

Vicarious guilt and shame among witnesses of ostracism: Effects of vicarious guilt and shame on the witnesses' behavior toward ostracized persons

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社会的排斥目撃者における罪悪感と恥—恥と罪悪感が被排斥者に対する目撃者の行動に及ぼす影響—
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要約

本研究の目的は、社会的排斥場面の目撃者による被排斥者への援助行動を促進する要因を検討することである。人にとって社会的つながりはなくてはならないものであるため、被排斥経験後には他者との新しい社会的つながりへの欲求が高まる。しかし、被排斥者自身では社会的つながりを築くのが難しい場合もあり、そのような場合には、社会的排斥を目撃した者による被排斥者への援助行動が重要となる。これまでの研究では、排斥場面目撃者の感情反応について、十分に検討されてこなかった。そこで本研究では、目撃者が抱く罪悪感と恥に着目し、これらの感情が後続の行動に及ぼす影響について検討するため、インターネット調査を実施した。社会的排斥を目撃した際のことを想起してもらい、その時の感情や、その後の行動などについて尋ねた。その結果、目撃者が罪悪感を抱くと被排斥者への援助行動が導かれることが示唆された。他方で、恥を感じた場合には、その出来事や被排斥者を回避しようとする動機づけが高まることが示唆された。

Key words

social exclusion, vicarious ostracism, vicarious emotion, observers of ostracism, helping behavior

1. Introduction

Humans cannot survive without social connections and have a fundamental need for interpersonal attachments (i.e., the need to belong) (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Therefore, the lack of social connections causes problems such as mental and physical maladjustment (for a review, see Williams, 2007). After being ostracized, people attempt to find new social connections; that is to say, they seek reconnection with others (e.g., Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007; cf. Sunami, Nadzan, & Jaremka, 2019).

However, if a person is chronically ostracized, a sense of helplessness and/or depression develops, which leads to the loss of motivation to reconnect with others. Therefore, in some cases, those who have been ostracized can find it difficult to find social connections by themselves (cf. Williams, 2009). In the present study, I examined factors that promote helping behavior (the provision of social support or connection, among other things) toward ostracized persons by a party who is not directly involved with the ostracism (a third party), in particular, a witness of the ostracism.

1.1 Ostracism and reconnection

Ostracism refers to being ignored and avoided by a group or individuals, and thus rendered an outcast (Williams, 2007, 2009). In the evolutionary process, humans have solved various problems associated with survival, such as reproduction and the acquisition of resources, by living with others in a group. For example, securing a food supply and protection from predators could be achieved by cooperating with others. In addition, members of a group shared food and resources and helped each

other in childbirth and child rearing. This way, humans would not have been able to survive without connections to a group and to other people and therefore have a fundamental need for such connections (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Therefore, being ostracized from social connection is a major risk in terms of health and psychological adjustment. Studies on loneliness have identified that loneliness could lead to anxiety and low self-esteem (e.g., Russell, 1982), depression (e.g., Ortega, 1969), and even suicide (e.g., Wenz, 1977). In addition, the results of a large-scale longitudinal survey have showed that depressive symptoms were more common in people with less social connection and that their risk of death was higher (Berkman et al., 2004; Eng, Rimm, Fitzmaurice, & Kawachi, 2002).

Ostracism not only leads to physical and psychological maladjustment but also threatens an individual's need to belong (e.g., Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). Therefore, people who are ostracized show interest in making connections with others or behave prosocially to avoid the risks of ostracism, to satisfy their need to belong, and to reconnect with others (e.g., Jamieson, Harkins, & Williams, 2010). For example, participants in an experiment who anticipated that they would be subject to ostracism in the future had a stronger desire to participate in subsequent tasks with others rather than being alone (Maner et al., 2007).

After experiencing ostracism, reconnection with others is important. However, there are cases in which ostracized people have difficulty in finding social connections on their own because of the sense of helplessness and depression or the loss of motivation to reconnect (cf. Williams, 2009). For example, an interview with people who experienced ostracism over a long period of time highlighted that in many cases, psychological resilience was lost because of depression or the sense of helplessness (Williams, 1997). In addition, in a quasi-experimental

study of people who had suffered chronic ostracism (longer than 3 months), the degree of helplessness and depression was higher when compared with participants in other groups (e.g., those with chronic physical pain, chronic diseases, and healthy people) (Riva, Montali, Wirth, Curioni, & Williams, 2017).

Past studies often examined efforts made by ostracized people themselves to reconnect. However, as discussed above, ostracized people may develop learned helplessness or physical and psychological maladjustment, and it may be difficult for them to become reconnected by themselves. This means that focusing on ostracized people alone is not sufficient to solve problems associated with them becoming reconnected. Therefore, there is a need to examine factors that allow for reconnection and that are independent of the ability of ostracized people in that regard; that is to say, there is a need to examine the helping behavior of witnesses of ostracism toward ostracized people (i.e., the provision of social connection and support). In the present study, I focused on the vicarious guilt felt by witnesses of ostracism and examined whether this vicarious guilt would promote helping behavior toward ostracized people.

1.2 Vicarious guilt and witnesses to ostracism

The focus of this study was the emotional reactions of the witnesses of ostracism, particularly on the guilt (vicarious guilt) that they experienced even though they were not perpetrators of ostracism. Vicarious guilt refers to the guilt experienced by one because of the undesirable actions of others despite one not being a perpetrator (Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005). Guilt experienced due to one's own wrongdoing has been found to increase reparative motivations toward the victim (e.g. Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996; Wicker, Payne, & Morgan, 1983). Because guilt is accompanied with counterfactual thinking ("I should not have done that," "I should have done something different") (Niedenthal, Tangney, & Gavanski, 1994), individuals tend to feel that they could have controlled the event that caused them to feel guilty (Wicker et al., 1983). Therefore, when a person experiences guilt, they also feel a reparative motivation toward the victim.

Lickel et al. (2005) predicted that when a person experienced vicarious guilt from the wrongdoing of others, they would take prosocial action to compensate the victim, as shown in Figure 1. A factor that might influence vicarious guilt is

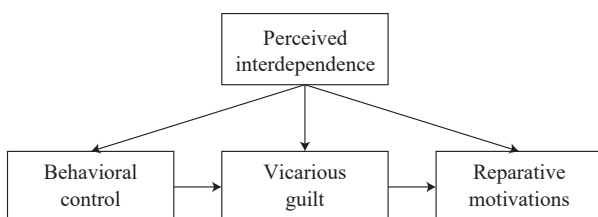


Figure 1: Model of the effects that perceived interdependence, behavioral control, and vicarious guilt have on reparative motivations
Source: Lickel et al., 2005.

an interdependent relationship between the witnesses and the perpetrator(s). An interdependent relationship refers to the degree of social interaction, possession of joint goals, and degree of shared behavior norms (e.g., Lickel et al., 2000; 2005). When in an interdependent relationship, people feel that they have some control over (e.g., they can prevent) the actions of the perpetrator, which leads to vicarious guilt and the need for reparative and/or helping behavior toward the victim.

1.3 Vicarious shame and witnesses to ostracism

However, the vicarious emotions experienced by witnesses of ostracism are not limited to guilt. Lickel et al. (2005) examined the vicarious shame experienced by witnesses of other's wrongdoing. According to Tangney, while shame and guilt were similar emotions, the motivations and actions resulting from these emotions were different. When a person feels guilt, they have a reparative motivation toward the victim; however, when shame is experienced, there exists the desire to separate and hide from the event because shame is caused by negative evaluation of the self, which increases the concern regarding evaluation by others, which is accompanied by a sense of helplessness (Tangney, 1995). Thus, shame motivates people to distance themselves from the event, and vicarious shame motivates a distancing behavior that is similar to the one motivated by personal shame (Lickel et al., 2005).

Vicarious shame is affected by the extent to which one's social and personal identity are tied to other ingroup members (i.e., identity relevance); in other words, the evaluation of social identity is affected by the ingroup evaluation, which, in many cultures, is the basis of identity (e.g., Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Therefore, when identity relevance is strong, there is concern that wrongdoing by other members lowers the evaluation of the ingroup, which threatens the image of the self. When a threat to the self from another's wrongdoing is sensed, vicarious shame is incited (Welten, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2012), which increases the motivation to become more distant from the event (Figure 2).

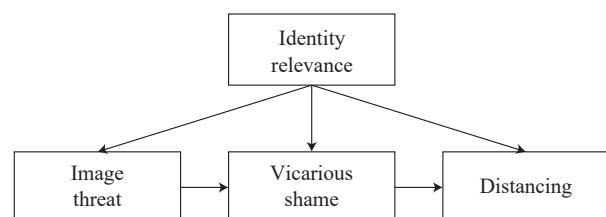


Figure 2: Model of the effects that identity relevance, image threats, and vicarious shame have on distancing
Source: Lickel et al., 2005.

1.4 The present study

Given the foregoing background, this study examined whether witnesses to ostracism developed helping behavior (reparative of ostracism) motivations toward the ostracized if they experienced vicarious guilt; the effect of the interdependence

between the witnesses and the perpetrators; and the acknowledgment of the witnesses' ability to control the behavior of the perpetrators and their own vicarious guilt (Figure 1). This study also examined the effect of identity relevance and threat to individual image (Figure 2) and whether vicarious shame motivated witnesses to distance themselves from the ostracism. To examine the foregoing points, an Internet research company was employed to conduct a survey.

2. Method

2.1 Participants and procedure

A preliminary survey was conducted with individuals aged 20 years and older who were registered with a Japanese Internet research company; those who claimed that they had witnessed an ostracism event without being involved themselves (continuously over a long period of time) were selected. After providing the objective of the study, confirming the anonymous nature of the data collection and analysis, and declaring that the survey results would be publicized in academic presentations and journals, informed consent was obtained, resulting in 239 participants (102 men, 137 women: $M_{age} = 40.6$, $SD_{age} = 10.7$).

First, participants were asked to remember when they had witnessed continuous and long-term ostracism at school, in their workplace, or in other places and to provide a short description of the time, location, people involved, and actions of those people. Subsequently, participants were asked to describe their feelings and thoughts at the instance at which they had witnessed such events.

2.2 Questionnaire items

2.2.1 Vicarious guilt and shame

There were 20 items on the feelings and emotions experienced by the participants about the time they had witnessed a scene of ostracism on a 5-point scale from "1: I did not feel at all" to "5: I felt strongly," for which the question order was randomly assigned for each participant. Based on Lickel et al., (2005), there were three items on vicarious guilt (guilt, regret, and remorse) and four items on vicarious shame (ashamed, embarrassed, disgraced, and humiliated), with the remaining questions being filler items selected from the Japanese scale (Terasaki, Kishimoto, & Koga, 1992).

2.2.2 Appraisals and motivations.

Fifteen questions were developed on the basis of Lickel et al. (2005) focusing on the participants' feelings toward the perpetrators, the victims of ostracism, and the event in which they had witnessed ostracism, using a 5-point scale from "1: not at all" to "5: very much," and with the question order being randomly assigned to each participant. The details of questions are described below.

- Perceived interdependence and identity relevance:
There were two questions on the degree of interdependence between the participants and the perpetrators of the ostracism:

"I could have stopped or changed the everyday behavior of the perpetrator if I wanted"; and "I knew the perpetrator well prior to the event." There were also two questions on the degree of identity relevance between the participant and the perpetrator: "I worried that others would have a negative image of me at my classes and/or workplace because of the perpetrator's behavior"; and "I thought that the image of my classes and/or workplace would be negatively affected because of the event."

- Behavioral control and image threat:

There were three questions on the degree of acknowledgment of the behavioral control over the witnessed event and/or perpetrator(s) of the ostracism: "I should have done something to prevent it"; "My actions and speech might have been involved in the cause of the event"; and "I was partially responsible for the event." There were three questions on the threat of the event against the participants' self-image: "I thought the event would have a negative impact on my image"; "I worried that the event would be associated with me when others evaluate me"; and "I worried that the perpetrator(s)' actions would affect how others see me."

- Reparative motivations and distancing:

There were two questions on the reparative behavior of the participants toward the ostracized: "I attempted to do something for the victim after the event" and "I think there was something that I could have done after the event to support the victim." There were also three questions on the distancing of the participants from the event and those involved: "I did not want to be involved with the perpetrator(s)"; "I wanted to leave the site of the event"; and "I did not want people to think that I was involved with the event."

3. Results

As instructed, all participants recalled and wrote about an event in which they witnessed ostracism. Eighty-three percent of participants recalled the events within one year or ongoing events. The two most common places where they witnessed ostracism were workplace (81 %) and school (14 %).

3.1 Variables

The descriptive statistics and Cronbach's α for each variable are shown in Table 1. Even though some variables had low Cronbach's α , the item-total correlations were sufficiently high for all items ($r_s > .66$). The correlation coefficients between each variable are shown in Table 2.

3.2 Effects of perceived interdependence, behavioral control, and vicarious guilt on reparative motivations

On the basis of the previous model (Figure 1), a covariance structure analysis was performed; however, the results did not provide a sufficient goodness of fit index ($\chi^2(1) = 11.915$, $p = .001$; RMSEA = .214, 95% CI: [.097,.351]; SRMR = .053; CFI = .922; GFI = .976; AGFI = .762; AIC = 29.965). The model

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's α for each variable

	<i>M (SD)</i>	Cronbach's α
Vicarious guilt	2.90 (0.99)	.81
Vicarious shame	3.20 (0.85)	.65
Perceived interdependence	2.98 (0.93)	.22
Identity relevance	3.13 (1.09)	.42
Behavioural control	2.53 (0.90)	.68
Image threat	2.69 (0.91)	.64
Reparative motivations	3.21 (1.07)	.74
Distancing	3.15 (0.94)	.57

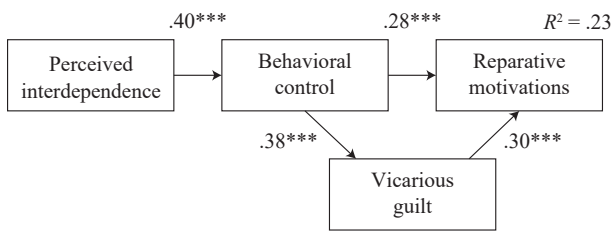


Figure 3: Effects of perceived interdependence, behavioral control, and vicarious guilt on reparative motivations
Note: The path coefficients are standardized. *** $p < .001$.

presented in previous studies summarized the results of the sequential analyses in one figure but did not present the results when all variables and paths were simultaneously inputted. Therefore, a new model was proposed in which the paths with little effects were removed and in which a path was added between variables with high correlation coefficients (Figure 3). The results showed a sufficient goodness of fit index ($\chi^2 (2) = 3.919, p = .141$; RMSEA = .063, 95% CI: [.000,.172]; SRMR = .029; CFI = .986; GFI = .992; AGFI = .960; AIC = 19.919).

A mediation analysis was also performed using three variables: behavioral control, vicarious guilt, and reparative motivations. First, the direct effect of behavioral control on reparative motivation was examined, from which there was found a significant effect ($\beta = .39, p < .001$). Then, a mediation variable (vicarious guilt) was input, from which both paths—from behavioral control to vicarious guilt ($\beta = .38, p < .001$) and from vicarious guilt to reparative motivation ($\beta = .30, p < .001$)—were found to

be significant. The direct effect of behavioral control on reparative motivation decreased to $\beta = .28 (p < .001)$. Finally, the Sobel test was performed on the indirect effect, from which the indirect effect was also found to be significant ($z = 3.84, p < .001$).

Therefore, the results of analysis of the new model showed that perceived interdependence increased behavioral control, which, in turn, increased reparative motivations toward the ostracized. It also showed that the effect of behavioral control on reparative motivations was partially mediated by vicarious guilt.

3.3 The effects of identity relevance, image threat, and vicarious shame on distancing

On the basis of the model in Figure 2, a covariance structure analysis was performed, from which it was found that the values were insufficient for some of the indices but that the fit was relatively good (Figure 4; $\chi^2 (1) = 7.990, p = .005$; RMSEA = .171, 95%CI: [.056,.310]; SRMR = .043; CFI = .956; GFI = .984; AGFI = .838; AIC = 26.023). The analytical results indicated that identity relevance increased image threat and vicarious shame and that vicarious shame and identity relevance led to distancing.

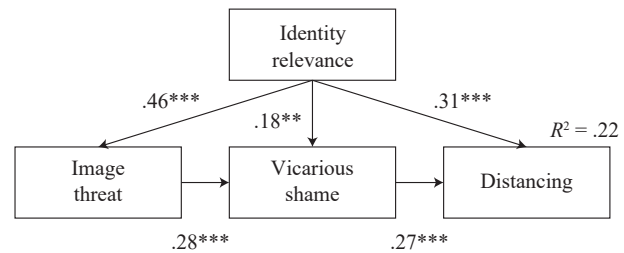


Figure 4: Effects of identity relevance, image threat, and vicarious shame on distancing
Note: Path coefficients were standardized. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the effect of vicarious guilt as a factor for the promotion of helping behavior (behavior to compensate for the damage caused by ostracism) by the witnesses of ostracism who are not directly involved in the ostracism. Vicarious shame was also found to be an emotion experienced by witnesses of ostracism. As vicarious shame has been assumed to

Table 2: Correlation coefficients between the variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Vicarious guilt	—						
2. Vicarious shame	0.61 ***	—					
3. Perceived interdependence	0.11 †	0.10	—				
4. Identity relevance	0.27 ***	0.31 ***	0.02	—			
5. Behavioural control	0.38 ***	0.31 ***	0.40 ***	0.22 ***	—		
6. Image threat	0.42 ***	0.37 ***	0.15 *	0.46 ***	0.41 ***	—	
7. Reparative motivations	0.40 ***	0.34 ***	0.24 ***	0.35 ***	0.39 ***	0.31 ***	—
8. Distancing	0.29 ***	0.37 ***	-0.17 **	0.39 ***	0.05	0.38 ***	0.04

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$

$n = 239$

motivate distancing from the event of ostracism, this study also examined the effect of vicarious shame on motivations to distance oneself from the situation. As predicted, the results indicated that vicarious guilt increased reparative motivation toward the ostracized and that vicarious shame motivated the witnesses to distance themselves from events of ostracism.

The effects of perceived interdependence, behavioral control, and vicarious guilt on reparative motivations were examined, from which Lickel et al.'s (2005) model in Figure 1 was found not to have a sufficient goodness of fit index, probably because the previous model did not simultaneously input all variables and paths in the analysis. Lickel et al.'s (2005) study, when examining the effect of perceived interdependence on vicarious guilt and reparative motivations, only examined the direct effects of perceived interdependence on vicarious guilt and reparative motivations. Therefore, when the indirect effects due to other variables are tested as in the present study, the direct effects of perceived interdependence on vicarious guilt and reparative motivations can disappear. Lickel et al.'s conclusions, however, that "one's perceptions of interdependence with that person are hypothesized to be associated with one's appraisals of having control over the occurrence of the event, which in turn are associated with the degree of guilt and reparative motivations" (Lickel et al., 2005, p. 148) were consistent with results of the present study. Another difference between the previous model and the present model (Figure 3) is that behavioral control was found to directly affect reparative motivations, whereby vicarious guilt mediated the effect of behavioral control. As the direct effect of behavioral control on reparative motivations was not examined in the previous study, its presence was not discussed. Behavioral control is a factor in recognizing the possibility of controlling the behavior of perpetrators; however, in both the previous and the present studies, questions about behavioral control included items regarding the sense of responsibility for the witnessed event. Therefore, this sense of responsibility seems to have an effect on reparative motivations. At the same time, the sense of responsibility resulted in guilt (e.g., Tangney, 1991) and guilt possibly increased the reparative motivations.

The results for vicarious shame were in line with those of the previous model (Lickel et al., 2005; see Figures 2 and 4) that identity relevance led to a sense of threat to self-image because of others' wrongdoings, which, then, incited vicarious shame, ultimately increasing the motivation to distance themselves from the event. As shown in the previous study, identity relevance was found to have a direct effect on vicarious shame. When identity relevance was high, the other ingroup members played an important role in social and individual identity. When individual social identity is damaged by wrongdoing by others, it leads to negative evaluation of the self and personal shame, which, in turn, motivates the desire to distance the self from the perpetrator(s) and the event so as to prevent being negatively evaluated because of others' wrongdoing.

While vicarious guilt has been found to lead to reparative motivations toward the ostracized, vicarious shame could motivate distancing. From the perspective of promoting helping behavior in those not directly involved in the ostracism toward the ostracized, while evoking vicarious guilt, vicarious shame must be regulated. The interdependence of the witnesses and the perpetrator is the factor that increases vicarious guilt, and identity relevance between the participant and the perpetrator is the factor that increases vicarious shame. In other words, to regulate vicarious shame while evoking vicarious guilt, interdependence between the witnesses and the perpetrator needs to be increased and identity relevance between the witnesses and the perpetrator needs to be reduced (or at least not increased). As interdependence is involved with close interactions, it is important to promote communication between group members to increase interdependence between witnesses and the perpetrator (e.g., Gaertner & Schopler, 1998; Lickel et al., 2000). Having joint group goals (or common goals) would be also effective strategy in increasing interdependence (e.g., Gaertner & Schopler, 1998; D. W. Johnson & R. Johnson, 1989).

Many previous studies have examined strategies to increase identity relevance between members to improve group performance (e.g., van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 2003). However, while identity relevance has the advantages, the present study found that when there was ostracism in a group, the third party did not interfere. To avoid the inhibiting helping behavior of witnesses toward the ostracized, identity relevance should not be increased any more than is necessary. Alternatively, as the threat to self-image evokes vicarious shame, the distancing behavior of witnesses from ostracism could be prevented by not letting others' wrongdoing threaten one's self-image. The results of the present study provide a perspective for the promotion of helping behavior toward the ostracized and illuminate possible solutions to prevent witnesses from distancing themselves from the scene of ostracism.

This study also has limitations when considering the promotion of helping behavior in witnesses toward the ostracized. Even if the motivation for helping behavior toward the ostracized is increased, it is not known as to whether this would lead to actual helping behavior. In the present study, reparative motivations were measured on the basis of two questions. In one question, the witnesses were asked whether they thought there was something they could have done after the event to support the victim but were not asked whether they took any action, meaning it is quite possible that a witness may have thought there was something they could have done but did not actually attempt to help the ostracized. In the other question, however, they were asked whether they attempted to do something for the victim after the event. Therefore, those who scored high on this item probably did something to help the ostracized. A mediation analysis that used the latter question, behavioral control, and vicarious guilt had results similar to those of the mediation analysis that used the combined index for reparative motivations. Thus, the percep-

tion of behavioral control and vicarious guilt may lead to helping behavior toward the ostracized; however, this needs further examination. As the present study was based only on survey results, it was not possible to conclude that there was a causal relationship. Future studies are needed to clarify this point. Similarly, experimental studies are needed to assess whether the vicarious shame experienced from witnessing ostracism leads to distancing and whether helping behavior toward the ostracized could be promoted while reducing vicarious shame.

Acknowledgment

This research was supported by Teikyo University Special Grant for Research 3000009. The author would like to thank Crimson Interactive Pvt. Ltd. for their assistance in manuscript translation and editing.

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(Received February 14, 2020; accepted March 17, 2020)