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BROADENING OUR PERSPECTIVE: NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND ACCEPTANCE

One of the risks that people assume upon pursuing social relationships is the possibility that they might be rejected. Indeed, one might even go so far as to say that this potential for rejection represents the price one must pay in order to seek the rewards of companionship and intimacy. Because social rejection plays such an important role in seeking out new relationships, researchers have recently begun to examine the nature of interpersonal rejection. Although numerous studies have focused on various responses to social rejection, we still know surprisingly little about the mechanisms, contexts, and outcomes of rejection experiences. This symposium will bring together researchers who have investigated these issues. Williams, Govan, Wheeler, and Nezelek report on daily experiences of ostracism using an event-contingent diary methodology. This rich data set explores how perceived motives and attributions for ostracism impact psychological needs. In their survey of working students, Hitlan and Harden provide some of the first evidence indicating how workplace exclusion impacts an employee's interpersonal and organizational attitudes and behaviors. Next, Nelson and Kelly examine the use of self-knowledge to re-establish psychological needs after a rejection experience. Finally, Markunas, Kelly, Miller, and Waner report on a series of studies that investigate the emotional and physical consequences as well as coping strategies associated with both rejection and overinclusion.

Discussant Information (optional):

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Symposium Abstracts:

Symposium #1

Speaker: *Kipling D. Williams*

Abstract: Everyday Ostracism using the Sydney Ostracism Record (SOR) Kipling D. Williams, Macquarie University Cassandra L. Govan, Macquarie University Ladd Wheeler, Macquarie University John B. Nezelek, College of William & Mary The present study complements existing laboratory-based research on ostracism (see Williams, 2001) by examining ostracism as it occurred in daily life. For two weeks, participants described what happened each time they felt ostracized. They provided descriptions using the Sydney Ostracism Record (SOR), an event-contingent diary method modeled after the Rochester Interaction Record (RIR; Wheeler & Nezelek, 1977). The questions on the SOR were based on Williams's need-threat model of ostracism (1997; 2001). The sample consisted of 40 participants who described 736 ostracism episodes. The majority of episodes were from persons of equal status and social in nature. Situational factors were cited as the reason for being ostracized (46%) followed by dispositional attributes about the ostracizer (42%). Participants felt that something about themselves was responsible for the ostracism only 12% of the time. The data were analyzed with a series of multilevel random coefficient models using the program HLM (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2000). As expected, participants reacted negatively to being ostracized. They reported lower levels of belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. Participants' needs were threatened more when they were ostracized by friends and close others than when they had been ostracized by acquaintances or strangers. Participants scoring higher in neuroticism reacted more negatively to ostracism. Neuroticism scores were negatively related to how much people felt they belonged, their self-esteem, their sense of control, and the

meaning of their lives. Discussion focuses on the linkages between lab and diary methods, and the extent to which the model was supported.

Symposium #2

Speaker: *Robert T. Hitlan*

Abstract: Exclusion at work: Examining the relation between exclusion and work-related attitudes and behaviors Robert T. Hitlan, University of Northern Iowa Jennifer Harden, University of Northern Iowa Research investigating the effects of social exclusion has indicated that experiencing such behaviors are extremely aversive to targets (Williams, 2001). Laboratory research indicates that being excluded results in a host of negative consequences such as increased psychological distress and increased tendencies to exhibit antisocial behaviors. In the workplace, however, exclusion per se has traditionally been thought about as one dimension of a larger problem (i.e., workplace bullying), as a component of ethnic harassment (Schneider, Hitlan, & Radhakrishnan, 2000), or as a form of retaliation suffered by those who “blow-the-whistle” at work (Miceli & Near, 1992). The current research extends previous work on exclusion by exploring the link between exclusion in the workplace and work-related attitudes and behaviors. As such, it helps to fill a gap in our current understanding of this important social phenomenon. One hundred and four working students completed a web-based “workplace experiences” survey. Participants indicated the frequency with which they felt excluded by supervisors and/or coworkers at work. Results indicated that as the frequency of exclusion increased so did antisocial/aggressive work behaviors, negative attitudes toward immigrants and immigration to the US, as well as, increased threats to participants psychological needs: belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. Moreover, exclusion at work was negatively associated with coworker satisfaction, work satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors. The current research sheds light on some of the implications to being excluded by others in the workplace and also important to the development of a theoretical model of workplace exclusion.

Symposium #3

Speaker: *Anna K. Nelson*

Abstract: Using self-knowledge to recover from rejection Anna K. Nelson, State University of New York at Buffalo, and Kristine M. Kelly, Western Illinois University Williams’ (1997) Needs-Threat Model proposes that ostracism produces a deficit in four psychological needs: belongingness, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. Further, the deprivation of these needs motivates the individual to attempt to re-establish the needs following the rejection experience. We tested the hypothesis that reflecting on one’s self-knowledge may be one technique by which individuals can restore these threatened needs. The four needs were measured in a sample of undergraduate students following a rejection or inclusion manipulation. Participants then performed a self-knowledge organization task (Showers & Kevlyn, 1999) that required them to sort 46 cards containing self-descriptive adjectives into categories that described meaningful aspects of themselves. Following the card-sort, the four psychological needs were again measured. Results indicated that while included participants’ psychological needs remained relatively constant, rejected participants’ psychological needs were initially threatened, but their needs for belongingness, control, and meaningful existence (but not self-esteem) were re-established after self-knowledge organization. This study suggests that it may be possible for individuals to overcome some of the negative consequences of rejection, in the absence of the opportunity to interact with others, by examining their self-structure.

Symposium #4

Speaker: *Susan J. Markunas*

Abstract: Coping with the satiation of belongingness needs: Emotional and physical reactions to being included too much Susan J. Markunas, DePaul University, Kristine M. Kelly, Western Illinois University, Kristin M. Miller, East Carolina University, and Kelly R. Waner, Western Illinois University Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that the need to belong is a powerful, pervasive, and fundamental aspect of human nature. One implication of the need to belong is that it should show satiation patterns similar to those of hunger or thirst. Once individuals have secured a minimum number of social connections, their motivation to form new relationships should diminish. A series of three studies sought to examine various consequences of social demands placed on individuals whose belongingness needs are satiated. Study 1 explored the behavioral and affective consequences of being included too much. Results indicated that the sources of overinclusion were mostly friends and romantic partners and that individuals responded to the situation by active or passive disassociation. Further, they reported high levels of both positive and negative affect during the overinclusion experience. In Study 2, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (rejection, inclusion, overinclusion, and control), which were manipulated by varying levels of acceptance from five confederates. Results indicated that overincluded participants smiled more and reported more anxiety than participants in the other conditions. Study 3 investigated physical symptoms and coping strategies associated with overinclusion and rejection. We found that rejection was associated with negative physical symptoms (e.g., headache, nausea) and negative coping behaviors (e.g., self-blame), while overinclusion was associated with active coping. Thus, our data indicate that once an individual’s belongingness needs are satiated, additional social demands may result in a blend of positive and negative experiences.