6. DISCUSSION, CONTRIBUTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

6.1 Discussion

The findings of the study bear out the proposed negative relationship between workplace ostracism and work engagement. This is expected as workplace ostracism negatively affects the basic human needs (Williams, 1997) and the self-regulating ability of an individual (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciaroco, & Twenge, 2005), thus hindering him/her from investing himself/herself completely into his/her work. The negative relationship between workplace ostracism and work engagement was found in the case of males as well as females.

We also find that the role ambiguity combines with the ambiguity inherent in the phenomenon of workplace ostracism (Robinson, O’Reilly, & Wang, 2012) to generate stress which adversely affects the work engagement of individuals. When we tested this hypothesis across gender groups, this combined ambiguity was found to have a significant negative relationship with work engagement only for females.

The individuals who have worked for a longer time at a certain place have invested part of their self-esteem in the social fabric of the workplace (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Van Dyne, Vandewalle, Kostova, Latham, & Cummings, 2000) and hence their work engagement is affected to a greater extent by perceptions of ostracism as compared to others. However, this hypothesized relation was not supported when we tested it across gender groups.

Psychological meaningfulness is found to have a negative relationship with workplace ostracism. The more a person derives meaning out of his job, the less weight he/she will attach to the attitudes of others towards him/her and consequently the impact of such attitudes on his/her work engagement will be less. This hypothesized relation was borne out across gender groups. Workplace ostracism was found to mediate the relationship between psychological meaningfulness and work engagement and this held true across gender groups.
The proposed negative relation between perceived organizational support and workplace ostracism is not supported, thus ruling out workplace ostracism as a mediator of the relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement. Maybe the reason for this is that the perceived support from the organization is not sufficient to compensate for the perception of being excluded and ignored by the individuals. Maybe the perceived support from the supervisor is more significant than the perceived support from the organization. However, when we tested this relation across gender groups, perceived organizational support was found to be negatively related to workplace ostracism only for females. This finding is consistent with previous findings in the literature concerning social support. Females have been found to use social support more often and to a greater extent than males (Ptacek, Smith, & Zanas, 1992; Wohlgemuth & Betz, 1991). Females are more likely to seek out social support as compared to males (Belle, 1987). Monnier et al. (1998) suggested that the reason behind this differential utilization of support may be the result of their socialization experiences. Further, workplace ostracism partially mediated the relation between perceived organizational support and work engagement for females.

6.2 Contribution to theory

The study makes contributions to the theory in the many ways. Consistent with the earlier studies on the harmful effects of workplace ostracism, we found that workplace ostracism has a significant negative relationship with work engagement.

We found that role ambiguity has a significant negative relationship with work engagement. Role ambiguity is a type of stress which decreases the work engagement. The findings of the study suggest that the interaction of role ambiguity with workplace ostracism has a significant negative relationship with work engagement. The ambiguity in the role which an individual has to perform combines with the ambiguity inherent in the phenomenon
of workplace ostracism and the stress induced by this combined ambiguity reduces the work engagement of the individual.

We also found that the interaction of the work experience at the current workplace with workplace ostracism has a significant negative relationship with work engagement. Individuals who have spent a longer time in a certain workplace have invested their self-esteem in the social fabric of that workplace to a greater extent. The work engagement of such individuals is more severely affected by workplace ostracism.

The study found that psychological meaningfulness has a significant negative relation with workplace ostracism. The extent to which people are able to derive meaning from their work, they are less affected by the perceptions of ostracism. We found that workplace ostracism partially mediates the relation between psychological meaningfulness and work engagement. Psychological meaningfulness decreases the salience of the perception about others’ attitudes and behaviors towards oneself, thus preventing the potential negative effects of the phenomenon of workplace ostracism on the engagement of the individuals.

The study also makes a contribution by assessing the transferability of the model across the gender groups. The findings of the model across the two gender groups suggest that perceived organizational support has a significant negative relationship with workplace ostracism only for females. We find that the perception of a supportive organization is important for females to decrease the salience of workplace ostracism.

We found that, in the case of females, workplace ostracism partially mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement. The perception of a supportive organization compensates for the lack of social exchange with the co-workers and in doing so tones down the negative effects of workplace ostracism on their work engagement.
The study found that, in the case of females, the interaction of role ambiguity with workplace ostracism has a significant negative relationship with work engagement. The stress that is the result of the combination of the ambiguity in the role with the ambiguity inherent in workplace ostracism decreases the work engagement of females.

6.3 Implications for managers

The study has the several implications for managers. It is imperative that the managers ensure that their employees find their jobs meaningful. The jobs can be made more meaningful by crafting them such that they have more autonomy, utilize several skills of the employee doing them or provide task identity to the employee performing the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This is important for reducing the perceptions of ostracism in the workplace which have a negative effect on the work engagement of the employees. This is significant since the managers cannot reduce the phenomenon of workplace ostracism, which is harmful for the work engagement of the employees, by any direct intervention.

Managers should reduce the ambiguity in the roles which the employees have to perform as doing so will increase the work engagement of their employees. Managers should also see to the fact that the employees perceive the organization as being supportive since the perception of organizational support helps in increasing the work engagement of the employees. In the case of females, the perception of organizational support is significant in increasing their work engagement in one another way also. The perception of organizational support reduces the salience of workplace ostracism thereby reducing its negative effects on their work engagement. Thus, managers can reduce the negative effects of workplace ostracism on the work engagement of female employees by creating the perception of a supportive organization.
6.4 Limitations and directions for future research

This study has several limitations as well. Data for independent and the dependent variables was collected at different times in order to reduce the common method variance. The time period between the phase one (in which the data for independent variable was collected) and the phase two (in which the data for dependent variable was collected) was only thirty-five days. Common method variance can be reduced to a greater extent by increasing the time lag between the collection of the independent and dependent variables. Future studies may be able to achieve better results by increasing this time lag.

Although 500 individuals filled the questionnaire for the independent variable, only 326 out of them were available for filling the second questionnaire (for the dependent variable). By putting in extra efforts, this number of 326 could have gone up.

Another limitation of the study is that the data was collected from only one occupational group i.e. teachers. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable across occupational groups. Future studies may empirically test the model across occupational groups.

The data was collected from colleges and universities in northern and central parts of the country. There might be some region-specific characteristics especially across gender groups. As such, the results are not generalizable across the country. Future studies may endeavor to test the model across the country.

As the diversity of the workforce is increasing, we find people belonging to different castes and religions entering the workplace. As some of these castes and religions have been facing ostracism in the society, future studies should endeavor to test the effects of workplace ostracism on them.
The study has the limitation of considering only age and gender as control variables. Education level (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009; Leung et al., 2011) and marital status (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009) have been used as control variables in other studies.

Another limitation of the study is that the impact of gender mix has not been explored. This may be taken up by future studies. However, literature on the topic of gender mix may throw some light on the issue. According to Simpson (2000), equality in the numbers of men and women in top management team “is possibly the single most important factor in creating a culture in which women feel comfortable and valued” (p. 5). Men in workplaces with equitable gender mix have lower job satisfaction, lower self-esteem, and higher job-related depression than men in workplaces with gender mix to the either extreme (Wharton & Baron, 1987).

The study sought to identify the contextual factors impacting workplace ostracism and its relation with work engagement. Because of this, psychographic variables were not considered. This is a limitation of the study. A number of studies in the recent past have explored the impact of psychographic variables on workplace ostracism (Leung, Wu, Chen, & Young, 2011; Wu, Wei, & Hui, 2011; Zhao, Peng, & Sheard, 2013).