

Empirical Investigation of Relationship between Workplace Ostracism and Employee Silence: A Test of Mediating Effects of Self-Esteem and Meaningful Existence in Context of Public Sector Universities in Punjab

Tehreem Fatima

PhD Scholar, Superior University Lahore

Muhammad Ilyas

*Associate Professor and Chairperson of Economics Department,
Government College Women University, Sialkot*

Choudhary Abdul Rehman

Chairman, Superior University Lahore

Muhammad Kashif Imran

PhD Scholar, Superior University Lahore

Abstract

The concept of workplace ostracism and employee silence has achieved considerable attention in field of organizational psychology in recent years. This research examined the relationship of workplace ostracism with facets of employee silence i.e. acquiescent, defensive and diffident silence with mediating role of perceived self-esteem and meaningful existence in teachers of Public sector universities in Punjab. Data were collected by 200 questionnaires distributed to university teachers serving in Public sector universities in Punjab selected by cluster sampling, out of which 159 usable responses were received. Regression analysis and Preacher and Hayes (2008) mediation test were used to analyze data by SPSS 20 Software. Results revealed a positive association between workplace ostracism and employee silence whereby meaningful existence and self-esteem partially mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee silence.

Keywords: Workplace ostracism, employee silence, acquiescent silence, diffident silence, defensive silence, meaningful existence, self-esteem, temporal need threat model.

The notion of ostracism constitute the perception of being isolated and ignored by an individual or group (Ferris, Chen, & Lim, 2016; Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2012). It is a widely pervasive phenomenon in multiple settings including organizations (Hales *et al.*, 2016). Research in ostracism has been initiated by the real-world observation of its negative consequences (Hales *et al.*, 2016) that is found to have numerous mental, physical and organizational consequences (Robinson *et al.*, 2012; Williams, 2007; Zhao & Xia, 2017). Despite knowledge of its negative consequences most of the prior research studies examined it social and psychological perspectives (Ferris *et al.*, 2016; Hales *et al.*, 2016) leaving the workplace related impacts an unattended area (Gkorezis, Panagiotou, & Theodorou, 2016a; Robinson *et al.*, 2012). In recent times the concept of workplace ostracism has gained attention of organizational researchers given the increased importance of social ties in modern work settings (Gkorezis &

Bellou, 2016; Gong *et al.*, 2012). It has been argued that workplace ostracism is one of the prime factors in reducing social interaction and knowledge sharing (Gkorezis & Bellou, 2016) ultimately resulting in negative outcomes such as reduced commitment, satisfaction, pro-social behaviors and performance (Zhao, Peng, & Sheard, 2013).

Regardless of emerging research on workplace ostracism in manufacturing, banking, nursing and hospitality industry (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016a; Hitlan, Kelly, Schepman, Schneider, & Zárate, 2006; O'Reilly & Robinson, 2009; Wu *et al.*, 2012) the educational sector has still received scant attention (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2016; Zimmerman, Carter-Sowell, & Xu, 2016). Higher educational institutions (HEIs) are amongst workplaces that necessitate the employee voice, expressing ideas, knowledge and valuable information in order to ensure their successful performance. Due to globalization, competition and advancement in technology the role of teachers is not just confined to performing their conventional teaching duties. Now they need to continuously learn and develop their knowledge through research, exchange of information and development of social connections with other teachers specially mentoring from senior teachers. In addition to this professional liaising with professional organizations is required that will enable teachers to remain up to date about the latest trends in industry and professional practices (Siddique *et al.*, 2011). For this purpose the need of open communication environment and good interpersonal relationships is paramount. In the absence of such environment and associations employee engage in silence behaviors that have damaging outcomes (Donaghey *et al.*, 2011; Gagnon & Cakici, 2008; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Workplace ostracism is one of the potential hindrances in employee information hoarding and voice behaviors (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016a; Jones, Carter-Sowell, Kelly, & Williams, 2009; Zhao & Xia, 2017).

Thus, we aim to examine the emerging variable of employee silence in specific context of Higher Educational settings as a consequence of workplace ostracism. Employee silence is a distinct form of withdrawal behaviors referring to the “*motivation of employees to withhold vs. express ideas, information and opinions about work-related improvements*” (Van Dyne *et al.* 2003 p. 1361). Drawing on the “Temporal need threat model” (TNTM) of experiences to ostracism we build the linkage between the said variables suggesting being ostracized results in low self-esteem and meaningful existence (Williams, 2009). These behaviors are found to be linked with employee anti-social and withdrawal behaviors (Williams, 2002, 2007, 2009; Williams & Nida, 2011) that are important predictors of employee acquiescent, defensive and diffident silence (Brinsfield, 2013; Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). Taken together, in order to bridge the identified contextual and theoretical gaps, the present research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in field of workplace ostracism and employee silence

(acquiescent, defensive and diffident) by investigating the relationship between two with mediating role of employee's self-esteem and meaningful existence.

Literature Review

Employees having good interpersonal relationships and high cohesion are more likely to express their opinion and share information that is a valuable source of decision making and improvement in modern organizations (Pacheco *et al.*, 2015). In organizations having ostracism employees indulge in silence and withhold valuable information and ideas having detrimental outcomes (Morrison, 2014; Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016a). Research studies have indicated that employee silence is a multidimensional construct (Brinsfield, 2013; Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). It has been argued by Brinsfield (2013) that the causes and motives behind employee silence are major determinant in examining its specific dimensions. In present research the aim is to investigate how workplace ostracism causes employees to indulge in silence. Workplace ostracism is an unethical and unfair treatment causing poor workplace relationships (Williams & Nida, 2011) that can possibly results in employee withdrawal fear of pain from rejection (Robinson *et al.*, 2012), and uncertainty (Arkin, Oleson, & Carroll, 2013). Dyne *et al.* (2003), in his seminal work gave three dimensions of employee silence i.e. acquiescent silence, defensive silence and pro-social silence. Acquiescent silence is withholding of employee information based on resignation and defensive silence is not speaking up due to the fear of negative outcomes that are extrinsic i.e. loss of job or being punished. However, pro-social silence that is based on altruistic and cooperative withholding of confidential information is not considered in the scope of present research; as it is focusing only on negative consequences of workplace ostracism. Additionally, we have taken another dimension of silence known as diffident silence that emerged to be conceptually related but distinct to defensive silence as it is based on fear of negative results due to uncertainty and low self confidence that are intrinsic in nature and Brinsfield (2013) called for empirical investigation of this recently emerged facet of employee silence. Thus, in this study we have taken three dimensions of employee silence acquiescent silence, defensive silence and diffident silence.

Workplace Ostracism and Acquiescent Silence

Workplace ostracism causes employees to be ignored and excluded by other members of organization. As a result their ideas, suggestions and opinion are not welcomed by coworkers (Robinson *et al.*, 2012). This causes employees to feel that information sharing and expressing viewpoints will not make any difference so they do not express themselves fully. They passively withhold information and ideas and engage in acquiescent silence that is withholding information, views, ideas and opinions on the basis of resignation (Dyne *et al.*, 2003; Morrison, 2014).

H1: Workplace ostracism has positive relationship with employee acquiescent silence.

Workplace Ostracism and Defensive Silence

Furthermore, Morrison (2014) asserted if employees feel speaking up will bring negative or unpleasant results it will cause them to withhold information and ideas and they will engage in defensive silence. When employees are ostracized, their ideas and views are ignored and remain un-appreciated that results in withdrawal (Robinson *et al.*, 2012), in order to avoid the pain of rejection they choose to be silent (Pacheco *et al.*, 2015).

H2: Workplace ostracism has positive relationship with defensive silence.

Workplace Ostracism and Diffident Silence

As a result of ostracism, a person feels that his ideas and information are not acknowledged as they are constantly being ignored. Uncertainty and ostracism are entwined (Arkin, Oleson, & Carroll, 2013) so victim of ostracism becomes develops internal fear that something is bad or wrong about them that has caused others to ignore them so they engage in diffident silence (Morrison, 2014).

H3: Workplace ostracism has positive relationship with diffident silence

Mediating role of Meaningful Existence and Self-esteem in relationship between Workplace Ostracism and Employee Silence

According to the theoretical conception of TNTM ostracism threatens meaningful existence and self-esteem of victim (Williams, 2009) that cause them to indulge in silence (Gkorezis, Panagiotou, & Theodorou, 2016b). If employees perceive that their opinions, views and suggestions will not be supported by peers and superiors they feel they do not exist meaningfully. The fear of being unwelcomed and isolated causes them to remain silent (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Pacheco *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, lower levels of self-esteem causes employees to feel less worthy, less competent and less expressive (Williams, 2009) that causes them to engage in acquiescent silence (Pacheco *et al.*, 2015).

Employees having lower level of self-esteem tend to be more protective and in pursuit of avoiding negative consequences they decide to be silent (Morrison, 2014; Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). Lack of acknowledgement and existing meaningfully develop a fear if employees share information and ideas it will not be acknowledged (Jones *et al.*, 2009; Williams, 2009). This causes them to engage in defensive silence that is keeping quiet to avoid painful experiences (Pacheco *et al.*, 2015). Employees who have lower self-esteem are found to have lower level of confidence and self-worth. This creates a sense of uncertainty and self-doubt whether voice will be valuable or not. People who have low perception of meaningful existence have high uncertainty and doubts

about themselves and they fear that their ideas are not meaningful so they keep them to themselves (Morrison, 2014; Williams, 2009). According to Brinsfield (2013) it can result in diffident silence as the employees are uncertain whether they should speak or not and they are doubtful regarding their knowledge and competence. Consequently they will keep quite to avoid embarrassment, damage of reputation, personal doubts and uncertainty (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016b). Hence, when individuals are ostracized at work their need to exist in meaningful manner along with need to have self-esteem is threatened (Williams, 2007, 2009). As a result they indulge in withdrawal attitudes (Robinson *et al.*, 2012) i.e. employee silence (acquiescent, defensive and diffident). Thereby, we postulate that,

H4: The relationship between workplace ostracism (WOS) and Employee Silence (ES) is mediated by self-esteem (E)

H4^a: The relationship between WOS and employee Acquiescent Silence (AS) is mediated by E.

H4^b: The relationship between WOS and employee Defensive Silence (DES) is mediated by E.

H4^c: The relationship between WOS and employee Diffident Silence (DIS) is mediated by E.

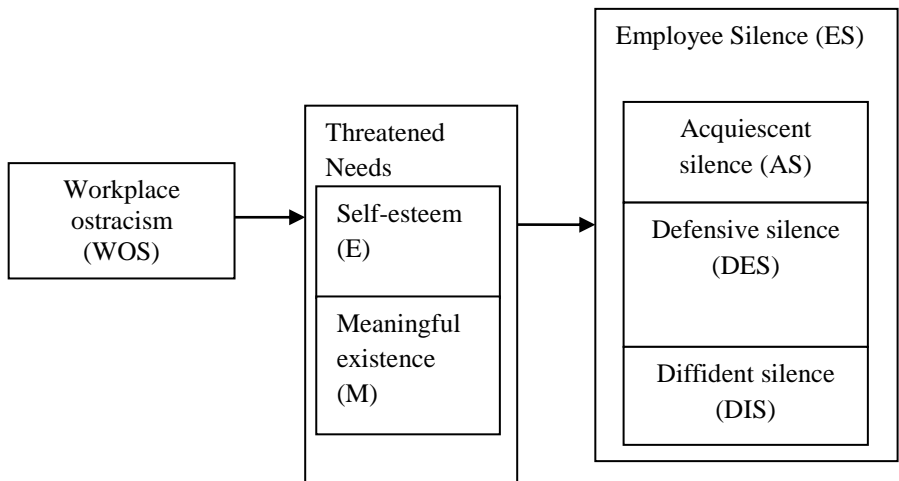
H5: The relationship between WOS and ES is mediated by meaningful existence (M)

H5^a: The relationship between WOS and employee Acquiescent Silence (AS) is mediated by M.

H5^b: The relationship between WOS and employee Defensive Silence (DES) is mediated by M.

H5^c: The relationship between WOS and employee Diffident Silence (DIS) is mediated by M.

Theoretical Framework



Research Methodology

The research is conducted under positivist paradigm by using deductive approach as the intention was to test mediation model and generalize findings among well-established variables. The ontological assumption of singular reality and epistemological assumptions consider objectivity of knowledge (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative cross-sectional survey design has been used as it is most used method in social sciences and it is appropriate when data are to be collected at single point (Neuman, 2005). Total 135 universities are operating in public and private sectors in Pakistan. Among them 76 belong to the public sector with 79% of teachers working in this sector. Population of this study constitute teachers serving in public sector universities of Punjab, cluster sampling used and population is divided into two clusters i.e. Lahore and other cities as 44% universities are present in Lahore. Participants were randomly selected from these clusters (AEPAM, 2011). Questionnaires were distributed among 200 respondents that is appropriate according to criteria (5 respondents for each item) established by Kline (2015) and similar research studies (Haq, 2014; Wu *et al.*, 2012; E. Xu, Huang, & Robinson, 2015). Out of 200, 159 usable responses were received yielding a response rate of 79.5 % that is in consistence with past research studies (Wu *et al.*, 2012). The questionnaire consisted of 38 questions, in which 6 questions were related to demographics, while workplace ostracism was measured using 10 items scale (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008), self-esteem and meaningful existence having 5 items each (Jamieson, Harkins, & Williams, 2010), acquiescent and defensive silence were measured using 5 items each (Dyne *et al.*, 2003) and diffident silence was measured on 5 item scale proposed by Brinsfield (2013) see Appendix A. Responses were measured on Five point Likert Scale (Strongly agree=1 to Strongly Disagree=5). Linear regression was used to analyze hypothesis testing direct associations among variables (i.e. workplace ostracism, acquiescent, defensive and diffident silence). It is an appropriate technique to find out the relationship in one independent variable and dependant variable so regression analysis was run three times for each dependant variable (Mukhopadhyay, 2008). In order to test the mediating role of self esteem and meaningful existence Preacher and Hayes (2008) multiple mediation test was conducted with 95% confidence interval and Bootstrapping with 5000 samples, this is an adequate technique given 5000 bootstrap samples because of its assumption of non normal sampling distribution and appropriateness for smaller sample sizes (Shrout & Bolger 2002). Furthermore, previous research studies testing the mediating mechanism between workplace ostracism and its outcomes with smaller sample sizes have also successfully applied regression based tests (Gkorezis & Bellou, 2016; Gkorezis, Panagiotou, & Theodorou, 2016).

Analysis and Results

Demographics

The demographic profile of participants is shown in Table 1

Table 1. *Demographic Summary of participants*

Sr.No	Questions	Category	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Gender	Male	84	52.0%	
		Female	75	47.2%	
2	Marital Status	Single	60	37.7%	
		Married	99	62.3%	
3	Age	20-25	36	22.6%	
		25-30	58	36.5%	
		30-35	35	22%	
		35-45	26	16.4%	
		Above 45	4	2.5%	
4	Education	Masters	29	18.2%	
		M.phil	113	71.1%	
		PhD	17	10.7%	
5	Designation	Lecturer	85	53.5%	
		Assistant	72	45.3%	
		Professor			
		Associate Professor	2	1.3%	
6	Experience	Less than 1 year	42	26.4%	
		1-5 years	68	42.8%	
		5-10 years	30	18.9%	
		10-15 years	13	8.2%	
		Above 15 years	6	3.8%	

Validity and Reliability Analysis

In order to make sure that the selected scales are valid in measuring the variables of study convergent and discriminant validity is established as shown in Table 2. Average variance explained (AVE) is well above 0.5 that shows its convergent validity as per the criteria of (Nuechterlein *et al.*, 2008). Additionally discriminant validity is also established as the value of AVE is greater than Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) and Average Shared Variance (ASV) as per the criteria of Fornell & Larcker, (1981) that sets the thresh hold for discriminant validity as $AVE > ASV$ and $AVE > MSV$. Furthermore, CR is also greater than 0.7 that shows scale items are internally consistent as per criteria of (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2. Convergent and Discriminant Validity of scales

Constructs	Number of Items	AVE	CR	MSV	ASV
Workplace Ostracism	10	.605	.877	.432	.389
Acquiescent Silence	5	.565	.865	.408	.365
Defensive Silence	5	.542	.854	.388	.350
Diffident Silence	5	.525	.846	.365	.304
Self-Esteem	5	.546	.856	.399	.376
Meaningful Existence	5	.550	.857	.401	.370

Notes. AVE= Average Variance Explained, CE= Composite Reliability, MSV=Maximum Shared Variance and ASV= Average Shared Variance Estimated values of Cronbach's Alpha are shown in Table 3, that showed that measures are internally consistent and reliable as values ranged from .87 to .978 that are good under criteria proposed by George and Mallery (2003) as values > .9 are considered excellent, while those > .8 are considered good.

Table 3. Reliability of Measurement

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Workplace Ostracism	10	.978
Acquiescent Silence	5	.954
Defensive Silence	5	.969
Diffident Silence	5	.871
Self-Esteem	5	.968
Meaningful Existence	5	.946

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted in order to find out the relationship among variables along with the strength of their association. The results showed that WOS has strong positive association with AS ($r=.918$), DES ($r=.910$) and DIS ($r=.832$). It means that teachers who experience WOS indulge in AS, DES and DIS. While WOS is negatively correlated to E ($r=-.892$) and M ($r=-.894$) that implies that teachers experiencing WOS have low level of E and M. AS, DES and DIS had also strong positive associations, that imply that teachers who are

engaged in one type of silence are also engaged in other types and vice versa. Furthermore, AS has strong negative correlation with E ($r=-.877$) and M ($r=-.876$) and DES and DIS has similar trend. It means that teachers having perception of low self-esteem and meaningful existence engage in AS, DES and DIS.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis

	WOS	AS	DES	DIS	E	M
WOS	1					
AS	.918**	1				
DES	.910**	.943**	1			
DIS	.832**	-	-	1		
E	.807**	-	-	-	1	
M	.853**	-	-	-	.888**	1
		.863**	.881**	.798**		

Notes. WOS=Workplace Ostracism, AS Acquiescent silence, DES=Defensive silence, DIS=Diffident silence, E=Esteem, M=Meaningful existence

** $p \leq 0.01$ (2-tailed).

Regression Analysis

Direct association in Independent and dependent variables was checked by using linear regression as shown in Table 4. It was found that WOS has significant relationship with AS ($\beta = 0.341$, $t=29.06$, $sig. < 0.01$), DES ($\beta = 0.345$, $t=27.48$, $sig. < 0.01$) and DIS ($\beta = 0.313$, $t=18.8$, $sig. < 0.01$). This implies that Hypothesis, H1, H2 and H3 are accepted, as WOS causes significant variance in AS (34.1%), DES (34.5%) and DIS (31.3%).

Table 3. Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	Dependent Variables		
	AS	DES	DIS
β	.341**	.345**	.313**
	$t= 29.06$	$t=27.48$	$t=18.8$
R^2	.918	.910	.832
Adj. R^2	.843	.828	.693
F-stat	844.505	755.345	354.162

Notes. WOS=Workplace Ostracism, AS Acquiescent silence, DES=Defensive silence, DIS=Diffident silence, E=Esteem, M=Meaningful existence,

** $p \leq 0.01$

Mediation Analysis

Mediating role of Self-Esteem in relationship of Workplace Ostracism and Acquiescent Silence

Mediation was tested using Preacher and Hayes (2008) Mediation test. Path A represented a negative association in WOS and E ($\beta = -.36$, sig. < 0.01, $t=24.68$) while Path B showed a negative association between E and AS ($\beta = -0.18$, sig. < 0.05, $t=2.8$). It was revealed by path C and C', that E cause partial mediation in relationship of WOS and AS (Path C, $\beta = 0.34$, sig. < 0.01, $t=29.06$, Path C', $\beta = 0.212$, sig. < 0.01, $t=7.6$). Overall model statistics for H4^a were also significant ($R^2=0.8652$, $F= 331.50$, $p=0.000$)

Table 4. *Mediation Analysis (Workplace Ostracism, Self-Esteem, Acquiescence Silence)*

	Path A	Path B	Path C	Path C'	R ²	F	Sig.
β	-.36**	-.18**	.34**	.212**	.8652	331.59	.000
t-value	24.68	2.8	29.06	7.64			

Notes. Path A= Independent to mediator, Path B= Mediator to dependant variable, Path C= Independent variable to dependant variable (Total effect), Path C'= Independent variable to dependant variable after controlling for mediator (Indirect effect)

** $p \leq 0.01$

Mediating role of Meaningful Existence in relationship of Workplace Ostracism and Acquiescent Silence

Path A represented a negative association in WOS and M ($\beta = -.35$, sig. < 0.01, $t=25.06$) while Path B showed a negative association between M and AS ($\beta = -0.25$, sig. < 0.01, $t=4.05$). It was revealed by path C and C', that M cause partial mediation in relationship of WOS and AS (Path C, $\beta = 0.34$, sig. < 0.01, $t=29.06$, Path C', $\beta = 0.25$, sig. < 0.01, $t=9.9$). Overall model statistics for H11 were also significant ($R^2=0.852$, $F= 471.89$, $p=0.000$). So, Hypothesis H5awas accepted.

Table 5. *Mediation Analysis (Workplace Ostracism, Meaningful Existence, Acquiescence Silence)*

	Path A	Path B	Path C	Path C'	R ²	F	Sig.
β	-.35**	-.16**	.34**	.212**	.8582	471.89	.000
t-value	25.06	2.4	29.06	7.64			

Notes. Path A= Independent to mediator, Path B= Mediator to dependant variable, Path C= Independent variable to dependant variable (Total effect), Path C'= Independent variable to dependant variable after controlling for mediator (Indirect effect)

** $p \leq 0.01$

Mediating role of Self-Esteem in relationship of Workplace Ostracism and Defensive Silence

Path A represented a negative association in WOS and E ($\beta = -.36$, sig. < 0.01, $t=24.68$) while Path B showed a negative association between E and DES ($\beta = -0.23$, sig. < 0.01, $t=3.5$). It was revealed by path C and C', that E cause partial mediation in relationship of WOS and DES (Path C, $\beta = 0.34$, sig. < 0.01, $t=27.48$, Path C', $\beta = 0.25$, sig. < 0.01, $t=9.6$). Overall model statistics for H4^b was also significant ($R^2=0.8410$, $F= 412.69$, $p=0.000$).

Table 6. *Mediation Analysis (Workplace Ostracism, Self-Esteem, Defensive Silence)*

	Path A	Path B	Path C	Path C'	R ²	F	Sig.
β	-0.36**	-0.23**	0.34**	.25**	.8410	412.69	.000
t-value	24.68	3.5	27.48	9.6			

Notes. Path A= Independent to mediator, Path B= Mediator to dependant variable, Path C= Independent variable to dependant variable (Total effect), Path C'= Independent variable to dependant variable after controlling for mediator (Indirect effect)

** $p \leq 0.01$

Mediating role of Meaningful Existence in relationship of Workplace Ostracism and Defensive Silence

Path A represented a negative association in WOS and M ($\beta = -.35$, sig. < 0.01, $t=25.06$) while Path B showed a negative association between M and DES ($\beta = -0.31$, sig. < 0.01, $t= 4.8$). It was revealed by path C and C', that M cause partial mediation in relationship of WOS and DES (Path C, $\beta = 0.34$, sig. < 0.01, $t=27.48$, Path C', $\beta = 0.23$, sig. < 0.01, $t=8.8$). Overall model statistics for H5^b were also significant ($R^2=0.8501$, $F= 442.47$, $p=0.000$)

Table 7. *Mediation Analysis (Workplace Ostracism, Self-Esteem, Defensive Silence)*

	Path A	Path B	Path C	Path C'	R ²
β	-.35**	-.31**	.34**	.23**	.8501
t-value	25.06	4.8	27.48	8.8	

Notes. Path A= Independent to mediator, Path B= Mediator to dependant variable, Path C= Independent variable to dependant variable (Total effect), Path C'= Independent variable to dependant variable after controlling for mediator (Indirect effect).

** $p \leq 0.01$

Mediating role of Self-Esteem in relationship of Workplace Ostracism and Diffident Silence

Path A represented a negative association in WOS and E ($\beta = -.36$, sig. < 0.01, $t=24.68$) while Path B showed a negative association between E and DIS ($\beta = -0.37$, sig. < 0.01, $t=4.3$). It was revealed by path C and C', that E cause partial mediation in relationship of WOS and DIS (Path C, $\beta = 0.31$, sig. < 0.01, $t=18.8$, Path C', $\beta = .17$, sig. < 0.01, $t=5.09$). Overall model statistics for H4^c were also significant ($R^2=.7265$, $F=207.19$, $p=0.000$).

Table 8. *Mediation Analysis (Workplace Ostracism, Self-Esteem, Diffident Silence)*

	Path A	Path B	Path C	Path C'	R ²	F	Sig.
β	-.36**	-.37**	.31**	.17**	.7265	207.19	.000
t-value	24.68	3.5	18.8	5.09			

Notes. Path A= Independent to mediator, Path B= Mediator to dependant variable, Path C= Independent variable to dependant variable (Total effect), Path C'= Independent variable to dependant variable after controlling for mediator (Indirect effect)

** $p \leq 0.01$

Mediating role of Meaningful Existence in relationship of Workplace Ostracism and Diffident Silence

Path A represented a negative association in WOS and M ($\beta = -.35$, sig. < 0.01, $t=25.06$) while Path B showed a negative association between M and DIS ($\beta = -0.25$, sig. < 0.01, $t= 2.7$). It was revealed by path C and C', that M cause partial mediation in relationship of WOS and DIS (Path C, $\beta = 0.31$, sig. < 0.01, $t=18.8$, Path C', $\beta = 0.22$, sig. < 0.01, $t=6.11$). Overall model statistics for H5^c were also significant ($R^2=0.7072$, $F= 188.38$, $p=0.000$). **Table**

Table 9. *Mediation Analysis (Workplace Ostracism, Self-Esteem, Diffident Silence)*

	Path A	Path B	Path C	Path C'	R ²	F	Sig.
β	-.35**	-.25**	.31**	.22**	.7072	188.38	.000
t-value	25.06	2.7	18.8	6.11			

Notes. Path A= Independent to mediator, Path B= Mediator to dependant variable, Path C= Independent variable to dependant variable (Total effect), Path C'= Independent variable to dependant variable after controlling for mediator (Indirect effect)

** $p \leq 0.01$

The results revealed that H4 (H4^a, H4^b and H4^c) and H5 (H5^a, H5^b and H5^c) were accepted.

Discussion

The results revealed that workplace ostracism is positively associated to all facets of employee silence, implying that ostracized teachers indulge in silence behavior confirming the findings of (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016b) who proposed workplace ostracism as a predictor of employee silence. When teachers experience episodes of ostracism, they develop a perception of being ignored, unwelcomed and ultimately they engage in withdrawal behavior of silence (Donaghey *et al.*, 2011; Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016b; Robinson *et al.*, 2012; Zhang, Wang, & Xu, 2016). They feel that the information sharing and speaking will not make any difference and its beyond their control to have a say in decision making thereby indulging in acquiescent silence (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003; Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Moreover, being ostracized is extremely painful experience (Hales *et al.*, 2016; Williams, 2002, 2007, 2009), so individuals keep quiet to protect themselves from this pain. The fear of ignored and unappreciated and unwelcomed ideas and views keeps them from indulging in voice as they think it will cause embarrassment, stress, depression and disrespect (Brinsfield *et al.*, 2009; Williams, 2002, 2009). This fear causes them to proactively keep their ideas and information to themselves in order to avoid negative consequences and engage in defensive silence (Morrison, 2014; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Xu, Loi, & Lam, 2015; Zhao *et al.*, 2013). Apart from the external fear of facing negative consequences, being ostracized creates an internal perception of uncertainty, as ostracized teachers started doubting their own knowledge and competence (Arkin *et al.*, 2013; Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016b). They feel doubt whether they are competent enough to share information and ideas or not, a doubt overshadows them and they feel doubtful whether they should speak or not and they involve in diffident silence (Brinsfield, 2013; Morrison, 2014; Xu *et al.*, 2015).

In order to get deeper insight into the underlying mechanism linking workplace ostracism to employee silence the intervening role of self-esteem and meaningful existence was postulated. The result of Preacher and Hayes (2004) mediation test proved that self-esteem and meaningful existence partially mediate the link between the mentioned variables. In the light of available literature, it can be established that ostracized teachers' fundamental need to exist meaningfully and have self-esteem is thwarted (Williams, 2009). Thereby, they feel insecure and have unfavorable evaluations of themselves that resulting in acquiescent silence based on resignation (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016b; Xu *et al.*, 2015). Employees with lower level of self-esteem tend to have protective tendencies and avoid negative outcomes, so they keep quiet to protect themselves from negative results and engaging in defensive silence (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016b; Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003; Xu *et al.*, 2015). It is also substantiated that ostracized teachers having lower self-esteem levels view themselves as less competent and have internal feelings of

being uncertain of their capabilities. Hence, they become non-decisive about their stance and prefer to indulge in diffident silence (Morrison, 2014; Pacheco *et al.*, 2015; Zhang *et al.*, 2016).

Additionally, meaningful existence was also found to partially mediate the association between workplace ostracism and employee silence. In case teachers are ostracized constantly by ignoring their ideas and suggestions, they are made realize that their existence has no meaning and worth for institution. This ultimately results in deteriorating teachers' perception of being useful and valuable person and causes them to think that they are not a worthwhile as their ideas and opinions have no worth for institute (Williams, 2009). Consequently, they indulge in silence based on resignation. Furthermore it will cause them to keep information and knowledge to themselves based on fear that it will not be heard or they might be ignored on this basis. A lower perception of being a valuable person also cause the teachers to preserve their image and save themselves from being perceived as incompetent person thereby engaging in diffident silence (Brinsfield, 2013; Gkorezis *et al.*, 2016b; Zhang *et al.*, 2016).

Conclusion

Drawing on TNTM the findings of this research substantiate that ostracized teachers develop perceptions of being ignored and excluded. This spurs lower perceptions of self-esteem and meaningful existence that cause them indulge in silence by withholding information and ideas that could have been used for betterment of their institutes on the basis of resignation, fear of negative results and internal doubt and uncertainty.

Contributions

Theoretically present research has contributed to the body of knowledge on account of answering the call of Zhang *et al.* (2016) by empirically unraveling workplace ostracism as a predictor of employee silence incorporating the mediating role of self-esteem and meaningful existence. The findings also offer policy and practice implications for authorities, management and decision makers in HEIs to improve the performance of their teachers by devising the practices that eliminate ostracism and employee silence creating an environment of unity, trust, inclusion and cooperation. They can create grievance mechanisms, proper performance appraisals and strategies to improve social interaction, information access and control of resource better in order to reduce the dysfunctional silence.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite having practical and theoretical contributions, present research has certain limitations. The results are based on cross sectional survey building on quantitative approach. Moreover, it incorporates only three dimensions of employee silence and the findings are only valid for teachers in HEIs of Punjab. In future, researches can incorporate other

types of employee silence i.e. pro-social silence (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003) and Deviant silence (Brinsfield, 2013), different mediators i.e. Psychological safety (Pacheco *et al.*, 2015) and felt obligation (Liang *et al.*, 2012). More comprehensive insights can be attained by examining the role of moderators such as trust (Khalid & Ahmed, 2016), individual dispositions, leader behaviors and contextual factors i.e. climate of fear, change resistant cultures, personality traits, leader-member exchange and leadership styles to find the inhibitors and facilitates of employee silence (Morrison, 2014). Future researchers can use mixed methods, investigate in other organizational and national contexts to attain generalizable and robust understanding in this area.

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