HOW PERCEIVED WORKPLACE OSTRACISM HINDERS CREATIVITY: COWORKER ENVY AS A TRIGGER

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ABSTRACT

Workplace ostracism is a construct that requires further studies since it potentially affects ostracized individuals' attitudes and behaviors, yet it is still understudied. The present study aimed to analyze the mechanism of the emergence of workplace ostracism through coworker envy and its effect on employee creativity. Creative process engagement was also used as a mediating variable for the effect of workplace ostracism on creativity. The data were gathered using a self-report questionnaire distributed to employees in the service sector. Out of 592 questionnaires filled out online, 201 met the criteria for further analysis. The result showed that coworker envy significantly and positively affects workplace ostracism. The finding also suggested that workplace ostracism has a negative and significant effect on creative process engagement but has no significant effect on employee creativity. However, this study revealed that creative process engagement fully mediated the negative effect of workplace ostracism on creativity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations are now facing an era of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). This era demands organizations to keep developing and enhancing employees' creativity to maintain their competitiveness and success through innovations (Kwan et al., 2018; Shalley et al., 2004). Creativity leads to innovations for profit or non-profit organizations when their creative ideas enrich organizational value and support the organizational goal (Amabile, 1996).

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Organizations believe that employee creativity may lead to novel ideas and benefit the products, services, procedures, and practices that ensure the organization's long-term survivability and competitiveness (Liu et al., 2015; Shalley et al., 2009). Employees' creativity is not only affected by their personal traits but also by their social environment, particularly in the workplaces (Amabile, 1988). For instance, an individual's negative experience at his or her workplace could potentially lower his or her engagement in creative processes (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Some previous studies have examined the antecedents of employee creativity, such as social network characteristics (Baer, 2010; Hirst et al., 2015; Perry-Smith, 2006; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003; Zhou et al., 2009) and other factors that are mostly political in nature, both in individual or organizational contexts (Chen & Hou, 2016; Li, & Chen, 2018; Soda et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2018). However, many studies tend to ignore the negative factors that could potentially have detrimental effects on employee creativity (Choi et al., 2009). One of the phenomenal constructs employees often experience is workplace ostracism (Williams, 2007). The present study attempts to examine workplace ostracism as a negative construct that potentially affects employee creativity.

Workplace ostracism is viewed as a type of social exclusion (Williams, 1997, 2001), where individuals feel that they are overlooked, excluded, and ignored by other individuals or groups in the workplace (Robinson et al., 2013). Ostracism may occur anywhere and be felt by anyone in any organization (Williams, 2007). However, ostracism is considered insignificant because it is viewed as a mild norm violation (Bedi, 2019). Previous studies revealed that the ostracism that an individual perceives leads to a range of negative work-related consequences, and it also harms the individual psychologically and physically (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2013; Williams, 2007). Other studies have even proven that the social pain resulting from ostracism is as painful as the physical pain (Eisenberger et al., 2003; Riva et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2013). Most of the studies apply the frameworks of belongingness theory (Baumeister, 2012), conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), and need-threat/need fortification theory (Williams, 1997) to understand how an ostracized individual responds to ostracism (Bedi, 2019). The majority of the existing studies on workplace ostracism focused on an ostracized individual's attitudes and behaviors (Ferris et al., 2008; Ferris et al., 2015; Leung et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2015; Zhu et al., 2017). However, studies on the effect of ostracism on the ostracized individual's creativity are still scarce (Kwan et al., 2018; Tu et al., 2019).

The present study attempted to investigate ostracized individuals' responses related to their creativity in the workplace. The interactions built with colleagues may determine the workplace atmosphere, either positively or negatively (Schneider, 1987). Referring to the dynamic componential perspective proposed by Amabile & Pratt (2016), social environment may either promote or hinder creativity through creativity-relevant processes (skills in creative thinking). Based on that perspective, the present study also examined the mediating role of creative process engagement in the effect of workplace ostracism on creativity. Considering that high engagement with creativity-relevant processes is required to deliver new ideas and creative solutions, the present study expected that creative process engagement serves as an important predictor that should be considered in explaining the effect of workplace ostracism on creativity. Ostracism felt by an individual is expected to determine his or her willingness to engage in creativity-relevant processes, which in turn affects his or her creativity in the workplace.

In addition to identifying the ostracized individuals' responses, we also investigate how individuals feel about being ostracized by coworkers. It is intriguing because only a few empirical studies have revealed the causes of workplace ostracism, particularly when perpetrated by the ostracized individual's coworkers (Howard & Cogswell, 2020). Social interaction among the members of an organization at a workplace is inseparable from social comparison, where individuals tend to compare themselves to people around them to judge their own social situation (Festinger, 1954). The result of this social comparison activity potentially triggers either positive or negative emotional reactions, such as pride (van Osch et al., 2018) or envy, dissatisfaction, and regret (Boles & Messick, 1995), as well as resentment and frustration (Feather, 2008). Envy, as a negative emotional reaction resulting from upward social comparison, an event where individuals feel that others possess a better quality, achievement, or possession than they do, and they also expect to have them, or expect others to lose them (Parrott & Smith, 1993). We are interested in further examining the effect of coworker envy on workplace ostracism because the pilot work conducted by Scott and Duffy (2015) has presented strong correlation between envy and ostracism.

The present study is expected to make the following theoretical contribution. First, as previously stated, studies on the antecedents of workplace ostracism are still scarce (Howard & Cogswell, 2020). The present study applied the social comparison theory proposed by Festinger (1954) to explain the role of coworker envy in affecting the emergence of workplace ostracism. Secondly, using the dynamic componential framework of creativity, the present study attempted to further analyze the effect of perceived workplace ostracism on creative process engagement, which, in turn, affects one's creativity in the workplace. The present study is expected to extend the existing concept given that the studies on the effect of workplace ostracism on creativity remain scarce (Kwan et al., 2018; Tu et al., 2019), especially on the horizontal interaction level (among individuals and coworkers), which have never been done before. Lastly, this study was conducted in the context of the Indonesian culture, which is dominated by collectivist values (Hofstede Insights, 2021). In Indonesia, Javanese culture acts as the foundation of the business context, where people generally apply kekeluargaan (kinship) norms, which is a manifestation of collectivism. This norm consists of two value dimensions, namely hormat (respect) and rukun (harmony), as the basis of organizational culture (Hermawan & Loo, 2019). The value of hormat (harmony) is defined as maintaining social harmony in society, including the work environment. People in this culture tend to avoid conflict, and when there is disagreement, individuals are less likely to express it in public (Sunaryo, 2010). It could be that ostracism is ultimately a solution when one dislikes the other, considering that people in this culture tend to be less direct about how they feel. This makes the phenomenon related to workplace ostracism interesting to study in the context of Indonesian culture. Previous research has shown that people from highly collectivist cultures tend to be sensitive to exclusion in the workplace (Anjum et al., 2022).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Workplace Ostracism*

In defining ostracism, there are two perspectives, the ostracizing individual's point of view and the ostracized individual's point of view. From the ostracizing individual's perspective, it is defined as "events when an individual or group omits to take actions that engage another organizational member when it is socially appropriate to do so" (Robinson et al., 2013). Such ostracism may take

the form of avoiding eye contact, leaving the room when the ostracized individual enters the room, not responding to greetings, and other forms. Meanwhile, from the ostracized individual's perspective, ostracism is defined as a degree of an individual's feeling of being overlooked, excluded, and ignored by other individuals or groups at work (Ferris et al., 2008). There are three general forms of workplace ostracism. First, it does not always contain motivation to harm the target (Robinson et al., 2013). Sometimes, people ignore their coworkers because they are busy with their own tasks (Ferris et al., 2008). Second, workplace ostracism occurs when an individual or a group excludes his or her coworkers while it is socially appropriate to involve them. Third, workplace ostracism is characterized by "the omission of positive attention from others rather than the commission of negative attention" (Robinson et al., 2013). Although some experts argue that ostracism is a part of mistreatment and incivility (Ferris et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2013; Scott & Duffy, 2015), not all mistreatments and incivilities are ostracism (Howard & Cogswell, 2020). For instance, assaulting coworkers is categorized as mistreatment but not ostracism, and gossiping coworkers is one of the forms of incivility but not ostracism.

Regardless of its forms and underlying motives, ostracism is a harmful experience for the ostracized individuals that adversely affects them (Ferris et al., 2008). It is harmful because basically, an individual possesses four basic needs to meet, namely the need for self-esteem, the need to belong, the need for control, and the need for a meaningful existence (Williams, 1997, 2001, 2009). Workplace ostracism threatens the fulfilment of these basic needs. Ostracism affects one's sense of belonging because an individual is potentially excluded from his or her group (Ferris et al., 2008). Ostracized individuals also feel that they have made a mistake or done something unfavorable, which in turn, threatens their sense of self-esteem (Williams, 2001). Further, when individuals are ostracized, their sense of control is damaged because they think that what they have done does not lead to others' reactions, and they do not have any idea on how to end the ostracism (Williams, 1997). Ostracism represents a form of "social death" that threatens individuals' sense of meaningful existence (Pyszczynski et al., 1999). Previous studies have proven that ostracism results in harmful effects for organizations, such as anti-performance behavior (Duffy et al., 2002), high employee turnover (O'Reilly et al., 2015), and lower organizational citizenship behavior (Ferris et al., 2008).

2.2. Coworker Envy and Workplace Ostracism

Based on social comparison theory, individuals possess an innate motivation to make self-evaluations (Festinger, 1954). Individuals are engaged in comparison processes in order to determine a standard by which to accurately evaluate themselves. Moreover, Festinger (1954) argues that individuals tend to compare their skills and opinions to others' in order to minimize uncertainty and to evaluate their position when a more objective comparison standard is unavailable. Social comparisons can be categorized into downward and upward social comparisons (Brown et al., 2007). Downward social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves to other individuals with worse characteristics and dimensions, whereas upward social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves to other individuals with better characteristics or dimensions. According to Festinger (1954), an individual tends to compare himself or herself to other individuals viewed as more successful (upward social comparison). Within the organizational context, employees typically view their coworkers as social comparison targets. Some studies revealed that social comparison that triggers envy works on more successful coworkers, which eventually leads to social undermining behaviors (Campbellet al., 2017; Duffy et al., 2012; Kim &

Glomb, 2014; Lam et al., 2011). As a reaction to inferiority, envious individuals may even exclude the envied target who is more superior from their social circle (Festinger, 1954).

Envy reflects a condition where an individual employee feels inferior to others in terms of quality, achievement, or possession, and he attempts to achieve these qualities or to make others lose them (Parrott & Smith, 1993). Being envious is unfavorable and harmful because it involves feelings of inferiority, hostility, and resentment since the individual's desired attributes are enjoyed by others (Smith & Kim, 2007). Accordingly, individuals are motivated to minimize envy (Duffy et al., 2012). Some studies found that when individuals fail to overcome their envy, their envious feelings may lead to deleterious outcomes, including schadenfreude, aggression, and even crime (Duffy et al., 2012; Smith & Kim, 2007). However, it may threaten professionalism. Avoiding interactions with coworkers who make an individual feel inferior may serve as a safe way to overcome envy (Menon & Thompson, 2010), instead of explicitly showing hostility. Given that ostracism tends to be harmless and not easily detected, ostracizing individuals is an easy and discreet way to mistreat others without being worried about violating roles (Björkqvist et al., 1994). Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Coworker envy positively affects workplace ostracism.

2.3. *Workplace Ostracism Affects Creativity via Creative Process Engagement*

Individuals' creativity is affected by coworkers' daily attitudes and behaviors in dyadic interactions and team dynamics (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Accordingly, the present study aimed to examine the effect of ostracism on the ostracized individual's creativity within the framework of the dynamic componential theory of creativity proposed by Amabile and Pratt (2016). The dynamic componential theory of creativity argues that a workplace environment may either limit or promote employees' creativity. Creativity is defined as the production of novel and useful ideas by an individual or small group of individuals working together for organizational products, services, or processes (Amabile, 1988; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Intrinsic motivation is not enough to promote creative outcomes (Amabile, 1983). Individuals also need to engage in creative activities that influence their creativity (Amabile, 1988). Creative process engagement includes (1) problem identification, (2) information searching and encoding, and (3) idea and alternative generation (Amabile, 1983). Individuals need to spend more effort to identify a problem, obtain as much information as possible, and generate numerous ideas and alternatives to produce both novel and useful solutions.

As previously described, workplace ostracism is an individual's perception that he or she is being ignored or forgotten by his or her coworkers (Ferris et al., 2015). This feeling is harmful to individuals and leads to unfavorable experiences in the workplace. Based on the dynamic componential theory of creativity (Amabile & Pratt, 2016), the social environment can either promote or hinder an individual's creativity through creativity-relevant processes. Consistent with this theory, a negative environment an individual perceives due to ostracism may discourage him or her from engaging in activities that support creative performance. It occurs because ostracism provide signs for individuals that they feel themselves worthless. Previous studies have proven that workplace ostracism threatens the ostracized individual's self-esteem (Bedi, 2019; Williams, 2001; Wu et al., 2015). Accordingly, when individuals feel they are being ostracized by their coworkers, they tend to exhibit little intrinsic motivation and effort to effectively and creatively complete their

tasks. It leads to lower engagement in creativity-relevant processes. In other words, ostracism potentially damages individuals' creative process engagement and interest in exploring different alternative, out-of-the-box solutions, which eventually leads to a lower level of creativity. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:
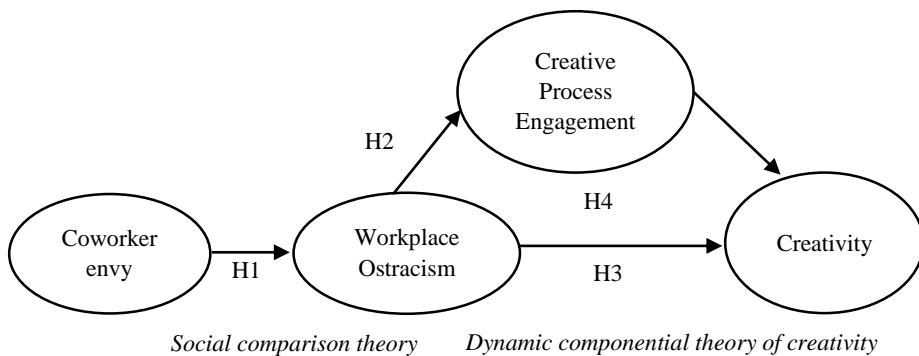
H2: Workplace ostracism negatively affects the creative process engagement.
H3: Workplace ostracism negatively affects employee creativity.
H4: Creative process engagement mediates the effect of workplace ostracism on employee's creativity.

Figure 1 displays the conceptual model of the present study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

3. **METHODOLOGY**

3.1. ***Sample and Procedure***

The participants of this study were employees in the service sector in Indonesia. The authors selected this sector because innovation has become the pinnacle of success factors and therefore, employee creativity is crucial for companies to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Catriana, 2021). Furthermore, the service sector accounts for 55% of Indonesia's GDP. A self-report questionnaire was distributed online to assess employees' perceived coworker envy, perceived coworker ostracism, creative process engagement, and creativity. Snowball sampling was applied by recruiting some key personnel of the companies to ease the data collection process. Then, these key personnel distributed the online questionnaire to their colleagues and encouraged them to participate in the survey. The colleagues continued to share the online questionnaire with others, and this process was repeated until the needed sample size was met. To define the minimum sample size of this research, the inverse square root method and the gamma-exponential method were used (the minimum absolute significant path coefficient in the model was 0.197; the significance level used for hypothesis testing was 0.05; and the power level required was 0.8). Based on these methods, the minimum sample size of this research ranged from 146 to 160. In sum, 592 respondents participated in this study, and 201 responses were complete and met the criteria for

further analyses, which represents a 33.95% response rate. This number exceeded the minimum sample size specified. Table 1 shows the respondent profile of the current study.

Table 1: Respondent Profiles

Gender	n	%
Female	113	56.22
Male	88	43.78
Age	**n**	**%**
25 age and under	49	24.38
26-30 age	62	30.85
31-35 age	30	14.93
36-40 age	30	14.93
40 age and over	30	14.93
Education	**n**	**%**
High school	31	15.42
Diploma	23	11.44
Bachelor	137	68.16
Master	10	4.98
Tenure in the organization	**n**	**%**
Less than 1 year	22	10.95
1-3 years	56	27.86
4-5 years	27	13.43
6 years and over	96	47.76

3.2. Measure

The present study used a self-report questionnaire to assess perceived coworker envy, perceived coworker ostracism, psychological empowerment, and commitment toward organization using a 5-point Likert scale ("strongly disagree" to "agree") that was distributed online. Coworker envy was assessed using three items developed by Vecchio (2005) to find out the extent to which an individual feels coworkers' envy towards him or her. One of the items reads, "Because of my success at work, I am sometimes resented by coworkers." Workplace ostracism was measured using ten items developed by Ferris et al. (2008) to examine the extent to which an individual feels ostracized or ignored by coworkers. One of the items reads, "Others ignored you at work." Creative process engagement was measured using indicators adapted from Zhang & Bartol (2010) comprised by eleven items on a 5-point Likert scale. This questionnaire measured three aspects, namely identifying problems, acquiring and coding information, and formulating ideas, from the managers' perspective of their employees' creative process engagement. One of the items reads, "This employee consults about a broad range of information." Employee creativity was measured using 13 items on a 5-point Likert scale adapted from (Zhou & George, 2001). One of the items reads, "suggests new ways to achieve goals or objectives."

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Result

Table 2: Minimum Value, Maximum Value, Mean, Standard Deviation, and Inter-Variable Correlation

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Coworker Envy	Workplace Ostracism	Creative Process Engagement
					Correlations		
Coworker Envy	1.000	5.000	2.620	0.834			
Workplace Ostracism	1.000	3.200	1.853	0.521	0.375**		
Creative Process Engagement	3.000	5.000	4.119	0.420	-0.125	-0.349**	
Employee Creativity	2.727	5.000	3.770	0.476	0.016	-0.167*	0.453**

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 displays the minimum value, maximum value, mean, standard deviation, and inter-variable correlation. The result of the analysis provides evidence for the formulated hypothesis. Coworker envy is positively associated with workplace ostracism ($r = 0.375$, $p < 0.01$): Workplace ostracism is negatively associated with creative process engagement ($r = -0.349$, $p < 0.01$): Workplace ostracism is negatively associated with employee creativity ($r = -0.167$, $p < 0.05$). This result supports the proposed hypotheses.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied to test the hypotheses by using SmartPLS 3.3.2. PLS-SEM was applied because it can address a number of dependent and independent variables simultaneously (Sholihin et al., 2011). There are two steps in performing a PLS-SEM analysis. First, evaluating the measurement model through validity and reliability tests of the constructs. Second, evaluating the structural model to examine the direct and indirect effects of the developed model.

4.1.1. Measurement Model

To evaluate the measurement model, validity and reliability tests were conducted for each construct. In validating the construct, the convergent and discriminant validity was analyzed. A construct is deemed to have convergent validity if its loading factor is greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Besides, it is recommended to have the Average Variance Extracted of greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 shows that the factor loading score and AVE of all constructs have met the recommended criteria to show convergent validity. Meanwhile, discriminant validity was evaluated based on Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criteria with a 0.90 threshold (Hair et al., 2017). Based on Table 4, all constructs had HTMT values of less than 0.90. The results indicated that all constructs fulfilled the requirements for discriminant validity.

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are used to examine the reliability of an instrument, and it is deemed reliable if the scores of both of them are above 0.80. Furthermore, Hair et al. (2006) argue that Cronbach' alpha score above 0.60 is acceptable. As shown in Table 3, the score of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability have met the criteria. Thus, the instrument was considered reliable.

Table 3: Measurement Model Results

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Coworker Envy	CE_1	0.906	0.909	0.943	0.846
	CE_2	0.936			
	CE_3	0.918			
Workplace Ostracism'	WO_1	0.751	0.937	0.947	0.641
	WO_10	0.717			
	WO_12	0.821			
	WO_2	0.743			
	WO_3	0.769			
	WO_5	0.873			
	WO_6	0.803			
	WO_7	0.847			
	WO_8	0.883			
	WO_9	0.779			
Creative Process Engagement	CPE_2	0.708	0.753	0.835	0.504
	CPE_4	0.681			
	CPE_5	0.757			
	CPE_7	0.667			
	CPE_9	0.732			
Creativity	Crea_10	0.765	0.917	0.930	0.547
	Crea_11	0.785			
	Crea_12	0.770			
	Crea_13	0.757			
	Crea_2	0.724			
	Crea_3	0.737			
	Crea_4	0.760			
	Crea_6	0.636			
	Crea_7	0.718			
	Crea_8	0.641			
	Crea_9	0.818			

Table 4: Discriminant Validity (HTMT$_{0.90}$ Criterion)

Constructs	Coworker Envy	Workplace Ostracism	Creative Process Engagement
Workplace Ostracism	0.403		
Creative Process Engagement	0.162	0.412	
Creativity	0.069	0.190	0.548

4.1.2. *Measurement Model*

After evaluating the measurement model, the structural model analysis was performed to test the proposed hypotheses. This analysis was done by testing the hypothesized direct and indirect effects. The following is the result of the PLS-SEM analysis:
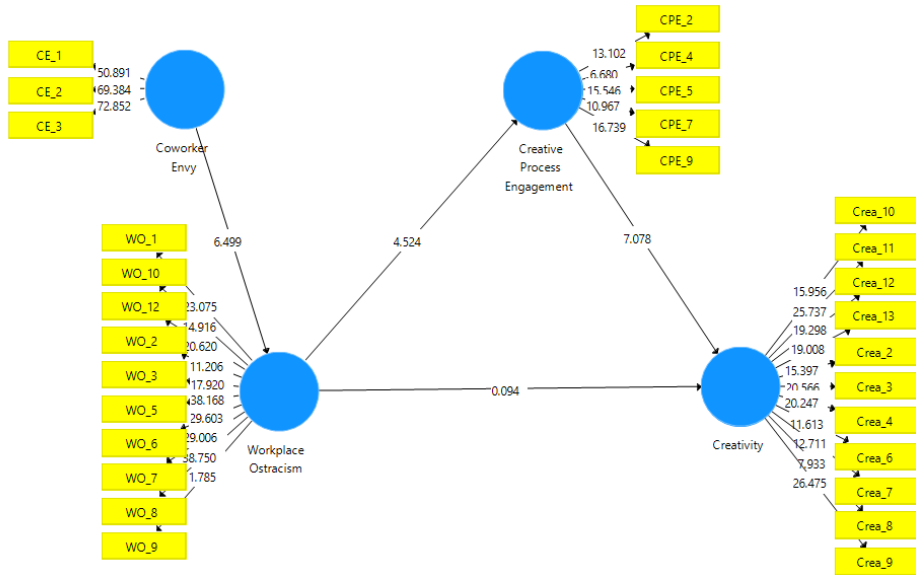
Figure 2: Structural Model Analysis Results

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Results

	Path Coefficients	Standard Deviation	*t* Statistics	*p* Values	Notes
Direct Effect					
Coworker Envy → Workplace Ostracism	0.381	0.059	6.499	0.000	Accepted
Workplace Ostracism → Creative Process Engagement	-0.355	0.078	4.524	0.000	Accepted
Workplace Ostracism → Creativity	-0.007	0.073	0.094	0.925	Rejected
Creative Process Engagement → Creativity	0.466	0.066	7.078	0.000	Accepted
Indirect effect					
Workplace Ostracism → Creativity	-0.165	0.045	3.677	0.000	Accepted

Hypothesis 1 expects that coworker envy positively affects workplace ostracism. The analysis result (Table 5) showed that coworker envy positively and significantly affects workplace ostracism ($ß = 0.381$, *p*-value < 0.01). In other words, H1 is supported. With regard to the consequences of workplace ostracism on organizational outcomes, the following results were obtained. The analysis result revealed that workplace ostracism negatively and significantly affects creative process engagement ($ß = -0.355$, *p*-value < 0.01). In other words, H2 is supported. The test result also demonstrated that workplace ostracism brings a negative, but not significant effect on creativity ($ß = -0.007$, *p*-value $= 0.935 > 0.01$), thus H3 is not supported. However, the indirect effect test showed that workplace ostracism negatively and significantly affects creativity through

creative process engagement (β = -0.165, *p*-value < 0.01). This result indicates that creative process engagement fully mediates the effect of workplace ostracism on creativity, thus H4 is accepted.

4.2. Discussion

The present study attempted to fill the gap of knowledge by responding to previous studies' calls for exploring workplace ostracism phenomena, particularly when it is committed by coworkers. This study identified the potential antecedents of workplace ostracism using social comparison theory, as a result, coworker envy was determined as a construct potentially leading to workplace ostracism. The result of the analysis found that coworker envy positively and significantly affects workplace ostracism. This finding was corroborated by prior research stating that an envious person tends to exclude and ignore the envied person as a means to reduce the discrepancy (Li, Xu, & Kwan, 2023; Mao, He, & Yang, 2021; Wu et al., 2015). Aligned with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), a compared person who is outstanding or substantially different will be perceived as a viable comparison by other group members, and in extreme cases, this person may be excluded from the social group as a response to inferiority. The result of the study indicated that ostracism toward the "envied target" serves as an alternative way when people fail to overcome their envious feelings, which potentially threatens their self-concept. Ostracism is viewed as a strategy to cope with envious feelings without being worried about violating a rule or committing a crime (Björkqvist et al., 1994).

The present study also examines the effect of workplace ostracism on creativity, which is still understudied (Kwan et al., 2018; Tu et al., 2019). Referring to the dynamic componential theory of creativity, the result showed that workplace ostracism indirectly influences creativity through creative process engagement. The result of the study has presented interesting evidence that creative process engagement serves as a mechanism that bridges workplace ostracism and creativity. According to the dynamic componential theory of creativity, the working environment can either foster or impede an individual's creativity (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Consistent with this notion, the current study proves that ostracism could potentially hinder the creativity-relevant process since it is considered as an unpleasant experience in the workplace. Being the target of the social exclusion makes the individual feels unworthy and lowers their self-esteem since they perceive being disregarded, ignored, or excluded by coworkers. This condition reduces their motivation and engagement in the creative process during task accomplishment. In other words, ostracized individuals tend to withdraw from the creativity-relevant process, which consequently leads to lower creativity in the workplace.

4.2.1. Theoretical Contributions

The result of this study confirmed the premise of social comparison theory, where the social comparison process results in emotional and social reactions that are either positive or negative (Festinger, 1954). The present study found that an individual was ostracized by his or her coworkers as a response to disadvantageous social comparison. As stated earlier, a social comparison in which the disadvantaged party feels inferior causes a feeling of envy. This situation has been proven to result in workplace ostracism experienced by the envied targets. The present study supported previous findings on the factors potentially leading to workplace ostracism (Li, Xu, & Kwan, 2021; Mao et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2015), given that there has been limited research addressing the antecedents of workplace ostracism (Howard et al., 2020).

The result of the study also supports the premise of the dynamic componential theory of creativity, that holds that the work environment may either promote or limit an employee's creativity. Ostracism, as a negative work environment for ostracized individuals, lowers their intrinsic motivation and willingness to engage in the creativity-relevant process. Lower engagement in the creativity-relevant process leads to lower creativity in the workplace. This finding gives a new insight into understanding the effect of workplace ostracism on employee creativity, particularly at the level of horizontal interaction (among individuals and coworkers) that has been understudied (Kwan et al., 2018; Tu et al., 2019).

The present study also supports the premise of the affective event theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which states that "the internal influence of employees (such as emotions) and reaction towards a particular event that occurs during their time working influences employees' attitudes and behaviors such as job satisfaction, employees' commitment, as well as job performance" (Thompson & Phua, 2012; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Ostracism is perceived as negative events for ostracized individuals. The result of the study proves that negative events (i.e., ostracism) result in lower creative performance, which is preceded by lower engagement in creativity-relevant processes.

4.2.2. *Practical Implications*

Following the result of the study, a number of recommendations for organization were made. Envy was found to trigger workplace ostracism that eventually adversely affects the employee's creativity. Since creativity is known as a source of innovation to achieve future sustainability, the organization should strive to prevent the feeling of envy among employees, which can lead to workplace ostracism. First, organizations should create justice climate in the workplace either in resource distribution or in policies such as performance appraisal, training, and development, promotion, etc. In this regard, the organization also could improve rare resources to minimize struggle for resources, for instance, by asking managers to spare their time to informally meet their team members. Second, organizations also need to develop a team-based work system intensively in order to encourage cohesiveness among members of the organization. Applying team-based performance recognition could reduce the sense of envy among individual team members. Organizations could provide rewards and empower competent employees by giving them a responsibility to help themselves and their teammates Third, to mitigate the adverse effect of ostracism, organizations should improve the perceived organizational support (POS). It could be done by creating a supportive organizational environment that cares about the employee's needs and well-being. POS is proven to be able to help employees fulfill their socio-emotional needs, such as self-esteem, affiliation, and social approval (Armeli et al., 1998), which are threatened by ostracism.

4.2.3. *Limitations and Future Recommendation*

The present study possessed some limitations. First, this study was done on employees in the service sector in Indonesia, whose culture or characteristics are different from those in other areas. Accordingly, care should be taken when generalizing to other objects. Second, the cross-sectional design this study applied prevents a more in-depth analysis of the phenomena of coworker envy, workplace ostracism, creative process engagement, and creativity because the data were collected

only from a single period of time. Third, the data that was collected was limited to the respondent's response to the question in the questionnaire. Information would be richer when using an in-depth interview with the respondents.

On the other hand, the present study opens an interesting avenue for future studies on workplace ostracism. A number of recommendations for future studies are made. First, regarding the relationship between coworker envy and workplace ostracism, future studies are recommended to include moderating variables as a buffer to minimize the impact of workplace ostracism, for instance, helping behavior. Envy may be lowered through a culture that maximizes helping behaviors (Menon & Thompson, 2010). Second, future studies are recommended to consider the use of moderating variables in analyzing the negative consequences of workplace ostracism, such as supervisory or organizational support. Third, future studies are recommended to involve more participants from other sectors, such as not-for-profit organizations such as hospitals, schools, etc., in order to capture a better understanding of the workplace ostracism phenomenon.

5. CONCLUSION

The result supports our contention that coworker envy has a positive and significant effect on workplace ostracism. The results also suggest that workplace ostracism directly has a negative and significant effect on creative process engagement but has no effect on employee creativity directly. Surprisingly, creative process engagement fully mediates the influence of workplace ostracism on employee creativity.

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