

LMX RELATIONSHIPS AND “SOCIAL DEATH”: A CURVILINEAR EFFECT ON OSTRACISM

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ABSTRACT

Referred to as “social death”, ostracism produces both psychological and physical consequences. It is known to cause stress, depression, loneliness, (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and turnover intent (Ferris et al., 2008), subsequently, ostracism can impact leader-subordinate and coworker dyadic relationships. The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory focuses on the dyadic relationship between a leader and subordinate. Traditionally LMX theorists emphasize the characteristics and implications of low- and high-quality leadership exchange levels, to the exclusion of middle-quality employees’ leadership relationships. Employees in high-quality relationships experience higher job satisfaction, higher organizational commitment, and lower turnover rates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Whereas, employees in low-quality relationships experience outcomes contradictory to employees in high-quality relationships. The scarce research that has been conducted on middle-quality employees suggests their organizational outcomes rival high-quality LMX employees. With few exceptions, LMX theorists have concentrated on the positive outcomes for employees in high-quality relationships and neglected to explore the potential negative consequences that could result from being a member in these relationships. Drawing from a sample of 132 employees in two different organizations, I explored whether identification with the adverse and preferential status associated with low- and high-quality relationships led employees to experience ostracism from coworkers. I hypothesize that middle-quality employees would be less subjected to ostracism than low- and high-quality employees. In other words, a curvilinear relationship between LMX quality and ostracism will exist. My results illustrated a polynomial (S-shaped) effect existed between LMX quality and ostracism, therefore, supporting my hypothesis. My results indicated that LMX quality between an employee and his or her leader might have important ramifications for their ensuing coworker interactions.

INTRODUCTION

A non-response to a cheerful good morning greeting, the avoidance of eye contact, or a coworker’s quick exit upon a colleague’s entrance are all subtle-like behaviors that regularly take place in today’s work environment – and represent examples of workplace ostracism. Ostracism that takes place in the work environment is defined as “the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others” (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008, p. 1348). When a human being’s fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) is violated in the workplace whether intentional or accidental, the consequences impacts both individuals and organizations and falls within the realm of deviant behavior. Ostracized employees experience stress, depression, and loneliness, (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995) which imperils their emotional and mental well-being and consequently, negatively impacts their performance and job satisfaction (Balliet & Ferris, 2013). Research also indicate that long-

term ostracism can adversely impact individuals' working memory, organization, and decision-making (Buelow, Okdie, Brunell & Trost, 2015) also resulting in costly organizational outcomes.

Referred to as "social death", being ostracized subsequently, impacts social networks within the organization, such as the dyadic relationships between leaders and subordinates and between coworkers. One of the most researched leader-subordinate theories is leader-member exchange (LMX) (Schyns & Day, 2010), which includes in its core the differential treatment of employees, thereby establishing a range of low- to high- quality relationship classifications (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). A high-quality relationship with a leader is characterized as possessing a high degree of mutual trust, respect, and admiration. On the other hand, a low-quality relationship lacks these merits. Consequently, employees involved in high-quality relationships become beneficiaries of rewards, career support, and favors from their supervisor and low-quality relationship employees, optimistically, receive formal job description benefits (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997).

Employees are very aware of their LMX classification which can lead to negative attitudinal and behaviors in employees (Vidhyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010). Research suggest employees' comparison of their LMX ranking acts as a "motivational force" behind these attitudes and behaviors (Mussweiler, 2003; Vidhyarthi et al., 2010). Therefore, a leader's dissimilar treatment of employees can impact coworkers' relational currency with each other, and consequently, these employee dispositions can result in anti-social behavior such as ostracism among the differentiated groups.

Moreover, research suggests high- and low-quality, also referred to as in-group and out-group, members may avoid each other in response to being ostracized (Ferris et al., 2008). Hence, this suggests bilateral targeting of ostracism between the two groups. Indeed, Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, and Strucke (2001) research contend ostracism is causally linked to antisocial behaviors toward the source of the exclusionary act. It is conceivable that many individuals will experience being in the roles of the victim and source during their work career. However, this also proposes that an employee may take on both the roles of source and victim of ostracism in a single workplace relationship.

While there are no studies that the author is aware of that directly evaluate a relationship between ostracism and LMX, examining a possible relationship between these two constructs contributes to LMX literature because significant research portrays high-quality LMX relationships as a generator of positive outcomes. Only a few studies have explored an exception to this school of thought. The limited research has found a positive relationship between high-quality LMX subordinates and stress, turnover intent, and turnover (Harris, & Kacmar, 2006; Harris, Kacmar, & Witt, 2005; Morrow, Yoshinori, Crum, Ruben, & Pautsch, 2005). Therefore, exploring additional possibilities that may contradict this asymmetrical research perspective can provide new insight into LMX relationships and augment extant research that is establishing negative outcomes associated with high-quality LMX relationships.

Similarly, ostracism research has taken an unbalanced approach and focused significantly on the target with limited research concerned with the source of ostracism (Grahe, 2015). Bearing in mind that workplace ostracism was operationalized (see Ferris et al., 2008) only eight years ago, this nascent research stream is experiencing a strong interest from various areas, i.e. human resources, psychology, communication, management, management decisions, and marketing based on the more than 160 citations of Ferris' and colleagues (2008) paper in Google Scholar. As with any emerging research, researchers have identified several gaps in the research. One of these opportunities is a lack of motives and factors that predict when individuals choose to

ostracize each other in the workplace (Gooley, Zadro, Williams, Svetieva & Gonsalkorale, 2015). This paper contributes to this limited knowledge by positing several motives (i.e., envy, communication, poor interpersonal skills, etc.) of workplace ostracism that I have integrated with the LMX theoretical framework.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore possible reasons behind workplace ostracism and test a curvilinear relationship between LMX and ostracism with the extremes of high-quality and low-quality relationships experiencing greater ostracism than mid-quality employees. This study is in response to a need to increase the focus on more universal and subtle forms of deviant behavior such as ostracism that encompass all levels of people in an organization (Ferris et al., 2008). Additionally, our analytics responds to recent calls for more sophisticated treatments of research constructs, suggesting that a “paradigmatic shift from linear to curvilinear models is needed to improve management theory and practice” (Pierce & Aguinis, 2013, p. 317).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Workplace Ostracism

In recent years, researchers have strived to augment comprehension of workplace ostracism (Ferris, Yan, Lim, Chen, & Fatimah, 2015) particularly since this phenomenon contributes to outcomes at individual, dyadic, group, and organizational levels. Most research on workplace ostracism focus on the victim’s (target) perspective and its accompanying consequences with less focus on the initiator’s (source) perspective and antecedents of ostracism (Gooley et al., 2015; Grahe, 2015). Ostracism threatens the fundamental needs of humans – belongingness, self-esteem, control, and a meaningful existence (K.D. Williams, 1997, 2001) and manifests in both our personal and work lives. The sense of belonging is diminished by ostracism since it endangers one’s social identification with a particular work group. An act as minor as being ignored in a cyber-ball-toss game has been found to threaten one’s sense of belonging (K. D. Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). Employees who are ostracized by their peers have a tendency to self-examine themselves to determine if they are at fault or if they instigated the act. In other words, is there something wrong with them, which threatens their sense of self-esteem (K.D. Williams, 2001). This situation also suggests a loss of control because a target of ostracism may be perplexed when they do not know if they provoked the act which then suggests they are at a loss of how to control and terminate the situation (K.D. Williams, 1997; Zadro, K. D. Williams, & Richardson, 2004). Ostracism also suggests an individual may have nothing of value to contribute to a group and, in essence, he or she is more of a liability rather than an asset which threatens one’s sense of meaningful existence (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, & Schimel 2004).

Debate exists on whether ostracism is a distinct construct or a component of broader constructs. Ostracism has been viewed as a facet of interpersonal deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000), workplace bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2005), aggression (Neuman & Baron, 1998) and social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Ferris et al. (2008) argue behaviors such as bullying, aggression, and social undermining involves interaction between the source and victim which is behavior contradictory to the unilateral foundation of ostracism. The primary characteristic behavior of ostracism is to disregard or ignore an individual which theoretically differs from the aforementioned forms of deviant behavior. However, Ferris and colleagues (2008) suggest ostracism may co-occur with bullying, aggression, or social undermining.

Unlike some deviant behaviors, ostracism is shrouded with ambiguity, and the intentionality behind an ostracism occurrence makes it an aversive and painful experience for

individuals (K.D. Williams, 1997). Whether the act is intentional or not, there is not a significant difference in response to motive. Indeed, research conducted by Zadro et al. (2004) found that individuals tend to perceive ostracism indiscriminately. In other words, irrespective of the circumstances, the pain associated with ostracism signals something is amiss with the social connection and influences the victim's desire to remedy the situation (K.D. Williams & Zadro, 2005; Zadro et al., 2004) either with prosocial or antisocial behaviors. Research indicate the psychological impact of ostracism produces contradictory social behaviors in targets. Ostracized victims either respond by increasing their compliance and productivity to regain good favor or by engaging in aggressive or irrational behaviors, and, in some cases, they may withdraw from the situation or source (Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013) to protect their psychological stability.

Workplace ostracism is estimated to cost organizations billions of dollars a year (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). As with other deviant behaviors, ostracism produces work-related stress, which can cost organizations in terms of sick days and insurance costs; additionally, associated turnover from ostracism results in a loss of intellectual capital, loss of organizational knowledge, and added expenses associated with the recruiting and training of new employees (Ferris et al., 2008). Despite high costs to an organization from employees' health and well-being and reduction to its bottom line, workplace ostracism has not received the attention in organizational behavior that it warrants given its apparent pervasiveness (Ferris et al., 2008; Sommer & K. D. Williams, 1997; K. D. Williams, 2007). Sommer and Williams (1997) contend that "there have been no programmatic attempts to examine this phenomenon empirically or to integrate theoretically its impact on individuals' emotions, cognitions, and behaviors" (p. 693). In the past few years, great strides have been achieved in organizing the literature, clarifying the construct, and outlining the prominent issues at hand (Robinson, et al., 2013). A central insight notes that "given there is very little research on antecedents of ostracism, we encourage future studies to examine where, when, and under what conditions ostracism is most likely to occur in organizations" (Robinson et al., 2013. p. 210). Intuitively, to comprehend how individuals experience ostracism, researchers need to explore the impact of ostracism from both the source's and victim's perspectives. Generally, an act of ostracism is initiated by someone, and only limited research has explored the culprit or source of ostracism occurrences.

The dyadic relationships between low- and high-quality LMX members provide fertile ground to explore this phenomenon. Interestingly, the intensity of ostracism is not lessened by the type of relationship between the target and source. K.D. Williams et al. (2000) argue being ostracized by in-group or out-group members does not diminish the effects of ostracism. Surprisingly, Gonsalkorale and K. D. Williams (2007) provide evidence of this by demonstrating being ostracized by the Ku Klux Klan can even have a negative impact.

Leader-Member Exchange

The LMX process characterizes the relationship between a leader and an employee, focusing on their respective roles and the subsequent quality of the relationship. According to the existing literature (Graen & Uhl-Bein, 1995; Scandura, 1999; Sparrow & Liden, 1997), leaders form unique relationship-based social exchanges with their subordinates based on trust and liking. The highest levels of trust and fondness may lead to a high-quality relationship whereas the lowest quality relationship is characterized by a strict economic exchange that is embodied by the formal job description (Blau, 1964).

High-quality LMX relationships

Research (Harris & Kacmar, 2006; Hofmann, Morgeson, & Gerras, 2003) has indicated that employees in high-quality relationships are more dependable; exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs); have lower turnover rates, greater organizational commitment, greater job satisfaction (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Wayne & Stilwell, 1993) and have less role-related stress (i.e., role overload, role ambiguity) than low-quality LMX employees. In high-quality LMX relationships, employees' bonds with their leaders are built on the foundation of mutual trust, respect, honesty, communication, and sharing of social networks (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Harris et al., 2005; Liden & Graen, 1980). This creates an appearance of a peer-to-peer relationship rather than a supervisor-subordinate relationship (Kramer, 2004). A reciprocity component also exists in their relationship, as high-quality LMX employees are expected to perform beyond their contractual duties (Northouse, 2010; Wayne & Green, 1993; Wayne et al., 1997). Consequently, high-quality LMX relationships between employees and managers result in positive outcomes for the organization (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Middle-quality LMX relationships

As all employees by definition cannot be rated highest, it is important to recognize that the remaining majority is not likely to be ranked as low-quality. There will generally be a group that simply falls in between, as the *middle-quality* group. The importance of studying and understanding middle-quality relationships within firms has been suggested for decades (Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Graen & Schiemann, 1978; Kramer, 1995), yet researchers have generally persisted in focusing on the more dramatic effects of the highly desirable characteristics of the very best performers as differentiated from the lowest quality employees.

From an empirical perspective, the handful of studies that have been conducted on this middle-quality group provides evidence that this group indeed merits more distinct recognition for their role in organizations (Nelson, Stafford, & Wright, 2011). Vecchio and Gobdel (1984), Liden and Graen (1980), and Kramer (1995) all found unexpected positive outcomes for this group as compared to the high-quality group. For example, there are indications that members of this middle-quality group may have more open communication with their supervisor, possess the highest levels of job satisfaction, engage in the highest level of administration decision-making, and experience the lowest levels of stress and role ambiguity. In addition to these findings, Harris and colleagues (2005) found evidence of lower turnover rates for middle-quality LMX members as compared to the higher quality group.

Low-quality LMX relationships

Evidence repeatedly shows significant differences between performance and outcomes for employees in high-quality versus low-quality LMX relationships (Northouse, 2010). In particular, the low-quality characteristics and attributes are virtually antithetic to the high-quality state. Low-quality LMX is predictive of negative work outcomes, higher propensity for turnover, lower quality work, less productivity, less motivation to be creative problem solvers, and less incentive to work toward fulfilling an organization's goal. Not surprisingly, low-quality LMX employees are also more apt to file grievances.

The ensuing behaviors and attitudes from low-quality LMX employees are likely to affect their interpersonal relationships in the workplace, especially contingent on the perceived procedural and interactional justice in the LMX process (Scandura, 1999). Moreover, low-quality LMX employees by definition lack the intimate manager-employee interactions that high-quality LMX employees enjoy (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Kramer, 1995; Liden & Graen, 1980). Accordingly, low-quality LMX employees receive the more mundane assignments, have less supervisory support, get little (if any) input into decision making, and are excluded from their leader's social networks.

The perceived inequalities created by these different LMX groupings can have a damaging effect on the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of members not included in the high-quality group (Northouse, 2010) possibly leading to behaviors (i.e., workplace deviance, turnover, ostracism), typical of social exclusion from a desired group. Hence, a leader's differential treatment of employees can affect coworkers' interpersonal relationships and can lead to the ostracism of certain employees (Sias (1996, 2009).

Ostracism and Leader-Member Exchange

In general, LMX researchers have largely ignored the negative consequences that may be associated with being an employee involved in a high-quality relationship (Bolino & Turnley, 2009; Rousseau, 2004) and focused more on the damaging outcomes associated with low-quality relationships (Gerstner & Day, 1997). More specifically, there is a scarcity of research that examines interactions between high- and low-quality employees as a result of their leaders' differentiation treatment (Bolino & Turnley, 2009; House & Aditya, 1997; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2005; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). The dissimilar treatment of followers may adversely influence coworkers' interpersonal relationships (Sias, 1996, 2009) resulting in attitudinal and behavioral responses (Vidyarathi et al., 2010).

From an evolutionary psychological perspective, individuals tend to avoid group members who do not create equity in dyadic social exchanges (Kurzban & Leary, 2001). Hence, group members with low-quality LMX relationships may be ostracized due to their poor social skills and therefore, seen as a social liability to the group (Wesslemann, K. D. Williams, & Wirth, 2014; Wesslemann, Wirth, Pryor, Reeder, & K.D. Williams, 2015). Another line of research suggests that when low-quality LMX members receive discriminating treatment from their leader that coworkers perceive as warranted (possibly stemming from an employee's poor job performance, habitual tardiness, etc.), they may be ostracized (Sias, 2009) because they are viewed as burdensome to the group (Wesslemann, et al., 2015), and consequently threatens the effectiveness of the group. Ostracism may also occur specifically because other members do not want to be thought guilty of the same work-related behaviors and attitudes by association such as the "halo effect" with low-quality LMX members (Sias, 2009; Sias & Jablin, 1995). Furthermore, members may resent employees who are "slackers" (not carrying their share of the workload) and subsequently ostracize these employees (Kurzban & Leary, 2001).

In contrast, high-quality group members may be ostracized because they are perceived as exploiting a leader's resources. Leaders have a limited amount of resources, i.e., time, socioemotional, and tangible resources which may be more readily accessible to high-quality employees. For an employee to be a leader's favorite, that person is more than likely receiving resources from the leader that are not being distributed to all employees equitably, thus the resentment from coworkers. From the perspective of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1988), which suggests people are motivated to acquire resources which can include a

supervisor's attention, therefore, the perception of lopsidedness in the distribution of resources may encourage employees to commit deviant behavior such as ostracism. According to Brotheridge & Lee (2002), perceived loss of resources can cause psychological discomfort. Thus these employees may resort to maladaptive behavior such as ostracism of high-quality LMX members to cope.

While high-quality employees may be ostracized due to their perceived undue benefits, they may also compel ostracism by representing a threat to lower quality employees. For instance, another consequence of high-quality relationships is open bidirectional communication between the leader and the member (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). As a part of the social exchange obligations of the relationship (Blau, 1964), the high-quality member may become the leader's "eyes and ears" in a business unit; the leader may depend on that member to share information (that may otherwise not be available) about other members in his or her group. Vadera, Pratt and Mishra (2013) elaborated a perspective on "constructive deviance," which by definition entails "behaviors that deviate from the norms of the reference group and conform to hypernorms" (p. 1223). In their model of antecedents, e.g., whistleblowing, to such behaviors, they posited a positive role for LMX exchange as a mechanism of felt obligation driving such behaviors. Thus, employees may view the high-quality member as an infiltrator and ostracize him or her for that reason.

Another possible motive for low-quality LMX members to ostracize high-quality LMX member is an employee may be perceived as receiving unwarranted favoritism from the leader and therefore, that employee may be ostracized for being the boss's "pet"; consequently, dislike and distrust develops as part of the relationship between the boss's pet and the other employees (Rousseau, 2004; Sias, 2009). Hence, high-quality LMX status attainment that is not founded on an employee's skill set, knowledge, and/or experience is likely to generate ostracism from lower-quality LMX employees. Yet, it is plausible to assume that the high-quality favored relationship of "boss' pet is warranted as part of the obligatory exchange characteristic of high-quality relationships.

Predictably, Schyns and Day (2010) suggest that members of "poor exchange qualities" may view members in high-quality relationships with jealousy, resentment, and possibly anger. By comparing differences in their LMX ranking, employees may develop envy which has been theorized to create negative effects in organizations (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007). A study conducted by Kim, O'Neill, and Cho (2010) revealed a significant relationship between low-quality LMX members and envy. Subsequently, this led to decreased employee citizenship behavior toward envied co-workers suggesting ostracism.

Research also suggest a possible mutual ostracism phenomenon between the low- and high-quality LMX groups. In a recent study, Ferris et al. (2015) suggest workplace ostracism is viewed heavily with uncertainty and ambiguity by the target. In other words, since the initial act of ostracism is one-sided, it is difficult for the target to determine if the ostracism occurrence is due to something they did or did not do, if the perceived act was intentional or not, or if the act actually occurred. The obscure nature of workplace ostracism purportedly induces anxiety, an avoidance emotion, in the target rather than anger, an approach emotion. Ferris et al. (2015) hypothesized and supported that this type of anxiety would fully mediate the effect of workplace ostracism on avoidance-oriented counterproductive workplace behavior (CWB) such as refusing to speak with, ignoring, and/or hoarding information from co-workers. Whereas, individuals exhibiting approach-oriented CWB are visibly hostile and upset. This evidence supports a theoretical relationship between an individual being a target of ostracism and responding with ostracism by

avoiding social interactions with the source of the ostracism (Ferris et al., 2008; K. D. Williams, 2007).

Thus, it can generally be predicted that LMX and ostracism will be negatively related. However, I suggest middle-quality members are less likely to be targets of ostracism than both these groups (Nelson et al., 2011). Middle-quality members do not have the privileges granted to the high-quality members and therefore are not perceived as receiving an unfair amount of resources from the leader. Research indicates, though, that middle-quality group members have many positive outcomes that can rival those of high-quality members (e.g., high levels of job satisfaction, lower levels of stress and role ambiguity) (Kramer, 1995; Liden & Graen, 1980; Vecchio & Gobdel, 1984), so I do not expect them to be targets of ostracism based on poor work performance or attitudes. Rather, I expect such members to be less likely to perform at such a low level as to be perceived as burdensome or deviant to other members in the organization. Thus, I investigate:

Hypothesis: A U shape characterizes the relationship between leader-member exchange quality and ostracism. Specifically, ostracism is high when LMX quality is low, ostracism decreases when LMX quality is moderate to moderately high, and ostracism increases when LMX quality is relatively high.

METHOD

Sample and Procedures

Participants in this study included employees from a non-profit organization (whose mission is to assist disadvantaged youth and families) and employees from a for-profit organization (an insurance company). Both organizations are located in the southeastern region of the United States. Each organization had approximately 210 employees, providing 420 potential respondents. Potential respondents received an e-mail from one of the organization's executives, which informed employees of the survey and indicated that it was voluntary. Potential respondents were also informed that the survey was designed to understand the relationships between "employees and their managers" and "employees and coworkers." To insure confidentiality, participants received a pre-addressed envelope from their human resources manager to return the self-administered surveys; this offered anonymity from other employees if employees wished to complete surveys away from the worksite. A nominal incentive (i.e., \$5 gift card to Starbuck or Wal-Mart) was offered for their participation. Surveys were coded prior to distribution, and the respondents were "deidentified" through a third party to insure confidentiality and anonymity with the researchers.

Over a 4-week period, 67 employees from the nonprofit organization responded. From the for-profit organization, another 67 employees responded, but 2 surveys were discarded due to missing data. Of the 420 surveys distributed, 134 were returned for a response rate of 32%. Slightly more than 80% of the study participants were female. Over half the participants (53%) were married. Nearly half (48%) of the respondents were African American, with Caucasians comprising approximately 36%, and Hispanic, Asian, and other made up the remaining 16%. The average age of the respondents was 42 years, and over 52% had obtained a college degree. The average number of years that employees had been with their company was 5.5 years, and the average length of time respondents had been with their managers was 2.5 years.

Measures

Leader-member exchange. LMX was measured using the Scandura, Graen, and Novak (1986) 7-item LMX scale which was modified to an 8-item scale. I modified the scale because item 1 actually encompassed two questions. The question was stated as: “*Do you know where you stand with your leader? Do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?*” However, this question was separated into the two following questions: 1) “I usually know where I stand with my immediate supervisor.” and 2) “I usually know how satisfied my supervisor is with what I do.” This scale was selected based on Gerstner and Day’s (1997) meta-analysis, which determined that this scale had the best psychometric properties of all LMX-measuring instruments. Participants responded to a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The full eight-item scale’s internal reliability is .94.

Workplace ostracism. Ostracism was measured using Ferris et al.’s (2008) 10-item scale. Sample items included “*Others ignored you at work*”, “*Others left the area when you entered*”, and “*Others avoided you at work*”. Response options corresponded to a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = never to 7 = always). The scale’s internal reliability is .83.

Control variables. I controlled for race and sex since it has been determined that the quality of a leader and member’s relationship can be influenced by demographic similarities (Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989). I dummy-coded gender with men as “1” and women as “2”. Race was coded with Caucasian as “0”, African American as “1”, Asian as “2”, Hispanic as “3”, and Other as “4”.

Organizational tenure has been identified to have a significant impact on LMX relationships (Bauer & Green, 1996). Organizational tenure was measured in blocks of months. For example, 1 to 60 months was coded as 1; 61 to 120 months was coded as 2; 121 to 180 was coded as 3; and 181 to 220 was coded as 4.

In addition to these three variables, I controlled for job satisfaction because past research (Edwards, 1992) indicates its critical role in LMX relationships (Ferris et al., 2008). The job satisfaction scale consisted of 3 items from Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh’s (1979) Organizational Assessment Questionnaire. Participants responded to a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). A sample item from the scale is, “*All in all, I am satisfied with my job.*” The internal reliability for this scale is .86.

ANALYSES

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test for a curvilinear effect to support our hypothesis. Prior to performing this procedure, I conducted a t-test to determine if it was appropriate to merge the data from both organizations into one sample. I next implemented two analyses to test for common method variance (CMV). A Harman One-Factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) was performed to determine if all of the items in the present study loaded on a single factor. I followed this test with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to insure LMX and ostracism were two distinct constructs.

I performed hierarchical regression analyses to detect a nonlinear relationship between LMX and ostracism. In Step one, I entered the control variables of organizational tenure, ethnicity, gender, and job satisfaction. I next entered the linear LMX term followed by the quadratic term in the third step. Finally, a polynomial term for LMX was entered. During each step, I determined if the LMX term(s) explained a significant amount of variance. For example, if linearity is the best depiction of the LMX-ostracism relationship, then only the LMX variable should explain a significant amount of variance. On the other hand, if appending the squared LMX term explains a

significant amount of variance above the linear term, then a curvilinear form (either a U shape or an inverted U shape) would be more representative of the relationship between the two constructs. Ultimately, unexpected quadratic results may indicate that the relationship is more complicated, and deserves further tests, such as may be discovered with a cubed LMX term (i.e., a relationship reflecting two bends in the curve, hence an S shape).

RESULTS

Independence of Samples

I conducted a T-test to determine the appropriateness of combining the data from the two organizations into a single sample. The Levene's test was used to compare the organizations. The results indicated there were no statistically significant differences between the companies regarding gender ($t = .521, p = .604$) and organizational tenure ($t = .547, p = .586$). There were statistically significant differences between the two companies regarding job satisfaction ($t = 3.682, p = .000$) and ethnicity ($t = 3.399, p = .001$). Company 1 (the nonprofit organization) had significantly more African American employees (76%) than Company 2 (the for-profit organization) which had 23%, and their employees were more satisfied with their jobs than the employees of the for-profit organization. To recognize the differences across the organizations, effects due to job satisfaction and race were controlled for in the statistical analysis. I treated African American as the reference group when running analyses.

Nonresponse Bias

With a response rate from participants of 32%, there is the probability of nonresponse bias. Researchers consider a return rate of less than 75% as an indicator of a possible nonresponse issue (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Linder, Murphy, and Briers, 2001). There are several ways to address this issue 1) compare respondents to the population; 2) compare respondents to nonrespondents; 3) compare early to late responders; and 4) follow-up with a random sample of 10% - 20% of nonrespondents (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001). Since research support that late responders are generally similar to non-responders (Miller & Smith, 1983), I utilized the "comparing early to late responders" method to determine if nonresponse bias was evident in this study.

Late respondents are defined by Lindner et al. (2001) as participants who respond after receiving the last reminder to complete a survey. If 30 or fewer responses are received, Linder et al. (2001) suggest using the last half (50%) of respondents' surveys to conduct a nonresponse bias analysis. There was a clear demarcation in receipt dates of the surveys received for this study. Based on the aforementioned method, there were 34 surveys that I designated as "late responders". I conducted a T-test on the LMX means of the two groups, and there was no statistically significant difference ($t = 1.511, p = .133$) establishing nonresponse bias as not an issue in this study.

Common Method Variance

The predictor and criterion variables were collected at the same time increasing the probability for Common Method Variance (CMV) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To detect the presence of CMV, I conducted a Harman One-Factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), where the basic premise is CMV is present if a single factor emerges from a factor analysis representing 50% or more of variance. Specifically, I conducted an exploratory factor analysis

(EFA) using a principal-components extraction and unrotated option, which yielded multiple factors with the first factor explaining approximately 35% of the variance. This provides some evidence that CMV should not overly influence the results of our testing.

In addition to the Harman One-Factor test, I conducted a confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to establish sufficient convergent and discriminant validity among the LMX and ostracism constructs. Relative to the number of measurement items, I had a small sample size; therefore, to improve the ratio of N to items, I reduced the number of items (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). Based on factor analysis results, items with the highest and lowest loading for each construct were combined first, followed by the items with the next highest and lowest loadings and so forth. This resulted in four parceled indicators for LMX and five parceled indicators for ostracism. (Little et al., 2002).

I first tested a one-factor model with all items loading into one latent factor. As shown in Table 1, the one-factor model demonstrated poor fit to the data but was significantly improved with the two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 301.67, p < .00$). Therefore, LMX and ostracism were deemed distinct constructs.

Table 1
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Ostracism

Competing Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI
One-factor model	343.91	27			.36	.26	.64
Two-factor model (LMX and ostracism)	42.24	26	301.67***	1	.07	.036	.98

Note. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; CFI = comparative fit index.

*** $p < .001$

Table 2 presents means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations. As predicted, LMX and ostracism were negatively and significantly related. Additionally, the control variables gender, and race (African Americans compared to “other” races) were significantly and positively related to ostracism. Not surprisingly, job satisfaction and LMX were significantly and negatively related to ostracism. Considering this, the analysis suggests that females, non- African American and non-Caucasian, and low-quality LMX relationship employees were more likely to perceive being ostracized.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations.^a

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	.80	0.40	--						
2. Race (A-A & Caucasians)	.363	0.48	-0.06	--					
3. Race2 (A-A & Others)	.159	0.37	0.59	-.033***	--				
4. Tenure	1.64	0.95	0.08	0.15*	-.01	--			
5. Job Satisfaction	6.04	1.04	0.04	-0.05	0.05	0.03	--		
6. Leader-member exchange	5.48	1.25	0.05	-0.05	0.02	0.19*	0.58***	--	
7. Ostracism	1.52	0.64	0.15*	0.05	0.19*	-0.09	-0.17*	-.22**	--

^a $N = 132$

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < .000$

Regression Analyses

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine if, as predicted, the relationship between LMX and ostracism is better described as nonlinear (See Table 3). In Step 1, the control variables were entered, and this revealed that other races were significantly and positively related to ostracism. This suggested that women who were neither African American nor Caucasian reported higher levels of ostracism than men. The control variable contributed 7% to the variance. In Step 2, the main effect was examined. The linear LMX term was introduced to the equation, and there was a negative relationship with ostracism, but the relationship was not significant. The linear LMX term only contributed an additional 1.7% to the variance. For Step 3, I entered the quadratic LMX term and it was negatively and significantly related to ostracism. The quadratic LMX term explained an additional 5.7% of variance, which was considerably more than the variance explained by the linear LMX term.

The curvilinear result, though, was the opposite of our original hypothesis. I considered the issue of the possible distribution of our different levels of LMX employees; specifically, a very small tail of high LMX employees could be overwhelmed by the results of lesser LMX relationships. Therefore, I investigated whether a cubed variable would assess this significant variance.

In Step 4, a cubed LMX term was entered and it was positively and significantly related to ostracism and explained an additional 2.6% of the variance. These results support our hypothesis for a curvilinear effect, but indicate that an “S” shape represented the data relative to a more complex relationship. Notably, while the percent of variance increase for the cubed LMX is not of high magnitude, it does align with organizational research investigating nonlinear relationships (Champous & Peters, 1987), and it explains more variance (2.6%) than simple LMX linear term (1.7%). Results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Linear and Nonlinear LMX Terms Predicting Stress

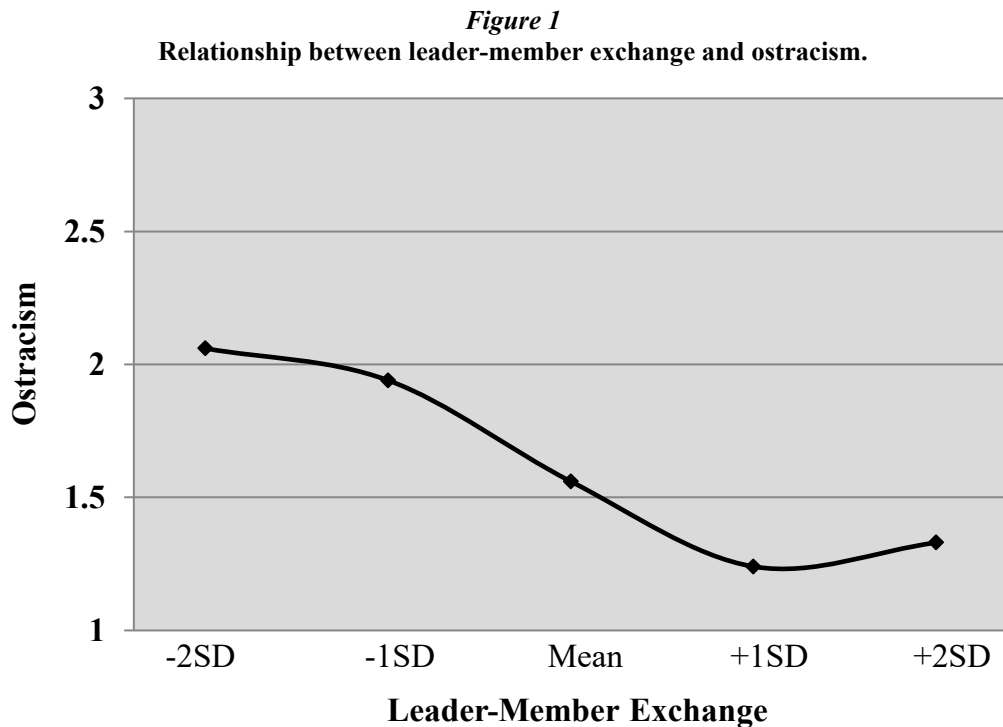
Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Step 1: Control				
Gender	.252	.254	.243	.228
Race 1	.190	.179	.193	.238*
Race 2	.371*	.370*	.372*	.391*
Organizational tenure	-0.80	-0.60	-0.39	-0.46
Job satisfaction	-.096	-.037	-.010	.022
Step 2: Main effect				
LMX		-.085	.533*	2.047*
Step 3: Quadratic effect				
LMX squared			-.068**	-.455*
Step 3: Cubic effect				
LMX cubed				.029*
ΔR^2		.017	.057**	.026*
Adjusted R ²	.073*	.084	.136**	.156*
F	3.063*	2.996**	3.949***	4.037***

Note. Unstandardized betas. LMX = Leader-member exchange

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

In sum, the positive beta for linear LMX, negative beta for LMX squared, and positive beta for cubed LMX indicated that the curvilinear relationship would be best illustrated as S shapes. I

illustrate the relationships between leader-member exchange and ostracism in Figure 1, following a formula recommended by Cohen and Cohen (1983), who suggest including scale scores calculated by substituting “one high and one low value” (p. 225) as end points. For the low value, I selected two standard deviations below the mean, and for the high value, two standard deviations above the mean.



DISCUSSION

I found a significant curvilinear relationship between LMX and ostracism while controlling for gender, ethnicity, job satisfaction, and organizational tenure. Gaining an understanding of the relationship between LMX and ostracism—a common phenomenon in the workplace—is important as the consequences can be devastating to the targeted individual and consequently affect an organization’s bottom line.

I predicted that low- and high-quality LMX relationships might make employees in these relationships targets of ostracism. The results of this study illustrate the relationship between LMX quality and ostracism is non-linear. Although the cubed LMX is visually not as pronounced, there was a significant relationship with ostracism. While the number of respondents that actually fit “high quality” and “high levels of ostracism” was low, this dynamic can be an important factor in organizational functioning. Middle-quality employees that highly value their sense of belonging to their current coworkers may feel discouraged from pursuing high-quality LMX relationships if they believe it could lead to ostracism.

Respondents who rate their LMX relationship to be of the highest quality and subjected to ostracism would be few as I proposed, thus less distinct positive relationship graphically. High-

quality members have empirically exhibited higher levels of organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and normative commitment (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris 2012). Taken together, it seems reasonable that only a few high-quality members will fall far enough outside the realm of these potentially respected behaviors to suffer ostracism.

Past LMX research has concentrated on the positive outcomes of high-quality relationships and the negative outcomes of low-quality relationships. Specifically, “organizational scholars tend to view strong leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships as a net positive to organization and to the employment relationship” (Rousseau, 2004:267). This study provides some preliminary evidence that high-quality relationships may have ancillary but painful negative outcomes.

Lastly, this study brings a new awareness to the importance of differentiating organizational outcomes beyond phenomena associated with the high and low-quality LMX relationships in recognition of a middle-quality LMX group. From a practical perspective, these three LMX tiers reflect what is prevalent in today’s work units (van Breukelen et al., 2006). Previous, but rare, studies indicate the importance of investigating the middle-quality group (Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Graen & Schieman, 1978; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The curvilinear relationship I found here strongly suggests the relevant existence of this group for organizational phenomena, suggesting further questions should explore the role of the middle-quality group in other areas of LMX research, e.g., outcomes in relationship development, cross-cultural dynamics, and organizational performance.

Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths. First, I found a significant curvilinear relationship while controlling for gender, ethnicity, job satisfaction, and organizational tenure. Second, to our knowledge, there are no other studies that have linked LMX and ostracism. Gaining an understanding of the relationship between LMX and ostracism—a common phenomenon in the workplace—is important because the consequences can be devastating to the targeted individual and consequently affect an organization’s bottom line. Third, this study expands beyond the traditional acceptance of high-quality relationships equating to positive outcomes. Repositioning our focus to encompass possible negative outcomes nurtures the advancement of LMX theory. Lastly and just as important, I bring awareness to the middle-quality group. The curvilinear relationship strongly suggests the existence of another group aside from the low-quality and high-quality groups. Therefore, this beckons us to ask, “What is the role of the middle-quality group in other areas of LMX research such as development, cross-cultural, organizational outcomes, etc.?” Evidence of the presence of this middle-quality group presents multiple avenues for future research.

This study has several limitations. First, the study sourced the predictor and criterion variables from the same sample, presenting the potential for common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). I attenuated this effect in the survey through reverse-coding selected questions and maintaining considerable distance between LMX-related and ostracism-related questions. Our analysis indicated CMV was not overwhelming, and the results provide a foundation for launching a more comprehensive investigation that may use network data, observational analysis or experimental procedures to validate the findings here. Second, the use of cross-sectional data limits our ability to establish causation. While LMX is related to ostracism, other reasons may better explain what is driving the relationship. Future studies may want to delve deeper into this possibility. Third, the data was self-reported data, which introduces the possibility of CMV and may have influenced our results (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, I did conduct tests to

demonstrate that this problem was not pervasive. Another potential weakness is the small sample size. While the sample size is small and may limit the statistical power of the hypotheses tests, these results can guide future research with larger sample sizes. The demographics of the study sample was heavily skewed toward minorities suggesting a limitation. While this may be a limitation as viewed by some, it can also be viewed as a reflection of the demographical changes that are occurring in the U.S. Lastly, social desirability bias may be present even though I informed participants their responses would be confidential and de-identified by an external third party to ensure anonymity. Podsakoff et al. (2003) suggest anonymity as a method to reduce social desirability bias.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

The results of this study suggest a number of avenues for future research. This is the only study I could find that empirically investigate LMX practices and ostracism outcomes together. Models that are more complex could employ SEM or multi-step methods to encompass related factors such as job satisfaction, turnover intent, organizational citizenship behavior, and productivity.

In addition, a longitudinal design would be beneficial in determining whether such LMX-ostracism relationships for both high- and low-quality groups persist with tenure, or are more fleeting. Ostracism may occur only at the onset of a high- or low-quality designation and may attenuate with time.

The curvilinear relationship suggests the presence of a middle-quality group; therefore, researchers going forward should attempt to isolate this group as they do low- and high-quality groups. This study followed the precedent established by Harris and colleagues (2005, 2006) in emphasizing and investigating nonlinear effects, and our results are consistent in illustrating that this methodology is relevant to the LMX perspective. Our theorizing, importantly, was explicitly based on considering conceptually how middle-quality employees would be exposed to less ostracism than their high and low-quality counterparts. As noted above, there is a wide range of organizational outcomes that could be revisited to consider how the existence of a sizable or prominent cadre of middle-quality employees warrants a different understanding of organizational dynamics than theorizing along a simple high/low dichotomy of quality relationships.

Finally, I note that the results revealed that women of ethnic groups other than African American and Caucasian reported higher levels of ostracism. Consistent with previous research on classroom interrelational dynamics (e.g., Jackson, Barth, Powell, & Lochman, 2006), our findings indicate that more work is warranted on cultural antecedents of workplace ostracism (Robinson, et al., 2013).

LMX theory is premised on the importance of improving organizational performance by adopting leadership behaviors tailored to the potential productivity and skills of different employees. As a perspective, it has generally overlooked whether employees commonly agree that high-quality LMX relationships are always the best route for their careers, or whether they may value other features of organizational life more, such as a high sense of belonging. This study begins this conversation on how work relationships outside the leadership dyad may be an integral part of the choices employees make in pursuing and sustaining their LMX quality. Considering this is the only study (or one of few studies) linking LMX to ostracism, there are plenty of research opportunities.

This study was conducted to demonstrate there are exceptions to the norm that high-quality LMX relationships are equivalent to positive outcomes. A curvilinear relationship is hypothesized

and supported suggesting members in low- and high-quality LMX relationships are subjected to more ostracism, a negative organizational outcome, than members in middle-quality relationships.

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