

## INTRAPERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL ASPECTS OF SOCIAL OSTRACISM IN SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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*Social ostracism referred as the silent treatment and being ignored, is a widespread form of social rejection and usually the first stage of bullying. The purpose of this article is to present specific theoretical questions about this phenomenon, existing in the scientific literature.*

*In our research we explore some intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of ostracism and we present our findings and interpretation of the results from the psychological perspective. The formulation of the recommendations for school psychologists, the teachers and the social educators and their application in everyday situation in school's environment could be the way of the prevention of ostracism as the first stage of bullying.*

**Keywords:** bullying, ostracism, exclusion, rejection

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Ostracism occurred long before it was named (ostrakismos) around 500 B.C., when Athenians cast their votes on shards of clay, ostraca, to determine whether a member of the community, usually a former political leader, should be banished for a period of 10 years (Gruter & Masters, 1986). Ostracism, defined here as being ignored and excluded, has been observed in almost all social species, in anthropological accounts of tribes from around the world, in modern industrialized nations, in governmental, religious, military, penal, and educational institutions, in informal groups and in close relationships, in playgrounds, and by children, adolescents, and adults. The ubiquity of ostracism is also reflected in many term used to describe it : the cold shoulder, treat with ignore, being sent to Coventry, the silent treatment, exile, banishment, expulsion, time-out, silencing. Ostracism is typically defined as being ignored and excluded, and it often occurs without excessive explanation or explicit negative attention. Ostracism is often operationalized as a process that is characterized as an unfolding sequence of responses endured while being ignored and excluded (Williams, 2007). Social exclusion appears to be defined as being excluded, alone, or isolated, sometimes with explicit declarations of dislike, but other times not (Twenge et al., 2001). Typically, the exclusion manipulation occurs either after interaction and separation from the others or as a hypothetical consequence in the future. Rejection is typically operationalized as a declaration by an individual or group that they do not (or no longer) want to

interact or be in the company of the individual. Again, rejection does not typically involve a protracted episode, but occurs after interaction and separation (Leary et al., 2005). Despite these apparent distinctions, investigators do not appear to be wedded to these operational definitions, nor do they consistently use specific terms for specific operations. Thus, these terms can be used interchangeably. The primary function of ostracism is to bring target back into the fold or to expel the target altogether. Individuals who deviate from others' expectations are often the targets of ostracism. Ostracism was functional and adaptive. Misperceiving an event as ostracism when it was not ostracism might incur some psychological costs, but missing ostracism when it was about to happen would likely result in death. Thus, humans would expect that we have evolved to detect ostracism in such a way that it would signal an alarm that would serve to direct attention toward determining if ostracism was in fact occurring, and if so, would direct our resources toward coping with it (Williams, 2007). Most people experience ostracism in their lives as the sources and as the targets. About three quarters of Americans report having received the silent treatment from their love ones (Faulkner et al., 1997). Wheeler and Harvey (2001), in their daily diary study found that a sample of Australians report done episode a day.

The reason we target on the phenomenon of ostracism is the evidence that ostracism is usually but not always the first stage of bullying in school environment (Kolař, 2005) and bullying has increasing tendency in recent decade. In Norway Dan Olweus found 8% bullies and 12% victims in his research of 130 000 students (Olweus, 1993). The research conducted by WHO, Health Behaviour in School-aged Children, HBSC is especially important enabling to compare results of different countries in this area as well. In 2001/2002 in 25 countries in a representative sample of 113 200 youth aged 11-15 took part in the research. Involvement in bullying is between 9-54 % (Nansel et al., 2004). In 2006 41 countries took part in the same research, findings shows that the proportion of those bullied at least twice over the last month is between 4% and 32% in the participating countries. The average value is 15%. The proportion of 11 year- old bullies is 2-24%, 9% as the full sample average shows (Currie et al., 2008). In Hungary 79.6% of the children asked were never bullied by their peers, 15,2% of them were occasionally bullied, 5,2% of them more frequently. The proportion of those bullying frequently is 4.7%, 19.8% of the children sometimes bully others (Aszmann, 2003). In the 2006 study of Németh (2007) 15% perpetrators, 12% victims and 10% bully-victims were registered. This data corresponds with finding in research in Slovakia which found 7.9% victims and 5.7 % bullies and interesting is the fact that 12% of respondents would join in bullying activities of unpopular pupil (Šimegová, 2011). Ostracism, exclusion and rejection are the concrete forms of hidden aggression that have long lasting consequences for the victims (Kováčová, 2011). In many cases these forms of aggression are indefinable for teachers.

As we mentioned above the ostracism is usually the first stage of bullying and we consider this stage as the most important to detect it and consequently to tackle the problem of bullying in school environment. Therefore we would like to outline some theoretical aspects of this phenomenon.

Many studies documented various self-reported levels of distress following ostracism, social exclusion, and rejection, usually sadness and anger, hurt feelings and pain (Leary et al., 1995; Williams & Zadro, 2005). Similarly, a sense of belonging, control, and meaningful existence diminishes following ostracism (Williams & Zadro, 2005). There are the evidences about long-term consequences of ostracism. William's model of

ostracism (Williams, 1997, 2001, 2007) characterizes this third stage as one of depleted coping resources resulting in acceptance of ostracism's message, alienation, depression, helplessness, worthlessness, these individuals no longer seek other for support or companionship, they are no longer compliant or aggressive, they self-ostracize, avoiding further rejection by preempting the possibility of acceptance, they report a substantial rate of depression, suicidal ideation, suicidal attempts, eating disorder, short-term promiscuity, they feel little ability to change their situation, they resigned themselves to feeling unworthy of attention. The direction of behavioral responses is complicated, there is no simply ostracism-behaviour link. Behavior responses vary according to which needs are being attempted or fortified by the individual. These can lead the individual to strive toward inclusion and acceptance, or to exact revenge and control over other (Williams, 2007). The purpose of our research was to explore how people remember their personal experiences as the source and the victims of ostracism. Research on social ostracism has mostly be realized on laboratory methods among nonclose relationship partners, but psychologists still know little about how ostracism function in real relationship (Williams, 2001).

We were inspired by Williams in using his approach by asking respondents of naturally occurring incidents involving ostracism in their life. Our respondents were 170 university students (aged 21-23) in Faculty of Education in various approbations. They could choose one of the alternatives and write story. The first alternative was to write story about the situation in which the author of the story was the target of ostracism – this alternative was chosen by 26 students, the second was alternative in which the author was the source of the ostracism – this alternative was chosen by 21 students, the third choice was to write story in which the author was the bystander of ostracism in his class which was chosen by 95 students, and the fourth choice was for the persons, that have never faced up the phenomenon of ostracism in their class and they write about the perceived determinants of the optimal relationship among pupils in school environment, which was chosen by 18 students. Each alternative has its own specific questions and the students implemented their questions on these questions in their stories.

We analyzed the answers of the victims and the sources of ostracism especially on questions:

1. Which circumstances and reasons led to the situation of ostracism in your class?
2. What do you think as the source of ostracism, the victim could feel facing up the ostracism/ what did you feel facing the ostracism as the target?
3. What impact had the ostracism on interpersonal relationship in you class?
4. How this situation could be resolved, what could the teachers and parents do?

On the basis of the analyse of students' stories there is big variety of the circumstances and reasons perceived both from perspective of the targets and the sources. From the view of the sources of ostracism most often mentioned answers were:

- ✓ personality characteristics of victims such as tendency to introversion, sensitivity
- ✓ academic success, preciseness of victims
- ✓ looks of victims, unattractiveness of face and body, disability, disease

- ✓ behaviour of the victims: stealing, superiority, defamation, infidelity, intrude on
- ✓ better socio-economic position of family member: the grandfather , the father,
- ✓ personality characteristics of the sources as enviousness, stubbornness, inability to forgive, cruelty

From the view of victims often mentioned answers were:

- personality characteristics of the victims such as tendency to introversion, vulnerability, complaisance
- look of the targets: obesity, glasses, darker colour of skin, eye's disability
- academic success, better grades
- financial situation of the family of the victims, the absence of a thing that are „in“
- inability of the victims to protect themselves, inability to find the way to the others
- big differences of the opinions, the style of life, life's ideals, religious thoughts
- changing the school, mostly from town to village
- the marital status: divorce, death of parent
- personality characteristics of the sources such as authoritativeness, manipulativeness, dominance, hostility, superiority, narcissism, using the power tactic, revengefulness

The analyse of the second question revealed that the sources of ostracism are able to empathize with the target now in adulthood, but they had the problem to be empathic with the target during the childhood, some of them now feel guilty and disgraced. They think that the victims experienced especially sadness of being isolated, pain, regret and complex of inferiority.

And what really did the victims feel during experiencing ostracism in their class? They revealed strong feeling of fear, sadness, regret, guilt, disgrace, disturbance, unhappiness, complex of inferiority, needlessness, redundancy, discomfort, despair, helplessness, injustice, injury, anger toward themselves „I am not as the other are“, anger to the sources of ostracism and inner emptiness. As we see there is big difference between the expression of emotional experience of the victims of ostracism and the perceived emotional experience of the victim from the view of the sources of ostracism after the situation. Both the victims and the sources revealed that ostracism had negative impact on whole class during long time. Most students would try to solve this problem in their future profession of teacher by optimal communication with pupils as they consider it as the most important thing.

*Conclusion.* Ostracism (to be ignored and excluded) is a painful experience for the target and have devastated consequences on the whole social group. Therefore it is necessarily to solve the existing problem of ostracism as the first stage of bullying and try to prevent this phenomenon.

For effective prevention it is necessary systematic approach and participation not only the teachers and pupils but also school psychologists, social educator and parent, too. Each of them plays important role in the process.

Our recommendations are targeted at all of them specifically. The most important role is played by the teachers and the specific subjects oriented on prosocial behaviour of pupils as the prevention of social problems. The pregradual preparation of future teachers should be oriented to reach the ability to detect the existence of ostracism in class at the beginning by

observing the children's behaviour, by being able to analyse their verbalization and consequently to be able to choose and realize appropriate strategy to solve the problem in class. To reach this aim it is necessary to implement such subjects of study that facilitate student to train this ability during study in model situations, role play activities, self-reflection of students, to provide them chance during their praxis to observe and to analyse children's behaviour and verbalization. Almost ten years we try to focus on this aims in pregradual preparation of the student and we see fruit of these efforts. We also consider implementation of the subject of Ethic education as the one of preventive strategy of bullying in school, as it is focused on the education of prosocial behaviour and about the concrete possibilities of this subject in minimalization of bullying reflect Podmanický (2011). Brestovanský (2011) indicates specific instruments for optimalisation of class atmosphere. The role of school psychologists is important in the cases where diagnose of individual or group interaction, individual and group consultation and counselling or therapy are needed either for the victims, the sources or for their parents. The possibilities of social pedagogy and education in prevention of bullying are offered by Liberčanová (2011) and Galbavý (2011) in their articles. There is one more specific field of prevention and it is prevention of disabled pupils in inclusive environment of our schools that is outlined by Bizová (2011). The parents of all pupils also have the role in prevention of bullying (Žúborová, 2011).

It is very important to cooperate in preventive process to reach the healthy interpersonal interaction not only among the pupils in the classes, but also among specialists in helping professions.

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