path model has good fit indexes ($\chi^2 = 3.30$, $p = .07$, $df = 1$, RMSEA = .09, AGFI = .92). In particular, the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and affective commitment was not significant ($\beta = -.07$, ns). Thus, Hypothesis 1a was not supported. The positive relationship between workplace ostracism and intention to leave was significant ($\beta = .35$, $p = .00$). Thus, Hypothesis 1b was supported. As shown in Figure 2, the path coefficients from the interaction term to affective commitment ($\beta = .15$, $p = .00$) and intention to leave ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .01$) were significant.¹ The effects of all control variables were not significant.

¹ We also tested the moderating effect with each of the four components of PsyCap. The self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism facets shared a similar pattern of being moderating effects as the general factor of PsyCap, whereas

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among study variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Firm A	.21	.41														
2. Firm B	.44	.50	-.46**													
3. Gender (female = 1)	1.46	.50	-.01	.12												
4. Age group	2.77	.72	-.03	.28**	-.18**											
5. Education	3.51	.76	-.09	-.23**	-.08	-.24**										
6. Organizational tenure	9.38	6.87	-.09	.53**	.00	.71**	-.34**									
7. Workplace ostracism	2.33	1.21	.04	-.18*	-.16*	.18**	-.02	.14*	(.90)							
8. Psychological capital	4.68	.70	.13*	-.19**	-.14*	.05	-.03	-.02	-.11	(.93)						
9. Efficacy	4.90	.68	.16**	-.17*	-.08	.01	-.04	-.05	-.13*	.84**	(.88)					
10. Hope	4.35	.92	-.03	-.14*	-.10	.02	.08	-.01	-.06	.48**	.38**	(.84)				
11. Optimism	4.15	1.10	-.02	-.09	.02	-.03	.04	-.02	.02	.36**	.23**	.22**	(.78)			
12. Resilience	4.38	.84	-.03	-.06	-.06	.02	.01	.04	-.00	.51**	.36**	.36**	.28**	(.76)		
13. Affective commitment	4.43	1.03	.05	-.02	-.06	.10	-.10	.09	-.09	.53**	.42**	.14**	.19**	.23**	(.83)	
14. Intention to leave	2.06	1.10	-.02	-.07	-.08	-.02	.05	-.08	.34**	-.32**	-.30**	-.02	-.07	-.13	-.44**	(.88)

Note. Correlations below the diagonal represent between-subject correlations ($N = 256$). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

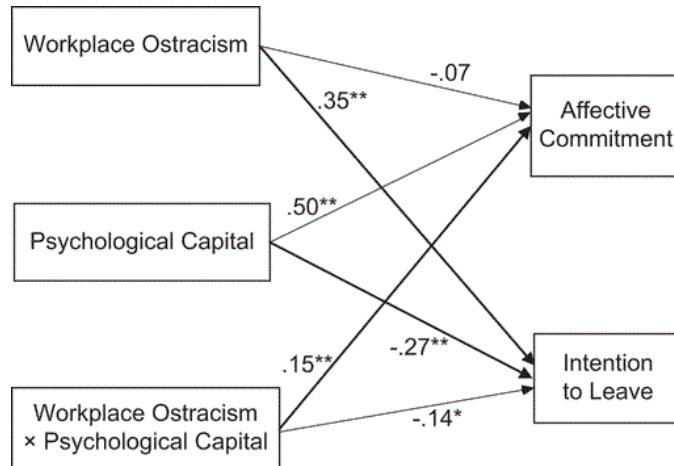


Figure 2. The results of SEM analysis of workplace ostracism and the interaction of workplace ostracism and PsyCap in predicting affective commitment and intention to leave. We conducted further analyses of the moderating effects of the four facets. Except for the dimension of hope, the moderating effects of these factors are consistent with the moderating effect of the general factor of PsyCap.

The simple slopes of workplace ostracism on affective commitment were separately graphed for the participants who were above (+1 *SD*) and below (−1 *SD*) the average PsyCap levels (Aiken & West, 1991). As shown in Figure 3, workplace ostracism was negatively related to affective commitment for those persons who rated lower than average in PsyCap (simple slope = −.50, $p = .00$), while the simple slope when PsyCap was above average was not significant (simple slope = .03, $p = .87$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

hope was not a significant factor. These results suggested that one general factor of PsyCap is empirically supported in the current model.



Figure 3. Interaction of workplace ostracism and PsyCap in predicting affective commitment. Plotted lines illustrate the effect of workplace ostracism on affective commitment for those respondents scoring 1 SD above the mean on PsyCap and for those respondents scoring 1 SD below the mean on PsyCap.

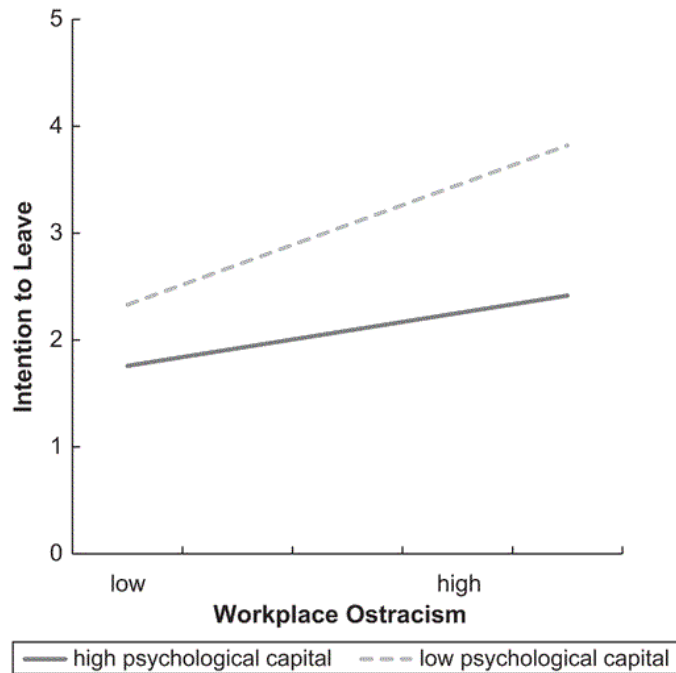


Figure 4. Interaction of workplace ostracism and PsyCap in predicting intention to leave. Plotted lines illustrate the effect of workplace ostracism on affective commitment for those respondents scoring 1 SD above the mean on the measure of PsyCap and for those respondents scoring 1 SD below the mean on the measure of PsyCap.

Finally, we plotted the interaction effect on intention to leave in Figure 4. Participants who were above (+1 SD) and below (−1 SD) the average PsyCap levels were graphed separately to show the relationship between workplace ostracism and intention to leave (Aiken & West, 1991).

Consistent with our arguments, the positive relationship between workplace ostracism and intention to leave was stronger for employees with lower PsyCap ($r = .50, p < .01$), as compared with the high-PsyCap group ($r = .22, p < .01$), supporting Hypothesis 2b.

Discussion

The results obtained from our survey of 256 Chinese employees confirmed that workplace ostracism has a positive relationship with intention to leave. However, its relationship with affective commitment was not supported in the same study. We further found that PsyCap buffers the relationship between workplace ostracism and affective commitment, as well as the relationship between workplace ostracism and intention to leave. In other words, PsyCap serves as an important moderator in the relationship between workplace ostracism and its outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

Our findings have some important theoretical implications. First, this study contributes to our understanding of the adverse consequences of workplace ostracism. The results demonstrate that workplace ostracism is positively related to intention to leave (i.e., turnover) among this sample of 256 employees. When workplace ostracism occurs, it threatens employees' social resources and may engender negative responses from them. In the present study, we found that employees have a stronger intention to quit their jobs when they experience workplace ostracism. Additionally, we did not find the impact of workplace ostracism on employees' affective commitment. The different effects on intention to leave versus affective commitment may reflect the distinction between cognitive and affective impact of workplace ostracism. A previous study (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003) found that ostracism actually leads to a lack of emotion (affective outcome) and has a negative impact on self-awareness (cognitive outcome). In particular, Twenge and his colleagues (2003) argued that the participants enter a state of emotional numbness after being ostracized in an effort to protect their self-concept. In the current study, intention to quit is more likely to align with the cognitive outcomes, whereas affective commitment is more likely to be ascribed as an emotional outcome. When employees experience workplace ostracism, according to Twenge et al.'s argument, they are shutting down their emotion system and show numbness in their affective state, which was captured by affective commitment. This would explain why their affective commitment was not changed due to workplace ostracism. On the other side, intention to quit was a rational choice in their attitudes in order to prevent further resource depletion from workplace ostracism.

Second, this study indicates that PsyCap is a valuable personal resource for employees as they seek to cope with workplace ostracism. According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), employees strive to maintain and increase their own resources. Workplace ostracism, then, can be viewed as an interpersonal stressor that decreases individuals' personal resources. As one type of personal resource, PsyCap can replace or compensate for other resources reduced by workplace ostracism (Avey et al., 2009). In particular, individuals with a high level of PsyCap are likely to be well connected outside the organization. Thus, when they experience workplace ostracism, PsyCap may potentially serve as a substitute for their reduced social resources at work and offset the loss of those resources wrought by ostracism. In addition, the positive emotional component that linked with PsyCap helps to prevent negative impact of workplace ostracism on affective

commitment. Therefore, when employees are ostracized, their affective commitment is lowered if they have a low level of PsyCap.

Third, the cultural context in the current study allows us to better understand the ostracism phenomenon in a different cultural setting. A study conducted by Balliet and Ferris (2013) found that individuals with a long-term temporal outlook are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors after experiencing ostracism; this long-term orientation actually buffers the negative impact of ostracism. This finding aligns well with our results, in that workplace ostracism has no major impact on affective commitment because Chinese people are, in general, long-term oriented; as a consequence, they should be less affected by ostracism in terms of having negative outcomes. In addition, our study extends Balliet and Ferris's (2013) study by examining attitudinal outcomes rather than behavioral outcomes of ostracism, thereby advancing the current literature on this topic.

Practical Implications

Our findings also have several important practical implications. First, by moderating the relationship between workplace ostracism and both affective commitment and intention to leave, PsyCap has a significant impact on employees' effective coping with workplace ostracism in China. In other words, high-PsyCap employees are able to overcome some of the negative impacts of being ostracized, which in turn protects their affective commitment to the organization and reduces their intention to leave.

Additionally, PsyCap has been seen as a positive capacity of individuals that can be developed effectively through interventions (Avey, Patera, & West, 2006; Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008). Therefore, by fostering the development of PsyCap among employees, human resources managers may help those employees build the critical resources needed for coping with stress arising in the workplace.

The current study revealed that ostracism has some detrimental consequences in Chinese workplace, such as reduced affective commitment for those employees with low psychological capital and increased intention to leave. These findings are particularly helpful for managers as they seek to understand the collective basis of the Chinese work context, which places great emphasis on interpersonal relationships. Specifically, the empirical evidence in this study offers Chinese managers an accurate picture of how employees alter their attitudes toward work when they experience bad treatment at work.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study has several limitations. First, although our model was conceptualized in terms of cause and effect, the use of cross-sectional and correlational data does not allow us to draw causal inferences. Future research might potentially use a longitudinal design to reexamine the relationship between workplace ostracism and its consequences, as well as to explore the moderators that may affect this relationship.

Second, because our data were based on self-reports, the magnitude of relationships may have been inflated by common method variance (Brief, Burke, George, Robinson, & Webster, 1988). However, Conway and Lance (2010) have suggested that the observed correlation between two variables measured by the same method is not necessarily inflated because the observed correlations are simultaneously attenuated by unreliability in both measurement scores of two variables, as compared to the true-score counterparts. These authors also suggest that four conditions determine whether self-report single-source data are valid: First, self-report must be an appropriate choice for the constructs of interest. Our study focused on attitudinal outcomes and the psychological process, and self-report would be a more accurate source of information than non-self-report in such a case because individuals usually have most knowledge about their feelings and psychological states. Second, a confirmatory factor analysis reveals that the variables have good discriminant validity with each other. This was true for our study data. Third, there is no overlap in items for constructs, which was the case in our study. Fourth, common method bias is minimized. We proactively considered the risk for common method bias by protecting participants' anonymity and evaluations when they answered the survey.

Additionally, Evans (1985) conducted a Monte Carlo study and suggested that the moderation effect (PsyCap moderates the relationship between ostracism and outcomes in the current study) is unlikely to be explained by common method variance because that outcome would require the common method variance to vary systematically with the moderator at both high and low levels, which was not the case in our study. Admittedly, future research might be recommended to separate the measures of the variables by following the suggestions of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003). In particular, multiple sources of data collection would help further examine the phenomenon.

Third, the generalizability of the current findings is limited by the data. For example, the use of a Chinese sample may make the findings presented here culture-specific. Chinese employees might potentially have a much stronger need to connect with other people, as they may be influenced by their largely collectivist culture. Therefore, the relationship between workplace ostracism, affective commitment, and intention to leave may be stronger than would be observed in Western countries. Future research should cross-validate the current findings by using samples from different cultures.

Fourth, our study is limited to the scope of the moderators examined. Based on the COR model, we focused our investigation of the moderators on personal characteristics (i.e., PsyCap). Future research might investigate how other kinds of resources, such as organization-based resources and group-level support, provide additional means for employees to cope with workplace ostracism. Additionally, future studies should explore other forms of outcomes, such as actual turnover behavior and organizational identification.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the current study has provided insights into the relationship between workplace ostracism and its job-related attitudinal outcomes by applying COR theory within the context of China. In so doing, this study has shown that PsyCap is a useful personal resource for Chinese employees to alleviate the negative consequences of workplace ostracism.

Acknowledgement

The research reported here was conducted in Projects 71272022, 71121001, and 71302154 supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC).

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