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Resilience to Ostracism: A Qualitative Inquiry

Abstract
Ostracism is a painful event, which may lead to prolonged psychological distress. However, little is known about the mechanisms which may help people recover from such events. This study explored how people who are not chronically ostracised describe processing and coping with ostracism. Using a qualitative methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participants (age group: 18-59; 12 female) from different occupational status groups. Thematic analyses revealed four major themes within the data: participants' immediate reaction to ostracism ("reflex"), subsequent reflections ("reflection"), efforts to manage their behaviour ("regulation"), and capacities to cope following ostracism ("adjustment"). Intensity emerged as a superordinate theme whereby the closer the ostraciser was to the participant, the greater the negative impact. The findings suggested that although most people will experience pain or stress following ostracism, it is how such events are reflected upon and managed that will determine when it leads to distress. Furthermore, some people may be resilient to ostracism. However, this resistance may weaken if the ostraciser(s) are considered close to the person.

Keywords
Ostracism, Resilience, Attribution, Psychological Flexibility, Qualitative Research Methodology, Thematic Analysis, Coping

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Resilience to Ostracism: A Qualitative Inquiry

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Ostracism is a painful event, which may lead to prolonged psychological distress. However, little is known about the mechanisms which may help people recover from such events. This study explored how people who are not chronically ostracised describe processing and coping with ostracism. Using a qualitative methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participants (age group: 18-59; 12 female) from different occupational status groups. Thematic analyses revealed four major themes within the data: participants' immediate reaction to ostracism ("reflex"), subsequent reflections ("reflection"), efforts to manage their behaviour ("regulation"), and capacities to cope following ostracism ("adjustment"). Intensity emerged as a superordinate theme whereby the closer the ostraciser was to the participant, the greater the negative impact. The findings suggested that although most people will experience pain or stress following ostracism, it is how such events are reflected upon and managed that will determine when it leads to distress. Furthermore, some people may be resilient to ostracism. However, this resistance may weaken if the ostraciser(s) are considered close to the person.
Keywords: Ostracism, Resilience, Attribution, Psychological Flexibility, Qualitative Research Methodology, Thematic Analysis, Coping

Ostracism has been defined as being ignored and excluded (Williams, 2001). However, within the empirical literature there are many related terms used to reflect similar meanings to ostracism (e.g., social rejection, social exclusion, interpersonal rejection). For example, social exclusion denotes a broader exclusion from groups or societies, whereas social rejection implies that an individual attempts to make a social bond but is denied (Blackhart, Knowles, Nelson, & Baumeister, 2009). Underlying all of these constructs is proposed to be "the inaction to socially engage another when it is socially appropriate to do so" (Robinson, O'Reilly, &Wang, 2013, p. 208). For the purposes of this study, the term ostracism will be used to encapsulate the other related terms.

Ostracism can in many cases be considered a trivial event (e.g., not being included in a group conversation), yet for quite a few people it can have a negative impact on their emotional state. Studies have consistently demonstrated that people who are ostracised for a short period of time report anger, and lower levels of mood (e.g., feeling sad) and fundamental psychological needs, such as belonging, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000; Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004; Zadro, Boland, & Richardson, 2006). Furthermore, ostracism has been found to cause an immediate experience of neurological pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003) and physiological stress (Kelly, McDonald, & Rushby, 2012). For example, Eisenberger et al. (2003) found that, when ostracised, individuals display increased activity in areas of the brain responsible for recognising pain. Therefore, ostracised individuals may experience social pain (from ostracism) similar to that of physical pain. Williams (2007) argues that such a pain reflex is an evolutionary failsafe mechanism to prevent permanent exclusion, as to be "out-of-the-group" was akin to a death sentence within hunter-gatherer societies during human's ancestral past.

Being ostracised is common (Nezlek, Wesselmann, Wheeler, & Williams, 2012) and can be experienced up to "25,000 times in our lives" (Williams, 2001, p. 229). However, what

impact will such frequent episodes of ostracism have on individuals? Researchers have demonstrated a positive relationship between ostracism and psychological distress (e.g., Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008; Wu, Yim, Kwan, & Zhang, 2012). For example, Ferris et al. (2008) found that participants who experienced frequent episodes of ostracism also tended to report high levels of anxiety and depression after a five month follow-up. Moreover, researchers have discovered that high levels of social isolation is associated with an increased risk of suicide over time (Tsai, Lucas, & Kawachi, 2015; Tsai, Lucas, Sania, Kim, & Kawachi, 2014). Therefore, individuals who are chronically ostracised may be at risk of significant psychological distress, which in extreme cases may lead to taking one's own life as a way of escaping from such pain.

The Temporal Need-Threat Model

The challenge for current ostracism researchers, therefore, is to understand the process in which people cope with such experiences. Indeed, not everyone who is ignored by their family or excluded from social groups will necessarily develop significant levels of psychological distress. Williams (2009) developed the Temporal Need-Threat Model (TNTM) to help account for how people cope with ostracism and how it leads to distress. Unlike previous ostracism models (e.g., Williams, 1997), the TNTM focuses on the sequential order from when an event of ostracism is detected through to when it may lead to ultimate resignation (See Figure 1). This model posits three main stages (after initial detection of ostracism): immediate (or reflexive), coping (or reflective), and long-term (or resignation).

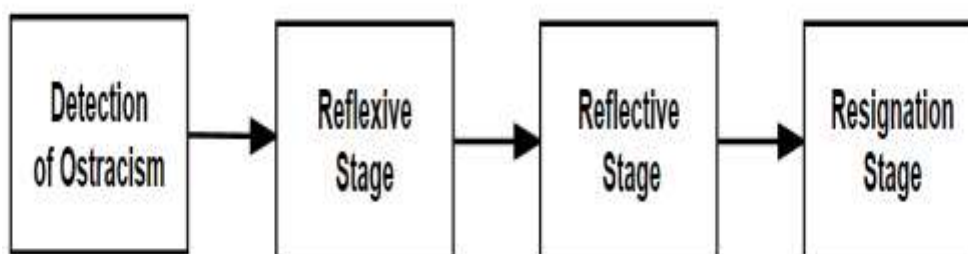

Figure 1. Williams (2009) Temporal Need-Threat Model (adapted)

During the reflexive stage, it has been suggested that individuals experience pain, a threat to their fundamental needs (i.e., belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence), and increased levels of negative affect (i.e., anger or sadness). Furthermore, individual differences (e.g., level of social anxiety) and contextual factors (e.g., the source of the ostracism) are proposed to have little impact on the pain experienced from ostracism at this stage (Williams, 2009). For example, Zadro et al. (2006) found no significant difference between individuals with high and low social anxiety (i.e., people who fear social rejection) on retrospective self-report measures of need-satisfaction and mood immediately following a brief laboratory ostracism condition.

In contrast, recent studies suggest that some people may be buffered against the negative impact of ostracism (e.g., Haq, 2014; Hermann, Skulborstad, & Wirth, 2014; Hsu et al., 2013). Hsu et al. (2013) reported that individuals who were high in trait resiliency (i.e., the capacity to bounce back from stressful events) were more likely to have reduced negative affect following ostracism. Moreover, those who were more resilient had heightened activity in the area of the brain responsible for releasing opioids (e.g., pain-relieving). Therefore, for some individuals, the immediate negative impact may be diminished depending on how resilient one

is. However, Williams (2009) did note that "long-term ostracism debilitate(s) psychological resilience," so perhaps the buffering effect of resiliency is short-term (p.306). Further research is needed to examine how resilient people may cope with ostracism, and how such processes may be similar or different to those who are less resilient.

During the reflective stage, ostracised individuals will attempt to understand the motives, the meaning, and the relevance behind their ostracism (Williams, 2009). Further, the individual is proposed to determine if they are actually being ostracised, and if so, will choose a method of coping in order to refortify their depleted needs (i.e., attempt to restore their levels of self-esteem, belonging, control, and meaningful existence). Ostracised individuals (e.g., if the ostracism is appraised to be meaningful) may tend to cope by either becoming more compliant and socially attractive (Böckler, Hömke, & Sebanz, 2014; Carter-Sowell, Chen, & Williams, 2008) or may react with anger and retaliate (Warburton, Williams, & Cairns, 2006).

At this stage, Williams (2009) proposes that individual differences influence how one copes with ostracism. Indeed, individual differences have been consistently found to prolong recovery time following ostracism including factors such as social anxiety (Zadro et al., 2006), the tendency to ruminate (Wesselmann, Ren, Swim, & Williams, 2013), and having a clinical diagnosis of schizophrenia (e.g., Perry, Henry, Sethi, & Grisham, 2011). For example, Perry et al. (2011) found that after a delay of eight minutes, control (i.e., non-clinical) participants exposed to a brief ostracism condition reported significantly greater need satisfaction and mood. However, clinical participants (those with a diagnosis of schizophrenia) maintained their low levels of need satisfaction and mood after the delay. Therefore, after a period of reflection, some individuals appear able to recover from their ostracism more quickly than others.

One key moderator of recovery from ostracism is attribution, considered a fundamental part of reflection, which may determine whether meaning is awarded to the pain from ostracism (Williams, 2009). When people attribute internally (i.e., it is my fault), then this is proposed to lead to more distress and negative impact on self-esteem (Williams, 2001). In contrast, people who attribute externally (i.e., it is the other person's problem) may experience less distress as the ostracism is unrelated to their self-concept (Williams, 2001). However, the type of external attribution may also influence recovery from ostracism. Indeed, Goodwin, Williams and Carter-Sowell (2010) found that when people attributed their ostracism to be due to racial prejudice (e.g., they ignored because they are racist), this tended to prolong their distress following ostracism. It is surprising, therefore, that there has been little examination of the role of attribution as a moderator in coping with ostracism.

Finally, Williams (2009) suggested that if the ostracism persists over a long period of time, then one's coping resources will become depleted. Such persistent ostracism is proposed to lead to feelings of alienation, depression, helplessness and unworthiness (Williams, 2009). Indeed, interviews with chronically ostracised individuals revealed that the psychological pain from ostracism can be so unbearable that being physically bullied is often preferred to ostracism (Zadro, 2004).

The Potential Influence of Psychological Flexibility

Ostracism is painful, and such experiences may result in unwanted private events (i.e., uncomfortable thoughts, sensations). However, will every person who experiences such discomfort become psychologically distressed? It could be argued that the way in which one manages such discomfort may influence whether any negative impact is short-term or long-term. The model of psychological (in)flexibility (Hayes, Stroshal, & Wilson, 1999) proposes that willingness to remain in contact with unwanted private events (i.e., thoughts, sensations) may support the movement towards valued goals. For example, if an ostracised person accepts

their experience of pain and does not struggle with their uncomfortable thoughts (e.g., I am being ignored because I am ugly), they may have more options available to cope with their ostracism (e.g., going to a social gathering even whilst thinking "I am ugly"). In contrast, if people avoid their unwanted experience, which is a natural reaction to pain from their ostracism, then they may be more restricted in how they cope with their pain and distress (e.g., avoiding a social gathering, ruminating about the event). Further, through enduring their psychological pain (i.e., sensations, thoughts), ostracised individuals may be able to redeem their depleted needs (e.g., through reconnecting with a perceived ostraciser or developing a new friendship) and recover from their ostracism more quickly.

Munnelly, Martin, Dack, Zedginidze, and McHugh (2014) found that when people are ostracised in one scenario, they also tend to expect to be ostracised in similar scenarios, thus increasing the likelihood of detecting and re-experiencing the negative effects of ostracism. For example, being ignored by work colleagues at a social work event may lead to the expectation of being ignored by work colleagues in other related scenarios (e.g., in the office, during lunch at work etc.). Therefore, the negative effects of ostracism may generalise and influence future behaviour (e.g., avoiding work colleagues in all settings out of fear of ostracism). Indeed, Williams (2001) highlighted that a common defence strategy to prevent one's ostracism is to actually avoid (or ostracise) others.

Accepting one's experience of discomfort[1] , and not struggling with painful thoughts, may broaden the potential behaviours (e.g., approaching rather than avoiding others) used in response to psychological pain and increase opportunities for learning for the ostracised individual. For example, the individual may notice that other work colleagues also feel isolated at the social event, and thus the ostracism may be context-specific (i.e., it is not just me, it is the situation). Therefore, flexible individuals have the capacity to limit the generalisation of their experiences with ostracism (Hayes et al., 1999).

The more people tend to devote large amounts of effort in attempting to avoid their unwanted experiences (e.g., suppression, procrastination), then the more they may lose contact with present experiences, have reduced opportunities for meaningful life events, and experience significant psychological distress (Hayes et al., 1999; Kashdan, Barrios, Forsyth, & Steger, 2006). Indeed, research has demonstrated that when one attempts to avoid, hide, or inhibit a thought (e.g., do not think of a white bear), the frequency of such thoughts (i.e., thinking of a white bear) actually increase (e.g., Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000). Therefore, the act of avoiding unwanted experiences of ostracism (e.g., attempting to distract oneself from the thought that they are a bad person) may, paradoxically, increase the intensity and frequency of the psychological pain.

Psychological inflexibility may lead to a fusion of the self with private events, such that an individual is unable to distinguish their private events from their sense of self (Kashdan et al., 2006). For example, being treated as though one does not exist may lead to negative thoughts (e.g., I am worthless). Such thoughts, for those who are inflexible, may result in the individual believing their "self" requires fixing in order to move forward. Indeed, the more one believes the content of their thoughts, the more likely they are to become distressed. In contrast, for those who are able to distinguish thoughts as an experience (e.g., I am having the thought that I am worthless), the more cognitive distance they may have from the distressing content (Gillanders et al., 2014).

At present there is little empirical research into how psychological flexibility may be involved in how people cope from ostracism. However, preliminary research suggests that

[1] It is important to note that when referring to acceptance of one's discomfort (e.g., sensations, thoughts), we are relating to the acceptance (not avoidance) of unwanted private *experiences* which may follow ostracism. This is not relating to the process in which people accept the content of their thoughts (e.g., I am being ignored because I am ugly) as such behaviour is consistent with the resignation stage of the TNTM (Williams, 2009).

training people to be mindful (i.e., directing attention towards their breath and not judging one's thoughts) recover significantly faster from ostracism than those who are asked to allow their thoughts to roam freely (Molet, Macquet, Lefebvre, & Williams, 2013). As mindfulness is associated with psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 1999), this may suggest that other forms of flexibility may be involved when coping with ostracism.

Measuring the Impact of Ostracism

At present, the majority of ostracism research is restricted to quantitative experimental methods. The main paradigm used to measure the effect of ostracism is that of Cyberball (Williams & Jarvis, 2006). Within Cyberball, participants are randomised into an inclusion or an exclusion condition, whereby they are asked to play an online game of virtual ball-toss against two other players. In reality, the other players are controlled by a computer program. Within the inclusion condition, participants are passed the ball an equal amount of time (i.e., 33%), whereas in the exclusion condition, participants are passed the ball initially (twice) but then not passed to again for the remainder of the game. Following Cyberball, participants are usually provided with a measure of retrospective need satisfaction (e.g., "during the game… I felt disconnected") to test the impact of ostracism.

However, such methods and measures may not provide a complete representation of how people actually cope with ostracism outside of the laboratory. For instance, the laboratory methods may not replicate the same intensity of being ignored by one's spouse. Further, the retrospective measures used in Cyberball have been demonstrated to be subject to biased responses such as inflating the impact of the ostracism (e.g., Garczynski & Brown, 2014). Indeed, Garcynski and Brown (2014) found that when questionnaires were framed in a past tense (i.e., how did you feel during the game), which is standard procedure within Cyberball measures, this led to significant reductions of need satisfaction following ostracism compared to when framed in a present tense (i.e., how do you feel now). However, other promising measures (e.g., a dial-o-meter) have been used to limit such biases when capturing psychological distress throughout Cyberball exclusion conditions (Wesselmann, Wirth, Mroczek, & Williams, 2012).

The other method recently used to investigate the experience of ostracism is that of questionnaire designs. For example, researchers ask participants to state how frequently they experienced ostracism within the past year. However, questionnaire-based ostracism studies have, at present, focused exclusively upon employees in work places (e.g., Ferris et al., 2008; Wu, Yim, Kwan, & Zhang, 2012). As ostracism is widely known to also occur outside of the workplace (e.g., Nezlek et al., 2012), applications of results from these studies to other contexts appears questionable. Similar to the Cyberball paradigm, the use of questionnaires may not be able to provide a sufficiently rich account for understanding how people cope with experiences of ostracism in other contexts (e.g., during daily social encounters outside of the workplace). Therefore, for the purposes of this article we proposed to use a qualitative phenomenological design (Creswell, 2007) using semi-structured interviews.

Unfortunately qualitative designs are sparse in the empirical literature on ostracism. Indeed, such studies have generally attempted to understand the causes and consequences of ostracism (Zadro, 2004), not to confirm the sequential order with which one experiences such events. Moreover, the development of the TNTM was largely on the basis of letters and diaries from chronically ostracised individuals (Williams, 2001; Williams, 2009). Thus, the TNTM may not fully account for how people who are not chronically ostracised (i.e., a non-chronic sample) experience and remember their ostracism. Therefore, the aim of this study was to describe how people who are not chronically ostracised experience ostracism in relation to the

three stages of the TNTM. Furthermore, a secondary aim was to describe how experiences of ostracism may relate to processes of psychological flexibility.

As previously highlighted, ostracism is a global phenomenon that is proposed to cause pain and distress (Williams, 2009). However, individuals who suffer chronic ostracism may experience prolonged pain for years or even decades. As such, the intended audience for the present study is for those individuals who feel ostracised, and for researchers planning to test intervention studies aimed at helping individuals recover from their ostracism. It is our hope that through reading the present study, that ostracised individuals who may feel helpless and alienated, will learn that they are not alone in how they experience such events, and that there are other ways which they may cope with their ostracism. Also, it is our aim to guide future ostracism researchers into examining potential factors which may help individuals recover from ostracism.

Role of the Researcher

The research team consisted of three researchers from the University of Chichester (D. Waldeck, I. Tyndall, and N. Chmiel). The principal researcher was D. Waldeck who was involved in all aspects of the study. Both I. Tyndall and N. Chmiel collaborated on the design of the study, and on the interpretation of the findings. However, I. Tyndall also supported the data analysis, and the writing of the present manuscript. I. Tyndall has a PhD in Psychology, and is a senior lecturer at the University of Chichester, with expertise in the domains of Cognitive Psychology and Research Methods. N. Chmiel is a Chartered Psychologist and has a PhD in Psychology. N. Chmiel is the Head of Department of Psychology and Counselling at the University of Chichester, and has expertise in the domains of psychology in the workplace and psychological wellbeing.

D. Waldeck is a PhD candidate in Psychology at the University of Chichester whose research focuses on the protective mechanisms which may prevent the negative effects of chronic ostracism. D. Waldeck has Master of Science Degrees in both Forensic and Health Psychology, and has conducted qualitative research during his studies. He also has worked in the social care sector in the UK supporting individuals with severe mental health problems to re-integrate into society. During this time, D. Waldeck observed occasions whereby service users would be ostracised not just by members of the public, but also by health care professionals (e.g., doctors). Such experiences led D. Waldeck to research into protective mechanisms which may help individuals cope with the painful effects of ostracism.

Methodology

Ethical approval for this research was received by the University of Chichester Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 1213:24). The study used a qualitative phenomenological approach in order to best "understand several individual's common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). As ostracism is proposed to be a phenomenon experienced by all humans (Williams, 2009), the phenomenological approach fits with the subject of investigation. Further, Creswell (2007) suggests that the phenomenological approach enables a "deep[er] understanding of the phenomenon" (p. 62), which may be of benefit to groups such as therapists aimed at dealing with such experiences (i.e., ostracism). In order to understand the mechanisms which may protect individuals from ostracism, it is important to first identify any shared experiences or methods which are used to cope with such events.

Participants and Recruitment

The participants in the present study were recruited from advertisements in emails to staff and students at the University of Chichester, and through social media outlets (e.g., Facebook) to the general population. We specified that participants did not necessarily need to have recently experienced ostracism in order to take part. Ostracism is prevalent and ubiquitous, so the majority of the population are likely to experience such events on a daily basis (Nezlek et al., 2012; Williams, 2009). However, individuals who do not necessarily feel ostracised may process such experiences differently than those who do remember such events and become distressed. Therefore, it was important to not restrict participation based on present levels of ostracism, as such exclusion may limit the emergence of potential protective factors during analysis. This study consisted of 21 participants (three university staff, 14 internal students, two external students, and two employed in the public sector in the UK). Of this sample, 57 % (n=12) were female, 48% (n=10) had a higher degree at university, and 33% (n=7) were currently enrolled in an undergraduate program. The majority of participants were classified as between the ages of 18 to 29 (n=14). The sample was of white racial identity.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted though semi-structured interviews, lasting between approximately 20 to 40 minutes. The length of the interviews was short compared to other qualitative studies exploring relatively similar subjects such as workplace rejection (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007) and parental alienation (Baker, 2005). Indeed, Strandmark and Hallberg (2007) and Baker (2005) interviewed participants for at least one hour. However, unless one has experienced chronic episodes of ostracism over their lives, ostracism is often considered to be trivial in comparison to other stressors such as work or relationship difficulties (Williams, 2001). Therefore, it was expected that, for some, if they perceived little ostracism in their lives, this would limit the length of the interviews. Participants were asked if they preferred their interview recorded using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder (VN-711PC) or to be handwritten by the researcher. In total there were 17 interviews audio-recorded and 4 interviews hand written.

Data were transcribed verbatim from the audio-recorded files by D. Waldeck. The interviews were conducted in a private office in the University of Chichester by D. Waldeck between September and November 2013. Participants were provided an information sheet and an informed consent form before interviews were conducted in the office. In order to assure participants awareness, verbal and written information concerning the design and procedure of the study was provided prior to obtaining written informed consent. They were also informed as to how their data would be recorded, analysed, documented, and presented. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all names were replaced with identifier numbers to help ensure confidentiality. To optimise participant's wellbeing, information was provided within the information sheet and debrief form as to benefits of the research, and to direct participants to appropriate agencies (e.g., local health care provider, counsellor) should they feel distressed during or following the study. For the purposes of this study, data was constituted as any descriptive verbal information (e.g., single words, phrases) expressed by participants.

The Interview

A semi-structured interview guide with open questions relating to specific themes was used in the interview. Specifically, in accordance with the TNTM (Williams, 2009), participants were prompted upon the following qualities of their experience: (1) the detection

of the ostracism (e.g., "describe what happened beforehand"); (2) the reflexive reaction to ostracism (e.g., "describe what your immediate thoughts and sensations were in that moment"); (3) the reflection upon the ostracism (e.g., "what were your thoughts after this happened?"); (4) attempts to refortify depleted needs (e.g., "what did you do after you were ostracised?"); and (5) resignation (e.g., " describe how long it took you to recover from this ostracism"). Participants were asked to describe significant ostracism events from their recent past to the distant past (i.e., childhood memories of ostracism).

However, to begin the interview, participants were asked to describe a recent event when they felt ignored or excluded by others. If they were unable to recall a recent event of ostracism, then they were asked to imagine a scenario where they could be. For example, "Imagine you are walking down the street and you see someone that you know. You attempt to gain their attention by waving to them, they see you, but then just completely blank [ignore] you. Describe what you would be thinking at that moment." In total there were 17 participants who were able to recall a recent event of ostracism and four participants who required prompting due to no recent experience. An additional inspection of the data was performed independently by two of the researchers and investigated the "real" vs "imagined" experiences. We found no differences between the levels of experience, and the codes fitted within the established themes.

Following completion of the study participants were debriefed both verbally and through being presented with a debrief form. At the end of the study, participants were entered into a raffle with the opportunity to win £50.

Thematic Analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic method was selected due to it being unrestricted to pre-existing theoretical frameworks, and may afford the researcher flexibility in selecting the appropriate analysis structure to reflect the reality of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is of importance to the present study as the reported experiences of ostracism may not necessarily fit within the framework of the TNTM (Williams, 2009). Indeed, the development of the TNTM was heavily influenced by the reports (diaries, letters) of people suffering from chronic experiences of ostracism. As no qualitative study to our knowledge has yet examined the process of ostracism experiences in a non-chronic sample[2], it is possible that unexpected topics or themes may emerge from the data. A flexible framework allows for researchers to detect themes which are unrelated to the structure of the TNTM (Williams, 2009) but to alternative models such as the (in)flexibility model (Hayes et al., 2011). The data collected was in the form of transcription.

The steps of thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were followed which included becoming familiar with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes and then defining themes (see Figure 2). First, the researcher (D.Waldeck) immersed himself in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts several times to ensure understanding. In addition, this step also included the researcher noting down initial ideas about the experiences shared by participants. Second, to create initial codes, the researcher examined the transcripts and then manually inserted different references (i.e., descriptive, linguistic, conceptual comments) which related to segments of text. For example, if a participant stated they reacted

[2] Participants were asked to complete the 8-item Ostracism Experiences Scale (OES; Carter-Sowell, unpublished) to determine how often, in general, they felt ostracised. The OES is answered on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 "hardly ever" to 7 "almost always." A sample item is "In general, others treat me as if I'm invisible." The average (mean) score for all participants was 3.71 which represented that as a group they perceived ostracism "very occasionally." No individual participants scored higher than 4.3 on average which represents that they perceived ostracism "some of the time."

with anger to ostracism, this may labelled (coded) as "anger" or "reaction." As recommended by Saldaña (2009), a second cycle of reviews was conducted to help ensure the codes were reliable and consistent. Third, the generated codes were then honed into potential themes, and data were rechecked for evidence of themes. Fourth, the potential themes were then reviewed by checking whether each theme related to the coded extracts and within the whole dataset. Fifth, the potential themes and subthemes were named and organised within a thematic map (i.e., a visual diagram indicating how each theme links to other themes and subthemes).

Figure 2. The first five stages of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Reliability of the Analysis

As all the interviews were conducted by the principal researcher (D. Waldeck) a second researcher (I. Tyndall) was brought in for cross analysis. Creswell (2007) highlighted that such procedures are necessary to help prevent any personal biases from researchers influencing the interpretation of the phenomenon in the data. Therefore, in accordance with best practice guidelines for qualitative analysis (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999), credibility checks were performed by I. Tyndall who had no involvement in the interviews or initial analyses. Specifically, I. Tyndall received a random selection of eleven interview transcripts and was asked to identify codes, and the resultant themes that emerged from the data. Subsequently, a meeting was held to discuss the themes from both analyses. There were no discrepancies identified for any of the themes for the study. Descriptive comments and conceptual comments from both researchers were included into the final analysis as well as linguistic comments. This checking process helped to ensure that themes constructed were reliable, clear, consistent, and reduces the potential bias of an independent researcher analysis.

To organise the results, the final step of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted. Specifically, vivid or compelling examples from the text (i.e., direct quotes) were selected to evidence the prominent themes and subthemes derived from the thematic analysis.

Results

During the course of the analysis, several types of ostracism were identified. For example, participants highlighted how they would be ignored on the train or on the street. Other participants discussed experiences when they were rejected by their family in the past, or were recently excluded from work groups. Other incidents of ostracism were even subtle, for example, feeling as though a car driver did not sufficiently compliment one's kindness when giving way at a junction. The experiences were varied, however, there were common themes, which appeared to link the way such events were reportedly processed by participants.

Four major themes emerged from the thematic analysis. Participants discussed their immediate "reflex" response to ostracism, their "reflection" on the ostracism event, how they "regulated" their own thoughts and behaviours, and factors, which can support or limit "adjustment" from ostracism. A total of 11 subthemes were identified in this study (see Figure

3). Further, an overarching category of "differential intensity" emerged across the themes, reflecting the extent to which participants were able to process ostracism differently depending on the context (i.e., how close the perpetrator was to the person and the type of situation the ostracism occurred in).

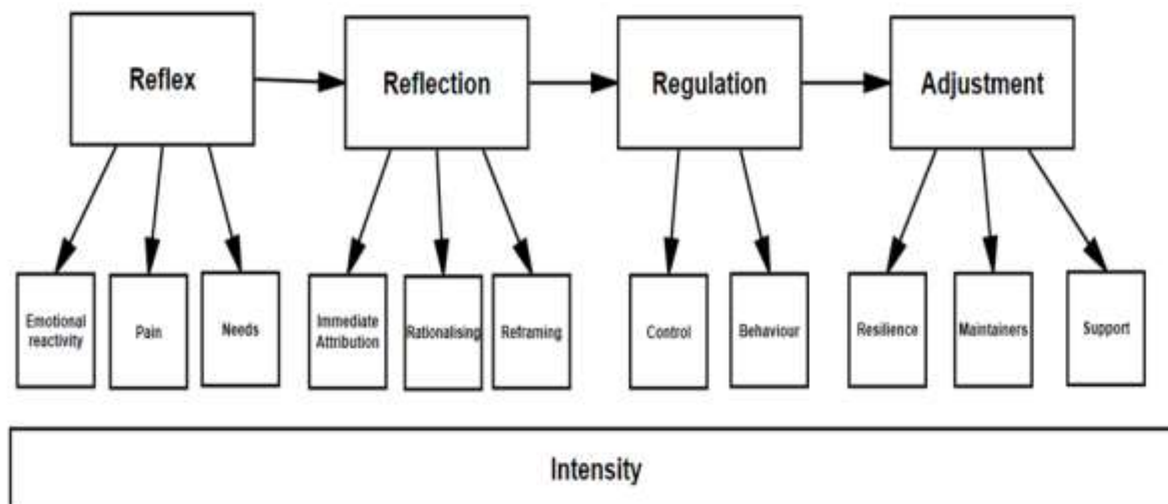

Figure 3. Themes and subthemes drawn from the thematic analysis.

Reflex

The first major theme incorporated the immediate impact of ostracism upon individuals. This included an increase of anger or stress (emotional reactivity), an experience of emotional pain (pain), and a loss of psychological drives (needs).

Emotional Reactivity

Participants described how they would react with an immediate anger or frustration when they felt ostracised. For example, "it's sort of an immediate anger that might last ten seconds or something like that" and "I get frustrated and I get peeved off." Further, participants described their experiences of ostracism being similar to that of emotional arousal or stress. For example, "It feels like butterflies and like sweating as well… just feeling really on edge" and "I did have a rush of blood."

Pain

For other participants, the immediate impact of ostracism was described as typical of an emotional pain response. The descriptions from participants suggest a different mechanism to that of stress and arousal which indicated anger or anxiety. Indeed, the experiences of emotional pain were more akin to an experience of being hurt. For example, "It would probably be more of a pain feeling," "your heart go[es] a bit tight," and "I would feel hurt." Moreover, one of the participants said:

> "the pain comes first and then it fades away and then the stress comes because you are just replaying it in your head."

This suggests that the pain and stress response from ostracism are distinct processes, and that pain may actually precede emotional reactivity for some individuals.

Needs

Participants described how when they were ostracised this would be compounded by a feeling of loss. For some, this loss may be related to one's connection with another, and for others it may be depletion in how they felt about themselves. Specifically, the participants described a reduction in either their levels of belonging, self-esteem or sense of existence. Indeed, some participants felt they were no longer connected with the ostraciser(s) (belonging). For example, one participant said:

> "I was very aware of myself and feeling out of place. Being uncomfortable in my own clothes. In my own skin. And feeling like I don't really belong."

Other participants identified that they felt a reduction in their self-esteem. For example, one participant said:

> "It's sort of you feel devalued and not equal in the sense that you're not worth that attention and not worth them putting that little bit of energy into it. So you feel less of a person and your confidence gets knocked, and in that sense that's why you get angry because you don't want to feel that way. You want to feel valued. You want to feel the same."

However, other participants felt a reduction in their sense of existence. For example, one participant said:

> "I'd blend in and say something and then they don't notice really. It's like I'm not really there."

Reflection

The second main theme incorporated participant's methods of reflecting upon their ostracism experiences. This includes: how individuals immediately interpret the ostracism as being their fault or as the perpetrator's problem (immediate attribution); attempts to analyse and understand the cause of the ostracism with the view to providing a solution to the "problem" (rationalising); and attempts to diminish the importance of the event through placing the situation into context (reframing).

Immediate Attribution

Participants described a process whereby they would immediately attribute the cause of the ostracism to be for an external reason, for example, that something was wrong with the perpetrator and not with them. For example, one participant said:

> "I think I'd immediately assume there was something wrong with them that day. I wouldn't think it was anything to do with me."

In contrast, however, some participants attributed the cause of the ostracism to be for an internal reason, for example, that something was wrong with them and not the perpetrator. For example, one participant said:

> "I would kind of feel like I've done something wrong and that there must be a reason, so it must be I can't make people pay attention to me."

Rationalising

Participants described how they attempted to mentally analyse the ostracism event in order to try and understand why it happened. For example, one participant said:

> "It took me like a day or two where I got to reflecting on it and put myself back into the event of what was going on. Was I being very social? Or was the group? Was I just not working together with the room very well? What was going on?"

However, being ostracised was perceived as a problem for some participants. Therefore, a process of finding a solution to this problem (i.e., problem solving) was described as part of this reflection process. For example, one participant said:

> "I would be thinking to find a solution. I wouldn't be focusing on just the feelings or the moment. I would be thinking of a solution to the problem. So if I was out of the group I was thinking how can I solve it? How can I find a group? I wouldn't be focusing on the fact of being upset or the fact that they betrayed me or whatever. Yeah. I would just try to find the solution, and maybe justify as well why something happened so I would understand it better."

For many participants the search for a cause of the ostracism appeared to stem from a sense of social injustice. Therefore, they felt as though they had been ostracised unfairly, therefore the cause of the ostracism is unclear and ambiguous. For example, one participant said:

> "It affected me in that there was no justice for it. I couldn't understand why. I didn't know what I'd done wrong particularly…any attempt for engagement was rejected time and time again. And it didn't seem fair."

Reframing

The subtheme of "reframing" was the most critical of the features described by participants within the reflection stage. This involved the process of transforming a potentially negative experience (e.g., sensations, thoughts) into either something positive or neutral. One such method was described as the attempt to diminish the importance of the ostracism. For example, one participant said:

> "If I try and make it less important then it's not worth putting the time and energy into it so it relieves the stress."

For the majority of participants, diminishing the importance of the ostracism was sustained by a process of contextualising. Specifically, participants attempted to rationalise the ostracism by trying to place it into context within their lives. For example, one participant said:

> "I just think that it's pretty much inevitable that you're going to be rejected in some form in your life. (.) and it's not the be all and end all."

When placing the ostracism into context, many participants attempted to see the "truth" behind the ostracism by attempting to see the event from different angles (perspectives). For example, one participant said:

> "Trying to look at it from different angles in that moment and sort of go, you know, *they are being rude to me.* She's probably hormonal. We'll let it drop."

In addition to viewing the ostracism from different angles, some participants described how they would focus on the needs of the perpetrator, instead of the impact of the ostracism upon themselves. Thus, a compassionate view of others appeared to be involved within the reflection process. For example, one participant said:

> "Sometimes I feel embarrassed for them feeling embarrassed that I've seen them so I suppose I worry more about how they're feeling than how I'm feeling."

Finally, participants described how they were eventually able to reframe the ostracism as a positive event over time. For example, two participants said:

> "I am happier because I won't allow these people to hurt me anymore and my love won't be destroyed."

> "I think positive thoughts, you can concentrate more on the people that are important to you and the people you do have a relationship with, because people you do have relationships with don't tend to ignore you."

Regulation

The third main theme incorporates participant's attempts to regulate and modify their inner psychological processes and their behaviour in response to ostracism. This theme includes the subthemes of "control" and "behaviour."

Control

Participants described how they attempted to control their reaction in response to ostracism. This is illustrated by excerpts from two of the interviews:

> "I think it's a defence mechanism because if you show that something hurts you in a way you are vulnerable, and especially when people are ostracising you, you don't want to show your vulnerability."

> "I didn't try to remove those thoughts from me, I was trying to cope with my physical reaction…try to override my automated response of blowing up really."

Further, controlling one's reactions to ostracism was also described as a method of delaying the reflection process. For example, one participant described:

> "I get upset. So I cry when I get upset. I didn't cry at the time I cried afterwards. I got upset when I went back home, but at the time then I think my blood pressure raised I would say slightly, because it angered me."

Another participant highlighted:

> "I think that in this situation I'd not show anything. I would probably try to act as normal as possible, but I can imagine that when I go back to my office where I would be in a position to sit down for a moment I'd think *what was that about?* and then I would start thinking about it. But at the time I would not let it show."

To assist in delaying the uncomfortable thoughts and sensations following ostracism, participants described how they would try to distract themselves. For example, "I'd try and get it out of my head as much as I can" and "it's easy enough to distract yourself and your feelings." Furthermore, the typical methods used to assist in distracting from the ostracism thoughts were described as watching television. For example, one participant said:

> "I try to listen to music and tv to try and forget these things. These help me to forget people who are letting me down."

Behaviour

According to participants, a range of behaviours were used in response to the ostracism event. One of the most common behaviours was to seek confrontation with the perpetrator of the ostracism and seek an immediate resolution. For example, one participant described:

> "I'd want to do it as soon as possible. If you wait then your thoughts just build in your head and you worry about it."

Another participant said:

> "I would probably just confront them about it and say *you can see I want to talk to you and I want help if it is bothering me and you're still ignoring me.* So I would confront the issue."

However, other individuals would adjust their behaviour and seek to avoid the perpetrator to avoid the unwanted distress caused from their ostracism. For example, one participant described:

> "I've been doing it without realising it. Putting some distance between us, because I don't feel like we've got anything in common anymore and if she can't be bothered to make the effort, why should I?"

Adjusting one's own behaviour to seek re-inclusion with the perpetrator of their ostracism was identified as a common strategy. Participants described how they would become quieter and be less engaging. For example, one participant said:

> "I'm not one of these people who are really loud and really boisterous I sort of end up drifting off into the background, and I sort of end up listening and nodding away and I sort of become part of the scenery. I sort of become the chessboard and not the chess piece."

Similarly, another participant stated:

> "I try to change the way I am to match the way they've been, but that's often unnoticed so I get even quieter to see if they notice and they don't."

Finally, some participants described how they would attempt to get the attention from the perpetrator of their ostracism. For example, one participant said:

> "To keep trying to get their attention I kept involuntarily jerking my head forward to get a response."

Adjustment

The fourth major theme incorporated the factors, which appeared to impact on how easily an individual could recover from an experience of ostracism. This theme includes the subthemes of "resilience," "maintainers," and "support."

Resilience

Some participants described how they were able to deflect the negative impact of their ostracism which indicates a degree of resiliency to such stressors. For example:

> "I wouldn't place a high emphasis on it," "I will get over all of them quite quickly," and "I'd question it, but it wouldn't really bother me."

Further, these participants appeared to adjust quickly from ostracism by not allowing any negative thoughts to endure by maintaining a positive and optimistic attitude. For example, one participant said:

> "It doesn't tend to last longer than a day with me… I give people fresh chances."

Another participant described:

> "I'm usually quite an optimistic and positive person, so when I do have negative feelings I try to turn them into something positive."

According to participants, their resilience to ostracism was built through learning from such negative events in the past. For example, one participant said:

> "I would say it's not a big deal to me anymore. If something quite severe was to happen, if it was friends, I would think *it happened. There's no point dwelling on it. Move on*. So I don't think that would affect me… I'd like to think that I could get over the stuff pretty quick now."

In contrast, however, some participants who were perhaps not able to develop resilience to ostracism appeared to be less adjusted following such experiences. For example, one participant described:

> "the worst case where I felt ignored was when my dad didn't bother to contact me when my nan had died. I found out on Facebook…I still haven't addressed this with him and waiting for a time when he's really low. Because even now I'm really p****d off about it."

Another participant said:

> "It affected my confidence…sometimes I hate her now…some behaviours cannot be forgotten."

Maintainers

The intensity of the ostracism experience was described by participants as dependent on how it was maintained. One of the most common maintainers reported was that of rumination where participants would dwell on the ostracism and over-analyse the event. It can be argued that rumination is part of reflection, however, in the context of this analysis, rumination appears to maintain distress and limit adjustment, whereas the reflection process detailed earlier does not necessarily require the use of rumination. One participant described:

> "It's a mixture of stress, because the moment you start ruminating about it you can get quite tense, because you kind of replay the whole scenario thinking about what went wrong, which is stressful."

Another participant stated:

> "if you're somewhere where you can't escape and you're able to think about it whilst you're able to build it up to the point where it's not just this wee negative feeling but a massive thing."

Similarly, the intensity of the ostracism episode was described as just as stressful if not more stressful if repetitive thoughts of the experience occur after the event. For example, one participant described:

> "it's the fact that I was thinking a lot about it. So it's almost like the whole process of thinking made my body clench up a little bit."

Another key maintainer was prevalence of ostracism. Participants who reported short durations or brief episodes of ostracism appeared to adjust quickly from such experiences. For example, one participant stated:

> "if it's just a one off occasion then its water off a ducks back, sort of forgotten about."

However, if the ostracism was persistent then participants reported that it would have more negative impact and they were less able to adjust quickly. For example, one participant said:

> "the more times it happens then the less excuses you can make for the other person. And it's more that thought gets stronger that it's you and not them."

Support

The final factor which helped to influence how quickly people adjusted from ostracism was that of the support they received from others. Participants highlighted how they would often seek support in helping to rationalise the ostracism. For example, one participant said:

> "I would talk it out. Sometimes I can't come up with the answer myself. I sometimes need to get other suggestions or others to reason out why this has happened."

Further, participants described how obtaining support from others was critical in adjusting from ostracism experiences. For example, one participant said:

> "I will talk about it with other people, and in talking about it with other people I feel better."

Similarly, another participant stated:

> "I'd probably speak to other people an awful lot. It's surprising how much better off I am when I'm talking to someone else."

In contrast, if support was not available then this may make coping with such experiences much harder. For example, one participant described:

> "I definitely would cry more, because if I couldn't find a solution in my own head …I would have felt left out and isolated. So probably who knows I could turn to drinking."

Intensity

The superordinate theme of "intensity" represented the variability in how ostracism impacted upon the participants. Specifically, participants described how the level of closeness of the perpetrator to them influenced the subsequent level of distress. Perpetrators of ostracism who were closer to the participants were likely to cause greater emotional reactivity. For example, one participant said:

> "I think if it's a romantic partner or if it's someone you live with or an ex-husband then it's stronger, a lot stronger. I don't think especially in a marriage, because you are living with that person and you're there on a day-to-day so how can you be ignored by someone you see on a daily basis? It's not a nice feeling so yeah it's definitely a much stronger feeling."

Similarly, another participant described:

> "Being ignored by a family member would make me feel more annoyed. The feeling is that they are supposed to care about you. For a friend they do not always need to. Family are obligated to pay attention but friends aren't."

However, perpetrators of ostracism who were less close to the participants were described as having less intensity. For example, one participant said:

> "I would probably think that's a little bit strange but it wouldn't really upset me that much because they're just an acquaintance at the end of the day. And as such it doesn't really have much impact on my life or my wellbeing so it wouldn't really affect me at all."

Further, participants described how the intensity of the ostracism was often dependent on the context, and therefore the situation in which the event occurred. For example, one participant described:

> "If it was something silly. If he was busy doing something and he ignored me, then I would carry on and ask a timeframe for when we could speak…but if he was ignoring me for a long time then it would probably mean our relationship is not the best so maybe I would then start to think about the relationship in general…it really depends on the situation."

Discussion

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how people not in the resignation stage of the TNTM (i.e., a non-chronic sample) experience ostracism, and attempt to understand the processes in which such events are recovered from. Our findings suggest that experiencing ostracism follows a similar process in accordance with the TNTM (Williams, 2009). In particular, people appear to experience an immediate negative psychological impact (e.g., pain, negative affect, stress). Such findings are consistent with experimental research using Cyberball (Eisenberger et al., 2003; Kelly et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2000; Zadro et al., 2006). Subsequently, an immediate attribution is made (i.e., it was my fault or it was their fault) which may guide the motivation to search for meaning behind the ostracism. Williams (2001) noted that if one tends to make internal attributions related to their ostracism then this should lead to more distress. Although the design of this study does not allow for a clear examination of this effect, using an external attribution appeared to make the reflection process easier to cope with (i.e., it is not about me, it is about them). However, additional empirical research is required to test the influence of attribution style further.

We have identified how people may attempt to resolve the pain of their ostracism by reframing the event. Such a process may be adaptive for individuals as they may be able to minimise the initial negative impact and thus potentially prevent further distress. Indeed, research has demonstrated that re-appraising (i.e., re-evaluating, reframing) one's ostracism can significantly reduce the time to recover from its painful effects (Sethi, Moulds, & Richardson, 2013). Considering that psychological flexibility has been found to fully mediate the effects of cognitive re-appraisal on psychological distress (Kashdan et al., 2006), the process of reframing one's experience with ostracism may be explained by the psychological (in)flexibility model (Hayes et al., 1999). According to Hayes et al. (1999), people who are psychologically flexible may be more adept at reframing such negative events (i.e., negative thoughts and sensations following ostracism) than those who are inflexible. Indeed, psychologically flexible individuals are able to transform the original function of distressing

thoughts by providing cognitive distance to their painful thoughts, and by decreasing the extent to which they believe in the literal meaning of such thoughts (Hayes et al., 1999). For example, the ostracised individual may have the thought "they ignored me because I am unlovable," however, the negative impact of this thought may be minimised when the thought is reframed (e.g., I am having the thought that I am unlovable). If the ostracised individual does not "buy" into their thoughts (e.g., I believe I am unlovable), this may, therefore, decrease unhelpful behavioural responses to such thoughts (e.g., not attending any social event).

Moreover, therapeutic strategies (as used within Acceptance and Commitment Therapy; Hayes et al., 1999) to promote cognitive distance (e.g., cognitive defusion) have been found to be effective in reducing emotional distress and believability in self-relevant negative thoughts (Masuda, Hayes, Sackett, & Twohig 2004; Masuda et al., 2010). Thus, chronically ostracised individuals who accept their ostracism and believe they are helpless may benefit from cognitive defusion strategies which could potentially help transform or reframe such thoughts.

In contrast, however, the manner in which one regulates their ostracism experience may also influence the distress caused. In particular, we identified that people may attempt to control their emotional responses by not reacting to ostracism at the time of the event. Such a process was supported by attempts to distract from the pain or to delay the reflection process. These behaviours are consistent with utilising experiential avoidance (EA), which is a form of psychological inflexibility, whereby people may not accept their internal private events and seek to change, or, in this case, control them (Hayes et al., 1999). Empirical research has demonstrated that individuals who are high in EA are more likely to suffer a range of negative psychological outcomes such as depression and anxiety (Bond et al., 2011; Kashdan et al., 2006). Indeed, attempts to avoid one's unwanted experiences have been shown to increase the prevalence of the experience (Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000). Thus, in essence, avoiding painful thoughts following ostracism (e.g., I am a bad person) may lead to the thought rebounding with greater intensity. Similarly, the participants highlighted how their pain was maintained over time the more it was ruminated or dwelled upon. Such findings are in accordance with previous research suggesting that rumination prevents people from recovering quickly after ostracism (Wesselmann et al., 2013).

Interestingly, however, not all people needed to use strategies to reduce the negative impact of ostracism as, for some, there was little impact. Such responses may relate to an individual's level of resilience to such phenomena. Recent empirical research has demonstrated that people high in trait resilience are more likely to activate pain-relieving chemicals (i.e., opioids) in their brain following an ostracism episode (Hsu et al., 2013). Therefore, people may learn to overcome the impact of their ostracism by reappraising such events immediately. Similarly, preliminary research has suggested that people who are high in positive psychological traits (i.e., psychological capital; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) such as *resilience* and optimism, tend to report feeling low levels of distress following ostracism in the workplace (Haq, 2014). Considering that some people may develop resilience following experiences of ostracism, this appears to, somewhat, counter Williams (2009) suggestion that persistent ostracism experiences will always lead to states of helplessness or depression. Future researchers may consider further investigation of the role of resilience as a buffer against ostracism.

Receiving social support appeared to be useful for participants in assisting with the reflection process following their ostracism. Furthermore, without such social support, some participants highlighted how this would have a detrimental effect on their wellbeing by maintaining the pain and not allowing alternative interpretations. At present, there is limited research regarding social support in the ostracism literature. One recent study conducted by Teng and Chen (2012) found that having a close companion (e.g., a friend) present when one

is ostracised appears to buffer the individual against the negative effects of ostracism. However, such a buffer only appeared to occur for individuals who are high in self-esteem. Thus, for individuals low in self-esteem, obtaining social support may provide little additional benefit. Further research is, therefore, required to examine the impact of social support on the reflection process.

Finally, we identified that the negative impact experienced following ostracism appeared to be influenced by how close the perpetrator was to the victim. Indeed, Nezlek et al. (2012) highlighted that people ostracised by a partner were more distressed than if it occurred by a stranger. Therefore, our findings suggest that people attribute more meaning and significance to their ostracism if it has a detrimental effect on their important relationships.

One advantage of the present study is that the qualitative design adopted enables for a transparent account of how experiences of ostracism may be processed, and how such processes (e.g., reflection, re-appraisal) influence how people cope with such events. Therefore, the results of this study may have more validity in relation to how people experience their ostracism in everyday life in comparison to somewhat artificial methods such as Cyberball (Williams & Jarvis, 2006). However, it is difficult to generalise the results from the present study to other settings or situations. Although the experiences of ostracism were in variable settings and situations (e.g., at work, at home), the sample used were not representative of the population. Indeed, the majority of the sample were from a higher education background within one university in the UK, and were all of white racial identity. It could be argued, therefore, that the experiences highlighted by participants in this study may differ from those from other backgrounds (e.g., education, racial). Future research is needed to capture a more generalizable representation of how people experience ostracism by recruiting from various populations. Importantly, however, Williams (2009) highlighted that ostracism is a global phenomenon experienced by all humans, so there may be little difference in the way such events are processed.

There were also limitations which may curtail the conclusions drawn from this research study. Indeed, there were few accounts of ostracism experienced within the recent past (i.e., within the past week), rather, the majority were described as from the past six months or distant past (i.e., childhood). Such accounts may be subject to biases in memory, for example, by exaggerating the impact of the emotion involved (Levine & Safer, 2002). Indeed, Baumeister, DeWall and Vohs (2009) suggest that "when (people are) asked to report long-ago instances of rejection or to imagine how they would feel if they were rejected, (people) have nothing to go on other than constructive memory and a priori assumptions about how one ought to feel" (p.6). As a consequence, people may be more likely to remember moments when they were most distressed rather than moments of not being upset (e.g., numb).

Further, as participants mostly remembered experiences from their distant past, the experiences of ostracism reported are not a reflection of how people are currently dealing with the ostracism they may experience. To this extent, the results from the present study provide little contribution to the TNTM (Williams, 2009) in regards to how people actually cope with ostracism. However, if chronically ostracised individuals were interviewed then it is, arguably, unlikely that a sub-theme such as resilience may emerge from the analysis. Indeed, Williams (2009) suggests that psychological resilience dissipates over time due to the inability to cope with the negative effects of ostracism. In contrast, according to the results of this study, for some individuals, the experience of ostracism may contribute to the development of resilience. However, further research is required to elucidate such a mechanism, as a person may develop tolerance (i.e., are less sensitive) to pain (Hsu et al., 2013) but still may experience distress after a delay following ostracism (Bernstein & Calypool, 2012).

Research has demonstrated that when people are led to believe they will be permanently ostracised in the future, they tend to lose motivation and feel helpless (Baumeister,

DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005). For example, Baumeister et al. (2005) found that such individuals tended to indulge in unhealthy snacking behaviour following information about their future ostracism. This suggests that ostracism may lead to the loss of motivation and difficulty in self-regulating (i.e., redirecting one's thoughts). One example of self-regulation would be to refrain from unhealthy snacking in spite of the discomfort that one is feeling. Recently, it was proposed that researchers examine factors which increase an individual's capacity to self-regulate to help them recover from chronic ostracism (Riva, Wesselmann, Wirth, Carter-Sowell, & Williams, 2014). Preliminary investigations have found that training people in mindfulness (i.e., the tendency to observe and not react with judgement to one's thoughts), can help people to self-regulate and recover more quickly from experiences of ostracism (Molet et al., 2013). As mindfulness is related to psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 1999), the present study appears to support the emerging literature suggesting that people may learn to overcome chronic ostracism.

In summary, being ostracised can be a negative psychological experience for individuals. However, some people will be resistant to such events, whereas others will be highly sensitive. Our findings suggest that some people appear to develop resilience to ostracism which, in part, may be supported with an external attribution style. Furthermore, receiving social support may help individuals acknowledge a different perspective and re-appraise the meaning and significance of their ostracism. In addition, psychological flexibility was identified as a potential moderator in determining how people cope with ostracism. Future research should examine the influence of psychological flexibility as a moderator of ostracism's effects, and to determine if reducing inflexibility/experiential avoidance (e.g., through engaging in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy; Hayes et al., 1999) can help people cope with ostracism experiences more easily.

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