

# Why Might I and What If I Lose Self-Control During Organizational Entry? The Influence of Coworker Ostracism on Newcomers' Socialization

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**Abstract.** Extant literature has underlined the importance of newcomers' socialization to the organization. However, the influence of coworker ostracism on newcomers' performance and adjustment has not been noticed. Drawing on the strength model of self-control theory, we propose a model exploring how coworker ostracism impacts newcomers' performance and adjustment through the mediation of state self-control. Through an empirical study, we find that coworker ostracism has a negative influence on newcomers' in-role performance, task mastery, and social adjustment. Important theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

## Introduction

Social ostracism is used to describe behaviors such as being overlooked, excluded, or ignored by other individuals or groups in the workplace [1][2]. In the workplace, most employees who have been rejected or isolated at work usually exhibit increased aggression, poor performance, a loss of prosocial behavior, and a susceptibility to self-defeating patterns of behavior. The antecedents and outcomes of ostracism have been discussed. Some researchers explored the antecedents of ostracism at organizational and individual levels, such as the costs of ostracism [2], highly stressful environments, and workplace diversity. Some scholars confirmed that ostracism has a negative influence on employees, promoting undesirable performance and counterproductive work behavior.

In despite of these progresses, previous approaches to examining ostracism can still be improved in several ways. First, state self-control is prone to being affected by varieties of situational factors, including internal and social factors [3]. Ostracism, as a social factor, has an obvious influence on individuals' mental state. However, no study has examined how ostracism influences employees' state self-control. Furthermore, most studies do not distinguish ostracism into different sources (i.e., colleagues and immediate supervisors). Extant studies mainly focus on either the general workplace ostracism or the influence of supervisor ostracism. Coworkers, who play a key role in the workplace, have close interactions with newcomers. Supportive coworkers help newcomers grasp work skills and improve task performance [4]. In addition, compared with old-timers, newcomers may be more vulnerable to ostracism, because they are sensitive and frail, they are eager to gain new knowledge and learn expected behavioral patterns from colleagues in the new organization.

We adopt the strength model of self-control theory to verify how coworker ostracism influences newcomers' socialization. This theory posits that there is a fixed amount of control resources available for self-control and controlling one's impulse can cause regulation failure of subsequent impulses [5]. Failure of self-control can result in immense personal and societal repercussions, depression, and aggression. In addition, rejection can cause a damaging mental state that may be harmful to self-control [6].

In general, self-control depends on a limited resource that can be consumed by acts of self-control, and subsequent self-control will be impaired after the first exertion of self-regulatory behavior. Drawing on strength model of self-control theory, we develop a conceptual model to address the above gaps. The conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

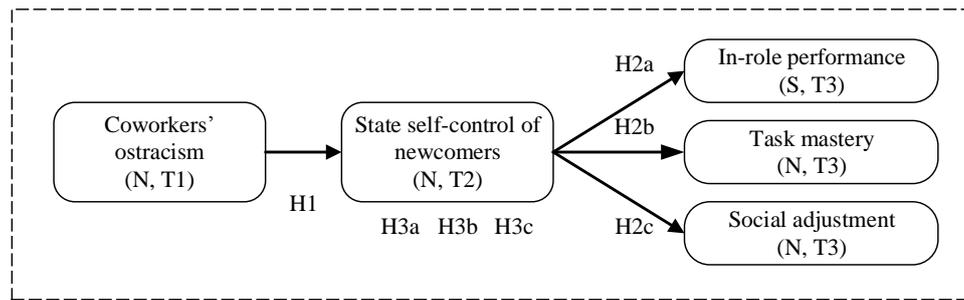


Fig. 1 Conceptual model

## Hypotheses

### Coworker Ostracism and State of Self-Control of Newcomers

Ostracism can impair self-control. On one hand, ostracism impairs intellectual performance and cognitive processing when people exert conscious and executive regulations [6]. Intellectual behavior and cognitive processing depend on self-control, which is needed in the process of setting standards. Ostracism may impede individuals' cognitive ability, resulting in a loss of the ability to monitor their behavior. On the other hand, ostracism may create a deconstructed mental state that may be detrimental to self-control and cause people to avoid self-awareness vital for effective self-control [7].

Newcomers can feel stressed and lose a sense of belonging when they perceive ostracism from coworkers. According to the strength model of self-control theory, stress or fatigue can deplete newcomers' strength and make their pattern of self-control break down. The extant literature has confirmed that being excluded causes decrements in self-control [6]. As mentioned above, newcomers' sense of control is decreased when they are excluded [1]; that is, they temporarily lose the ability to control themselves and their state self-control will be at a low level.

*Hypothesis 1: Coworker ostracism is negatively related to state self-control of newcomers.*

### The Mediating Role of State of Self-Control

In the strength model of self-control, effortful self-control consumes limited resource that depleted by any acts of self-control, causing poor performance on subsequent self-control tasks. If newcomers experience such rejection as their colleagues avoiding eye contact, neglecting them, refusing to share information, they have to control their emotions or alter their attitudes to deal with the negative situation by depleting their self-control resources. Consequently, the level of the state self-control of employees becomes low, and then their in-role performance, task mastery, and social adjustment may be reduced.

In-role performance is defined as the formally prescribed outcomes and behaviors that directly contribute to an organization [8]. Task mastery refers to the way in which newcomers learn how to complete their jobs after entering an organization [9] and relates to the ease and skill with which newcomers are able to perform their work.

Research has suggested that losing control can result in undesirable outcomes. Inadequate self-control lead to overeating, alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and failure to perform tasks. Losing control can also lead to underachievement in school, a lack of persistence, interpersonal problems. Thus, we predict that being out of control is detrimental to task mastery of newcomers. On one hand, newcomers who fail to self-control cannot focus on seeking information essential for the completion of their tasks. On the other hand, if newcomers cannot control their emotions or impulses when being ostracized, they may refuse to communicate with coworkers who are important sources of information. Consequently, newcomers who have low level of self-control strength are not able to effectively learn skills and perform jobs well, owing to a lack of necessary information and communication. Thus, we propose:

*Hypothesis 2a: State self-control is positively related to newcomers' in-role performance.*

*Hypothesis 2b: State self-control is positively related to newcomers' task mastery.*

*Hypothesis 3a: State self-control mediates the negative influence of coworker ostracism on newcomers' in-role performance.*

*Hypothesis 3b: State self-control mediates the negative influence of coworker ostracism on newcomers' task mastery.*

Social adjustment refers to the way in which newcomers perceive being liked and accepted by colleagues [4]. Employees who are socially accepted by coworkers may perform better than those who are excluded, considering that the relationships they form with their coworkers may serve as social capital, which facilitates their adjustment. Newcomers exert effort to seek relational information and social tactics from coworkers, in order to achieve social acceptance.

Drawing on strength model of self-control theory, effective self-control allows newcomers to control and alter their behavior to stifle socially undesirable impulses, in order to follow rules and make positive contributions to the organization [6]. However, coworker ostracism can cause newcomers to become unwilling to maintain self-control, owing to a lack of necessary strength. Newcomers who fail to control themselves may also become stressed and anxious, losing the ability to seek relational information. Thus, we propose:

*Hypothesis 2c: State self-control is positively related to newcomers' social adjustment.*

*Hypothesis 3c: State self-control mediates the negative influence of coworker ostracism on newcomers' social adjustment.*

## Method

We tested our conceptual model with samples from a large airline company in China. In Time 1, we collected data on control variables, and perceived ostracism from newcomers' coworkers. In Time 2, we asked newcomers to report their state self-control. In Time 3, we measured the outcome variables of in-role performance (rated by newcomers' immediate supervisors), task mastery (rated by newcomers), and social adjustment (rated by newcomers). By the end of the three phases, we had matching data on 236 newcomers (40.27% of the initial sample).

For all measures, we used a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree). We used a 10-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) developed by Ferris et al. (2011) to measure coworker ostracism [10]. We used a 5-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ) developed by Thau and Mitchell (2010) to measure state self-control of newcomers [11]. We used Williams and Anderson's (1991) 7-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) to measure in-role performance [12]. We used Morrison's (1993) 5-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ) to measure task mastery [9]. We used a 5-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) developed by Chao et al. (1994) to measure social adjustment [13]. We controlled for an assortment of variables, including age, gender, education, and position.

## Results

### Descriptive Analyses

The means and standard deviations of each construct and the controlled variables involved in the present study are shown in Table 1. In addition to this, Table 1 also shows the correlations of all these variables and the Cronbach's alphas indicating the reliability of these five constructs.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Gender	1								
2	Age	-0.082	1							
3	Education	0.040	0	1						
4	Position	-0.048	-.170**	-.148*	1					
5	Coworker ostracism	0.115	0.036	-0.11	-0.051	<b><i>0.938</i></b>				
6	State self-control of newcomers	-0.034	-0.001	-0.084	0.035	-.474**	<b><i>0.81</i></b>			
7	In-role performance	0.031	0.031	-0.038	0.027	-.264**	.420**	<b><i>0.895</i></b>		
8	Task mastery	-0.034	0.038	0.032	0.069	-.382**	.383**	.399**	<b><i>0.928</i></b>	
9	Social adjustment	-0.020	0.02	-0.037	0.022	-.323**	.356**	.413**	.400**	<b><i>0.890</i></b>
	Mean	0.53	32.54	1.53	0.63	2.66	5.60	5.29	5.43	5.19
	SD	0.50	5.92	0.59	0.49	1.34	1.03	1.07	1.18	1.22

Note: Cronbach's alphas are shown along the diagonal in bold italics.

In regard to gender, 0 is female and 1 is male, so the mean value represents the proportion of males.

\*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05; the same is true for the tables below.

### Test of Hypotheses

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses in the present study.

After controlling the effects of gender, age, education, and position, a significant negative effect of coworker ostracism on state self-control of newcomers ( $\beta = -0.381$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was found, which supports H1 (please see Table 2 for details).

Table 2. The relationship between coworker ostracism and state of self-control of newcomers

Dependent variable: State self-control of newcomers				
	Model 11	Model 12	Model 13	Model 14
<b>Control variables</b>				
Gender	-0.061	0.062	0.054	0.035
Age	0.000	0.003	0.005	0.001
Education	-0.139	-0.245*	-0.234*	-0.224*
Position	0.048	-0.013	-0.023	0.001
<b>Independent variable: Coworker ostracism</b>		-0.381**	-0.375**	-0.309**
R2	0.009	.244**	.250**	.342**
$\Delta R2$	0.009	.236**	0.006	.092**
F	0.497	14.887	12.74	16.932

According to suggestions from Baron and Kenny (1986), there is a full mediation when the following conditions are satisfied: the independent variables can significantly predict (a) the mediator and (b) the dependent variables; (c) the mediator is significantly associated with the dependent variables; and (d) the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables changes to non-significant when the mediator is introduced to the relationship. When the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables becomes weaker rather than non-significant when the mediator is present, the mediating effect is partial.

Condition (a) is supported by H1 (Model 12). Condition (b) is supported with a negative significant effect of coworker ostracism on in-role performance ( $\beta = -0.226$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ; Model 22). A

positive prediction regarding state self-control of newcomers and in-role performance ( $\beta = -0.688$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ) was found to support H2a and condition (c). When the mediator of state self-control is present, the relationship between coworker ostracism and in-role performance became non-significant, which suggests that there is a full mediation of state self-control of newcomers in regard to its relationship with coworker ostracism and in-role performance, supporting H3a (please see Table 3 for details).

Table 3. The mediation of state self-control of newcomers on the relationship between coworker ostracism and in-role performance

	<b>Dependent variable: In-role performance</b>				
	<b>Model 21</b>	<b>Model 22</b>	<b>Model 23</b>	<b>Model 25</b>	<b>Model 24</b>
<b>Control Variables</b>					
Gender	0.079	0.152	0.106	0.128	0.102
Age	0.007	0.009	0.007	0.008	0.011
Education	-0.063	-0.126	-0.003	-0.031	-0.011
Position	0.067	0.031	0.046	0.036	0.011
<b>Independent variable: Coworker ostracism</b>		-0.226**		-0.077	-0.061
<b>Mediator: State self-control of newcomers</b>			0.438**	0.39**	0.33**
R2	0.004	.081**		.187**	.241**
$\Delta R^2$	0.004	.076**		.106**	.054**
F	0.26	4.04		8.766	8.995

As for the mediation of state self-control of newcomers in regard to the relationships between coworker ostracism and task mastery, conditions (a), (b), and (c) were met. Coworker ostracism has negative influences on state self-control of newcomers ( $\beta = -0.381$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 12) and task mastery ( $\beta = -0.340$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 32). H2b is supported by a positive significant effect of state self-control of newcomers on task mastery ( $\beta = 0.443$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 33). However, when the mediator is present, the effect of coworker ostracism on task mastery is weaker ( $\beta = -0.224$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 34), rather than non-significant, which suggests that the mediation of state self-control of newcomers in regard to the relationship between coworker ostracism and task mastery is partial. Thus, H3b is supported (please see Table 4 for details).

Table 4. The mediation of state self-control of newcomers on the relationship between coworker ostracism and task mastery

	<b>Dependent variable: Task mastery</b>				
	<b>Model 31</b>	<b>Model 32</b>	<b>Model 33</b>	<b>Model 34</b>	<b>Model 35</b>
<b>Control Variables</b>					
Gender	-0.065	0.044	-0.038	0.026	0.01
Age	0.01	0.013	0.01	0.012	0.016
Education	0.09	-0.004	0.151	0.07	0.096
Position	0.202	0.149	0.181	0.153	0.12
<b>Independent variable: Coworker ostracism</b>		-0.340**		-0.224**	-0.221**
<b>Mediator: State self-control of newcomers</b>			0.443**	0.303**	0.315**
R2	.244**	0.01	0.152**	.158**	.205**
ΔR2	.236**	0.01	0.143**	.148**	.053**
F	14.887	0.581	8.277	8.631	9.859

In terms of the mediation of state self-control of newcomers in regard to the relationships between coworker ostracism and social adjustment, conditions (a), (b), and (c) were met. Coworker ostracism has negative effects on state self-control of newcomers ( $\beta = -0.381$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 12) and social adjustment ( $\beta = -0.306$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 42). H2c is supported by a positive significant effect of state self-control on social adjustment ( $\beta = 0.420$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 43). However, when the mediator is present, the effect of coworker ostracism on social adjustment is weaker ( $\beta = -0.191$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Model 44), rather than non-significant, which suggests that the mediation of state self-control of newcomers in regard to the relationship between coworker ostracism and social adjustment is partial, supporting H3c (please see Table 5 for details).

Table 5. The mediation of state self-control of newcomers on the relationship between coworker ostracism and social adjustment

	<b>Dependent variable: Social adjustment</b>				
	<b>Model 41</b>	<b>Model 42</b>	<b>Model 43</b>	<b>Model 44</b>	<b>Model 45</b>
<b>Control Variables</b>					
Gender	-0.039	0.06	-0.013	0.041	0.023
Age	0.005	0.007	0.004	0.006	0.01
Education	-0.068	-0.153	-0.01	-0.08	-0.057
Position	0.051	0.003	0.031	0.006	-0.022
<b>Independent variable: Coworker ostracism</b>		-0.306**		-0.191**	-0.184**
<b>Mediator: State self-control of newcomers</b>			0.420**	0.30**	0.287**
R2					
ΔR2	0.002	0.111**	.128**	.160**	.187**
F	0.002	0.109**	.125**	.049**	.027*

## Discussion

Based on the strength model of self-control theory [5], we shed light on how coworker ostracism affects newcomers' socialization. Specifically, we found that coworker ostracism negatively

influences newcomers' in-role performance, task mastery, and social adjustment through the mediating role of state self-control. Overall, our study revealed the critical role coworker ostracism plays in the socialization of newcomers.

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