

## Language Exclusion and the Consequences of Perceived Ostracism in the Workplace

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The current research examined the impact of workplace ostracism on work-related attitudes and behaviors. Participants read a vignette describing a series of workplace interactions between the participant and two coworkers. During the interactions, participants were included in a group discussion, ostracized by coworkers in English or ostracized in Spanish. Consistent with predictions, ostracized participants reported lower levels of organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors than included participants. Ostracism by language resulted in lower work group commitment and higher levels of symbolic threat compared with included participants and those ostracized in English. Increased prejudice was also reported by participants exposed to language ostracism. Results are discussed in terms of their implications for general attitudinal processes and employee-related work attitudes and behaviors.

**Keywords:** ostracism, exclusion, workplace attitudes and behavior, prejudice

Social exclusion is often psychologically damaging to victims. Research has provided evidence for links between feeling ignored, rejected, or unwanted and a variety of negative outcomes, including sadness (Atlas & Morier, 1994), loneliness (Jones, 1990), hurt feelings (Leary, Springer, Negal, Ansell, & Evans, 1998; Leary & Springer, 2001), social anxiety (Baumeister & Tice, 1990; Beck, Laude, & Bohnert, 1974), depression (Coie, Terry, Zakriski, & Lochman, 1995), and lowered self-esteem (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Jones,

1990; Leary, 1990). In addition, social exclusion can lead to aggressive behavior and disengagement from those responsible for the exclusion as well as from neutral third parties (Leary, Koch, & Hechenbleikner, 2001; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). Ostracized individuals also report liking group members less (Pepitone & Wilpizeski, 1960), report an increased desire to avoid future contact with them (Cheuk & Rosen, 1994), and actively derogate those who rejected them (Bourgeois & Leary, 2001). These results demonstrate that the social outcast experiences both emotional pain and distressing behaviors.

Most studies investigating the consequences of social exclusion have focused on social situations with little empiric attention given to work-related interactions, yet the potential relevance and importance of examining ostracism in this context have been pointed out by a number of researchers. For instance, Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon (2002) propose that ostracism is one distinct type of organizational undermining behavior. According to this conceptualization, un-

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dermining behavior may take the form of direct actions (e.g., verbal derogation) or withholding behaviors (e.g., failing to provide a coworker with important information or shunning another employee). Organizational socialization practices such as these have been found to increase workers' perceptions of inequitable treatment (Allen & Meyer, 1990a) and reduce workers' commitment to their organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990b). Lack of organizational support also contributes to decreases in workers' citizenship behaviors (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983). Thus, workplace ostracism can be considered a form of passive undermining behavior that harms the organization or its employees. In addition, crosscultural research has found that workplace exclusion is related to organizational commitment in both the United States and Israel even after controlling for several demographic variables, including gender, ethnicity, age, exempt status, and education (Mor-Barak, Findler, & Wind, 2001). Moreover, Jex, Adams, Bachrach, and Sorenson (2003) found that organizational constraints (e.g., lack of supplies, equipment, supervisor and coworker support) are related to decreased citizenship behaviors. Jex et al. argue that such constraints lead employees to focus more on "in-role" behaviors required to perform their job and less on "extrarole" or citizenship types of behaviors. We argue that exclusion represents one such situational constraint.

Other research has indirectly examined workplace exclusion within the broader construct of workplace incivility. Behaviors studied have been those intended to harm the organization and/or its employees in some way, including organizational misbehavior (Vardi & Weiner, 1996; Vardi & Weitz, 2004), workplace deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), antisocial behavior (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997), dysfunctional behavior (Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly, & Collins, 1998), counterproductive work behavior (Sackett & De Vore, 2001), and workplace bullying (Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2002). Moreover, many of these activities entailed some form of exclusionary behavior. For example, one form of retaliatory organizational behavior involves applying the "silent treatment" to whistleblowers (Miceli & Near, 1989, 1992; Near & Miceli, 1986; Williams, 2001) and to punish noncooperative group members (Ouwerkerk, Kerr, Gallucci, & van Lange,

2005). Indeed, factor analysis of organizational tactics used by workers to influence their supervisors, coworkers, and subordinates yielded a dimension reminiscent of ostracism such as ignoring others and withdrawing help (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1997).

A limited number of studies have directly investigated ostracism among coworkers. Using a social loafing paradigm, Williams and Sommer (1997) assigned participants to one of four conditions crossing ostracism (inclusion or exclusion) and work condition (coactive or collective). Participants were instructed they would be working as part of a group on a brainstorming task (idea generation). While waiting for the study to begin, participants were either included or excluded from a ball-tossing game initiated by two experimental confederates while the experimenter was out of the room. Next, participants were asked to generate as many uses as possible for a common object (knife) and that their uses would be individually identifiable (coactive) or combined with the other group members (collective). Results indicated than men worked less hard collectively than coactively (a typical social loafing finding) regardless of condition. Women, however, engaged in social compensation. That is, after experiencing exclusion, they worked harder collectively (as a group) than coactively (individually). Women were also found to display more engaging types of behaviors when ostracized (leaning in, smiling), whereas men tended to disengage from the game (looking in their wallet, combing hair). These results imply that women, more than men, make more overt attempts to compensate through increased task performance. On the other hand, men act in ways to protect self-esteem (i.e., ego protection).

Schneider, Hitlan, and Radhakrishnan (2000) studied ethnic harassment in four samples of working students and industry personnel. The goal of this survey research was to examine the nature and correlates of ethnic harassment. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated a two-factor structure to their Ethnic Harassment Experiences (EHE) scale. One factor included items assessing verbal derogation and included items relevant to exclusion resulting from one's ethnicity. Zero-order correlations indicated significant positive relation between exclusion and work withdrawal, and a significant negative relation was found between exclusion and super-

visor satisfaction. Furthermore, exclusion with only low levels of accompanying verbal harassment resulted in the worst psychologic well-being and physical health conditions for workers.

One type of exclusionary behavior that is becoming more common in American organizations is related to language diversity. Language use has become one of the most important political and social issues in the United States. In the past few years, 26 states have adopted English as their official language, and several states have implemented English-on-the-job laws (U.S. English Incorporated, 2001). The number of immigrants entering the United States each year combined with the fact that approximately half of immigrants currently in the United States do not speak English well (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001) suggests that those U.S. citizens who speak only English are increasingly likely to encounter people who are speaking an unfamiliar language. A number of legal cases demonstrate that individuals often feel excluded, ostracized, and offended when others in their work environment communicate in a foreign language (Garcia v. Gloor, 1980; Garcia v. Spun Steak Co., 1993; Jurado v. Eleven-Fifty Corp., 1987).

Researchers have recently begun to study the consequences of language exclusion in both social and work settings. Hitlan, Kelly, and Zarate (2005) found that language exclusion was associated with expressed prejudice toward immigrants. In such circumstances, the excluded individual may feel marginalized and react by increasing the psychologic distance between themselves and those perceived to be responsible for the exclusion. It is argued that increased prejudicial attitudes represent one way to psychologically distance oneself from another (or group). In another study, Dotan, Rubin, and Sommer (2004) studied language exclusion specifically in work teams. Their results indicated that workers who felt excluded when their coworkers spoke a foreign language liked their coworkers less and perceived their work team as less successful. Furthermore, effort after language exclusion was moderated by personality whereby extraverts increased their work effort, whereas introverts decreased their work effort. Finally, language exclusion resulted in more aggressive behavior, especially for participants high in rejection sensitivity. Taken together, the

results of these studies suggest that the perception of exclusion by coworkers speaking foreign languages can negatively affect the productivity, group cohesion, and general work experience of individual workers. Given the increased numbers of immigrants in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001) and that Americans have more opportunities to interact with foreign language speakers, language use will continue to be an important workplace issue.

As this review of the literature suggests, social exclusion is a relatively common behavior in the workplace. Particularly, being excluded by coworkers speaking a foreign language is becoming more commonplace in the American work environment. Previous research has shown that exclusion has an impact on work performance and can lead to detrimental behaviors and health problems. However, beyond these outcomes, not much is currently known about how exclusion affects workers. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of coworker exclusion on three important organizational variables: workplace commitment, citizenship behaviors, and prejudice. It is hypothesized that exclusion by coworkers will result in decreases in organizational commitment and citizenship behaviors. We further explored the impact of language ostracism on commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors. In addition, it is predicted that language exclusion will increase expressed threat and prejudice when compared with included participants and participants excluded by English.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants were 600 undergraduate students (374 women, 221 men, and 5 who failed to indicate gender) from four different universities: The University of Texas at El Paso ( $n = 240$ ), Illinois State University ( $n = 114$ ), Central Washington University ( $n = 205$ ), and The University of Michigan ( $n = 41$ ). The students volunteered to participate in this study in exchange for extra course credit. They ranged in age from 18 to 58 years ( $M = 21.41$ ,  $Mdn = 20$ , mode = 19,  $SD = 5.47$ ). Most participants were white (52.7%), followed by Latino/Mexican Americans (25%), Mexican-Nationals (4.5%),

Asian Americans (3.8%), Latino-Caucasian (3.8%), black (3.5%), Native American (3.5%), and 2.1% indicated "other."

Because the experiment involved manipulation of exposure to the Spanish language, we examined participants' Spanish language ability and dropped those participants who were fluent in Spanish (mean fluency score of 4–5 on a 1–5 rating scale). We also eliminated participants if they were not U.S. citizens. This filtering procedure left 470 participants (299 women and 171 men) who were U.S. citizens not fluent in Spanish. The mean age of this final group of participants was 22 years (range = 18–58 years). The responses from these 470 participants were used in the data analyses.

### Experimental Procedures

After reading and signing an informed consent form, participants were randomly assigned to read one of three workplace interaction vignettes (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to read the vignette while assuming the perspective of the main character. The current procedure was modeled after a similar approach used in previous ostracism research (see Faulkner, 1998). All participants read the same introduction indicating that they have been working as an ergonomics engineer for a major automobile manufacturer for the past 2 years. They are happy with their job and their work group and are excited about their future with the company. After the introduction, the exclusion manipulation was administered.<sup>1</sup>

### Inclusion

In the inclusion condition, the vignette indicated that during a series of interactions at work two coworkers, who spoke Spanish, offer to teach the participant Spanish and help interpret any Spanish words the participant does not understand. The vignette went on to describe several work-related interactions in which the coworkers actively included the participant in several different types of work-related activities.

### Spanish Exclusion

In the Spanish-exclusion condition, the vignette indicated that the two coworkers speak to each other in Spanish at work. They have also

ignored the participant's requests to stop conversing in Spanish. The vignette went on to describe instances in which the coworkers excluded the participant in several different types of work-related activities.

### English Exclusion

The English-exclusion condition was identical to the Spanish-exclusion condition except that the coworkers conversed only to each other in English, ignoring the participant.

After reading the workplace interaction vignette, participants completed measures of the dependent variables.

### Dependent Measures

**Manipulation checks.** To determine the effectiveness of the exclusion manipulation, participants answered a question designed to assess the extent to which they felt accepted by their coworkers (i.e., "How accepted did you feel by your coworkers?"). The extent to which participants perceived their fellow coworkers as different from themselves was measured by an additional item (i.e., "How similar did you feel to your coworkers?") and the extent to which they felt connected with their work group members ("Did you feel like you did not belong or feel connected with your work group members?" (reverse-scored)). Responses for all items were obtained on a nine-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*constantly/extremely*). Higher scores indicate more perceived

<sup>1</sup> Twelve vignettes were originally developed for this study crossing three exclusion conditions (inclusion, English ostracism, Spanish ostracism) × two gender of coworkers (male versus female) × ethnicity of coworkers (Anglo versus Hispanic). Preliminary analyses were performed by a five-way multivariate analysis of variance using exclusion condition, gender of coworkers, ethnicity of coworkers, participant gender, and participant ethnicity as independent variables and commitment, citizenship behaviors, symbolic threat, realistic threat, and prejudice as dependent variables. Results indicated limited effects for the effects of gender and ethnicity (for both coworkers and participants). Results indicated a significant multivariate effect for condition, a two-way interaction for condition × gender on normative commitment, and a three-way interaction for condition × gender of coworkers × gender of participant on normative and continuance commitment. As a result, vignettes were collapsed across exclusion conditions for all subsequent analyses.

acceptance by and similarity to and belonging with the other coworkers depicted in the vignette.

*Organizational commitment.* Organizational commitment was measured using Meyer and Allen's (1997) Organizational Commitment Scale. The scale assesses three components of commitment: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. The affective component assesses an employee's emotional attachment to and identification with their organization (e.g., "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization"). The continuance component measures an employee's commitment to their organization based on the associated costs of leaving the organization (e.g., "I feel I have too few options to consider leaving this organization"). Normative commitment measures an employee's general feelings of obligation toward their organization (e.g., "I feel this organization deserves my loyalty"). For each six-item subscale, participants are asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with each item on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Item wording was modified slightly to be consistent with the current methodology. For example, the original item, "I feel this organization deserves my loyalty" was modified to read, "I would feel this organization deserves my loyalty." Reliability analysis for the current research indicated good internal consistency for each of the subscales: affective ( $\alpha = .85$ ), continuance ( $\alpha = .75$ ), and normative ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Two additional items were administered to assess work group commitment ("How much would you like to continue working with the other members of your work group?" and "How likely would you be to decrease your effort on group-related tasks?"  $\alpha = .72$ ). When necessary, items were reverse-coded and total scale scores were computed by summing across scale items and averaging. Higher scores indicate greater levels of commitment for each of the scales.

*Organizational citizenship behaviors.* To measure organizational citizenship behaviors, we used two subscales from Moormann and Blakely's (1995) Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale: interpersonal helping and organizational loyalty. Interpersonal helping involves helping coworkers with job-related duties (e.g., going out of your way to help

coworkers with work-related problems.). Organizational loyalty involves promoting and defending the organization (e.g., encouraging friends and family to utilize organization products). The original instructions asked participants to indicate how often they actually engaged in different behaviors at their organization. However, we modified the instructions to request participants to indicate how often they would engage in different types of behaviors after reading the vignette. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a five-point response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Total scale scores were computed by summing across scale items and averaging. Higher scores indicate greater levels of interpersonal helping and organizational loyalty. Reliability estimates for the current research indicated good reliability for both interpersonal helping ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and organizational loyalty ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Expressions of threat/prejudice.* Participants completed three scales measuring different types of perceived threat and prejudice toward immigrants, including symbolic threat, realistic threat, and prejudice (Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998). Symbolic threat measures the degree to which Americans feel that Mexican immigration threatens American culture and that American culture will be changed in undesirable ways by immigration (e.g., "The values and beliefs of Mexican immigrants regarding work are basically quite similar to those of most Americans."). Realistic threat assesses the threat that native citizens perceive when immigrants are thought to compete for scarce economic resources and pose threats to the economic welfare of citizens of the host country (e.g., "Mexican immigrants are contributing to the increase of crime in the U.S."). Participant responses were obtained on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). When necessary, items were reverse-coded and total scale scores were computed by summing across scale items and averaging. Higher scores indicate greater levels of threat.

The prejudice scale asked participants to rate their attitude toward immigrants on 12 attitudinal items: hostility, admiration, dislike, acceptance, superiority, affection, disdain, approval, hatred, sympathy, rejection, and warmth. All

responses were obtained on a 10-point intensity scale ranging from "none at all" to "extreme." A total scale score was created similar to the method used previously. Once again, higher scores indicate higher levels of prejudice. Taken together, the threat and prejudice scales demonstrated adequate internal consistency in the present study, with alpha coefficients for symbolic threat, realistic threat, and prejudice at .76, .85, and .85, respectively.

*Spanish language ability.* Spanish ability/fluency was measured by four items assessing different aspects of language fluency. Participants were asked to rate their ability to read, write, speak, and understand Spanish. All responses were obtained on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*no ability*) to 5 (*excellent ability*). A mean scale composite was created whereby higher scores are indicative of greater Spanish language ability/fluency. Reliability estimates in this study indicated excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

## Results

### Manipulation Checks

To assess the effectiveness of the exclusion manipulation, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was computed using inclusionary status (included, English exclusion, Spanish exclusion) as the independent variables and acceptance and similarity scores as dependent variables. Results indicated a significant multivariate main effect for inclusionary status,  $F(6, 882) = 182.44, p < .001$ . Univariate tests indicated a significant effect for acceptance,  $F(2, 443) = 659.51, p < .001, \eta^2 = .75$ , similarity,  $F(2, 443) = 328.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .60$ , and belonging,  $F(2, 443) = 248.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .53$ . Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations for each variable as a function

of inclusionary status. A Tukey's test revealed that participants excluded in both English ( $M = 1.69, SD = 1.25$ ) and Spanish ( $M = 1.97, SD = 1.63$ ) indicated feeling less accepted than included participants ( $M = 7.62, SD = 1.81$ ). Similar findings emerged for perceived similarity and belonging. For perceived similarity, participants excluded in either English ( $M = 2.78, SD = 1.56$ ) or Spanish ( $M = 2.60, SD = 1.55$ ) reported feeling less similar to their coworkers than included participants ( $M = 6.80, SD = 1.66$ ). Similarly, participants excluded in English ( $M = 2.93, SD = 2.06$ ) and Spanish ( $M = 2.93, SD = 1.99$ ) felt less of a sense of belonging to their work group than include participants ( $M = 7.45, SD = 1.97$ ). No differences emerged between the two exclusion conditions. We interpreted these results to mean that our exclusion manipulation was effective.

### Organizational Commitment

To assess the impact of language exclusion on organizational and work group commitment, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance was conducted using inclusionary status as the independent variable and the three commitment subscales (i.e., affective, continuance, normative) and the work group commitment scale as dependent variables. Results indicated a significant multivariate main effect for inclusionary status,  $F(8, 910) = 85.02, p < .001, \Lambda = .33$ . Follow-up univariate tests indicated that this effect was driven by univariate effects for affective,  $F(2, 458) = 184.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = .45$ , normative,  $F(2, 458) = 41.69, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$ , and work group commitment,  $F(2, 458) = 407.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .64$ . Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the three organizational commitment dimensions as a function of inclusionary status. Tukey's tests indicated that for affective commitment, partic-

Table 1  
Acceptance and Similarity Ratings as a Function of Inclusionary Status

Rating	Inclusion		English exclusion		Spanish exclusion	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Acceptance	7.64	1.81 <sub>a</sub>	1.72	1.30 <sub>b</sub>	1.97	1.62 <sub>b</sub>
Similarity	6.87	1.62 <sub>a</sub>	2.78	1.55 <sub>b</sub>	2.62	1.56 <sub>b</sub>
Belonging	7.45	1.97 <sub>a</sub>	2.93	2.06 <sub>b</sub>	2.93	2.92 <sub>b</sub>

*Note.* Means in the same row with different subscripts are significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

**Table 2**  
*Dimensions of Organizational Commitment as a Function of Inclusionary Status*

Commitment	Inclusion		English exclusion		Spanish exclusion	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Affective	5.33	1.05 <sub>a</sub>	3.38	1.08 <sub>b</sub>	3.29	1.03 <sub>b</sub>
Continuance	4.50	1.02 <sub>a</sub>	4.66	1.10 <sub>a</sub>	4.53	1.10 <sub>a</sub>
Normative	4.57	1.19 <sub>a</sub>	3.59	1.13 <sub>b</sub>	3.46	1.18 <sub>b</sub>
Work group	8.05	1.31 <sub>a</sub>	4.24	1.47 <sub>b</sub>	3.83	1.51 <sub>c</sub>

*Note.* Means in the same row with different subscripts are significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

ipants excluded in English ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) and Spanish ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) reported less affective commitment to their organization than included participants ( $M = 5.33$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). No differences emerged between the English and Spanish exclusion conditions. A similar pattern emerged for normative commitment. Both English- ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) and Spanish-exclusion conditions ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) reported significantly less normative commitment than included participants ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ). Results of work group commitment indicated that included participants ( $M = 8.05$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) reported higher levels of commitment to their work group than those excluded in English ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) and Spanish ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ). In addition, the difference between the English-exclusion and Spanish-exclusion conditions was also significant. Participants excluded in Spanish reported being significantly less committed to their work group than did participants excluded in English. Thus, it appears that exclusion is the driving force behind lower levels of organizational commitment but that type of exclusion played a role in participants' commitment to their work group.

### *Organizational Citizenship Behaviors*

To examine the effect of language exclusion on organizational citizenship behaviors, a one-

way MANOVA was computed using inclusionary status as the independent variable and interpersonal helping and organizational loyalty as the dependent variables of interest. Results indicated a significant multivariate effect for inclusionary status,  $F(4, 914) = 14.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Lambda = .88$ . Follow-up univariate tests revealed significant effects for both interpersonal helping,  $F(2, 458) = 25.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ , and organizational loyalty,  $F(2, 458) = 23.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Group means and standard deviations for this analysis can be found in Table 3. Results of a Tukey's test indicated that participants excluded in both English ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) and Spanish ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) reported lower levels of interpersonal helping than included participants ( $M = 5.43$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). A similar pattern emerged for organizational loyalty. Participants excluded in English ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) and Spanish ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) indicated lower levels of organizational loyalty than included participants ( $M = 5.58$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ). Similar to the findings with organizational commitment, exclusion seems to be responsible for the obtained decrease in citizenship behaviors.

### *Expressions of Threat/Prejudice*

A one-way MANOVA was computed using symbolic threat, realistic threat, and prejudice scores as the dependent variables and inclusion-

**Table 3**  
*Organizational Citizenship Behaviors as a Function of Inclusionary Status*

Behavior	Inclusion		English exclusion		Spanish exclusion	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Interpersonal helping	5.43	1.05 <sub>a</sub>	4.79	1.07 <sub>b</sub>	4.57	1.18 <sub>b</sub>
Organizational loyalty	5.58	1.16 <sub>a</sub>	4.87	1.29 <sub>b</sub>	4.67	1.27 <sub>b</sub>

*Note.* Means in the same row with different subscripts are significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

ary status as the independent variable. Results indicated a significant multivariate main effect for inclusionary status,  $F(6, 870) = 3.89, p = .001, \Lambda = .95$ . Univariate tests indicated significant effects for each of the threat/prejudice measures: symbolic threat,  $F(2, 437) = 9.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$ , realistic threat,  $F(2, 437) = 4.85, p = .008, \eta^2 = .02$ , and prejudice,  $F(2, 437) = 5.55, p = .004, \eta^2 = .03$ . Table 4 displays the means and standard deviations for these threat/prejudice variables as a function of inclusionary status. Results of a Tukey post hoc test indicated that for symbolic threat, participants excluded in Spanish ( $M = 4.81, SD = 1.19$ ) reported significantly higher levels of symbolic threat than either included participants ( $M = 4.23, SD = 1.23$ ) or those excluded in English ( $M = 4.26, SD = 1.29$ ). In addition, participants in the Spanish-exclusion condition expressed significantly higher levels of symbolic threat than participants in the English-exclusion condition. For realistic threat, participants in the Spanish-exclusion condition ( $M = 4.28, SD = 1.40$ ) reported higher levels of realistic threat than included participants ( $M = 3.75, SD = 1.50$ ). The English-exclusion group ( $M = 3.97, SD = 1.42$ ) did not differ from either inclusion or Spanish exclusion. For prejudice, once again, participants in the Spanish-exclusion condition ( $M = 3.54, SD = 1.34$ ) expressed significantly more prejudice than participants in the inclusion condition ( $M = 3.00, SD = 1.37$ ). In addition, there was a nonsignificant trend for Spanish exclusion to result in more prejudice than English exclusion ( $M = 3.23, SD = 1.36; p = .13$ ).

## Discussion

The current research was conducted to examine some of the potential consequences of work-

place ostracism. That is, how does being ostracized by one's coworkers relate to work-related attitudes and behaviors? Although an increasingly important question, it has received relatively little attention in the organizational literature. The focus of this study was on how workplace ostracism is related to organizational commitment and the display of organizational citizenship behaviors. An additional goal was to assess the impact of language-based ostracism on prejudice. Our findings suggest that general ostracism rather than language ostracism is the driving force behind one's tendency to adopt negative workplace attitudes and behaviors.

We hypothesized that being ostracized by coworkers speaking a foreign language would lead targets to express lower levels of commitment to their organization than participants who were not ostracized. Results partially supported this prediction. Ostracized participants reported that they would be less emotionally attached to their organization (affective commitment) and that they would feel less of an obligation to remain with the organization (normative commitment). Ostracized participants also reported lower levels of commitment to their work group. In addition, participants ostracized by language reported less commitment to their work group than either included participants or participants ostracized in English.

These findings indicate that the impact of being ostracized in one's work group goes beyond the immediate context in which the exclusion occurred. Participants were not only less committed to those directly responsible for the behavior, but also toward the larger organization in which the behavior occurred. Such findings seem particularly important given that organizational commitment had been found to relate positively to several other work attitudes and behaviors including job performance (Brett,

**Table 4**  
*Expressed Threat/Prejudice as a Function of Inclusionary Status*

Threat/prejudice	Inclusion		English exclusion		Spanish exclusion	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Symbolic threat	4.23	1.23 <sub>a</sub>	4.26	1.29 <sub>a</sub>	4.80	1.19 <sub>b</sub>
Realistic threat	3.75	1.50 <sub>a</sub>	3.97	1.41 <sub>a,b</sub>	4.28	1.40 <sub>b</sub>
Prejudice	3.00	1.37 <sub>a</sub>	3.23	1.37 <sub>a,b</sub>	3.54	1.34 <sub>b</sub>

*Note.* Means in the same row with different subscripts are significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

Cron, & Slocum, 1995), success of employees' work unit (Aryee, Luk, & Stone, 1998) and negatively with job tension, intentions to leave the organization, and turnover (Hochwarter, Perrewe, Ferris & Gercio, 1999; Somers, 1995).

Data also partially supported the hypothesis that language-ostracized participants would report lower organizational citizenship behaviors. Our results demonstrated that ostracized participants would be less likely to engage in behaviors intended to help other coworkers with job-related tasks (i.e., interpersonal helping behaviors), and they also reported being less likely to support and defend the organization from criticism, as compared with included participants. However, those participants ostracized by language did not report significantly lower intentions to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors than did those participants ostracized in English. There are at least two likely reasons for this finding. First, similar to the findings with organizational commitment, the outcomes associated with being excluded may be strongest toward those perceived to be responsible for the exclusion. Although a measure of citizenship behaviors toward coworkers was not included in the current research, such a measure would be needed to test this proposition. We expect that findings would emerge similar to those found with work group commitment mentioned previously. Second, it may be that being ostracized, in and of itself, is what is important rather than language per se. The latter interpretation seems less likely given our findings concerning work group and organizational commitment.

Consistent with predictions, results indicated that language ostracism led to significantly higher levels of symbolic threat compared with English ostracism and inclusion. Participants ostracized by Spanish reported significantly higher levels of symbolic threat than participants excluded by coworkers who were conversing to one another in English. Participants who were excluded in English did not report significantly higher levels of symbolic threat compared with included participants. For realistic threat and prejudice, participants ostracized in English did not report significantly higher threat levels or prejudice than included participants, whereas those who experienced language ostracism did differ significantly from included participants. Language ostracism led to signifi-

cantly higher levels of realistic threat and prejudice as compared with included participants. Participants in the language ostracism condition, however, did not report significantly higher levels of threat and prejudice than participants ostracized in English. Although language ostracism impacted each of the threat and prejudice measures, the strongest impact was related to the perception that American values and culture would be changed in undesirable ways by allowing continued immigration to the United States.

This finding has important implications for the increasing value organizations place on teams and teamwork. With technologic advancements in communication and increased global competition, there has been increased emphasis on the use of work teams (LePine, Hansom, Borman, & Motowildo, 2000; Mohrman, Cohen, & Morhman, 1995).

Furthermore, Yeatts and Hyten (1998) found several interpersonal characteristics that distinguish high-performance work teams from others. Included among these were the ability to communicate effectively with one another, conflict among group members, group cohesion, and trust among group members. In addition, Levi (2001) suggests that many conflicts within diverse groups are brought on by communication difficulties based on stereotypes and/or distrust among group members. As a result, organizations may want to highlight the importance of diversity in an attempt to facilitate team interdependence and intergroup relations within the larger organizational context. Our findings also have implications for general attitudinal processes as well as employee-related work attitudes and behaviors. In the current research, ostracized participants reacted with a diminished sense of obligation to their employer, less emotional attachment to their organization, and less likelihood of engaging in citizenship behaviors toward both coworkers and their organization in general. Based on effect size estimates, it appears that ostracism exerts its strongest impact on organizational commitment, followed by citizenship behaviors, and prejudice and threat.

Of particular importance is that the effect of ostracism on symbolic threat increased when employees were unable to understand the language in which their coworkers were conversing. In this regard, language contributed to how

threatened participants were as the result of being excluded. Although future research is needed to tease out possible third variables contributing to this effect, a few variables seem particularly likely to function as mediators of this effect. For example, it seems likely that language ostracism is more likely to be more ambiguous than general ostracism. When employees are ostracized in a known language, they are able to understand what is being said by their coworkers—possibly obtaining information as to why they are being ostracized. In contrast, this option does not exist when one is excluded by a foreign language. Thus, one reason for additional effects of language exclusion is that it increases attributional ambiguity (Schneider, Hitlan, & Radhakrishnan, 2000; Williams, 2001). Such ambiguity may also increase paranoid thoughts (e.g., "They are talking about me.") and/or decrease an employee's perceived control over their situation (Williams, 1997).

### Conclusion

Currently, the U.S. population is over 284 million, and by the middle of this century, this figure is projected to rise above 400 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Immigration to the United States is expected to account for much of this increase. People are immigrating to the United States at the rate of over one million people per year. In addition, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2001), over 44 million U.S. residents speak a language other than English. Of those, 19.5 million do not speak English very well. The sheer number of immigrants entering the United States each year, combined with the fact that approximately half of immigrants in the United States do not speak English well (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001), suggests that U.S. citizens are increasingly likely to encounter people who are speaking an unfamiliar language, and this may have important implications for workplace interactions. Our research demonstrates the potentially unique effects of language-based ostracism on social interaction in a work environment. Knowing the effects of language-based ostracism might help organizations to become proactive in developing strategies to overcome the negative effects of such behavior.

How might organizations choose to deal with the potential effects of workplace ostracism? Tentatively, research could explore the impact of free foreign language classes to employees (e.g., free Spanish classes), especially for organizations in which diversity is highly valued. At the other extreme, 26 states have currently adopted English as their official language, and several have gone a step further implementing specific English-on-the-job laws (U.S. English Incorporated, 2001). Research examining the implications of how such laws either facilitate positive or negative intergroup relations will be extremely useful for organizations seeking to become more culturally and ethnically diverse. The current research represents one of the first known empiric examinations of how being ostracized in one's place of work contributes to important work-related attitudes and behaviors. In addition, it also supports the contention that language can serve as one mechanism for exclusion.

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(Appendix follows)

## Appendix A: Experimental Manipulation Vignettes

### General Instructions

Please take your time and read the following story carefully and thoughtfully. Put yourself into the shoes of the main character. Think about how you would be feeling if this were you. The results of the study are valid only if you really think about how you would be feeling if you were the main character. After you have finished reading the story, you will be asked a series of questions.

#### *Inclusion Condition*

You are 23 years old and have been working for a major American automobile manufacturer for the past 2 years as an ergonomics engineer. As an ergonomics engineer, you are responsible for designing improvements in the instrument panel of automobiles, making them more “driver-friendly” and easier to use. Much of your time is spent working with others in the “Interior Design Division.” However, you and your two other team members, Merisel Lopez and Imelda Gonzalez [Hispanic females; Britney Johnson and Susan Smith, Anglo females; Carlos Lopez and Fernando Gonzalez, Hispanic males; Brad Johnson and Michael Smith], generally refer to yourselves as the “Pilot Performance Team.” It has been a good job and the type you were hoping for after college. You majored in engineering and always enjoyed being around people, so a position with a major automobile manufacturer was perfect.

Outside of work, many people have indicated to you that the instrument layout was one of the factors in their decision when purchasing a car. In fact, one of your team’s design layouts was highlighted in *Car and Driver Magazine*. Acknowledgments such as these makes you feel good about yourself and gives you and your team a sense of pride knowing that others respect what you do. In fact, many of your college friends are envious because you have a career that has made you quite secure financially. You are very excited about your career prospects!

After the *Car and Driver Magazine* segment, your team was chosen to design the instrument layout for the company’s new sports car—the *Excalibur SPI*. The company has invested millions in the development of the *Excalibur SPI* and is counting on your team to design a revolutionary driver cockpit. You and your team members, Merisel Lopez and Imelda Gonzalez, have worked together for awhile and are good friends. During meetings and other social interactions, the team members often sit together. Both Merisel and Imelda know Spanish so you told them that you did not know Spanish and asked if they could teach you. In addition, you asked them to interpret for you so you could learn quicker; both

agreed. Now, whenever you do not understand something, one of them will help interpret so you can continue to learn. This behavior has continued for several weeks and shows no sign of stopping any time soon.

Furthermore, when designing the cockpit layout for the *Excalibur*, all team members are consistently asked for their opinions. Sometimes, if your team is behind, all three team members will stay late to try and solve the problem. On occasion, the team will stay later than necessary and order a pizza to continue working on the *Excalibur* and other projects. Time and again, your team has had projects completed ahead of schedule. Even when one team member is sick or has an emergency, they call the other team members to see how things are going and catch up on what they missed that day. A few times this kind of communication has saved your team a great deal of time, which saved the company money.

At the annual company picnic 2 weeks ago, your team sat at the same table and had a very good time. This year, however, your spouse was unable to make the picnic this year so you sat with Merisel, Imelda, and their spouses. At the picnic, Merisel, Imelda, and you were teammates in several contests. For example, your team came in second place during the company’s annual relay race. After talking with another employee whom you had worked with previously, you returned to Merisel and Imelda’s table. You noticed they were talking to one another in Spanish. You sat down and said “Hello”; each responded in Spanish (Hola) and began to include you in their conversation. Everyone had a good time at the picnic. After interacting for awhile longer, you decided it was time to leave and you wished everyone a good night.

Your team members have all worked together closely for many months and you have had a good relationship with both of them. Several times in the past, Merisel, Imelda, and you have done favors for one another. For example, you helped Merisel patent an emergency sensor that alerts drivers to their automobile’s low air pressure, potentially saving lives and helping her earn money. Similarly, she has helped you by babysitting and by designing the web pages for your consulting work. Many times on Fridays after work Merisel, Imelda, and you would go out for a couple cocktails and have a few laughs. In general, you feel that your team members always value your input and include you in all professional and social discussions.

### *English-Exclusion Condition*

You are 23 years old and have been working for a major American automobile manufacturer for the past 2 years as an ergonomics engineer. As an ergonomics engineer, you are responsible for designing improvements in the instrument panel of automobiles, making them more “driver-friendly” and easier to use. Much of your time is spent working with others in the “Interior Design Division.” However, you and your two other team members, Merisel Lopez and Imelda Gonzalez [Hispanic females; Britney Johnson and Susan Smith, Anglo females; Carlos Lopez and Fernando Gonzalez, Hispanic males; Brad Johnson and Michael Smith], generally refer to yourselves as the “Pilot Performance Team.” It has been a good job and the type you were hoping for after college. You majored in engineering and always enjoyed being around people, so a position with a major automobile manufacturer was perfect.

Outside of work, many people have indicated to you that the instrument layout was one of the factors in their decision when purchasing a car. In fact, one of your team’s design layouts was highlighted in *Car and Driver Magazine*. Acknowledgments such as these makes you feel good about yourself and gives you and your team a sense of pride knowing that others respect what you do. In fact, many of your college friends are envious because you have a career that has made you quite secure financially. You are very excited about your career prospects!

After the *Car and Driver Magazine* segment, your team was chosen to design the instrument layout for the company’s new sports car—the *Excalibur SP1*. The company has invested millions in the development of the *Excalibur SP1* and is counting on your team to design a revolutionary driver cockpit. Things were going great for the first several months; however, several weeks ago, you realized that something strange was going on with your team. During meetings and other social interactions, Merisel Lopez and Imelda Gonzalez, the other two members of your team, have been talking to one another but excluding you from their conversations. At one point in time, you asked them to be more thoughtful. Even after that, they have continued conversing to one another while ignoring you much of the time—even when you are in their presence.

Another problem with this situation is that it sometimes occurs during work-related activities. At times, when working on specific design layouts for the *Excalibur*, they seem to be continuing to ignore you. It is one thing for them to have personal conversations and not include you, but it is another thing to exclude you during work-related activities—especially when all of you are supposed to be working together. Time and again you have to remind them that you would like to be included in their work-

related conversations. Such behavior often ruins your train of thought. A few times miscommunication has cost your team a great deal of time, which costs the company money.

Another instance occurred at the annual company picnic 2 weeks ago. In the past, your team has sat at the same table and had a very good time. This year, however, both Merisel and Imelda sat together with their spouses at another table. Unfortunately, your spouse was unable to make the picnic this year so you sat with employees from another division whom you did not really know very well. Eventually you walked over to say hi to Merisel and Imelda. When you arrived at their table, you noticed they were talking to one another so you sat down and said “Hello”; each responded curtly and returned to their original conversation, only briefly acknowledging your presence (by a brief glance) every once in awhile. After approximately 30 minutes, you decided to leave.

Your team members’ behavior is curious to you because you have all worked together closely for many months and you have had a good relationship with both of them. Several times in the past, Merisel, Imelda, and you have done favors for one another. For example, you helped Merisel patent an emergency sensor that alerts drivers to their automobile’s low air pressure, potentially saving lives and helping her earn money. Similarly, she has helped you by babysitting and by designing the web pages for your consulting work. Many times on Fridays after work, Merisel, Imelda, and you would go out for a couple cocktails and have a few laughs. Before last month, you felt that your team members had always valued your input and included you in all professional and social discussions. Now, it seems that they talk mostly among themselves, leaving you “frozen out.”

### *Spanish-Exclusion Condition*

You are 23 years old and have been working for a major American automobile manufacturer for the past 2 years as an ergonomics engineer. As an ergonomics engineer, you are responsible for designing improvements in the instrument panel of automobiles, making them more “driver-friendly” and easier to use. Much of your time is spent working with others in the “Interior Design Division.” However, you and your two other team members, Merisel Lopez and Imelda Gonzalez [Hispanic females; Britney Johnson and Susan Smith, Anglo females; Carlos Lopez and Fernando Gonzalez, Hispanic males; Brad Johnson and Michael Smith], generally refer to yourselves as the “Pilot Performance Team.” It has been a good job and the type you were hoping for after college. You majored in engineering and always enjoyed being around people, so a position with a major automobile manufacturer was perfect.

Outside of work, many people have indicated to you that the instrument layout was one of the factors in their decision when purchasing a car. In fact, one of your team's design layouts was highlighted in *Car and Driver Magazine*. Acknowledgments such as these makes you feel good about yourself and gave you and your team a sense of pride knowing that others respect what you do. In fact, many of your college friends are envious because you have a career that has made you quite secure financially. You are very excited about your career prospects!

After the *Car and Driver Magazine* segment, your team was chosen to design the instrument layout for the company's new sports car—the *Excalibur SPI*. The company has invested millions in the development of the *Excalibur SPI* and is counting on your team to design a revolutionary driver cockpit. Things were going great for the first several months; however, several weeks ago, you realized that something strange was going on with your team. During meetings and other social interaction, the two other team members, Merisel Lopez and Imelda Gonzalez, both of whom you consider good friends, started talking to one another in Spanish—a language they both know. At one point in time, you told them that you did not know Spanish. After that, you asked them to teach you Spanish and interpret for you, but it seems as if they ignored that request. Even after that, they have continued conversing to one another in Spanish much of the time—even when you are in their presence. This behavior has continued for several weeks and shows no sign of stopping any time soon.

Another problem with this situation is that it sometimes occurs during work-related activities. At times, when working on specific design layouts for the *Excalibur*, they continue to speak Spanish rather than English. It is one thing to have personal conversations in another language, but it is another thing to perform work activities in another language—especially when all of you are supposed to be working together. Time and again you have to remind them

that you do not speak Spanish. Such behavior often ruins your train of thought. A few times miscommunication has cost your team a great deal of time, which costs the company money.

Another instance occurred at the annual company picnic 2 weeks ago. In the past, your team has sat at the same table and had a very good time. This year, however, both Merisel and Imelda sat together with their spouses at another table. Unfortunately, your spouse was unable to make the picnic this year so you sat with employees from another division whom you did not really know very well. Eventually you walked over to say hi to Merisel and Imelda. When you arrived at their table, you noticed they were talking to one another in Spanish. You sat down and said "Hello"; each responded curtly in Spanish (Hola) and returned to their original conversation, only briefly acknowledging your presence (by a brief glance) every once in a while. After approximately 30 minutes, you decided to leave.

Your team members' behavior is curious to you because you have all worked together closely for many months and you have had a good relationship with both of them. Several times in the past, Merisel, Imelda, and you have done favors for one another. For example, you helped Merisel patent an emergency sensor that alerts drivers to their automobile's low air pressure, potentially saving lives and helping her earn money. Similarly, she has helped you by babysitting and by designing the web pages for your consulting work. Many times on Fridays after work, Merisel, Imelda, and you would go out for a couple cocktails and have a few laughs. Before last month, you felt that your team members had always valued your input and included you in all professional and social discussions. Now, it seems that they talk mostly among themselves, leaving you "frozen out."

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