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Behind the Scenes of Silence: Understanding Workplace Ostracism in the Arab Gulf States

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Declaration

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Posts and Presentations Arising from this Thesis

Blog Post

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Practitioner Publication

Al-Barwani, N., Farley, S. and Leach, D. *Can I have your attention please? Why you need to address workplace ostracism.* A report to KPMG UK. Beyond Platform, 14th June 2022.

Conference Presentations

Al-Barwani, N., Farley, S. and Leach, D. *Workplace Ostracism: The Case of the Sultanate of Oman*. The 21st EWOP Congress: The Future is Now: The Changing World of Work, Katowice, Poland, 24-27th May 2023.

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Other Presentations

Al-Barwani, N. *Silent Treatment at Work*. Presentation to MBA Students, Sultan Qaboos University, College of Economics and Political Science, Oman,10th November 2021.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates workplace ostracism, which occurs when an individual or group refrains from taking actions that involve engaging another worker when doing so is socially appropriate. From prior research we know that in this scenario, the target may not be able to prove that they were ostracised given its silent nature; thus, the ostracising experience is confirmed as painful. Yet a complication comes about because cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the targets' perception of ostracism and influencing the strategies they employ to cope with it. This complication is of concern because it is still unknown how employees' nationality influences their perception of the ostracising experience in the workplace and the coping mechanisms, they adopt to buffer its negative effects.

The course of action to address this concern entails shedding light on two contrasting contexts to thoroughly investigate how cultural identity influences employees' perceptions and coping mechanisms in response to workplace ostracism. Thus, this thesis aims at answering a central research question, which is: 'how does the experience of workplace ostracism differ in the Arabian Gulf States workplaces, compared to the Western workplaces?' Two studies following a cross-cultural mixed-methods approach were conducted to investigate this matter.

Study 1 followed a qualitative strand involving interviews with 15 Omani employees, who had experienced ostracism generating narratives that highlighted context-specific forms of ostracism and coping mechanisms that served as the foundation for developing hypotheses in the second study. While Study 2 adopted a quantitative approach, employing a cross-sectional self-report questionnaire completed by 736 employees from Oman and Britain across different sectors.

Meta-inference was drawn from the integration of the two datasets revealing a commonality in the manifestation of workplace ostracism across cultures. Yet, noteworthy contextual factors were identified, underscoring cross-cultural differences. Hence, the central contribution of this work lies in the integration of contextual factors into the examination of workplace ostracism in cross-cultural research. The findings provide practitioners with the knowledge to effectively address such issues. The study's findings, theoretical and practical contributions, and strengths and limitations are discussed, and potential avenues for future research are also explored.

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List of Abbreviations

WDB	Workplace Deviant Behaviour
CWB	Counter Productive Behaviours
WO	Workplace Ostracism
OB	Organisational Behavior
CCR	Cross-cultural Research
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
MMR	Mixed-methods Research
HR	Human Recourse
RQ	Research Question
OCB	Organisational Citizenship Behaviours
QUAL	Qualitative
QUANT	Quantitative
CMB	Common Method Bias
LCC	Low-context Culture
HCC	High-context Culture
UK	United Kingdom
ESD	Exploratory Sequential Design
TA	Thematic Analysis
F2F	Face-to-face
CR	Critical Realism
SET	Social Exchange Theory
WO-10	Workplace Ostracism original 10-items scale
WO-16	Workplace Ostracism modified 16-items scale
ID	Independent Variable
DV	Dependent Variable
HRM	Human Recourse Management
COR	Conservation of Resource Theory

"It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves."

-Ralf Ellison, *The Invisible Man* (1952, p.3)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Left Out and Left Behind

Every day at work, we encounter a number of stimuli in social interactions, including both inclusion and exclusion, all interpreted through our lens of perspectives, cultural and beliefs values and personal traits. Ostracism is a social phenomenon which involves being excluded or ignored by others (Ferris et al., 2017). It is a prevalent aspect of our daily lives, whether we acknowledge it or not, shaped by contextual factors and societal norms (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017; Robinson and Schabram, 2019). The term '**ostracism**,' as per the Oxford Dictionary (2016), traces its origins back to Athens in the 5th century BC, where it was employed as a tactic to exile a citizen for a period of ten years, a practice known as *ostrakismos* (Williams, 2007). Even during that historical period, the rationale behind ostracising individuals remained unclear—was it due to opposition to a leader's idea, or rooted in non-political hatred and personal motives? (MacDowell, 2016).

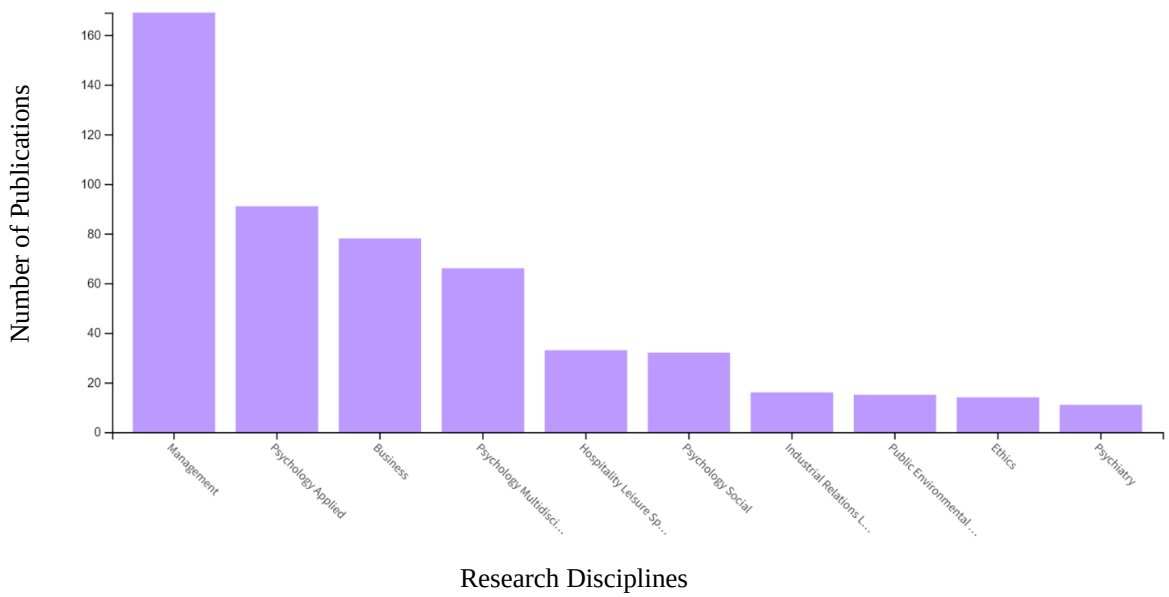
Ostracism is evident both within and outside organisations (Robinson and Schabram, 2019), extending to modern nations, governments, religious and educational institutions, and various other contexts (Williams, 2007). It transcends hierarchical levels, genders, and age groups (Ferris et al., 2008). For instance, instances of ostracism can be observed among children and tribes such as the Amish (Ferris et al., 2008). It is not limited to human societies; ostracism is also observed in the animal kingdom, manifesting in interactions between lions and chimpanzees (Ferris et al., 2008). Many tribes globally consider social exclusion of a tribe member as a severe form of punishment, akin to a 'mortality silence' cue, with some referring to it as 'social death' (Ouwerkerk et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2005; Wesselmann and Williams, 2017; Williams et al., 2019).

In contemporary society, where a significant portion of people's daily lives is spent in the workplace, instances of workplace deviant behaviour (WDB), such as bullying, harassment (Robinson et al., 2013), mistreatment (Howard et al., 2020), incivility (Ferris et al., 2017), and cyberbullying (Farley et al., 2021), are widespread. Consequently, there has been a dramatic increase in research focusing on counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) over the past 15 years (Cortina et al., 2018). However, despite the common occurrence of ostracism,

which is recognised as a distressing experience in daily life (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017; van Beest and Sleegers, 2019; Ferris, 2019; Howard et al., 2020), its subtle and passive nature led to its oversight by scholars until recently. Hence, scholars have called for a shift in attention from overt forms of WDB, such as bullying and incivility, to more subtle forms, specifically ostracism (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2013).

Yet, much of the current ostracism studies have been conducted in laboratory or school settings. In comparison, little research has been conducted in the work settings, which this research aims to investigate. Historically, the exploration of ostracism emerged in social psychology research in 1997, primarily through the contributions of key researcher Kipling Williams, who conducted subsequent studies on the subject (Ferris et al., 2017). Particularly, the year 2000 was recognised as the birth of ostracism in the management discussion (Williams et al., 2000), see Figure 1.1. Only then, ostracism has significantly captured scholars' attention in the fields of organisational behaviour, psychology, and human resources (HR) (Liu et al., 2016).

Figure 1.1: The Research Disciplines in Which Workplace Ostracism is most Frequently Published, According to Web of Science



This interest has led to the integration of the concept into organisational research, where it is termed workplace ostracism (WO). Workplace ostracism occurs when:

> An individual or group omits to take actions that engage another organisational member when it is socially appropriate to do so… Such as when an individual or group fails to acknowledge, include, select, or invite another individual or group (Robinson et al., 2013, p.206).

The issue of WO is acknowledged as a significant concern in organisational settings. Several studies have presented concerning statistics indicating that a substantial portion of individuals within organisations have either encountered ostracism or have engaged in ostracising behaviour towards others within a six-month timeframe (Gamian-Wilk and Madeja-Bien, 2021). Certainly, WO functions as a double-edged sword, capable of triggering either positive or negative behaviorus, such as reinforcing positive norms or engaging in WDB (Robinson and Schabram, 2019). In the case of the latter, these actions could result in significant financial losses for organisations, potentially reaching billions, and have broader societal and customer repercussions (Bennett et al., 2018). This impact then extends to society and customers, who bear the consequences of an employee's actions, affecting not only the organisation but also the overall wellbeing and social norms of society (Bennett et al., 2018).

A review on WO by Liu and Xia (2016) argued that WO severely affects employees' mental health, reducing job satisfaction, job performance, and organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB). WO has been identified as a factor that depletes the personal resources of ostracised individuals (Zhu et al., 2017). WO also has diverse impacts on employees' engagement, perceived organisational justice commitment, turnover intention, and actual turnover (Howard et al., 2020). According to a meta-analysis, although the impact of WO on turnover intention was relatively small, it encourages the actual turnover rates due to its adverse effect on wellbeing, emotions, and self-perceptions (Howard et al., 2020). Leaders should be aware that the negative cascading impact of WO operates in a spiral and sequential manner (Wesselmann et al., 2019) which in turn, may lead to the loss of invaluable HR. For example, the negative outcomes stemming from an employee's encounter with WO impact their job effectiveness, subsequently influencing the overall effectiveness of the organisation (Gamian-Wilk and Madeja-Bien, 2021). Nevertheless, despite the ongoing expansion of ostracism literature, there is limited understanding of WO (Gamian-Wilk and Madeja-Bien, 2021).

Interestingly, there has been a dearth of theoretical contributions regarding WO. This gap can be attributed to a misconception surrounding ostracism, which argues that as long as it does not cause harm on the same level as other overt workplace misconduct such as bullying or aggression, it is considered benign behaviour (Robinson et al., 2013). Some even regarded it as a professional approach to handle an undesirable interaction (Robinson and Schabram, 2019). It is, therefore, necessary for research on organisational behaviour (OB) to closely scrutinise the phenomenon of WO to provide empirical evidence that silence is not always golden.

Nevertheless, despite the recent increasing interest in ostracism and its antecedents and consequences, a significant portion of existing literature primarily pertains to Western samples, particularly those from North America and Western Europe (Schaafsma, 2017; Uskul and Over, 2017; Mao et al., 2018). However, in terms of the Eastern societies, although some studies have employed Chinese employees as subjects, they often fail to explicitly emphasise Asia or China as specific cultural contexts (Mao et al., 2018). Similarly, while a substantial number of studies on ostracism within East Asian populations have originated from China and South Korea, there remains a notable gap in understanding how culture moderates responses to ostracism (Sommer et al., 2021). Hence, it is crucial to recognise that China alone cannot adequately represent Asia as a contextual basis for comparison with Western samples. Because there are distinct behavioural and communication patterns influenced by socio-religious factors between Arabs of the Middle-East and Chinese (Sharahili, 2015). Additionally, the majority of samples in cross-cultural studies on ostracism have been drawn from college students, with limited comparisons across a few East Asian countries (eg, Japan, Hong Kong, and China) and Western countries (eg, the US, the UK, and Germany) (Schaafsma, 2017). This limitation underscores a key challenge in ostracism research across cultures, as differences observed in a handful of countries fail to explain how ostracism may manifest differently in various other cultural contexts.

Previous literature also examined the coping mechanisms that assist the target of ostracism in mitigating the adverse impacts of WO. According to Rudert and Greifeneder (2019), social norms shaped by culture play a crucial role in determining individual reactions. For example, recent insights from researchers acknowledge that while ostracism types exhibit similarities across cultures, the responses and coping strategies employed in dealing with ostracism may vary based on cultural specificity (Schaafsma, 2017). In addition, cross-cultural

psychologists stated that cross-cultural differences play a role in how people consider their relationship with others as a component of the self which in turns affects their perception of ostracism (Schaafsma, 2017). Moreover, it has been assumed that exclusion sensitivity is culturally universal that is rooted deeply in the evolutionary history, therefore, cultural diversity was not given the priority in literature (Uskul and Over, 2017). As a result, discussing the phenomenon of ostracism is incomplete without its context, specifically cultural background (Mao et al., 2018). Thus, future research should be guided by cultural theoretical assumptions in order to provoke new hypotheses and test its applicability to other contexts.

Nevertheless, there remains an uncertainty about the key organisational and cultural factors that significantly affect reactions to WO in the Middle-East context, specifically in the Arabian Gulf States that share similar cultural and religious values (Joseph, 2018), distinguishing them from the rest of the Arab countries, and how that differs from the ones already known in the West. Without such cross-cultural comparisons, the researcher posits that the consequences of ostracism are likely to vary across cultures, highlighting the distinct coping mechanisms employed in each cultural context and emphasising the cultural differences in the efficacy of each strategy. This assumption arises from the observation of WO literature that inadequately considers cultural influences, creating a significant gap that warrants exploration. Consequently, cross-cultural research (CCR) on workplace ostracism stands as a distinctive area for investigation, offering a valuable opportunity to examine the perception of WO and how coping mechanisms impact the consequences of workplace ostracism.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

Three research aims are addressed in this thesis:

1. To identify cultural factors influencing workplace ostracism in the Arabian Gulf States workplace environments.
2. To examine how culture influences employees' coping mechanisms.
3. To investigate the cultural nuances impacting the experience of workplace ostracism in Arabian Gulf States and the West.

To achieve these aims, the thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 5 & 7 address both the first and the second aim. The first aim is: the identification of cultural factors influencing WO in the Arabian Gulf States workplaces. This aim is underpinned by one research question: (1) how is workplace ostracism experienced in the Arabian Gulf States, and what cultural-specific forms of workplace ostracism are encountered there? (RQ1). While the second aim is: the examination of how culture influences employees' coping mechanisms. This aim underpins two research questions: (1) how do employees cope with workplace ostracism in the Arabian Gulf States (RQ2); and (2) how cultural and contextualising factors might have contributed to the way Arabian Gulf States employees cope with ostracism (RQ3). While Chapter 6 & 7 address the third aim: the investigation of the cultural nuances impacting the experience of WO in the Arab Gulf and the Western workplaces. One research question underpins this aim: (1) how does the experience of workplace ostracism differ in the Arabian Gulf States workplaces, compared to the Western workplaces (RQ4).

Indeed, the latter question (RQ4) is regarded as the central and overarching question that serves as the foundation for the preceding research questions, namely RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, and the methodology elucidated in this thesis. The reasoning of the sequence of these research questions preceding the central question will become more apparent following a thorough review of the literature and the methodology.

1.3 Thesis Structure

To address the research questions, two studies were carried out in the present thesis, and the structure of the thesis was designed accordingly. This introductory chapter (Chapter 1) is succeeded by Chapter 2, which aims to assess the existing literature on workplace ostracism. The chapter explores the evolution of research on workplace ostracism phenomenon, considering its recent integration into organisational studies (Liu et al., 2016). It also clearly explains the distinctions and intersections between ostracism as a distinct construct and other related constructs. Additionally, the chapter critically examines previous cross-cultural studies to gain contextual insights into how workplace ostracism is experienced across cultures, paving the way to justify the need for the current research and identifying research gaps.

Chapter 3 rationalises and details the selection of the methodology employed for this research, which is cross-cultural mixed-methods. It introduces the concept of CCR emphasising the importance of conducting CCR when investigating workplace ostracism. The chapter also justifies the decision to adopt this methodology as essential for addressing the research questions. Consequently, it provides a brief explanation of the three phases undertaking in this research and introduces the methods utilised for Study 1 and 2, outlining the underlying philosophical stances that support the application of mixed-methods research (MMR).

Chapter 4, in turn, presents the methodology utilised for Study 1, which forms the foundation for the qualitative component (QUAL) of the MMR approach. More precisely, it introduces Phase 1 of the MMR, providing explanation to the use of narrative research. The chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the data collection method and the qualitative data analysis technique employed, namely the narrative thematic analysis conducted in the Omani context. Additionally, it discusses the ethical considerations taken into account during the implementation of Study 1.

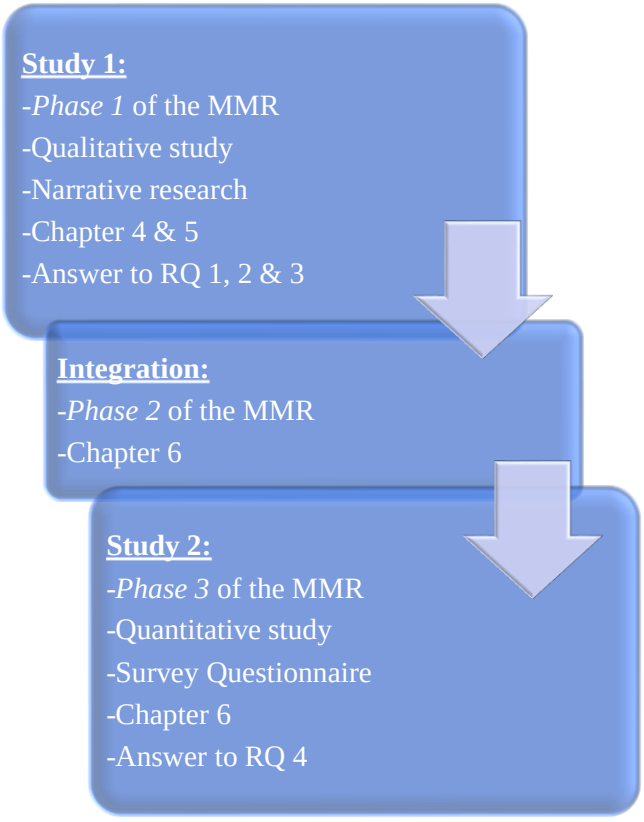
This chapter is followed by Chapter 5 that presents the findings of Study 1 introduced in Chapter 4. It explains the themes emerged from the narratives adopting in-depth interviews with Omani employees which meets the first and the second research aims, answering RQ1, RQ2. It presents the themes reflecting the contextual forms of WO phenomenon experienced by the Omani employees, and the most common coping strategies adopted by the interviewees by highlighting the contextual factors that stand out as unique insightful emergence of the cultural factors different from that known in the West, thereby, answering RQ3.

The results of Study 1 explained in Chapter 5 inform the development of Study 2 which is presented in Chapter 6. Study 2 serves as the quantitative component of the MMR (QUANT). It explains Phase 2 & 3 of the MMR which explains the formulation of the hypotheses developed from Study 1 underpinning the integration phase, then explained phase 2 which illustrates the conduction of the survey questionnaire across the two cultures providing empirical evidence. This chapter consolidates the findings from the two conducted studies, providing insights into the contextual factors influencing the experience of WO in one Arab Gulf State, Oman and contrasting it with Western perspectives in the context of existing

literature. Doing so allowed answering RQ4, the central question of the whole thesis. It also presents the ethical considerations undertaking in Study 2.

The last chapter of this thesis is Chapter 7, which summarises the key findings resulting from the integration of both studies within this cross-cultural mixed-methods research. The overall theoretical contributions of this study are underscored. The chapter also highlights the research strengths and limitations and suggests potential avenues for future research directions. The practical implications derived from the thesis outcomes, crucial for practitioners to combat the detrimental phenomenon of workplace ostracism, are presented in this chapter. Finally, the thesis ends with concluding remarks summarising the main insights and take away points drawn from current study. Figure 1.2 illustrates the structure of the two studies conducted in this thesis. Next chapter will review the literature on workplace ostracism.

Figure 1.2: The Structure of the two Studies Conducted Within this Cross-cultural Mixed-methods Study



Chapter 2: Positioning Workplace Ostracism

2.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as the literature review of the phenomenon of workplace ostracism. The purpose of this review is to lay out the thesis's focus and clarify how it intends to fulfill the research aims outlined in the introductory chapter. The current chapter expands on the content presented in Chapter 1 to provide a more in-depth exploration of workplace ostracism as a unique research construct.

In order to meet this aim, this chapter illuminates the conceptualisation of ostracism, with a specific emphasis on WO. It explores the historical evolution of the construct, delves into the theoretical foundations of ostracism, and establishes the justification for the earlier presented research questions. The review further elaborates on the cross-cultural studies on the subject and synthesises their findings.

2.2 The Development of Workplace Ostracism Research

Chapter 1 offered a comprehensive overview of the evolution of ostracism in the literature. This section further expands on this topic with a focus on workplace ostracism.

In the past, ostracism was primarily explored in clinical development research (Williams, 2007) discussing its impact on childhood and adolescence (Steensma et al., 2014). However, it crossed over into organisational research when a groundbreaking 10-items workplace ostracism measurement, employing a unidimensional factor structure, was developed by Ferris et al. (2008) using five samples (Liu et al., 2016; Ferris et al., 2017), see Appendix 2.1. The WO 10-items scale measures employees' perception of ostracism (Ferris et al., 2008). Subsequently, consistent research on WO emerged. Yet, it yielded conflicting and varied results (Mao et al., 2018). For example, in a survey questionnaire, (60%) of the targets perceived ostracism to be purposeful and intended to cause harm (Mlika et al., 2017). It seems that employees' interpretations of WO are more influenced by their individual characteristics rather than the explicit actions of those engaging in ostracising behaviour. Thus, it is crucial to recognise that employees might perceive ostracism even in situations where their

colleagues' actions are unintentional (Yang and Treadway, 2018). Hence, there is still no general agreement on whether actual ostracism should be treated the same as perceived ostracism (Howard et al., 2020) since perceived and actual ostracism are clearly different (Ferris et al., 2016; Yang and Treadway, 2018; Howard et al., 2020), assuming that the effects of each type potentially will result in different effects on the target (Yang and Treadway, 2018).

While ostracism has undergone extensive examination in diverse social science disciplines (Williams, 2007), its exploration within organisational psychology has been relatively limited (Robinson et al., 2013; Gamian-Wilk and Madeja-Bien, 2021). Although there have been updates to the measurement, specifically involving supervisors and their subordinates as sources, by Wu et al. (2015) and Ferris et al. (2016; 2017), the original measurement developed by Ferris et al. (2008) remains widely in use to date. However, this measurement lacks consideration for culture-specific forms of workplace ostracism, with the argument that it may not be suitable for diverse contexts. Consequently, there is a recognised need for an expansion of this scale to include cultural variations. It is important to note that when referring to WO, the definitions supported by organisational scholars, involving acts such as ignoring or excluding, may exhibit slight variations from the definition of social ostracism advocated by Williams (2009), which includes both ignoring and excluding behaviours (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2013). Thus, investigating ostracism in workplaces has significant implication inducing differing effects than when its experienced outside of work settings.

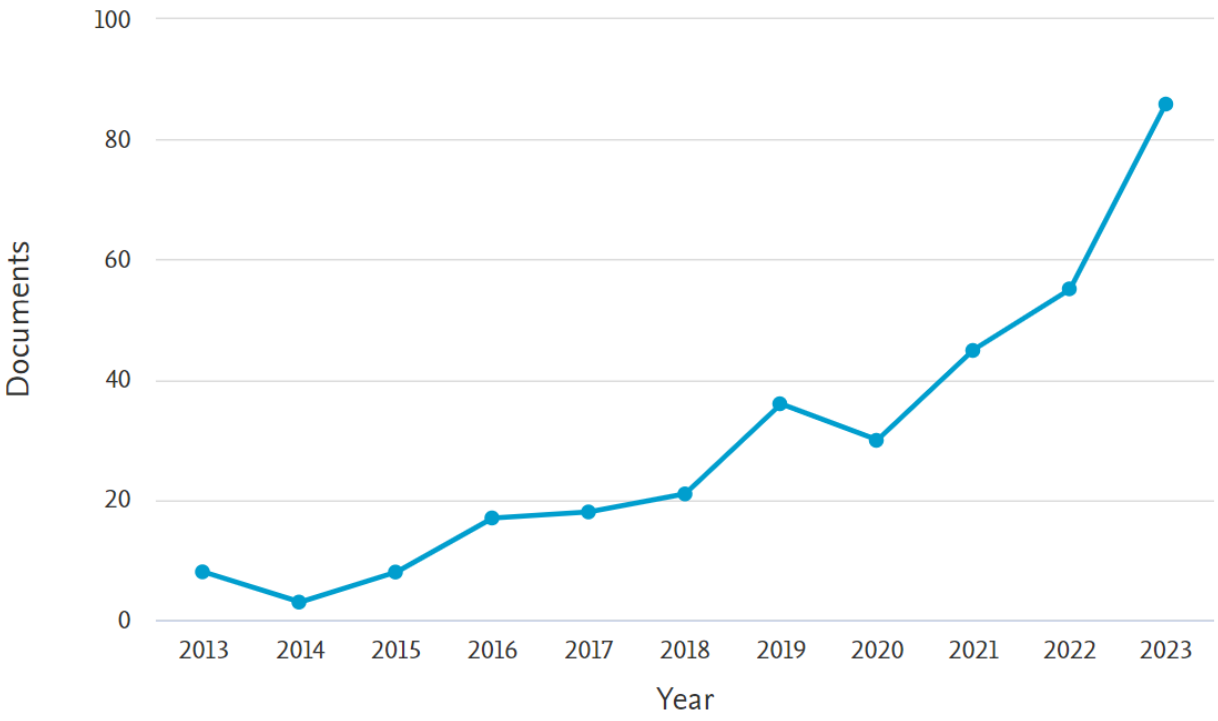
Upon screening Scopus journal articles from 2013 to 2023, a notable rise in publications concerning workplace ostracism is noticed, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. This indicates the growing interest in workplace ostracism as a phenomenon worthy of investigation within work environments.

2.3 The Conceptualisation of Ostracism

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, scholars have made several attempts to distinguish ostracism as a distinct construct, highlighting the need to shed light on its characteristics. A notable feature of ostracism revolves around the practice of 'the silent treatment' (Williams et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2013; Liu and Xia, 2016), differentiating it from

concepts such as ‘mistreatment.’ In the context of silent treatment, the primary distinguishing feature of ostracism is **the act of omission** (Robinson and Schabram, 2019). For example, individuals often choose to hurt others through the omission of action, such as ostracism, rather than through the commission of actions associated with mistreatment, such as bullying (Robinson et al., 2013). In other words, ostracism means omitting positive attention rather than committing negative attention (Robinson et al., 2013). The omission feature does not solely entail the absence of negative behaviours, such as arguments, but also involves excluding someone from participating in positive conversations or socialisation (Ferris et al., 2017). In essence, it is the inaction of socially including someone (Robinson et al., 2013).

Figure 2.1: The Number of Articles Published on Scopus Between 2013-2023 on Workplace Ostracism



Another feature of ostracism is **the ambiguity** surrounding the intention to harm the target and uncertainty about whether ostracism has objectively occurred at all (Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2016; 2017). Yet, despite scholarly efforts to differentiate ostracism from other constructs, ostracism remains a misunderstood behaviour.

Additional characteristics of ostracism include its potential to manifest **physically;** that is in-person (Williams et al., 2005; Wu et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2016) or

virtually (Ren et al., 2015; Yaakobi and Williams, 2015). Remarkably, the impact of ostracism does not necessarily require a face-to-face (F2F) interaction (Mao et al., 2018). For example, individuals may experience ostracism through digital means, a phenomenon exemplified by 'phubbing behaviour.' Phubbing entails using smartphones or other technology during F2F interaction, combining the terms 'phone' and 'nubbing' (Wesselmann et al., 2019). Being ostracised online is known as **cyber-ostracism** which refers to instances where ostracism occurs regularly beyond F2F encounters (Hippel et al., 2005). Cyber-ostracism has been explored in various contexts, such as online cyberball experiments (computerised ball-tossing game) and interactive computer games (Hippel et al., 2005; Yaakobi and Williams, 2015; Jensen and Raver, 2018; Rudert et al., 2018), mobile phones (Wang et al., 2020), including text messages (Hippel et al., 2005), social media platforms (Wang et al., 2020; Tang and Duan, 2023), online chat rooms, group chat, personal web spaces (Niu et al., 2018), phone calls, and mail (Hippel et al., 2005). At work, the rise of remote work and reliance on electronic tools such as emails and e-groups has intensified cyber-ostracism (Harvey et al., 2019). The antecedents and consequences of cyber-ostracism vary globally due to the impact of international business on all firms. Cultural factors play a role in the enaction of cyber ostracism, as one culture (in-group) may engage in online ostracism of members from other cultures (Harvey et al., 2019). Thus, exploring cultural factors in the occurrence of cyber-ostracism is an intriguing area especially post-pandemic.

One recent interesting form of ostracism is **linguistic ostracism**, which includes any situation where people talk to each other using a language other people surrounding them cannot understand (Robinson, et al., 2013). The inherently non-purposeful nature of linguistic ostracism, combined with the context of a team-based environment, renders it a unique form of ostracism (Fiset and Bhave, 2021). In simpler terms, language significantly influences the shaping of an individual's social identity. Employees tend to feel a stronger bond with those who share their linguistic ingroup and a weaker connection with those belonging to their linguistic outgroup. Consequently, when colleagues communicate in a language not mutually understood, focal employees may perceive themselves as part of a linguistic outgroup, and feel ostracised (Fiset and Bhave, 2021). Therefore, investigating the effects of this particular form of ostracism in work setting is important (Ferris et al., 2017), especially in highly diverse cultures such as the UK.

The experience of ostracism varies in terms of its **intensity**. This spectrum ranges from extreme fashion such as exiling or banishment (Ferris et al., 2008) and termination of employment (Robinson and Schabram, 2019) to subtler forms such as avoiding eye contact or giving someone the silent treatment (Williams et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2016). Additionally, the intensity can differ in terms of **quantity**, spanning from low to partial ostracism (eg, responding only to direct questions and maintaining partial eye contact) to high and complete ostracism (eg, avoiding eye contact altogether, not responding at all, self-withdrawal from the situation, and refraining from initiating conversations) (Zadro, 2004; Williams, 2005). However, according to social impact theory, which posits that the impact of ostracism is diminished when experienced collectively with others, the effect becomes less intense when ostracised along with other people compared to facing ostracism alone (Robinson et al., 2013). For example, *partial ostracism* may occur when it happens occasionally and involves a few coworkers targeting many employees. On the other hand, *full ostracism* occurs when members consistently target only one employee (Robinson et al., 2013). It is, therefore, proposed, that the impact of WO is most profound when it is full rather than partial, extreme rather than episodic, stemming from a larger group rather than a smaller one, and aimed solely at one worker rather than multiple employees (Robinson et al., 2013). This is because enduring long-term ostracism, or consistently experiencing ostracism over an extended period, has different consequences compared to partial ostracism, which occurs relatively infrequently over time (Williams, 2001).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of ostracism, it is essential not only to examine its features but also to differentiate it from other constructs. This review sheds lights into the differentiation of ostracism, highlighting its fundamental distinctions from synonymous in terms of linguistic meaning (Section 2.3.1) and from other overt deviant behaviours in its nature as a deviant act (Section 2.3.2).

2.3.1 Ostracism, Rejection, and Social Exclusion

Social exclusion and rejection have been frequently used interchangeably in business, management, and social psychology literature for the past two decades. Ostracism stands apart from rejection-related encounters as it entails being ignored while in the perpetrator's presence, whether in physical proximity or through digital means such as e-communication

(Wesselmann and Williams, 2017). However, despite the overlap between ostracism, rejection, and social exclusion, nuances still exist. For instance, while Rudert et al. (2019) argued that research on ostracism, rejection, and social exclusion conveys similar meanings; Lakin and Chartrand (2008) identified ostracism as a subtype of social exclusion. Similarly, Williams (2007) explicitly distinguished between rejection, social exclusion, and ostracism. He argued that **rejection** is characterised as a definitive declaration that an individual is not welcomed or wanted, while **social exclusion** simply implies isolation. However, **ostracism** is defined as "ignoring and excluding individuals or groups by individuals or groups" (Williams, 2007, p.427). The notable distinction is that while rejection typically does not involve a prolonged episode and occurs after separation and interaction, social exclusion, on the other hand, can happen either after one is separated from others following interaction or as a probable outcome in the future (Williams, 2007).

Furthermore, Wesselmann et al. (2019) argue that exclusion can result from either ostracism or rejection, defining *rejection* as unwanted direct or indirect communication or discriminatory behaviours, including explicit interpersonal rejection. Direct communication involves explicitly informing individuals that someone in a group is refusing to interact with them, while indirect communication is experienced when encountering an angry response or a cold and hurtful reaction from the other party (Wesselmann et al., 2019). Based on this, Wesselmann et al. (2019) categorised *exclusion* into **rejection-based exclusion**, which involves receiving negative attention, and **ostracism-based exclusion**, which entails being ignored in some way. The subtle distinction lies in the nature of attention. The former involves receiving negative attention, while the latter entails receiving no attention, which is the core nature of ostracism.

This overlap highlights a recognised need for more empirical studies to distinguish between the above constructs (Williams, 2007; Wesselmann and Williams, 2017). This is only attainable when the construct of ostracism is examined through the means of other contextual factors. One rationale behind Wesselmann and Williams's call (2017) to make distinctions among these constructs is that individuals experiencing inner negative emotions for being ignored may struggle to differentiate between rejection- and ostracism-based exclusion. This challenge is particularly evident since each type of exclusion leads to distinct negative consequences (Williams, 2009; Wesselmann et al., 2019). For example, experiencing rejection and exclusion from colleagues negatively impacts one's sense of belonging and

self-esteem, leading to psychological withdrawal, depression, and health issues (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Therefore, literature needs to address more theoretical frameworks concerning inclusion, belonging, and acceptance (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017). This call is supported by the two meta-analyses mentioned by Robinson et al. (2013), which revealed that experiencing rejection is more negatively impactful than being included in neutral circumstances. To elaborate, Doolaard et al. (2020) discovered that both being removed from a group and inhibiting members from accessing the group result in equal harm. Conversely, despite targets found both behaviours equally hurt, the perpetrators in the same study reported that preventing a potential member from entering the group is perceived more normative than removing a current member. This raises concerns about whether ostracism and exclusion are opposite terms of inclusion and acceptance (Robinson et al., 2013), or if being included does not necessarily imply being accepted.

Beside social exclusion and rejection, there are other constructs similar to ostracism including workplace ignorance (Van Kleef et al., 2010), abandonment, experiencing being 'out of the loop' (Robinson et al., 2013; Sommer et al., 2021), and workplace exclusion (Liu et al., 2016). Additionally, workplace ostracism can manifest as organisational shunning, referring to the intentional systematic exclusion of an employee who was previously part of daily rituals signifying organisational membership (Robinson et al., 2013).

2.3.2 Workplace Ostracism vs. Workplace Deviance

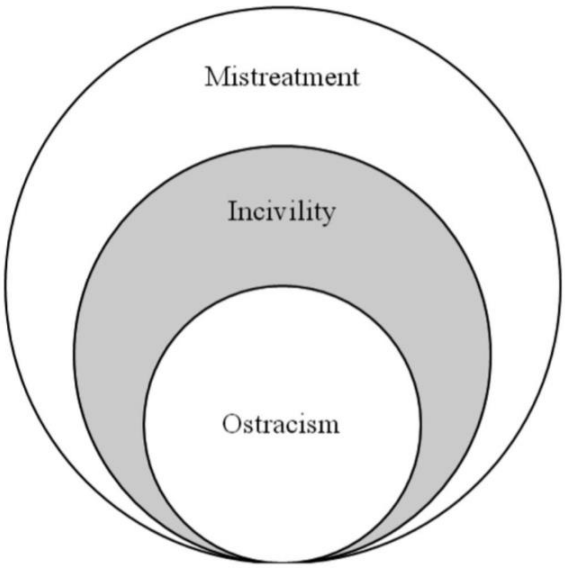
Workplace deviance is known as "voluntary behaviour that violates significant organisational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organisation, its members, or both" (Robinson and Bennett, 1995, p.556). This definition encompasses both *organisational* and *interpersonal deviance*. The first category involves deviance directed at organisations through production and property deviance, whereas the second category targets individuals, classifying them into two types: those exhibiting political and personal aggression (Bennett et al., 2018), see Appendix 2.2. Each classification in the typology is further divided into two dimensions, distinguishing between minor and serious deviant behaviours. However, this analysis will concentrate on interpersonal deviance, as many scholars have categorised ostracism within a broader measure of interpersonal deviance (Robinson et al., 2013; Bedi, 2021) such as abusive supervision (Bedi, 2021), and interpersonal mistreatment (Wu et al., 2016), or interpersonal conflict (Mlika et al., 2017)

that breaches interpersonal fairness (eg, prosperity and respect) (Ferris et al., 2017), and inhibits one from accessing information (Riaz et al., 2019) or resources (Robinson et al., 2013; Liu and Xia, 2016; Riaz et al., 2019). This classification is justified by the fact that ostracism signals the quality of one's relationships with others (Robinson and Schabram, 2019). A cross-lagged design proposed by Ferris et al. (2016), asserted that WO is a component of a comprehensive measure of workplace aggression, comprises constructs such as incivility, undermining, and abusive supervision. Notably, this measure incorporates items specifically assessing WO. This claim was backed up by their findings that each of these constructs results in distinct outcomes; for instance, abusive supervision triggers anger, whereas WO elicits anxiety. Moreover, in predicting job satisfaction, WO outweighed both interpersonal deviance and abusive supervision. Interestingly, WO exhibited the least influence in predicting OCB. Conversely, interpersonal deviance had a more prominent role than WO in predicting workplace deviance (Bedi, 2021). However, these findings refute previous findings that observed strong significant effects of the impact of WO on deviance, belongingness, and silence (Howard et al., 2020). These collective findings suggest that WO exerts a more substantial impact on shaping employee work-related attitudes, whereas interpersonal deviance and abusive supervision prove more valuable in predicting work behaviours such as OCB or workplace deviance (Bedi, 2021). Although Robinson and Bennett's (1995) seminal typology is interesting, it did not include ostracism amongst the interpersonal deviance behaviours, nor has the following research expanded the well-known typology of workplace deviance to position ostracism.

Yet, recent reviews clearly distinguished ostracism from other constructs such as incivility and mistreatment (Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2017; Howard et al., 2020). Further evidence supporting the notion that ostracism shares similar behaviours with deviance, specifically, mistreatment and incivility may lie in the findings of the meta-analysis conducted by Howard et al. (2020), who statistically found that ostracism has a strong and significant relationship with both mistreatment and incivility. The generally accepted use of the term **workplace mistreatment** refers to the initiation of counternormative negative actions or the abandonment of normative positive actions directed at another coworker (Howard et al., 2020). It can take the form of direct aggression, for instance, harassment or indirect aggression, such as gossiping and nasty looks (Howard et al., 2020), by which it is also identified as interpersonal deviance (Bennett et al., 2018). In organisational research,

ostracism is seen as a type of mistreatment, if the ostraciser was the source of harm (Robinson and Schabram, 2019). Hence, ostracism is a mixture of both mistreatment and incivility (Robinson et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2020). Figure 2.2 represents how the three constructs of ostracism, incivility, and mistreatment overlap. It illustrates that ostracism includes the fewest forms of behaviours; incivility has more behaviours than ostracism but fewer than mistreatment, which includes the largest behaviours (Howard et al., 2020).

Figure 2.2: A Diagram of Ostracism, Incivility and Mistreatment, Adopted from (Howard et al., 2020, p.3)



Incivility refers to the violation of norms of respect featured with low-intensity social interactions in which their harmful intention is vague, while ostracism is the non-interactive constituent of incivility (Ferris et al., 2017). That is, incivility occurs in the course of interactions between the target and the perpetrator in a negative manner, whereas with ostracism there is no interaction between the two parties (Ferris et al., 2017). This difference is viewed as the most conclusive way to differentiate between ostracism and incivility (Ferris et al., 2017). Because it has conceptually agreed that since ostracism is the act of 'omission', rather than 'commission', then any interactional behaviours towards the targets or words falls outside its scope (Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2017). On the contrary, recent research on ostracism advocates for its integration into communication studies, recognising it as a dysfunction in interpersonal communication between the target of ostracism and the perpetrator (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022). For example, many experts now contend that rather than viewing ostracism as non-interactive behaviour, it might be more useful to view it as an unforeseen or undesirable form of communication (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022). They

suggest that ostracism is best understood as a message that a recipient perceives as a threat to their interpersonal inclusion with a desired group or individual. Put differently, their argument posits that whether a message is overly harsh or subtly conveyed, if the recipient views it as a threat to their inclusion in social interactions or a challenge to their social status, it is perceived as an interpersonal ostracism message (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022).

In addition, although ostracism may happen with no malevolent intention or with no intentions at all, and the awareness of actors of incivility on the harmful consequences of uncivil behaviour is an essential element of incivility (Robinson et al., 2013). Ferris et al. (2017) stated that ambiguity with respect to hostile intentions is a shared characteristic between ostracism and incivility. Hence, ostracism and incivility have a lot in common, but some of the shared behaviours are: avoiding someone at work; not responding to someone's greetings; not engaging someone in a conversation (Ferris et al., 2008; 2017). Whereas one difference is that incivility includes showing impoliteness to colleagues or workplace interpersonal deviance which could be rather the consequences of WO (Mao et al., 2018). Indeed, targets of incivility are more likely to perceive ostracism (Bedi, 2021). Interestingly, not all interactions are characterised by contextual or status distinctions. For example, while incivility is marked by general rudeness or disrespect whereby in these instances, both parties engaged in a spiral of conflict (Jensen and Raver, 2018), ostracism on the other hand cannot be understood without its context (Uskul and Over, 2017).

Despite the literature's argument that the experience of ostracism shares similarities with mistreatment and incivility (Howard et al., 2020), as of now, there is no consensus on which of the three constructs—mistreatment, incivility, and ostracism—is more prevalent or has a greater impact, precedes the other one, leaving this question unresolved (Ferris et al., 2017). Generally, top-down incivility has been empirically evident to be an antecedent of perceived ostracism (Schilpzand et al., 2016). For example, a mixed-methods study in the United Kingdom (the UK) revealed that managers were the primary source of bullying (Carter et al., 2013). Moreover, a two-time lags study found that WO is positively and significantly related to workplace incivility (Zeeshan et al., 2023). Likewise, in the Arab context, perceived incivility was found to be significantly related to perceived ostracism (Ebrahim and Eldeep, 2020).

Nonetheless, a handful of studies (Zadro, 2004; Ferris et al., 2008; 2017) have demonstrated that outcomes resulting from ostracism differ from those arising from negative attention. For instance, in a role-play experiment conducted by Zadro (2004), it was found that being the target of ostracism is distinct from being the target of interpersonal conflict, such as an argument. Targets of ostracism reported lower levels of belonging and self-esteem compared to targets of arguments. In a comparison of the consequences of both WO and bullying, O'Reilly and co-workers (2015) discovered that ostracism can be equally or even more distressing in the short term, even with just a single episode, and it can have longer-lasting effects on workers compared to workplace bullying. The researchers illustrated that WO is psychologically more harmful than bullying. Notably, the study results suggest that when both exposure to workplace bullying and isolation are considered, only ostracism is associated with negative psychological outcomes. The threatened sense of belonging mediated the impact of ostracism on well-being and work-related attitudes, including low job satisfaction and intentions to leave the job. Furthermore, exclusion and rejection (but not bullying) were linked to workplace turnover three years later (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Clearly, dealing with ostracism is considerably more challenging and complex compared to coping with incivility, harassment, aggression, bullying, and similar behaviours (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2021). This is because addressing situations where individuals or groups may not have taken action is more difficult than addressing incidents that are known to have occurred or were witnessed by others (Robinson et al., 2013). This divergence may be attributed to the aversive and exclusionary nature of ostracism, which is unique in threatening basic human needs, including a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and control (Williams, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013), unlike arguments where there is an exchange of conversation and attention, albeit negative (Robinson et al., 2013).

The above review confirms O'Reilly et al. (2015) argument on ostracism that receiving negative attention is way much better than receiving no attention. With that in mind, it is clear that the non-interactive component of ostracism versus the interactive feature of other forms of deviant behaviours as well as the ambiguity of motives behind each behaviour should lead to deferential outcomes in different contexts accordingly. Nevertheless, prior to discussing the antecedents and consequences of ostracism, it is essential to commence with a theoretical explanation of ostracism.

2.4 Theoretical Explanation of Ostracism

Williams (2001) developed a notable model of ostracism (Appendix 2.3) that conceptualises the phenomenon of ostracism and represents different taxonomic dimensions of ostracism according to its motives. The first motive manifests when ostracism is **intentional**, which intends to be either punitive, defensive, or oblivious. Examples of *punitive* motives are punishing the target (Williams et al., 2005), and protecting the group's interest (Henle et al., 2023). Whereas examples of *defensive* motives are protecting oneself from whistleblowers or a threat to group longevity (Robinson and Schabram, 2019; Wesselmann et al., 2019; Henle et al., 2023). While examples of *oblivious* motives are regarding someone as not worthy of attention or being noticed (Williams et al., 2005). However, in cultures that emphasise interdependence, ostracism might be viewed as less effective method of punishing undesirable behaviours (Uskul and Over, 2017).

The second motivation is **unintentional ostracism**, which occurs when the individual, upon closer examination, realises that the perceived ostracism is not, in fact, intentional (Williams et al., 2005). Another form of unintentional ostracism is **role-prescribed ostracism**, where an individual goes unnoticed by others for cultural or contextual reasons, such as being in a bus or lift (Williams et al., 2005). Another reason for experiencing ostracism arises from a lack of language proficiency (Sommer et al., 2021) or when others engage in discussions unrelated to their background, leaving them with insufficient information on topics such as celebrities and music bands (Wesselmann et al., 2019).

Similarly, a proposition by Robinson et al. (2013) was made that non-purposeful ostracism is more likely to occur in workplaces characterised by diversity. This is because people naturally tend to form social bonds with those similar to them, leaving those perceived as different feeling excluded (Robinson et al., 2013). Therefore, in a highly diverse environment such as the UK with a substantial number of immigrants (McDowell, 2016), it is more probable that these groups experience heightened levels of ostracism (Carter-Sowell et al., 2021). In such highly diverse countries, specific individuals, typically belonging to particular marginalised ethnicities or groups, face official recognition denial (Williams and Nida, 2022). Therefore, these individuals are not acknowledged and perceive themselves as invisible. They undergo a feeling of disconnection from their country and its values,

experiencing alienation and a sense of unworthiness of attention, increasing ostracism (Williams and Nida, 2022).

Later, Williams's (2009) published the milestone **temporal threat model**, which forms the basis of ostracism and provides a comprehensive overview of how and why ostracism is enacted, and what its consequences are, see Appendix 2.4. Interestingly, Williams (2009) contend that experiencing ostracism causes as much pain as physical pain, with immediate effects felt during and immediately after being ostracised, which he termed the *reflexive reaction*; the initial stage of the model. Therefore, it becomes crucial to tap into the concept of **pain** in this review. Ostracism is labeled as 'workplace evil' (Sharma and Dhar, 2023), and 'cold violence,' indicating that its impact can be as emotionally hurtful as the experience of physical pain (MacDonald and Leary, 2005). Through laboratory experiments, Ferris (2019) discovered that the social pain resulting from exclusion, rejection, and ostracism closely resembles physical pain, similar to the pain felt when injured. This suggests that pain is a product of the brain, instinctively interpreting social pain as physical pain (Ferris, 2019). In a similar experiment utilising fMRI technology, researchers have discovered that the brain bases of social pain closely resemble those associated with physical pain (Mao et al., 2018). These findings appear acceptable, supported by an experiment conducted by Timeo et al. (2019), which acknowledged that a distraction strategy (ie, turning attention away from negative thoughts) was equally effective in alleviating both physical and social pain. Consequently, if social pain is painful, it is indeed equated to pain (Ferris, 2019). Building on this, Williams (2007) argued that irrespective of individual differences and needs, such as a sense of belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence, any form of ostracism will induce pain, asserting that individual differences do not mitigate the painful experience of ostracism at this stage. He argues that experiencing ostracism is painful, whether it originates from a complete stranger in a lift, a passerby, or even a member of a disliked out-group.

These assumptions were derived from observations made through the cyberball approach; an online ball-toss game designed to simulate ostracism. Participants engage in the game with virtual individuals over the internet, and the findings indicated that participants indeed experienced pain immediately after being ostracised (Jensen and Raver, 2018). However, the shortcomings of their method have been clearly recognised for two reasons. First, despite Ferris (2019) asserting that online ostracism is indeed painful, Rudert and Greifeneder (2019)

argue that the negative reactions of the target during the reflexive stage when using a computer are not equivalent to experiencing ostracism in person by humans, which indicates the importance of examining ostracism in real-life scenarios (Ma and Bellmore, 2016). Additionally, while Wesselmann and Williams (2017) affirm the high validity of cyberball experiments in measuring ostracism, the experimental designs are criticised for lacking external validity (Jensen and Raver, 2018). Therefore, Rudert and Greifeneder (2019) suggest the need for alternative paradigms, such as non-manipulated ostracism, to be employed when measuring ostracism in order to mitigate common-method bias (CMB). They specifically recommend the inclusion of qualitative methods (Pfundmair, 2019), particularly those related to different types of ostracism (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017).

Moreover, unlike Willaim's (2009) claims, Rudert and Greifeneder (2019) have fostered debate regarding the reflexive stage particularly questioning whether individuals genuinely undergo pain immediately after experiencing ostracism. According to their perspective, the target must engage in cognitive construal to comprehend the social event, implying that the experience of ostracism is subjectively reasoned. They propose that the interpretation of ostracism as a situation is cognitively mediated, and the target, based on this inference, can select how to respond. Rudert and Greifeneder's (2019) disagreement with Williams is fully endorsed by experience. In their experiment, they used a game called 'dislikeball', which is different from the standard cyberball. Dislikeball is played by asking participants to throw the ball to the least liked person where they found that social norms such as **culture** are integral to cognitively interpreting social cues, because norms are practiced daily. For instance, studies have demonstrated that if ostracism is understood as a violation of an inclusion norm, individuals react negatively (Uskul and Over, 2017). On the other hand, if ostracism aligns with the prevailing norm, the situation is interpreted as less threatening, and negative reactions are reduced (Uskul and Over, 2017).

To elaborate, a study by Lee et al. (2016) adopting a process design revealed that individuals from low-context cultures (LCC), such as America, Germany, and Switzerland, where self-expression aligns with personal feelings and interests, and criticism is explicitly communicated and formally documented, interpret implicit communication as either being ignored or rejected, viewed as counternormative behaviours. In contrast, individuals from high-context cultures (HCC), such as Arabs, Japan, Korea, and China, where confrontation is avoided to preserve social relationships and emotions are suppressed, consider indirect

communication as a normative way of self-expression. Thus, in HCC, people derive meaning from indirect communications such as facial expressions, silence, and body language (Lee et al., 2016).

Furthermore, a study involving children indicated that kids from individualistic societies perceive ostracism as more painful than children from collectivistic societies (Timeo et al., 2019). This difference is attributed to the social norms prevalent in each culture, influencing the level of anxiety associated with exclusionary situations (Timeo et al., 2019). Individualism, characterised by a loosely-knit social framework where individuals are primarily responsible for themselves and immediate family, is linked to a high degree of individual freedom (Imm Ng et al., 2007). On the contrary, collectivism is marked by strong interpersonal ties, with individuals expected to care not only for themselves and immediate family but also for extended family as an expression of loyalty (Hofstede, 1983; Imm Ng et al., 2007). The perception of individualism varies across cultures, with some viewing it as a source of wellbeing and a blessing, while others see it as alienating (Hofstede, 2001). The UK exemplifies a high individualistic culture, whereas Arab countries serve as examples of high collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 1983; 2001; Schaafsma, 2017). Hence, it can be concluded that culture acts as a filter determining whether an individual experiences immediate pain after experiencing ostracism, irrespective of individual personality differences.

Nevertheless, Williams (2009) contends that the cognitive assessment by the target only takes place in the following stage, the *reflective stage*, and not in the initial stage. During this phase, individuals subjected to ostracism evaluate the situation, its causes, antecedents, and their tendency to react, all of which are influenced by individual differences and contextual factors (eg, prevailing social norms related to ostracism) that guide the fortification of the most threatened need (Williams, 2007). The cognitive evaluation includes the use of strategies such as prayer and recalling social support, along with an analysis of the reasons behind the occurrence of ostracism (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017). For instance, Chinese employees were found to employ cognitive resources to alleviate the negative effects of ostracism at work, thereby reducing immediate CWB (Yan et al., 2014). Moreover, a qualitative study involving British staff and students discovered that participants emphasised the significance of social support during the reflective stage, serving as a buffer against the negative effects of ostracism (Waldeck et al., 2015). Additionally, Pfundmair et al. (2015a) found, through

the manipulation of exclusionary status, that abstract thinking (ie, adopting a distant mode) facilitates recovery from ostracism. Consequently, the role of cognitive appraisals, also known as avoidance (Fitzgerald, 1990), is crucial in examining cross-cultural differences in response to ostracism, as Easterners tend to have distinct cognitive construals of exclusionary events compared to Westerners, viewing them as situationally constrained and, to some extent, inevitable, beyond simply perceiving them as unfair (Kimel et al., 2017).

The final stage in the temporal model is the *resignation stage* which represents the most recent and least explored aspect of Williams's (2009) temporal model. At this stage, individuals who have experienced ostracism are more inclined towards prosocial behavior, displaying high sensitivity to social influence (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017). For instance, they might become more alert to others and improve their capacity to distinguish differences between distinct categories, such as happy and angry faces, compared to distinctions within a category, such as two happy expressions. This heightened sensitivity is beneficial for establishing future social connections with others (Mao et al., 2018). In comparison to those included, on the other side, ostracised individuals are more prone to compliance, obedience, and conformity to others (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017). However, when individuals facing chronic ostracism perceive their efforts to reconnect and recover as futile, they will ultimately resign themselves to feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017). Those persistently ostracised individuals who attempt to fortify their threatened psychological needs through reconnection but fail to recover may resign themselves to depression and acceptance of their ostracised status (Timeo et al., 2019; Wesselmann et al., 2019).

It is prudent to note, that while Williams's (2009) assumptions seem to be well grounded and relied on in various appropriate academic research (eg, Pfundmair et al., 2015a; Yang and Treadway, 2018; Rudert and Greifeneder, 2019; Timeo et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019), his model and previous work has been limited to non-work settings and/or without consideration to cultural differences in the how and why ostracism is enacted and affect its consequences. As such, this review provides sufficient evidence that cross-cultural studies are needed to understand the phenomenon of WO.

2.5 The Antecedents of Ostracism

There has been little discussion on the antecedents of ostracism in the workplace (Howard et al., 2020). According to Ferris et al. (2017), Jensen and Raver (2018), and Howard et al. (2020) the major flaw in the literature of ostracism concerning its antecedents is that is pays tremendous attention to the negative characteristics of the target such as neuroticism (Howard et al., 2020), rather than the perpetrator or the organisational factors (Robinson et al., 2013; Moa et al., 2018). The reasons behind ostracising behaviours remain unclear. On one hand, a meta-analysis by Howard et al. (2020) revealed that leaders' domineering characteristics are the primary source of ostracism. On the other hand, other researchers, such as Williams et al. (2005), Robinson et al. (2013), and Schaafsma (2017) argue that positive characteristics of the target, such as good negotiation skills (Ferris et al., 2017), and subordinates' competencies (Chang et al., 2021) may cause ostracism rather than the target's negative traits. On the contrary, observers of WO attribute the causes of ostracism to differences among the members of the ostracised individuals considering it a form of punishment for violating norms based on their moral judgment (Rudert et al. 2018). This issue causes complexity in determining who is held responsible for the ostracising behvaiours, especially when the target is an empathetic colleague expressing concern for others (Cortina et al., 2017) or is perceived as warm (Arpin et al., 2017).

In regard to the target's characteristics as antecedents of WO, earlier research has indicated that personal traits of the target play a crucial role as antecedents of ostracism (Zadro, 2004). Recent evidence by Howard et al. (2020) contend that the characteristics of the target were found to be secondary antecedents of ostracism after leadership. On the other hand, Williams (2007) suggests that individual characteristics have either an insignificant or a small association with ostracism. Nonetheless, personality characteristics were found to be the most significant factor of perceived WO rather than actual ostracism (Yang and Treadway, 2018).

Leadership is identified as a social variable associated with ostracism, with abusive supervision being a key facet (Howard et al., 2020), confirmed by Bedi's (2021) review. According to Howard et al. (2020), perpetrators in workplace environments, often characterised as domineering, exhibit indicators such as engaging in a pattern of ostracising behaviours and mistreatment towards employees, emphasising benefits and devaluing risks.

When these domineering employees hold leadership positions, they tend to lack empathy, prioritise self-interest, and use power and status to mistreat others, viewing targets as obstacles to their career advancement.

Nonetheless, the concept of leadership varies across cultures (Gelfand et al., 2017), and Howard et al. (2020) meta-analysis lacks cultural references to the studies investigated, suggesting that the experience of ostracism and its consequences may differ when leaders take on the role of ostracisers in diverse cultural contexts. Ferris et al. (2017) contend that WO might occur even in organisations with well-established norms of respect, particularly in cases involving passive leadership and a lack of punishment for wrongdoers. This form of leadership, characterised by destructive traits, destroys the trust that employees place in their leaders, which is exacerbated by a deficiency of support from those leaders (Bedi, 2021). Surprisingly, however, transactional, authoritarian, and laissez-faire leadership styles were positively associated with WO in a self-reported study conducted in a highly collectivist country (Kanwal et al., 2019). This is because these leadership styles denote the absence of leadership taking the shape of avoiding leadership. This entails absence of direct instructions and frequent transactions, which instigates the feeling of ostracism by employees (Kanwal et al., 2019). Only transformational leadership style was negatively associated with WO (Kanwal et al., 2019), as well as spiritual leadership in the same context (Ali et al., 2020). The findings also indicate that authoritarian leadership emerges as the most influential predictor of workplace ostracism (Kanwal et al., 2019). Additionally, in one Arab Gulf State, interpersonal distrust between leaders and subordinates and among employees predicted perceived WO (Al-Dhuhouri and Shamsudin, 2023). In the same context, leaders' favoritism was found to trigger subordinates' perceived ostracism leading to colleagues ostracising each other (Mohd Shamsudin et al., 2023). Given the previous argument, it is expected that leaders would be the main source of workplace ostracism.

Robinson and colleagues' (2013) groundbreaking systematic review on WO proposed assumptions on the basic antecedents of WO within organisations. For example, they argued that a *conflict-avoidant* organisational culture has lenient policies and limited mechanisms that resolve interpersonal tension, so employees use ostracism to express disapproval. This cultural orientation is defined by the belief that conflict is dangerous and can disrupt relationship harmony. Consequently, if conflict arises, the norms of changing the subject of conversation or refraining from discussing the subject is deemed acceptable (Gelfand et al.,

2012). As a result, in a culture that avoids conflict, individuals typically suppress any expression of conflict, and the only approved approach to handling conflict involves a passive and agreeable management style (Gelfand et al., 2012).

While this proposition seems to sit comfortable with the findings of some research on organisational culture in Oman, one Arab Gulf State, a few nuances present. For example, Hans and Bariki's (2012) survey method study on lower-level managers at oil and gas companies in Oman found that when resolving interpersonal conflicts, managers adopt accommodation conflict resolution style (lose/win) where one-party sacrifices while allowing the other party to win, aiming to build social credit rather than focusing on personal interests or task goals (Hans and Bariki, 2012). Those who adopt the accommodating style are inclined to prioritise the needs of others at the expense of their own (Hans and Bariki, 2012). Due to their prioritisation of relationship-focused principles, the prevalence and suitability of conflict-avoidance in collectivist societies are believed to be significant (Tjosvold and Sun, 2002). On the other hand, in competitive organisational climates (Robinson et al., 2013), such as the UK (Benaida and Arif, 2013), colleagues may mistreat even sympathetic employees (Cortina et al., 2018), particularly those with a competitive mindset (Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2017). In such environments, employees tend to choose ostracism over direct confrontation or ridicule, perceiving it as a more advantageous and powerful strategy, particularly when it comes to threatening employees' needs (Williams et al., 2005). On the other hand, given the stronger emphasis on interconnectedness, harmony, and conflict-avoidance in collectivist cultures, direct confrontation with those ostracising them may be viewed as rude (Jahanzeb and Fatima, 2018). Indeed, culture significantly explains business behaviours in each country (Plocher et al., 2021), and the motives behind the ostracising behviours.

2.6 Ostracism Across Cultures

2.6.1 The Definition of Culture

The first identification of culture in written form occurred by Edward B. Tylor (Hall, 1959). Anthropologists define culture as the way of peoples' life which sums their learned behavioural patterns, material things, and attitudes (Hall, 1959). Geert Hofstede, a prominent interculturalist, considers culture as an inherent possession (Långstedt, 2018) and describes

it as the programming of the mind that distinguishes an individual from the rest of the group, where the person's value system acts as mental software (Venaik and Brewer, 2008). From a psychological perspective, culture is characterised as a significant level of shared beliefs, behaviours, and ways of thinking among individual members in a society or cultural groups (Schwartz, 2014). Similarly, Hall (1989) contends that culture is closely tied to, if not synonymous with, what we define as the 'mind.' However, Schwartz (2014) challenges Hofstede's (1983) metaphor by asserting that societal culture, observed in the functioning of institutions, organisational policies, and practices, constitutes a normative value system influencing peoples' minds. According to Schwartz (2014), these values are not intrinsic to their minds, as proposed by Hofstede (1983). In Schwartz's view, societal culture is not a psychological variable; instead, it exists externally to individuals.

Culture holds tremendous significance as it touches every facet of human life, influencing aspects such as language, personality, emotional expressions, communication styles, cognitive processes, problem-solving approaches, business practices, marriage, family dynamics, governmental systems, military operations, and city planning (Hall, 1989). Anthropologists have categorised cultural behaviours into overt and covert, implicit and explicit, encompassing topics that are openly discussed as well as those that remain unspoken. The role of the unconscious mind in relation to culture is still a subject of debate regarding the extent to which cultural influences shape unconscious processes (Hall, 1989). For instance, gaining an understanding of the language, material artifacts, and human behaviours within a particular culture provides insights into how people feel and the strategies they employ to avoid confrontation. This understanding is crucial for recognising behaviours that operate beyond one's conscious awareness, as these behaviours are often communicated unconsciously (E.T. Hall and M.R Hall, 2001). As a consequence, a key question arises: what cultural dimensions play a vital role in relationships, and under what conditions can cultural differences and values have positive or negative implications (House et al., 2004; Taras et al., 2010), and how do they influence overall dynamics (Gelfand et al., 2017)? The question posed here emphasises the importance of culture recognition in understanding a social phenomenon such as workplace ostracism.

2.6.2 Cross-cultural Perspectives on Ostracism

Cultural factors influence individuals' perceptions, reactions, and mechanisms for coping with ostracism within organisational settings (Mao et al., 2018). It has been acknowledged as a significant moderator of the effects of ostracism, particularly in relation to factors such as power distance and task interdependence (Ferris et al., 2017; Rudert and Greifeneder, 2019). The discussion of ostracism necessitates consideration of its contextual factors, specifically cultural backgrounds (Mao et al., 2018; Bedi, 2021) as it plays a vital moderating role (Uskul and Over, 2017; Mao et al., 2018; Tu et al., 2019). For example, when individuals are faced with ostracism events that are stress inducing, disturbing, and confusing, they engage in efforts to interpret and explain cues from their environment. This involves undergoing a process of sensemaking to facilitate the social construction of understanding (Mao et al., 2018). As social roles and relationships serve as a foundation for sensemaking and considering that cultures vary in defining interpersonal connections, cultural characteristics may serve as crucial indicators for individuals to comprehend the occurrence of ostracism (Mao et al., 2018). Indeed, numerous papers have started assessing cultural factors differences and have progressed beyond examining primary effects to investigate variables that moderate cultural distinctions (Gelfand et al., 2017).

For example, in Uskul and Over (2017) review on ostracism in cross-cultural studies, they argue that there has been a shift from earlier studies predominantly involving participants from Western Europe and North America in ostracism research. The emphasis on cultural diversity in previous investigations was often neglected, given the prevailing assumption that sensitivity to exclusion is inherently universal across cultures, attributed to its deep-rooted nature in humans' evolutionary history. In fact, the degree of sensitivity towards ostracism does differ across cultures (Pfundmair et al., 2015b; Sommer et al., 2017). It was argued that individuals with a high sense of individualism are more sensitive to how others treat them (Li et al., 2021). For instance, results of several manipulation experiments conducted by Pfundmair et al. (2015b) on multiple cultures showed that German participants differentiated between exclusion and inclusion, whereas Chinese participants exhibited similar reactions in both scenarios. Similarly, Germans, in comparison to Chinese and Turkish individuals, displayed higher degree of sensitivity to the exclusion manipulation in the same study conducted by Pfundmair et al. (2015b). Thus, they concluded that collectivists did not exhibit immediate reactions, suggesting a lesser threat of perception to ostracism than the individualists. However, there is a growing recognition among researchers that

understanding reactions to ostracism requires a more nuanced approach, especially in collectivistic cultural groups. These groups prioritise collective goals, emphasise mutual obligation, and display stronger social interdependence (Uskul and Over, 2017). Accordingly, current research should aim to investigate whether responses to ostracism reveal distinct patterns within these collectivistic cultural contexts different from the ones already known in the West (Uskul and Over, 2017).

Until now, there is conflicting evidence regarding whether ostracism is more prevalent in individualistic or collectivistic societies and whether members of individualistic cultures are more sensitive to ostracism than members of collectivistic cultures. For instance, using descriptive correlational research design, Ebrahim and Eldeep (2020), and Mohamed et al. (2021) found that just over half of the participants they surveyed reported lower level of WO in an Arab context. In the same way, Yang and Treadway (2016) argue that collectivists are less likely to be ostracised and perceive being ostracised than the individualists. Moreover, collectivists are found to be less negatively affected by ostracism than those in highly individualistic cultures (Uskul and Over, 2017; Knausenberger and Echterhoff, 2018; Bedi, 2021). This is because individuals with a stronger collectivistic orientation perceive exclusion as a minor social injury, in contrast to those with a more individualistic orientation who view it as a major social injury (Pfundmair et al., 2015b). Also, individuals in collectivistic cultures tend to avoid rejection by the group which holds particular significance, given their strong reliance on group dynamics and the normative emphasis on fostering connections with others (Schaafsma, 2017). This emphasis does not necessarily imply a stronger need for belonging compared to individuals from individualistic cultures, but rather an increased concern about securing a fitting place within the group (Schaafsma, 2017). It seems as though that a high degree of interdependence plays a protective role for collectivists, as indicated by reduced physiological and self-reported distress linked to ostracism (Pfundmair et al., 2015b). Perhaps, due to their tendency to demonstrate respect and uphold positive interpersonal relationships, individuals from collectivistic cultures are less inclined to openly discuss or report instances of ostracism, conflict, or shape their reactions based on the treatment they receive from others (Wu et al., 2019; Bedi, 2021).

Along the same line, individuals from a collectivistic culture, as opposed to an individualistic one, perceive ostracism as less threatening even in the absence of social reminders (Knausenberger and Echterhoff, 2018). Specifically, when confronted with the necessity for

social reminders of one's social connectedness, participants from a collectivist culture exhibit fewer negative emotions and a diminished sense of threat compared to those from an individualistic culture (Knausenberger, and Echterhoff, 2018). This is because individuals with a greater collectivistic orientation may not perceive social exclusion at the individual-level as a threat to their sense of self, leading to a lack of motivation to engage in behavioural coping mechanisms (Pfundmair et al., 2015b). On the contrary, various studies revealed that individual-level rejection sensitivity by others is stronger among collectivist East-Asian societies such as Korea and Japan, compared to individualistic European Americans (Uskul and Over, 2017).

On the other hand, in more individualistic cultures, social obligations have a lower influence on people's behaviour, and the consequences of not fitting in are less pronounced compared to collectivistic cultures. Consequently, individuals in individualistic cultures may exhibit less concern with the avoidance of rejection (Schaafsma, 2017). Similarly, in more individualistic cultures, people tend to define their self-concept in independent terms, deriving self-esteem from uniqueness, expressing autonomy, and pursuing personal goals. This does not imply a lack of desire for connection; rather, individuals in individualistic cultures rely less heavily on their groups and feel less obligated toward them (Schaafsma, 2017). These cross-cultural distinctions in self-perception may suggest variations in how individuals from different cultures are concerned about fitting in, avoiding rejection, and responding to actual threats to their inclusionary status (Schaafsma, 2017).

Beside collectivism-individualism, the foregoing results could be explained in the light of power-distance. For example, certain Asian countries (high power-distance) exhibit greater tolerance for deviant behaviours, treating them with indifference, in contrast to European countries (low power-distance) where a deviant individual within an organisation is perceived as dangerous and unacceptable (Hofstede, 1984). As such, employees who endorse the value of power-distance may demonstrate reduced aversion to ostracism, as they exhibit greater tolerance for interpersonal mistreatment from authority figures such as supervisors or senior colleagues in the workplace (Wu et al., 2016).

On the contrary, evidence show that societies that prioritise social harmony and interpersonal connections are more threatened by ostracism (Sommer et al., 2017). For example, employees with a strong tendency towards collectivism within the workplaces found

ostracism more distressing, given that it contradicts their values of belonging to a collective entity (Wu et al., 2016). Likewise, Jahnzeb and Fatima (2018) as well as Jiang et al. (2021) have indicated that employees in collectivist cultures are particularly sensitive to WO. Possibly, because in these cultures, deviating from group norms subjects the norm violator to ostracism (Gamian-Wilk and Madeja-Bien, 2021). Consequently, employees in collectivist cultures not only endure the pain of ostracism but also bear an additional cognitive burden by suppressing their emotions (Jahanzeb and Fatima, 2018), because in collectivistic cultures, expressing negative emotions is considered disrespectful (Hofstede, 1984), as is the case in Arab countries where the open expression of emotions is not anticipated (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). This added strain is likely to make them feel excessively stressed (Jahanzeb and Fatima, 2018). Furthermore, in collectivist cultures where individuals derive their identities from various social groups (eg, family and organisations), exclusionary behaviours within these groups may be perceived as 'identity threats' by the targets, causing deep emotional distress (Jahanzeb et al., 2018). Thus, ostracism may lead the targets of ostracism to feel a sense of not belonging to the group, intensifying the overall strain. Hence, given the contradictory results, it is crucial to conduct cross-cultural studies to examine whether the observed relationships are influenced by cultural factors (Anjum et al., 2022).

2.6.3 The Cultural Influence on the Outcomes of Ostracism

The consequences of ostracism

Experiencing ostracism lead to adverse outcomes for employees such as negative mental health (Wu et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2013; Robinson et al., 2013; Liu and Xia, 2016; Mao et al., 2018; Riaz et al., 2019; Howard et al., 2020) and job satisfaction (Liu et al., 2013; Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2015; Liu and Xia, 2016; Chung and Kim, 2017; Howard et al., 2020). However, it is strongly related to job satisfaction (Howard et al., 2020). Workplace ostracism was found to be very strongly related to wellbeing outcomes (eg, psychological wellbeing and emotions) (Howard et al., 2020; Bedi, 2021; Li et al., 2021). Wellbeing ranges from negative states (eg, misery) to positive states (eg, elation) and reflects an individual's psychological condition. This broad category includes emotional responses, satisfaction in specific domains, and overall judgments of life satisfaction (Li et al., 2021). To add, a meta-analysis conducted by Howard et al. (2020) unveiled a robust correlation between WO and various psychological outcomes, including silence and a diminished sense

of belonging. The study further identified a statistically significant positive association between WO and adverse effects on wellbeing, job tension, and negative emotions. It posited that the hurtful psychological consequences of ostracism would be mitigated among targets who remain unaware of their ostracised status. In contrast, when targets perceive themselves as subject to ostracism, the likelihood of experiencing negative outcomes is highly anticipated, regardless of the occurrence of actual ostracism (Robinson et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2020). However, a person's sense of ostracism may arise from cultural differences (Wesselmann et al., 2019).

As with the sensitivity to ostracism, cultural research on ostracism also claims divergent results concerning the impact of culture on wellbeing. Generally, cultural factors such as values hold by individuals in each culture do affect people's wellbeing (Knafo et al., 2011). Indeed, wellbeing is one of the most widely discussed effect of WO which affects individuals at both, individual- and organisational-level (Gamian-Wilk and Madeja-Bien, 2021) and both collectivists (Cheng and Ma, 2022; Ma et al., 2022; Fatima et al., 2023), and individualists (Lau et al., 2009; Li et al., 2021). Nevertheless, Li et al. (2021) observed that the associations between WO and wellbeing exhibit greater strength in individualist contexts compared to collectivist contexts. For example, observations by Pfundmair and colleagues (2015c) suggested that ostracism has a more significant impact on the psychological and physiological wellbeing of individualists, while collectivists showed lower physiological stress and higher levels of psychological wellbeing when confronted with ostracism.

The extant literature found several job-related outcomes of WO across cultures. As noted earlier, WO severely impacts belongingness, emotional exhaustion, organisational deviance, OCB, interpersonal deviance, and job satisfaction (Li et al., 2021). Interestingly, these outcomes were found to be more pronounced in individualist settings compared to collectivist contexts (Li et al., 2021). This is particularly evident as the the associations between WO and organisational identification and OCB are stronger in collectivist contexts than in individualist contexts (Li et al., 2021). However, when collectivism was employed as a boundary condition in examining the impacts of WO, the findings reveal a detrimental association between WO and job engagement (Xu et al., 2020). For example, in the Arab contexts, WO is shown to decrease employees' engagement and job performance, and increase job tension (Mattar et al., 2022). Whereas linguistic ostracism was found to lessen knowledge sharing behaviour and heightens knowledge hiding and hoarding in an Arab

context (Albana and Yeşiltaş, 2022). In addition, WO strongly predicts workplace envy in another Arabian culture (Shady et al., 2023). This indicates that cultural background determines the outcomes of such phenomenon differently on employees.

Nationality and ostracism

The forgoing contradictory findings illustrate that the severity and prevalence of ostracism are dependent on the specific context, emphasising that factors beyond Hofstede's cultural dimensions such as nationality are indeed crucial aspects to consider when studying a phenomenon. Hence, along with individualism-collectivism dimension, cultural differences can also be determined by nationality which in turn affects the experience of ostracism (Marchesi et al., 2021). For example, Eastern populations tend to perceive the self as intrinsically linked to others and define themselves through relationships with others, such as their nationality (Köllen and Kopf, 2022). Nevertheless, the issue of nationalism and the associated exclusionary mechanisms within workplace settings tends to be overlooked (Köllen and Kopf, 2022). Over the past two decades, cross-country surveys in Western Europe reported that there is no indication of a decline in trends related to national attachment and pride. In fact, there has been an increase in national pride, and national attachment has remained stable (Antonsich and Holland, 2014). Despite the European Union's efforts to promote greater integration in the labor market and the free movement of people, there is a surprising lack of studies examining workplace issues such as ostracism, discrimination and racism related to nationalism and stereotypes based on nationality within specific national contexts (Köllen and Kopf, 2022). In addition, Omanis with different sub-cultures are proud of their Arab and Islamic heritage, which poses a challenge for the government in balancing modernity and cultural heritage (Al-Barwani and Albeely, 2007). It is, therefore, important to explore the role of nationalism as a shared heritage between different groups of people in a country to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of the integrated labor market and the associated management challenges listed above (Köllen and Kopf, 2022).

An examination of cross-cultural studies through a review of the literature reveals that when evaluating the phenomenon of WO across different cultures, such as the West and East, the majority of research extensively relies on Hofstede's (2001) collectivism-individualism dimension (Gelfand et al., 2017) due to its significant moderation effects of WO (Li et al., 2021). Yet, limited attention has been devoted to exploring whether or how culture moderate

responses to social ostracism (Sommer et al., 2017), beyond collectivism-individualism dimension (Gelfand et al., 2017). This is crucial, particularly considering findings from the World Values Survey, which indicate a global trend toward cultural traits characteristic of rich Western individualistic nations (Kaasa and Minkov, 2020). Nevertheless, various types of traits evolve differently, and national cultures change at varying speed (Kaasa and Minkov, 2020). However, despite variations between countries, individuals with identical individualism scores in the US and China, for example, are likely to exhibit different behaviours due to varied cultural contexts of each country (Taras et al., 2010). This implies that Hofstede's cultural dimensions, particularly collectivism-individualism, are no longer sufficient for explaining a phenomenon. Instead, a precise understanding of people's behaviours should be based on their shared cultural norms as reflected in their national identity. Hence, researchers are encouraged to go beyond collectivism-individualism dimension in CCR (Gelfand et al., 2017).

As a consequence, cultural contexts encompass political, global, and historical circumstances that shape our work and life (Hall, 1989). As a result, understanding these contexts can lead to differences in how work is understood, promoting diversity and addressing race and racism, which cross-cultural studies often overlook (Jackson, 2018). This approach embraces indigenous knowledge that challenges the limitations and dominance of Western thoughts and subjects them to critique (Jackson, 2018). Hence, conducting in-depth studies within countries to explore the homogeneity of cultural variables within country samples is essential for CCR (Fernández et al., 2000). Because context helps us understand things that might not make sense otherwise (Johns, 2006), the contextual factor embedded in this study is the national culture of the countries under investigation: Oman and the UK. In general, there is a scarcity of studies on WO in the Arab region, which differs culturally from East-Asian countries that the research of WO focused on; an area that warrants exploration. The Sultanate of Oman, specifically, was chosen due to the limited available data on Omani cultural studies and scales (At-Twaijri and Al-Muhaiza, 1996; Al-Lamky, 2007), specifically in the area of WO. Oman is one of the Arabian Gulf States that is part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), comprising six nations (Oman, Saudi Arabia, Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait). The GCC countries share a similar culture and history and have experienced common economic, social, political, and economic development (Joseph, 2018). Arabic is the official language in the Arab Gulf States and are recognised as conservative Muslim

countries (Oman Country Review, 2024). This region is usually addressed as one unit due to the similiters among the GCC countries (Joseph, 2018). Indeed, a country like Oman is significant in challenging universal theories and conceptions of OB due to its unique heterogeneity nature (Common, 2011). Therefore, it is assumed that the UK, as a high individualistic country, would offer a robust comparative context to Oman, serving as its counterpart. Given that cultural background affects the perception of ostracism, the sensitivity towards exclusion, and the outcomes of WO, the following research question is posed:

RQ 1: How is workplace ostracism experienced in the Arabian Gulf States, and what cultural-specific forms of workplace ostracism are encountered there?

Because cultural variations influence the impacts of workplace ostracism, it is anticipated that employees will employ different coping mechanisms in response to this experience within each specific cultural context, as elaborated in the following section.

2.6.4 The Cultural Influence on the Coping Mechanisms with Ostracism

Coping is a dynamic process wherein individuals may, at certain points, rely more on emotional or defensive strategies and at other times on problem-focused strategies, depending on alterations in the person-environment relationship (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). To comprehend and assess coping, it is essential to identify what an individual is coping with. The more precisely the context is defined, the easier it becomes to associate particular coping thoughts or actions with the demands of that context (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). For instance, while research on coping constantly demonstrates that personality traits are commonly associated with coping, cultural factors continue to serve as a reliable predictor of coping, even when accounting for traits (Adam and Ward, 2016). While personality may still hold the utmost significance in coping within a single cultural sample, cross-cultural comparisons results indicate that cultural factors might be equally significant as personality in influencing coping (Adam and Ward, 2016).

In general, **emotion-focused coping** tends to emerge when an individual appraises environmental conditions as hard to change the harmful experiences (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Examples of emotion-focused coping include avoidance, distancing, minimisation,

positive comparisons, selective attention, deriving positive value from negative events (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), and seeking of emotional social support such as getting moral support, understanding, and sympathy (Carver et al., 1989). Conversely, **problem-focused coping** is more likely adopted when conditions are perceived as amenable to change. Problem-focused coping strategies involve actions such as defining the problem, generating alternative solutions, evaluating alternatives in terms of costs and benefits, making a choice, and taking actions, resembling problem-solving techniques (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). It also includes seeking instrumental social support such as seeking advice, information or help (Carver et al., 1989).

Social support pertains to the degree to which individuals seek assistance from others in managing and regulating their emotions (Carver et al., 1989). There are different sources of social support, which include family, co-workers, supervisors or significant others (Cruz et al., 2021). Culturally, Eastern people tend to use more emotional-focused coping such as seeking support from friends or adults than problem-solving which is adopted more by Westerners (Ma and Bellmore, 2016). This is because people of high power-distance cultures relative to lower power-distance cultures, intend to socially connect more with others when ostracised (Mao et al., 2018). When they are ostracised, they are better protected against a single ostracism experience and recover more easily with social support (Mao et al., 2018). In other words, in order to restore the impairment of ostracism, collectivists resort to different sources of social support which they perceive valuable in their cultural background (Mao et al., 2018) such as seeking support from their manager and colleagues wherein accessing to these resources proved to better prepare the ostracised employee to cope with work demands (Bedi, 2021).

Rresearch has extensively explored the various functions of social support, such as serving as an independent predictor, mediator, or moderator in individual relationships within many life domains (Kossek et al., 2011) as to job burnout (Wu et al., 2021). It has been found to predict job satisfaction and mental health (Bradley and Cartwright, 2002). Additionally, workplace social support serves as an immediately accessible resource and has the potential to mitigate the adverse impact of workplace ostracism across various domains (Zhang et al., 2023). While the targets of ostracism have been observed to adopt various behavioural coping mechanisms, including defensive ostracism, acceptance, resignation, and others (Williams, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013), workplace social support such as career mentoring and task

support strongly predicted job satisfaction (Harris et al., 2007). Therefore, Howard and colleagues (2020) called for research on the impact of social support in attenuating the consequences of ostracism at work.

A cross-cultural mixed-methods study on adolescences from Taiwan (a collectivistic culture) and US (an individualistic culture) indicated that adolescents exhibited different coping responses to peer ostracism, such as a greater tendency to seek adults' support in Taiwan and a preference for problem-solving coping in the US. Additionally, variations were observed in the social cognitions employed during the coping process, with connection seeking being prominent in Taiwan and demonstration of self-independence being more prevalent in the US (Ma and Bellmore, 2016). On the other hand, other studies found contrary results. For example, in cultures where the group is prioritised over the individual, as indicated by cultural dimensions such as embeddedness and hierarchy that equates with collectivism, people are generally less inclined to burden others with their problems. This tendency can, in turn, reduce the probability of seeking social support (Taylor et al., 2004). Therefore, individuals from such culture that places a high value on tradition while having low levels of autonomy and egalitarianism may be more inclined to cope by turning to religion, particularly seeking God's help and praying more than usual (Bardi and Guerra, 2011). This tendency is not only influenced by the emphasis on traditional values within their culture but is also considered a culturally normative coping strategy (Bardi and Guerra, 2011).

Therefore, it is striking to note that social support goes hand in hand with religious coping; yet differs according to the context. For example, religious coping is viewed as part of social support when support is sought from religious network (Adam and Ward, 2016). Results suggest that religious coping may differentially impact wellbeing outcomes (Bardi and Guerra, 2011). Despite this interest, there is still a lack of research exploring religion as a coping mechanism for dealing with work-related outcomes (Tracey, 2012) and specifically ostracism except for the work of Aydin et al. (2010) on a sample of Muslim and Christian students and migrants who argued that those who were ostracised reported stronger intentions to engage in religious behaviours. In an experimental design, it was found that practices such as prayers have been proven to be effective methods for recovering from ostracism, as they can lead to a more significant restoration of people's fundamental needs for satisfaction (Hales et al., 2016). Nonetheless, it is important to note that this experiment was conducted

solely on Christian students. Therefore, the impact of religious coping on ostracised employees remains unknown.

One of the main issues in our knowledge of coping mechanisms in the Arab world is a lack of studies on coping with ostracism, particularly in the Gulf States. As a result, there is a scarcity of studies on how employees in this particular context cope with WO. Consequently, the following paragraphs will offer an overview of established coping mechanisms for managing distress in general. In the Middle-East, Islam dominates all aspects of life, making it difficult for Westerners to realise the degree to which religion pervades their lives (Hall, 1959). In the Arab world, both Arabic and Islamic norms and values shape to a great degree individuals' expectations and behaviours (Galanou and Farrag, 2015), that are well articulated in Islam (Suleiman, 2016). Therefore, religious coping mechanisms are expected to serve as a contextual factor in dealing with ostracism. This assumption is backed by a mixed-methods study targeting Omani staff in a non-profit organisation, which revealed that Islamic values and beliefs significantly buffered participants' work-related stress (Emam and Al-Lawati, 2014). Specifically, participants mentioned that having faith in God gave them strength and aided them in making sense of events around them concerning work and personal matters. Additionally, their study interestingly revealed that prayer was another prevalent way participants use to cope with stress, which in turn reflected in their overall wellbeing and helped them find meaning and purpose in their job. Moreover, a study conducted by Hossain and Rizvi (2016) in Oman, examining the correlation between happiness and religiosity through self-rating questionnaire administered to individuals of various nationalities and faiths, revealed that Omanis (predominantly Muslims) ranked as the second most happiest people. They also found that, regardless of religious belief, the higher a person's religiousness, the higher the level of happiness experienced as belief systems guide people's behaviours, especially in the face of challenges. The authors argue that the level of happiness someone feels depends on how close they feel to God.

On the other hand, there has been a consistent decrease in religious involvement throughout the 20th century in the UK, year after year, each birth cohort becomes less religious than the one before (Crockett and Voas, 2006; Kaasa and Minkov, 2020). In fact, the religious affiliation in the UK contends that a notable portion of the population identifies themselves with no religion, comprising (37%) (UK Parliament, 2021). Accordingly, it is therefore

expected in this study for religious practices to stand out and to be enacted more by Arabs than the Westerners when coping with WO.

Both religious-coping and emotion-focused coping are considered avoidant-coping strategies (Bardi and Guerra, 2011). Engaging in avoidant-coping is more common for people coming from cultures that are high on embeddedness versus autonomy and hierarchy versus egalitarianism (collectivism vs. individualism respectively) (Bardi and Guerra, 2011). Avoidance as an emotion-focused coping that does not directly change the meaning of an event. Instead, the meaning shifts due to selective attention or avoidance relies on what is being focused on or intentionally avoided (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The meaning of an encounter can remain unchanged even if certain elements are overlooked, or reflections on the encounter are temporarily set aside (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Ostracism and avoidance behaviours are deemed similar terms (Van Kleef et al., 2010). Kimel et al. (2017) provide an example, arguing that individuals subjected to ostracism often experience emotional numbness, which, in turn, suppress their emotions and prompt avoidance as a coping mechanism. This avoidance, as claimed, results in lack of experiencing pleasure, engaging in positive interactions and social activities, feeling emotionally and physically flat, and struggling with positive emotions such as happiness. Additionally, research indicates that targets of ostracism who avoid retaliation are prone to internalising mistreatment and self-blame (Howard et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the adoption of avoidance strategies such as cognitive appraisal over other coping mechanisms depends on cultural background (Aydin et al., 2010; Mao et al., 2018). For instance, manipulation experiments on ostracism revealed that individualists with less positive affect are more inclined to exhibit avoidance behaviour after experiencing ostracism (Pfundmair et al., 2015a). On the contrary, regardless of the nature of affect, it was argued that collectivists tend to adopt avoidance and defensive silence when ostracised or facing conflict (Jahanzeb et al., 2018).

Furthermore, avoidance involves pretending the event did not take place (Fitzgerald, 1990), in which coping responses may be oriented towards diminishing the importance of the ostracising event cognitively, an aspect that has not been yet tested in work settings (Robinson et al., 2013). For instance, Pfundmair et al. (2015a) contend that engaging in abstract thinking (ie, more psychological distance) represents a potential coping mechanism for dealing with social exclusion, offering a means to effectively manage everyday social

threats. The cultivation and activation of an individual's abstract mindset has the potential to enable people to view social experiences from a more positive perspective (Pfundmair et al., 2015a). For example, Pfundmair et al. (2014) multi experiments on ostracism present evidence indicating that individuals from collectivistic backgrounds react less negatively to ostracism compared to those from individualistic backgrounds. The findings imply that their reduced negative reaction to ostracism may be attributed to cognitively perceiving it as less threatening than individuals from individualistic cultures did due to a greater access to social support.

Research on how different cultures cope with ostracism is still in the early stages (Schaafsma, 2017). As presented, scholars have demonstrated conflicting evidence regarding how individuals from cultures emphasising collectivism versus those emphasising individualism react to and manage the distress associated with ostracism. In addition, cultural diversity was not given priority in the literature of ostracism (Uskul and Over, 2017). Thus, more cross-cultural research is needed in the area of coping with ostracism (Schaafsma, 2017). Building on the discussions outlined in this review and following the recognised gap related to the cultural influence on the phenomenon of ostracism, three additional research questions have been formulated:

RQ2: How do employees cope with workplace ostracism in the Arabian Gulf States?

RQ3: How cultural and contextualising factors might have contributed to the way Arabian Gulf States employees cope with ostracism?

RQ4: How does the experience of workplace ostracism differ in the Arabian Gulf States workplaces, compared to the Western workplaces?

These questions are considered sufficiently broad to address the research objectives: (1) the identification of cultural factors influencing WO in the Arab States workplaces, (2) the analysis of WO impacts on employees' coping mechanisms, and (3) the investigation of the cultural nuances impacting the experience of WO in the Arab States and the West.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has presented a comprehensive literature review on ostracism spanning various disciplines, emphasising its distinctive conceptualisation compared to related constructs such as rejection and exclusion, and other deviant behaviour constructs such as incivility and

mistreatment. Special attention has been given to unpack the unique features and characteristics of ostracism, underscoring its ambiguous nature as a silent treatment.The focus then shifts to workplace ostracism within organisational research, which is the primary focus of this thesis. It explores the various manifestations of ostracism in the workplace and delves into the adverse effects it has on employees.

Furthermore, the review extends to the cross-cultural aspects of ostracism, shedding light on the disparities in its sensitivity, reaction, and coping mechanisms between collectivist societies including Arab contexts and individualistic Western cultures. The examination of ostracism across cultures identifies a literature gap in the understanding of workplace ostracism, emphasising the need for more CCR to grasp the phenomenon's nuances in terms of its forms, prevalence, severity, and effective coping mechanisms specific to each culture. Consequently, the review establishes the rationale for the research questions posed and the research objectives to be accomplished.

Chapter 3: Thesis Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will offer a comprehensive overview of the research methodology employed in this cross-cultural study. It will explain the research type and design, and provide a general description of the three phases incorporated in this investigation, including the two adopted studies. Subsequent chapters will provide a detailed explanation of each of the two studies. The qualitative aspects will be covered in Chapters 4 & 5, whereas the quantitative aspects will be addressed in Chapter 6. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the rationale for opting for a cross-cultural mixed-methods approach and provide a discussion on the underlying philosophical stance that informs the study.

3.2 Research Type

In order to discuss the suitability of the methodology chosen for this study, it is first crucial to provide an overview of cross-cultural research.

3.2.1 Cross-cultural Research

At the end of the 20th century, specifically between 1980 and 2000, a significant shift occurred with the emergence of the computer and internet era. This technological advancement greatly influenced the field of cross-cultural comparisons in OB research (Gelfand et al., 2017). During this period, pioneering works by researchers such as Hofstede and Schwartz laid the foundation for cross-cultural studies (Gelfand et al., 2017). These studies revealed notable differences in various constructs across cultures, such as leadership, OCB, job performance, and more. Hence, this era marked a crucial turning point in understanding how culture affects organisational dynamics and behaviours (Gelfand et al., 2017).

The 21st century witnessed a continued and significant impact of cross-cultural studies on the field of OB. From the beginning of the 21st century to the present date, there has been an increasing emphasis on cultural diversity within organisations in literature, as a result of

globalisation and the ageing population. This focus aims to identify strategies for retaining skilled employees from different cultural backgrounds (Gelfand et al., 2017). Notably, during this era, subjects such as CWB including issues (eg, harassment and mistreatment, stress, abusive supervision, work-family conflict, and turnover), as well as the exploration of cultural influences on emotions have gained considerable attention (Gelfand et al., 2017). Moreover, there is greater emphasis on translations and measurement equivalence when studying cross-cultural differences (Gelfand et al., 2017). Precisely, topics of conflict and negotiations across cultures has been thus far, constituting the highest topic of interests in cross-cultural literature (Gelfand et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, the focus should not only be on cultural differences during distinct activities of communication such as meeting, business negotiations, job interviews and lectures, or on what misperceptions about what to be expected, rather, cross-cultural studies should investigate other aspects of communication activity (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2019). For example, cultural terms and phrases used on a daily basis by people as part of their communicative action are vital to them and an integral part of studying cross-cultural communication (Carbaugh, 2017). Thereby, the bottom-line of efficient cross-cultural communication is more of revealing the right reply than sending the right message (E.T. Hall and M.R Hall, 2001).

Overall, the 21st century has brought about a more sophisticated understanding of how culture shapes OB, opening up new avenues of research and inquiry (Smith et al., 2012; Gelfand et al., 2017). Therefore, there is a growing necessity for CCR to understand both the similarities and differences among cultures (Smith et al., 2012).

3.2.2 Methodological Issues in Cross-cultural Studies

The issue of culture has been brought to researchers' attention in recent years by cross-cultural psychologists and others, who have called for a more coherent approach to understanding culture (Karasz and Singelis, 2009). Adapting the right methodology and methods in capturing the cultural values and differences across countries is a challenge for researchers. Because culture is inherently a complex phenomenon (Fischer and Poortinga, 2018), striving for diversity in methodology and epistemology with more rigorous methods should be a priority in this field (Smith et al., 2012). Though the diversity of samples and

methods have increased in recent cross-cultural literature, adopting a multiple-methods approach is still little in frequency despite its particular importance in studies of cultures (Gelfand et al., 2017). The complementarity of quantitative methods with qualitative methods must be encouraged, especially as the qualitative methods received almost no attention in cross-cultural studies and OB studies published in the Journal of Applied Psychology (JAP) over the last 100 years (Smith et al., 2012). Similarly, field, and qualitative data should be complemented by other quantitative methods (Smith et al., 2012). A review conducted by Spector and Howard (2021) contend that only a single study conducted a qualitative method design to measure workplace ostracism, highlighting the need for mixed-methods design in cross-cultural research.

However, it is worth mentioning though, that a major flaw in cross-cultural research is the overemphasis on cultural differences via chasing statistical differences (Fischer and Poortinga, 2018). Interestingly, (71%) of the articles reviewed by the authors only pointed out the differences, and not a single one published the invariances or the similarities. This issue results in publication bias because if the findings did not find differences, the article would not be published (Fischer and Poortinga, 2018). Moreover, recent methodological developments have supported the research of cross-cultures to widen its scope using, for instance, Qualtrics and MTruck (Gelfand et al., 2017). As for data analysis, strategies such as multilevel models, moderated mediation analyses, and nested hierarchical clustering are employed to reveal cultural clusters (Gelfand et al., 2017). Since culture is now measured not only assumed, translation and measurement equivalence issues are significant and increasing but remain, low (Gelfand et al., 2017).

Furthermore, when reviewing JAP articles, Spector and Howard (2021) observed that nearly all articles using non-US samples included cautionary statements regarding the generalisability of their findings to other cultural contexts. Conversely, articles with US samples did not use such statements, assuming their results to be generally applicable rather than specific to Americans. Thereby, when studying cultures, it is essential to realise that the American sample represents a phenomenon specific to its culture rather than a universally applicable phenomenon (Smith et al., 2012).

Hence, the issue of generalisability is an important matter to consider because, for example, though both the US and the UK are placed on the extreme individualistic cultures within the

continuum of individualism vs. collectivism (Hofstede, 1983); issues of space, territory, status, relationships, friendships and others are different between the two countries (Hall, 1989). Therefore, if the variance between similar cultures such as the UK and the US are noticeable, then the variance with other similar ones would be more expansive. Thereby, to make accurate inferences, a representative set of random samples extracted from all groups needs to be adopted. Samples taken from a single country must be representative of all inhabitants (Fischer and Poortinga, 2018). Relying on only one type of sample (eg, students) as most cross-cultural studies do, drawn from a few universities, and only in a limited number of countries does not represent the population of generalisability. Therefore, making broader claims based on such samples is not possible (Fischer and Poortinga, 2018). Consequently, the generalisability must be evident statistically using a multi-methods approach (Smith et al., 2012). As such, all studies should question whether their results can be generalised to other contexts and under what conditions this generalisability applies (Smith et al., 2012).

3.2.3 Mixed-methods Research

The research follows a cross-cultural mixed-methods approach. *Mixed-methods research* (MMR) is a research methodology where researchers combine components of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. This includes the application and integration of both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, methods of data collection, analysis, and inference techniques (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). In addition, mixed methods research involves gathering both qualitative data, which is open-ended and subjective, and quantitative data, which is closed-ended and objective, in response to research questions or hypotheses (Clark et al., 2021). The two forms of data are combined in the analysis stage through techniques such as merging the data, explaining the data, building from one dataset to another, or embedding the data within a larger framework (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). These techniques are incorporated into a specific mixed- methods design that outlines the procedures to be used in a study (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007). This integration allows for more insights attained from information provided by either qualitative or quantitative data alone (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). Therefore, when MMR approach is used, it will assist in gaining a better picture of what is behind the embedded sentences, along with what is behind the numbers (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

3.3 Rationale

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in the field of social sciences took place earlier than is commonly recognised (Maxwell, 2016). MMR is currently experiencing a revival in psychology and social sciences (Karasz and Singelis, 2009). As a lot of the queries we have cannot be easily resolved through conventional approaches (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017), this method represents a viable alternative to using a single method design. For example, the main factor that affected the choice of the MMR over other approaches is the type of social *research problem* (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017; Poth and Shannon-Baker, 2022). Given the central research question (RQ4): 'how does the experience of workplace ostracism differ in the Arabian Gulf States workplaces, compared to the Western workplaces?', mixed-methods design was considered a legitimate way to answer this question. Gaining insights into the influence of contextual factors of a phenomenon through MMR adoption can provide a real benefit for the researchers (Poth and Shannon-Baker, 2022). A mixed-methods design is valuable when neither a purely quantitative nor qualitative approach is enough to effectively comprehend a research problem (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017) such as assessing whether the phenomenon of WO is perceived and coped with similarly across cultures. Besides, combining the strengths of both methods while minimising their limitations can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). Because the research aims outlined in Chapter 1 focus on recognising cultural factors to better understand the phenomenon of WO, employing MMR is deemed necessary to fulfill the research goals.

As context matters (Johns, 2006), and due to the complexity of social reality, paradigm-bridging is the tool used to unpack the complexity of a certain context (Bamberger, 2008). Quantitative researchers must pay greater attention to integrating qualitative research, context-oriented methodologies, and contextual nuances into their theoretical frameworks. To do so, quantitative researchers should pay attention to (1) specify and test precisely how situational constructs are likely to have an impact, and (2) any mediating mechanisms through which these situational constructs might exert their impact (Bamberger, 2008). In cases where there is a deficiency of qualitative research, quantitative researchers could adopt qualitative methods during the early (pre-hypotheses development) phases of their research.

This serves as a strategy to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the potential situational factors such as culture that could influence the phenomenon of interest. The insights obtained from such preliminary investigation could generate new context-related constructs and omit others (Bamberger, 2008). This approach has the potential to solve the issue of the emergent dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative researchers. In this dichotomy, qualitative researchers immerse themselves so deeply in a specific context that they might overlook broader patterns, while quantitative researchers, intent on identifying universal phenomena, may miss the nuances that are often present in a specific context (Johns, 2006).

Indeed, this method is a clear advance on current methods in cross-cultural studies. The diversity of methods and samples in cross-cultural studies have increased; though important but still low in frequency (Karasz and Singelis, 2009; Smith et al., 2012; Gelfand et al., 2017). In cross-cultural research, more and more people are promoting the use of mixed-methods (eg, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Bryman, 2006; Greene, 2008). This is because MMR in CCR serves a means of enhancing the credibility of cross-cultural inferences in identifying cultural differences (Schaffer and Riordan, 2003; Fischer and Poortinga, 2018; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2019). It is also viewed as a way to test the generalisability and transferability of the newly developed instruments (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Credibility of the data is enhanced through the MMR approach because it is a powerful design that provides method *triangulation* when mixing two approaches (Hesse-Biber, 2011). The triangulation of the one single study includes a mixture of the two approaches in all three stages of the research, starting from the research objectives, data collection, and data analysis (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Thus, it aids in finding corroboration and variation drawn from the use of various methods that study the same phenomenon (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

In addition to triangulation, the objective of using mixed-methods research is to achieve a comprehensive and thorough understanding and validation of the research results (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). This is achieved through the *complementarity* MMR provides, in which one method complements another method in a way that enhances the understanding of the overall findings (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Cozma, 2011; Smith et al., 2012). Thus, MMR approach provides a clear contrast between the results attained from the qualitative data and the quantitative data collected across cultures (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

This suggests that results from distinct samples are more persuasive when they are derived from varied data sources and research methods, provided that the research is aimed at disproving alternative explanations explicitly (Fischer and Poortinga, 2018).

At an organisational level, this design helped in incorporating the perspectives of individuals to intensify experiences, documenting diverse cases for comparison, using both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand changes needed for diverse groups and finally evaluating policy decisions to deal with such phenomena. Like many structures within organisations, the standard way of evaluating a phenomenon involves using people as instruments of measurement (Spector and Howard, 2021). For example, Spector and Howard (2021) argue that because WO is a personal experience, and the focus is often on the lack of behaviour rather than its presence, the most straightforward approach widely used in the literature to assessing it is through self-reported accounts while using other methods is applicable and needed to examine ostracism at workplaces. For example, it is believed that the ways to examine WO as an existing phenomenon despite its silent nature beyond self-reported accounts may include a variety of research methods and approaches that provide a more nuanced and comprehensive view of this phenomenon such as MMR. However, one issue with research that relies on a solitary source of data, such as self-reports, is the potential for distortion in the connections between variables as a result of common biases or common methodological variance (Spector and Howard, 2021). Put differently, due to the passive nature of most WO behaviours, they can be difficult to observe. Therefore, using an alternative source of data collection can help to show that the relationship between WO and other variables are not only due to common method variance (Spector and Howard, 2021). Therefore, collecting data from multiple sources such as that provided by MMR is a sound strategy to this research to increase the researcher's confidence that the research findings reflect the reality not methodological error.

Research on WO and related mistreatment is a relatively recent development, but it has revealed crucial information about the detrimental effects on both individuals and organisations (Spector and Howard, 2021). However, thus far, only a limited range of methodologies such as self-report have been employed to explore WO, indicating that there is still much to be accomplished to comprehensively enhance our understanding of workplace circumstances that may contribute to or prevent such behaviour (Spector and Howard, 2021). Moreover, a significant portion of current investigations on WO is dependent on

observational techniques that can offer valuable perspectives on factors related to ostracism, but lack in providing substantial insights into the mechanisms underlying ostracism and the process surrounding WO (Spector and Howard, 2021). Furthermore, the current literature discusses ostracism only in the Western context using samples of students or online experiments such as cyberball and did not take place in workplace environments (Spector and Howard, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to diversify the methods of studying this phenomenon if we want to gain a better close up look into WO in different cultures. This methodological diversity is attainable through cross-cultural MMR design given that the distinct samples of the current study which represent different cultural characteristics are involved to measure the phenomenon of WO.

Taken together, the aim of this approach is not to offer researchers a single, more valid truth, but to facilitate a more in-depth, complex, and thorough comprehension of the issue (Tracy, 2010). In general, incorporating diverse data sources can broaden the scope of inquiries being examined, and can strengthen the validity of conclusions when findings from multiple sources align with one another (Spector and Howard, 2021). Also, to consider whether the findings can be extended to other contexts besides exploring the conditions under which they may or may not be applicable.

3.4 Research Design

A frequently employed MMR design in the social sciences, deemed suitable for this study in addressing the central research question (RQ4) is the *sequential mixed-methods sampling*. This design involves the integration of one method to inform and enhance the other (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). It follows *a two-stage sequential design* wherein the results of Stage 1 (qualitative) will be used to develop the design of Stage 2 (quantitative) (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Specifically, *the exploratory sequential mixed-methods design* (ESD) is used, which involves starting with a qualitative research phase where the researcher explores the perspectives of participants. After analysing the data, the researcher uses the information to create a second, quantitative phase QUAL > QUANT. The data obtained from the qualitative phase can be used to develop an appropriate research instrument for the quantitative phase. In other words, in a second phase, the study switches to surveys in order to generate results that can be applied to a population to help explain the initial qualitative

results (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). Precisely, it is a process that involves three phases: a qualitative phase, the integration point known as the quantitative feature phase (eg, developing a new instrument), and finally a quantitative phase (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).

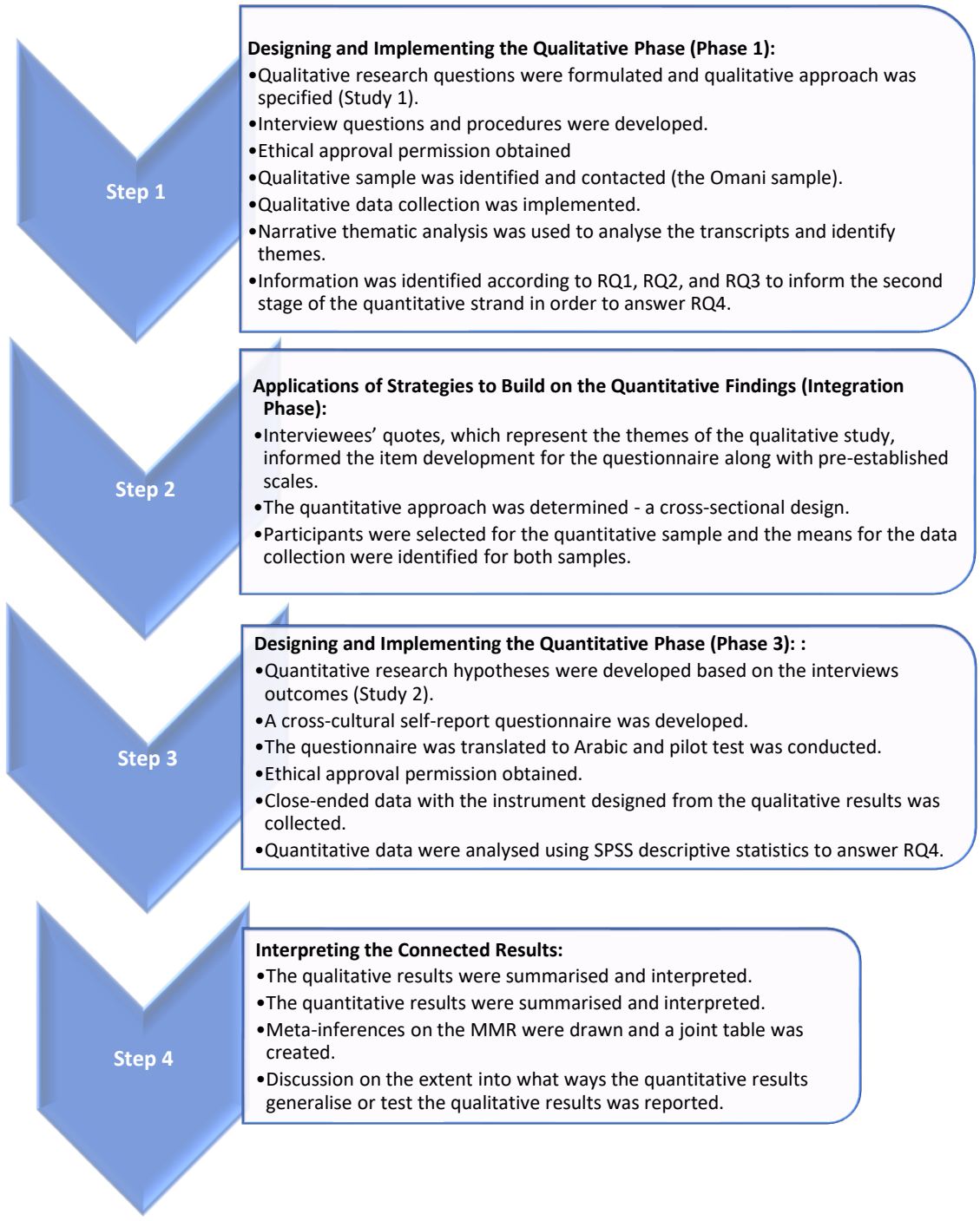
The first qualitative phase adopts narrative research which involved conducting in-depth interviews explained in further detail in Chapter 4, while the second integration phase involved developing an instrument which is a survey questionnaire. The survey-development approach involves utilising the initial qualitative phase to aid in defining the measures and questions included in a survey instrument detailed in Chapter 6. After the instrument was designed based on pre-established scales with a few added items from the first phase, it was then given to a representative sample for administration outlined in Chapter 6, see Figure 3.1.

Most importantly, when exploring a phenomenon, it is best to start with a qualitative data collection, especially when there is a need to develop or modify a quantitative instrument or measure as culture-specific (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). For that reason, the use of ESD was mainly chosen due to allowing the interviews to explore how ostracism was experienced in an Arab Gulf context to determine whether it differed from the Western context. Subsequently, hypotheses were developed to investigate similarities and differences, which were then tested in the quantitative study. Consequently, since WO in Oman remains relatively under-investigated, starting off with qualitative methods to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from the perspectives of Gulf Arabs and subsequently comparing it with the established literature, justifies the selection of an ESD over an explanatory sequential design[1] or a convergent design.[2] Doing so allowed for developing a contextually sensitive questionnaire and developing new variables unavailable in the literature nor accommodated to the population being studied (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017).

[1] **Explanatory sequential design:** The initial phase of this approach involves gathering and analysing quantitative data, succeeded by gathering and analysing qualitative data to provide explanations or extensions to the findings obtained from the quantitative phase (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).

[2] **Convergent/parallel/concurrent design:** The researcher gathers both quantitative and qualitative data on the topic. These two methods of data collection occur simultaneously but are usually separate; meaning, one is not dependent on the results of the other. The fundamental concept is to compare the two sets of results to enhance the understanding of an issue, validate findings from one approach using the other, or to check whether participants react similarly when responding to quantitatively predetermined scales and when answering open-ended qualitative questions (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).

Figure 3.1: Flowchart of the Procedures in Implementing an Exploratory Sequential Design Based on Creswell and Plano Clark (2017)



Under ESD each type of data is collected at a different time, yielding certain advantages. For instance, ESD is easy to explain, execute, and present when data is divided into distinct stages (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). While this design typically emphasises qualitative aspects, incorporating a quantitative component can enhance its appeal to audiences that favor

quantitative approaches (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). As well, this design is valuable if a second, quantitative phase is required based on insights gained from the initial, qualitative phase (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017), which allowed for the creation of a measure as one of the possible outcomes of the research process. The expected outcome of using the ESD is to provide a better measure for a marginalised sample (full-time and part-time workers of various sectors in the case of the current study) and population (Arab Gulf societies), as it is seen as the suitable approach for developing an improved measurement instrument (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017).

3.5 Exploratory Sequential Mixed-methods Design Procedure

As mentioned, ESD comprises three phases with two methodological stages. In the first stage, analysis of the qualitative data yielded quotes, codes, and themes. Each theme resulting from phase one initially presented first- and second-order themes as reflected by quotes, which were then used to construct items for the questionnaire in the second phase. This transition from qualitative data analysis to the development of quantitative scales in the second phase is a valuable process (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017) for this type of research. Hence, apart from crafting a well-designed psychometric instrument that suits the sample and studied population, analysing qualitative data also facilitated the identification of new variables not yet explored in the WO literature, such as culture and pre-social behaviours (Robinson et al., 2013). This aided in determining the types of scales present in existing instruments and in categorising information for further exploration during the quantitative phase. Subsequently, the identified variables were examined using a large participant sample.

The procedure of ESD is illustrated in Figure 3.2. In this study, the researcher conducted a concise qualitative narrative thematic analysis of the data (discussed in Chapter 4), illustrating how qualitative exploration can contribute to the formulation of hypotheses for quantitative testing. Specifically, the QUAL findings were instrumental in shaping hypotheses aimed at investigating the impact of WO in both cultural contexts, through survey questionnaire detailed in Chapter 6. Later, the researcher extensively reviewed existing literature to identify standardised measures aligned with the qualitative findings. These measures, along with some newly devised ones derived directly from quotes and themes, were integrated to create a survey instrument. This instrument underwent multiple

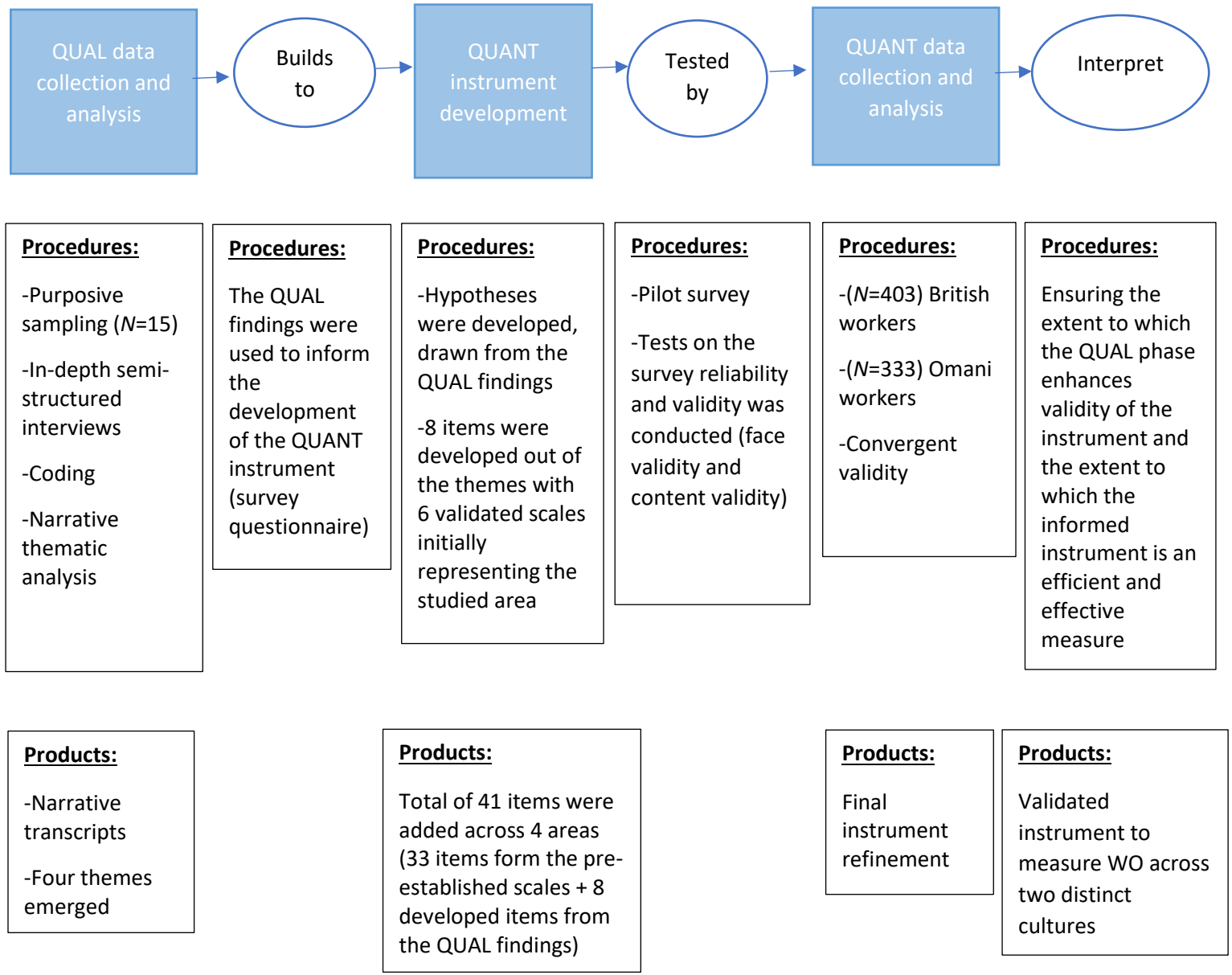
refinements to ensure strong construct validity, as validated through pilot testing. The integration phase yielded measures that were subsequently administered to both samples.

3.6 Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophy has made significant contributions to the field of social science by providing insights into which methodologies to employ and how to justify the chosen methods for social inquiries (Hammersley, 2006; Maxwell, 2011). The debate over the most appropriate research methodology in social science has been a contentious issue among philosophers, scientists, and sociologists (Maxwell, 2016). On one side, philosophers argue that they lay the groundwork for scientific studies by explaining the nature of the world and the acquisition of reliable knowledge (Hammersley, 2006). On the other side, scientists argued that practical experiences and observations lead to knowledge without the need for philosophical intervention to guide their studies (Benton and Craib, 2011).

Although philosophy and science were recently separated, it remains essential to explore both perspectives to determine the key considerations when conducting research (Della Porta and Keating, 2008). Ontology and epistemology constitute the foundational principles of contrasting approaches in social sciences (Della Porta and Keating, 2008). In simple terms, *ontology* addresses the question of what constitutes reality. It pertains to the set of values and beliefs that a researcher perceives as real and factual (Ryan, 2018). In contrast, *epistemology* deals with the process of knowledge creation (Moon and Blackman, 2014) and how we come to understand the world (Ryan, 2018). When seeking to understand the reality of the human world and enhance our understanding, the question of how researchers attain that knowledge inevitably leads to the exploration of epistemology (Ryan, 2018).

Figure 3.2: Diagram of the Current Research Adopting an Exploratory Sequential Design Based on Creswell and Plano Clark (2017)



3.6.1 Critical Realism and MMR

A commonly held belief among the community of mixed-methods research is that 'pragmatism'[3] represents the suitable philosophical framework for conducting such studies (eg, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010; Maxwell, 2011) with a focus on a pragmatic worldview (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Whereas others believe that other paradigms such as *critical realism* (CR) form the best philosophical foundation for MMR (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010). However, the current study aligns with with assumptions of CR. Critical realism is a philosophical movement initiated by the British philosopher, Roy Bhaskar (Wikgren, 2005). Since its emergence in the 1970s within Anglo-American philosophical science, it has effectively attracted scholars from various disciplines in the human sciences, including economics, psychology, international relations (Brown, 2014), religion (Bhaskar and Hartwig, 2016) and more. In recent times, CR has achieved further significance, being embraced and praised by leading researchers in management studies (Brown, 2014).

Critical Realism posits that there is an independent (objective) world that exists regardless of individuals' perceptions, language, or imagination (Edwards et al., 2014). However, it also acknowledges that a portion of this world comprises subjective interpretations, which influence how it is perceived and experienced. This dual recognition is a significant and relatively novel aspect in social science research. Many research textbooks tend to present a simple contrast, categorising approaches into objectivist (positivist[4], deductive, and empiricist[5]), often associated with quantitative methods, and subjectivist (social

[3] **Pragmatism** is an alternate paradigm that encourages the dynamic mixing of methodologies and integration of research outcomes. Adopting a pragmatic approach influences the methodologies employed by mixed-methods researchers and their utilisation of research findings (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). Pragmatism leads to a problem-solving, action-driven inquiry processes rooted in a commitment to democratic principles and progress (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

[4] **Positivists** argue that valid knowledge comes from empirically observing the world around us using our senses and following the scientific approach. They focus on objective facts and evidence to gain valid knowledge (Moon and Blackman, 2014).

[5] "**Empiricism** (knowledge is derived from sensory experience)" (Moon and Blackman, 2014, p.1175). Empiricists believe that knowledge should be free from researchers' biases and experiments. They believe that context, passing of time and circumstances of the enquirers can change yielding different results (Ryan, 2018). For them, knowledge is considered true when a hypothesis has been proven through observation and testing (Bell and Bryman, 2011).

constructionist[6], inductive, and interpretive[7]), typically aligned with qualitative methods (Edwards et al., 2014; Maxwell, 2016). According to CR, this division between *objectivists*, who work with numbers and facts, and *social constructionists*, who delve into the meaning systems of social selves, creates a false illusion of two separate realities. The objectivists claim to be the gatekeepers of 'proper' science and criticise the social constructionists for their failure to provide robust findings that can be widely generalised across the broader social context (Edwards et al., 2014). On the contrary, the social constructionists argue that discourses generate 'realities' that are local and fragmented and criticise the objectivists for assuming that their measures correspond to an objective world 'out there', when, in reality, all knowledge is reasonably relative and subjectively interpreted (Edwards et al., 2014).

Ontologically speaking, both empiricists and positivists share a realist belief in an objective world that exists independently of researchers. However, they differ from critical realists in that they confine this world to empirical 'facts', observable phenomena that they often quantify and correlate in an attempt to derive universal statements or 'laws' about the world (Edwards et al., 2014). This empirical ontology, following the early natural sciences, leads positivists to reject any metaphysical notions that cannot be observed. In essence, if something cannot be observed, it is considered unreal according to their perspective (Edwards et al., 2014). However, CR differentiates between a reality that exists regardless of what we think of it (the intransitive dimension), and our thinking, beliefs, and perceptions of it (the transitive dimension) (Wikgren, 2005). This can encompass established facts, models, theories, methods, and techniques utilised by researchers in a specific context and timeframe. Consequently, new knowledge emerges with two dimensions: it represents socially generated knowledge concerning an objective reality independent of humans (Zachariadis et al., 2013). Accordingly, the ultimate goal of research for critical realists is not to identify generalisable laws that pertain to positivism nor to identify the beliefs or the lived experiences of social actors that pertain to interpretivism. Rather, it is to develop a deeper level of understanding

[6] **Constructivists** explore the different ways people create their own realities and how these creations affect their lives and interactions with others. They look at how individuals perspectives shape the world we live in (Patton, 2015). Constructionism argues that we gain knowledge through our understanding of the world which is shaped by the social-cultural practices, customs and capacities that we possess and engage in, rather than solely based on personal experiences (Hammersley, 2006).

[7] **Interpretivists** do not seek to identify regularities or construct laws to explain human behaviour. Instead, they focus on understanding individual cases and how certain things develop over time. They often use qualitative methods to study these cases (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivists also acknowledge that scientists' personal views and opinions can affect how data is collected and analysed (Patton, 2015).

and explanation (McEvoy and Richards, 2006). In CR-led research, the primary goal is to use our perceptions of observable events to identify the mechanisms that give rise to them (Zachariadis et al., 2013). Thus, the critical realist view on causality should focus on realism of the process and condition under which 'X' causes 'Y', not on the relationship among different events (eg, the fact that event 'X' has been largely followed by event 'Y') (Zachariadis et al., 2013).

It is noteworthy that both the natural sciences and the earlier works in the social sciences do not exhibit the types of purportedly fundamental philosophical distinctions or claims of the incompatibility of these two approaches (QUAL and QUANT) that were characteristics of the paradigm wars observed in certain areas of the social sciences. These issues were central in the emergence of MMR as a distinct and self-conscious approach in the latter part of the 20th century (Maxwell, 2016). Apparently, CR does not commit to a single type of research, but rather employs distinct qualitative and quantitative methods, solving the 'paradigm war' and arguments made by advocates of each distinct philosophies. Thus, CR assumptions are well situated within the MMR paradigm for two reasons. First, it is deemed a balanced approach between two other ways of thinking: empiricism (relying only on observable facts) and interpretivism (focusing on subjective interpretations) (Zachariadis et al., 2013). Hence, it offers a more detailed understanding of reality through methodological pluralism (Zachariadis et al., 2013; Maxwell, 2016). Since CR is open to employing methods from different philosophies, it looks at society with a critical eye, questioning the existing assumptions without blindly accepting current beliefs or norms at face value (Zachariadis et al., 2013; Ryan, 2018).

Secondly, it strongly preserves the connection between meta-theory and method as CR as a philosophy of social science is a meta-theory (Edwards et al., 2014). It is not a set of testable ideas on its own, but it guides researchers to produce more accurate explanations for social phenomena than what is currently known. Subsequently, CR does not give specific concepts or methods for research, but it encourages researchers to explore causal relationships without having detailed preconceptions about what particular causal mechanism might work, what type of data is more important, and how the existence of the data could be demonstrated. Instead, critical realists are interested in finding and understanding how different causal relationships are connected to clarify the generative mechanisms in a particular situation (Edwards et al., 2014).

3.6.2 Critical Realism and ESD

The application of ESD can be explained from a philosophical stance. For example, multiple worldviews are used throughout the study, and these worldviews shift from one phase to another. Since the initial stage of an ESD involves qualitative research methods, specifically narrative research, researchers tend to adopt a constructivist approach in order to gain a deeper understanding that values multiple perspectives. Because the truths presented through narratives are inevitably incomplete and partially committed, one way to strengthen validity of the narratives' interpretation and the claims made by participants is to quantify them (Riessman, 2008). As the study progresses into the quantitative phase, the philosophical stance may shift towards a postpositivist[8] approach, which focuses on identifying and measuring variables and statistical trends (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Yet, the interpretive approach is often viewed as incompatible with a positivist approach, and a contrast to it. While quantitative research methods are challenging to combine with an interpretive approach, qualitative methods offer vast opportunity for an interpretive investigation (Guest et al., 2012). As a result, many people believe that it is difficult to accommodate qualitative research methods with a positivist approach, but this is incorrect. The classification of research as interpretive, positivist, or a combination of the two is determined by how researchers handle qualitative data, not the methods themselves (Guest et al., 2012). Despite Poth and Shannon-Baker's (2022) claim that the researcher's theoretical and philosophical foundation should be taken into consideration prior to choosing MMR (Poth and Shannon-Baker, 2022), the researcher agrees with Maxwell's (2011) viewpoint that philosophical premises should not be assumed as 'foundational'. Though these premises indeed recognise the connection among the premises of an approach, they should not assume that these form a singular, coherent 'paradigm'. Consequently, the researcher endorses Maxwell's (2011) perspective that we must not lock ourselves to a singular worldview or paradigm, as this is deemed a more logical and productive approach for MMR.

[8] **Post-positivism**: Positivists hold the view that knowledge which is considered valid can only be produced through objective and empirical observations that are based on sensory experience and conducted in accordance with the scientific method. Thus, post-positivism encourages the usage of multiple methods to identify valid belief since all methods have their shortcomings (Moon and Blackman, 2014).

3.7 Summary

Chapter 3 has reviewed the methodology employed in the current cross-cultural study. It pinpoints the significance of cross-cultural research in answering the posed research questions. Research on cross-cultural studies has seen significant development and growth since the last century, urging a greater focus on exploring cultural nuances to better explain the mechanisms underlying phenomena at work. Therefore, this chapter highlighted the call for bridging various methods to address diverse research questions in order to comprehend complex phenomena in diverse cultural contexts. As a result, the chapter justifies the choice of a mixed-methods design as a well-suited methodology to answer the research questions and to unveil the underlying mechanisms behind the perception of WO and the strategies people use to cope with ostracism from a cultural perspective, particularly exploratory sequential design. It also explains the process of data collection which begins with qualitative methods, followed by quantitative methods, facilitating rigorous comparisons between two distinct cultures.

This chapter describes the philosophical assumption underpinning MMR which is critical realism which guides the choice of data methods and analysis due to its compatibility with the mixed-methods design. It advocates the belief that there is an objective reality independent of us, as well as a subjective interpretation of the world. This perspective entails bringing together two paradigms, qualitative and quantitative, to understand reality both objectively and subjectively which has been undertaking in the study. The following chapter will discuss the first phase of the current study, that is the qualitative study, namely narrative research.

Chapter 4: The Qualitative Study (Study 1)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an opportunity to explain the first phase of the exploratory sequential design (ESD), which focuses on qualitative data methods comprising the research design, namely narrative research and data collection. It serves as the foundation for accomplishing the first and second research aims, ultimately leading to the answering of the first three research questions. As an overview, the chapter will also cover population and sampling, interview procedures, researcher's reflexivity, and the ethical considerations taken into account for this research, followed by a discussion on the data analysis process.

4.2 Narrative Research

The development of narrative theory has existed for centuries. It has initially stemmed from examining literary, biography, memoir, autography, diaries, social services, archival documents, health records, photographs, organisational documents, folk ballads, scientific theories, other art work (Reissman, 2008), history, anthropology, sociology, education, and sociolinguistics (Creswell and Poth, 2015).

The word '*narrative*' has multiple meanings, employed in various ways across different disciplines (Reissman, 2008; Creswell and Poth, 2015). For example, in daily oral storytelling, the speaker links events together in a meaningful sequence, which has implications for future actions and the message that the speaker intends to convey. The speaker chooses which events are important, structures them into a logical order, establishes connections between them, and assesses their significance in relation to the intended audience (Reissman, 2008). In addition, the term 'narrative' can refer to the *phenomenon* being investigated, such as a story about illness (Reissman, 2008). It can denote the *method* used in a study, like the procedures for analysing narratives (Creswell and Poth, 2015). As a research method, it starts with examining the experiences conveyed through the stories told by individuals. Thus, it is essential to consider the context surrounding the narrative to better understand it, which may include physical, emotional, and social factors (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative enquiry does not only focus on validating individuals' experiences, providing insights into how individuals perceive their identities (Reissman, 2008), but also explores the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which those experiences were and are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Kirkman, 2002; Creswell and Poth, 2015). It involves arranging the meaning of those experiences chronologically (Creswell and Poth, 2015), or thematically (Reissman, 2008; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Allen, 2017).

4.3 Justifications for Narrative Approach

The current study aims to identify cultural factors influencing workplace ostracism in the Arabian Gulf States workplace environments and to examine how culture influences employees' coping mechanisms, as outlined in Chapter 1. In order to achieve these two aims, a more thorough examination of the phenomenon is necessary to address RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. This is only attainable when the employed qualitative approach offers suitable means to unpack the cultural-specific factors influencing the scrutinised phenomenon under investigation. Additionally, this study focuses on aspects beyond the psychological effects of WO, calling for the need to use qualitative methodologies that provide alternative perspectives in the data (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022). Thus, narrative research is considered the most suitable approach for this purpose.

Narrative enquiry is known for its sensitivity to context (Reissman, 2008), which is crucial when examining the impact of WO within a cultural framework. Understanding WO in relation to culture is essential for organisations, as it strongly predicts outcomes for key employees (Mao et al., 2018). Therefore, generated narratives from participants' stories provide a rich context for understanding how a person becomes a target of ostracism (Spector and Howard, 2021).

To elaborate, during data collection, particularly when piloting interviews, the findings from the pilot interviews led the researcher to adopt a narrative research approach. It became evident during the pilot phase that participants were sharing their experiences in the form of stories, emphasising contextual details such as time, place, and the roles of individuals involved. At times, participants narrated different stories that took place in different workplaces, time frames, or involved different people. Therefore, in the preliminary analysis

of the pilot interviews, it was necessary to highlight all the mentioned elements to capture a rich amount of information. This involved framing the actors' (the targets of ostracism) stories and explaining the interplay between the actors, perpetrators, and other individuals involved in the narrative (as detailed below), hence adopting narrative research deemed suitable to answer RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3.

4.4 Qualitative data Collection

Narrative research in human sciences typically uses interviews as the primary means to collect information (Riessman, 2008). However, when examining how interviewees construct their responses as a cohesive story, it reveals challenges and opportunities in interviewing that are not apparent when only looking at the question-and-answer format. This approach differs from traditional social science interviewing, which relies on discrete open or closed questions. Narrative interviewing aims to elicit detailed accounts, rather than brief answers or general statements, and these narratives can take various forms and sizes (Riessman, 2008).

When viewing research interviews as conversations, normal conversational rules apply, such as taking turns, relevance, and entrance/exit talk (Riessman, 2008). To generate a narrative, the speaker needs longer turns at talking, which is not typical in regular conversations or survey interviews. Indeed, narratives can lead to other stories, and the interviewer and interviewee can negotiate extended turns and shifts in topics (Riessman, 2008). When these shifts happen, it is helpful to explore with the participant the associations and meanings that connect multiple stories. To fully understand an experience, it is important to pay attention to the details, including specific incidents and turning points, rather than just general assessments (Riessman, 2008).

In fact, narrative enquiry should not follow a linear procedure or steps; rather, it is a fluid enquiry (Creswell and Poth, 2015). Interviews make sense of the nature of the problem by understanding what is going on, that surveys cannot ask or explain (Saunders et al., 2015). They offer the opportunity to delve deeply into the actions in which individuals claim to engage and the behaviours they have encountered (Spector and Howard, 2021). Hence, interviews not only have the capacity to explain complex processes in organisations over

time, but also have the mechanisms of emotions, symbols, and relations that motivate such processes (Maitlis, 2017).

Having said that, the data collection adopted was in-depth *semi-structured interviews* with open-ended questions. This type of interview has been carried out in most qualitative research and is seen as the backbone of it (Campbell et al., 2013). Unlike structured and unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to guide the interviewee towards topics they want to hear about, according to guided questions and topics that interest them (Greener, 2008). Narrative enquiry tends to focus on personal stories of a particular type of experience, or a number of experiences, particularly the themes, structure and content that are often gathered through interviews (Allen, 2017). Because determining the stories' boundaries can be challenging (Riessman, 2008), the researcher believes that semi-structured interviews are the best interviewing style to control the boundaries of the stories. Moreover, considering the overlap between ostracism and other forms of mistreatment, such as bullying, it is believed that conducting semi-structured interviews would better guide the researcher to steer participants' narratives in the right direction, thereby effectively addressing the research questions. In addition, the words and phrases used by the respondents will help to generate themes and classes that support the identified theme (Campbell, 2014).

By spending time with participants, listening to their experiences, and using different means if participants wanted to, was the best way to answer the research questions (Daiute, 2014). Riessman (2008) demonstrated how researchers can transcribe interviews in various formats to create different types of stories. These transcripts can focus on the researcher as either a listener or a questioner, highlight the interaction between the researcher and participant, portray a conversation that progresses through time, or capture the changing meanings that arise from translated material. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher took the listener stand while the participants were telling their stories, followed by a shift of her position from a listener to a questioner, interrogating the participants with follow-up questions to provide more context to the narratives told.

Though it is believed that adopting narrative research for this study is a novel approach, it is not free of challenges that must be addressed. For instance, collaborating with the participant is necessary (Cho and Trent, 2006), and researchers must reflect on their own personal and political backgrounds, which can influence how they interpret the narrative (Creswell and

Poth, 2015). Thus, narrative enquiry raises concerns about power relations, and researchers must be aware of the ethical issues that arise when collecting, analysing, and telling individual stories (Creswell and Poth, 2015). Hence, ownership of the story, who can tell it, who can change it, and whose version is convincing, are critical questions to consider. Realising and comprehending this complexity is not an easy task and requires careful attention (Creswell and Poth, 2015). Therefore, in order to overcome these challenges, the ethical considerations, researcher reflexivity and careful data synthesis and analysis were all taken on board when immersed in the data at all stages of the research process, as the following sections will explain.

4.5 Population and Sampling

When conducting a narrative research and analysis, the researcher places a significant emphasis on selecting the appropriate sample. It is important that all chosen individuals have a wealth of stories to share about their personal experiences. Depending on whether the person is exceptional, marginalised, or ordinary, the researcher may consider a variety of sampling options (Creswell and Poth, 2015).

4.5.1 Sampling Strategy

From that sense, the researcher considered the *population* of the first phase, which is targeting full-time Omani employees over 18 years old across industries and sectors. It is typical in narrative research, (Reissman, 2008) as it is in qualitative studies (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017), for sampling to be *purposeful* and not random. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants and sites that can meaningfully contribute to a better understanding of the research topic (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). This is because the primary objective of the analysis is not to make generalisations to the wider population, especially considering the challenge of reaching out to Omani participants from different sub-groups that make up the fabric of the Omani societies (Al Jahdhami, 2016). Instead, the main focus is on interpreting the embedded meaning of the stories told in the interviews. In other words, narrative enquiry is a type of investigation that focuses on specific cases for most narrative studies centred around individuals and groups, rather than samples representative of the general population (Reissman, 2008). As such, identifying a comparable

unit of analysis in cross-cultural research is another challenge, with its associated access to recording interaction, translation, and data analysis (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2019). Therefore, the investigator should define the narrative unit based on considerable variation, such as bounded spoken segment about a particular incident (Reissman, 2008). Consequently, the *unit of analysis* was the ostracising behaviour experienced by Omani workers who had experienced WO as the target of ostracism bounded in work settings.

As sampling strategies may vary during the data collection process, researchers have to be flexible (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). For example, during the recruitment and interviewing process, the sampling strategy evolved from *maximum variation*, which aimed to capture diverse individuals from various sites (Creswell and Poth, 2015), to *snowball* or *chain sampling*. In this approach, early participants referred the researcher to other individuals they knew who had rich information about the experience of ostracism in different industries. This shift helped to increase the diversity of sectors represented in the study, as the former approach alone did not provide sufficient variation until supplemented by the latter. However, the principle of *intensity sampling*, which involves seeking cases that exemplify the phenomenon intensely (Creswell and Poth, 2015), was consistently maintained throughout the selection process.

The level of sampling in qualitative research should be taken into account, such as the site, the event level or the participant level, with a balanced distribution of gender, age, occupation, sector, industry, and status (Creswell and Poth, 2015). Therefore, these levels were taken into consideration (Creswell and Poth, 2015). For example, Table 4.1, shows that the interviewees work in both public and private sector and occupy either managerial level or junior level. However, achieving maximum variation as part of the sampling strategy in terms of age and gender was challenging, resulting in a slight discrepancy in those terms.

Table 4.1: Participants' Demographic Information

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Position	Sector
Anwar	Male	29	Middle Manager	Private_Food industry
Adil	Male	50	Senior Manager	Private_Oil & gas
Aisha	Female	30	Middle Manager	Private _Oil & gas
Eyad	Male	32	Middle Manager	Private _ Banking
Lamis	Female	38	Employee	Public Company
Lamyaa	Female	35	Middle Manager	Private_Telecommunication

Nadir	Male	42	Middle Manager	Private_Oil & gas
Najat	Female	37	Middle Manager	Private_Construction
Noor	Female	39	Middle Manager	Private_Banking
Rayya	Female	39	Middle Manager	Public_Education
Salma	Female	35	Middle Manager	Public Ministry
Shihab	Male	30	Middle Manager	Private_ Oil & gas
Weam	Female	33	Employee	Private_Engineering & construction
Yasir	Male	37	Middle Manager	Private_Airline
Yumna	Female	40	Middle Manager	Public_Education

4.5.2 Recruitment Strategy

Participants were recruited through personal networking and online social media (ie, LinkedIn), resulting in a satisfactory response from the intended population across various industries and sectors. On LinkedIn, a post was published to invite interviewees, with an infographic describing the phenomenon to distinguish the uniqueness of ostracism from other constructs, as shown in Appendix 4.1. Simultaneously, a brief video on WO was created by the researcher to engage the audience and maximise the reach of the post to as much pool of potential interviewees as possible. It is important to note that, in order to avoid potential power imbalances that could influence participants' responses (Kinney, 2017) and to enhance objectivity, minimise subjectivity, and reduce researcher bias (Cho and Trent, 2006; Tracy, 2010; Vogl, 2013), the researcher maintained an 'outsider position'. This means that the researcher was not part of the same group as the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013) and had no personal or professional relationships with the individuals interviewed. This approach also helped avoid the associated risks, politics, conflicts of interest, and ethical issues that may arise when collecting data from one's own workplace, family, or friends (Creswell and Poth, 2015).

Because the authenticity of accounts is an issue in narrative research (Creswell and Poth, 2015), screening potential interviews allowed choosing which participants to proceed with and which ones to exclude from the study. For instance, the sample was chosen based on participants' personal experiences of WO as the targets of ostracism and the extent to which their narratives contained rich detail and depth. To ensure richness of the potential interviews, prospective participants were asked to provide an overview of their stories they would like to share before proceeding to the interview, followed by some questions over a phone call or voice notes messages for more clarification and to determine if the stories display actions of

other forms of mistreatment or omissions of actions that the study focuses. Also, the researcher considered the intensity and quantity of the ostracism experiences as well the variety of the ostracising behaviours they encountered when selecting participants. For instance, individuals who had only encountered ostracism once or twice were excluded. Furthermore, since ostracism manifests in various forms, the researcher ensured that she interviewed individuals who had experienced multiple forms of ostracism over a prolonged period, originating from the same perpetrator(s), to provide a foundation for rich narratives. Thus, several potential interviewees were excluded prior to proceeding to the actual interviews, and two out of the seventeen interviews were excluded from the analysis after they took place, resulting in a sample size of fifteen.

As shown in Table 4.1, in this process, nine females and six males were interviewed, with an average age of 36.4 years. Among the participants, a few (27%) work in the public sector, while the majority work in the private sector. Specifically, the dominating sector among the participants is the oil and gas industry, followed by the banking sector, with various other sectors also represented. Additionally, the majority of the participants (80%) hold middle management positions.

4.5.3 Sample Size in Narrative Research

The *sample size* in narrative research typically ranges from one or two (Creswell and Poth, 2015) to several interviews with extended narratives that transcend one's entire career and traverse across time (Reissman, 2008; Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). However, since the researcher is not interested in participants' life stories, but is interested instead in their stories concerning the phenomena of ostracism in a limited context, she opted to determine the sample size based on data saturation. *Saturation* is defined as the standards of determining sample size in which theoretical advancements are demonstrated (Roy et al., 2015), where gathering more data does not add substantial information or new insights (Guest et al., 2007), or when no further deviant cases (Low, 2019), properties, or themes emerge (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell and Poth, 2015).

Critically, the issue of data saturation in thematic analysis (TA) (explained below) and in cross-cultural research has been an issue in the literature (Guest et al., 2007; Hagaman and Wutich, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2021). While Guest and co-workers (2007) found that

saturation is achieved after twelve interviews and meta-themes occur as early as after the sixth interview, Hagaman and Wutich's (2017) cross-cultural research review found that, when the sample is homogenous, data saturation relatively occurs within 16 or fewer interviews and common themes then could be identified. Conversely, Braun and Clarke (2021) challenge the validity of choosing the sample size based on saturation only for other approaches to TA (eg, reflexive thematic analysis), not the general approach to TA which this research adopts. Similarly, Low (2019) argues that the concept of saturation does not offer any instructional direction on how researchers can determine when to stop data collection, and it represents a logical fallacy since there are always new theoretical insights as long as data collection continues.

Despite the aforementioned arguments and their logical positions, the data collection was stopped once saturation was reached, in this case, when the experiences of ostracism and coping techniques appeared similar across the narratives, resulting in interconnected categories (Riessman, 2008). Moreover, saturation was achieved when the accounts provided detailed answers to the research questions (Low, 2019).

In addition, the sample was relatively homogeneous in terms of culture, age group, nationality, religion, and educational background. This homogeneity allowed the researcher to identify the shared themes that were similar across narratives after few interviews had taken place, which were reinforced by the following interviews. Furthermore, the data was found to align well with previous research, providing similar insights (Low, 2019) while also offering unique common perspectives attributed to certain cultures (Allen, 2017). Also, the analysis primarily focuses on thematically analysing narratives of ostracism within the workplace context, setting the boundaries for the emerged themes. Therefore, it was determined that 15 interviews were sufficient to explain ostracism in Omani workplaces.

4.6 Interview Procedure

The interview questions and topics were derived from the general research area and the research questions and objectives (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The questions were then reviewed, revised and translated to Arabic. To capture all aspects of the phenomenon, the types of questions varied between open-ended, general and focused questions, starting with an introductory question, then follow-up questions and probing questions. The probing

questions were used to clarify what had been told through direct questions, ensuring that probes enquired about the events and issues that some people might see as forthtelling and others not (Reissman, 2008). Indirect questions were used to avoid causing distress to the interviewees when addressing potentially uncomfortable topics that may be difficult to answer directly.

An interview protocol was prepared based on the works of Bryman and Bell (2015) and J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell (2017) to guide the researcher throughout the interview process. The interview questions were piloted and subsequently revised and finalised to align with a narrative inquiry approach, allowing for spontaneous data generation, see Appendix 4.2. Interviewees were asked to provide a brief story as a starting point, which elicited more comprehensive narratives with all their complexities, including turning points, climaxes, and resolutions. This adjustment in the questioning approach aimed to better address the research questions. Overall, the interviews focused on five key areas: the antecedents of ostracism, the various forms of ostracism, coping mechanisms, the outcomes of workplace ostracism, and the cultural and organisational factors influencing the phenomenon.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at a location convenient for the participants and lasted an average of one and a half hours. Two recording devices were used during the interviews, with the participants' consent. The recordings were later transcribed manually from Arabic to English upon completion. The researcher went through the transcripts multiple times to avoid any loss of meaning in translation. However, one issue encountered during the translation process was unpacking the local metaphors used by participants, which added richness to the spoken stories (Reissman, 2008), but were understood only by locals or those who were familiar with the Omani spoken dialect that differs substantially from written classic Arabic. When translated into English the metaphors did not convey the exact intended meaning, as context was lost. To address this issue, the researcher consulted a few Omani academics in linguistics studies, who provided the closest translation to the intended meaning.

To maintain ethical standards and ensure the accurate interpretation of stories while avoiding misuse of the data, the researcher took steps to increase credibility and trustworthiness of the interpretation. This included developing an initial analysis and description of emerging themes from the narratives and seeking participants' reflections on the findings (Riessman,

2008; J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). This process aimed to enhance data accuracy and minimise the risk of participant identification (Cho and Trent, 2006; Riessman, 2008). However, this was done with only three participants, who agreed to review the transcripts, while the remaining participants chose not to receive written narratives, expressing their full trust in the researcher's interpretation.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that participants may not necessarily agree with the researcher's conclusions, but this does not invalidate the interpretation. It rather reflects the existence of 'multiple realities' and 'truths', which is acceptable in qualitative research (Riessman, 2008). However, one challenge faced by the researcher was that the theoretical comments provided with the analysis to the participants – that is, the observation made in relation to the specific theory, driven by theoretical commitments (the underlying assumptions and beliefs that the researcher adopt when approaching the study of WO) – were not always compatible or meaningful to some participants (Riessman, 2008). Another challenge was that, the researcher being native herself, it is necessary to avoid taking sides by revealing only positive results, but mentioning contrary findings and various perspectives is important (Hair, 2016; J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). Therefore, when analysing the data, the researcher was mindful of her own influences on the research results. In addition, immediately after the interviews, the researcher summarised the main points discussed by the participants off the record and communicated them back to the participants. This allowed for a distinction between the researcher's views of their lives and their own perspectives, and it helped clarify any misunderstandings and verify the accuracy of the data (Tracy, 2010).

4.7 Researcher Role and Reflexivity

Contemporary, narrative researchers are becoming increasingly self-conscious regarding their own roles in the production of narratives as they formulate and report their studies' results (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011).

All writing is 'positioned' and reflects a particular perspective, so the audience has the right to know who we are and how our past experiences shaped our research and interpretation (Tracy, 2010; J.W. Creswell and J.D. Creswell, 2017). Prior to commencing data collection, the researcher's gender as female was expected to be a potential issue when recruiting men

speaking about as sensitive an issue as ostracism in a conservative and sensitive society, as men in particular are not used to expressing their emotions openly. This proved to be one of the challenges the researcher faced, especially being a female from the same culture. It is possible that men saw speaking to the opposite gender of the same culture about being ostracised as a threat to their manhood or an embarrassment to their self-image.

As a native Omani, born to native Omani parents, who is also fluent in one of the most widely spoken languages in Oman beside Arabic, the researcher has a deep understanding of the cultural context and characteristics of both the native Omanis and the ones belonging to different sub-cultures. Having been born, raised, and spending most of her life in Muscat, the capital of Oman, where a diverse range of sub-cultures is concentrated (Al-Ghailani, 2005) and home to a significant population of Omanis and expatriates (Al-Farsi, 2010), the researcher is in a strong position to comprehend the cultural pressures and underlying behavioural mechanisms that are likely to influence the experiences of ostracism among participants. Even if race is not directly addressed or deemed significant in the data, the researcher's background enhances her understanding of these dynamics and her interpretation of the data.

Moreover, the researcher's position as an insider created a highly engaging environment, leading to unexpected openness among the participants, during the study, particularly among women. This enhanced the emotional and aesthetical criteria of the narratives' validity (Reissman, 2008), also referred to as 'empathetic validity' and resonance (Tracy, 2010), as they shared their stories. These narratives moved the researcher and made her think differently about the phenomenon, engage in dialogue and critically reflect on her own experiences. This served as the foundation for producing evocative representations of the data, allowing readers to easily relate it to their own experiences and intuitively apply the findings to their own actions (Tracy, 2010).

On the other hand, being an outsider to the industry, apart from a professional internship, the researcher's work experience has primarily been within academia, which encouraged participants to openly discuss their industry or institutional assumptions. It built mutual trust that the ultimate goal of the study is academic research, with no other agenda. Participants recognised that the researcher's career is centred around organisational research, which can benefit them and their organisations if they choose to cooperate.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

In line with Research Data Management Policy at the University of Leeds, there are several ethical issues that were taken into consideration prior to conducting the study, during data collection and data analysis, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

After receiving all the ethical approvals from the University of Leeds and finding participants for interviews, and prior to the participation in the interviews, consent forms and the participants' information sheet (Appendix 4.3 & 4.4) were sent to the participants. These documents disclosed the purpose of the study and clearly stated that taking part in the study is voluntary, and withdrawing from the study at any time is the participants' right (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Considering the language-related issues that are associated with cross-cultural studies, such as translation (Liamputtong, 2008), both the consent form and the information sheet were written in Arabic, as it is the first language of all the participants.

During the interviews, the researcher discussed the objectives and the use of the study, and assured participants of the confidentiality of the information shared by them. The researcher was aware not to ask leading questions in order for the narratives to flow naturally, nor to make them feel uncomfortable because the topic is sensitive, and only recorded what they wanted to share without forcing to share more just to get a nice narrative. Furthermore, participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The names of the workplaces were anonymised, and only the sectors they belonged to and the job titles of some of them were mentioned in the research, provided that the job titles were not identifiable. If the job titles could potentially identify the participants, they were reported differently (eg, Middle Manager instead of mentioning the exact job title). Additionally, data were stored on secured online storage permitted by the university, encrypted by a password and accessed only by the researcher.

Given the potential emotional pain and harm participants might feel while discussing their experiences, the researcher took proactive measures to ensure their wellbeing. For example, prior to the interview date, and at the beginning of each interview, participants were explicitly informed about the potential discomfort they might experience and were provided with information on where to seek support if needed. They were encouraged to communicate any distress they encountered during the interview to the researcher immediately, and were

assured of their right to take breaks or even reschedule the interview if it became distressing for them. These guidelines were clearly outlined in the information sheet, see Appendix 4.4.

Moreover, considering the fact that the researcher may have had prior opinions or expectations about the results, as well as being aware of what practitioners and management may want to hear, the findings presented an ethical dilemma. However, it is crucial to maintain honesty and report the results fully and transparently, even if they go against the wishes of the managers (Hair, 2016).

4.9 Data Analysis

Narrative inquiry has rapidly grown in popularity across social sciences, where researchers have taken the 'narrative turn' to understand and document accounts' discursive complexity (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). Due to its popularity, narrative analysis has become a discipline in its own right (Reissman, 2008; Holstein and Gubrium, 2011; Creswell and Poth, 2015).

Narrative analysis is a form of analytical frame in which researchers interpret stories told by participants within the context of research and/or are shared in daily life (Allen, 2017). However, despite narrative research literature offering captivating methods for analysing specific types and aspect of narrative, methods for analysing storytelling and the social life of stories are generally minimal (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). Likewise, enquiries into cultural conditioning of stories and social organisations are still peripheral. Institutional studies of narratives appear in organisation studies and sociology, but also remain at the margin of scholarship (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). Similar to other methods of social research, narrative analysis involves conceptualising, data collection and management, analysis and various types of representation, such as cultural criticism, report-writing, and therapeutic insights. All these are integral components of narrative enquiry (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011).

There are distinct approaches to analysing narratives such as structural narratives, functional analysis, dialogic analysis, and thematic narrative analysis (Allen, 2017). *Structural analysis* refers to the examination of specific elements of a story, such as plot components that constitute the abstract, the orientation, the complicating point, and the coda or conclusion

(Allen, 2017). This type of analysis typically follows a basic story structure, which includes a beginning, a middle, and an end (Allen, 2017; Bell and Bryman, 2022). Therefore, the narratives under this analysis are presented chronologically, which is not a focus of this research nor is essential in answering the research question, given that following a linear timeline it is not a necessary requirement when analysing narratives (Bell and Bryman, 2022).

In the second type, which is the *functional analysis*, storytelling serves various goals or purposes for the narrator. Narratives are shared for multiple reasons, often overlapping (Allen, 2017). For instance, some stories are recounted to document personal experiences, while others aim to persuade others to adopt specific thoughts, emotions, or actions. Narrators may also share their stories for therapeutic purposes, both for themselves and their audience. Thus, functional analysis is useful when researchers want to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and intentions behind storytelling and how it impacts both the narrator and the audience. Since this is not the intended goal of this research, which aims rather to look for patterns of a certain phenomenon collectively, this type of analysis was excluded.

The third type is *dialogic/performance analysis* of narratives. The examination of dialogic and performance aspects in narrative analysis explores various aspects, such as to whom the story was told, why, how, the location, and audience of storytelling, as well as the identities involved in the narrative (Allen, 2017). It also considers how the story connects with broader discourses within a particular community or culture. In this type of analysis, the researcher is not only looking at the functional elements of the narratives but at those of the narrator, the audience, and the context, which sometimes includes joint storytelling by more than one narrator or a group of people, to analyse the facework taking place when stories are told. However, the aim of this research is not to explore how the act of narration itself influences the meaning and reception of narratives, nor gain understanding of how stories are communicated, therefore, this type of narrative analysis was also excluded. The last type of narrative analysis is thematic narrative analysis which was chosen for this study.

4.9.1 Thematic Narrative Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a valuable tool for investigating social processes and cultural practices, as narratives play a crucial role in how we understand our lives and the world around us (Reissman, 2008). It is the most effective way to comprehend the complexities of

meanings present in a textual data set (Guest et al., 2012), and the most frequently employed method for analysing qualitative research data (Reissman, 2008; Guest et al., 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2021). TA is diverse and not tied to any particular theoretical or epistemological perspective, as it can be adapted to any area of social or cultural theory (Reissman, 2008). Therefore, with TA, the similarities and differences across the data set can be easily highlighted, generating unexpected insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Hence, a crucial question for us to ask is: what is the social and cultural setting in which the narratives that were analysed were produced and interpreted? (Reissman, 2008).

Thematic narrative analysis was chosen to serve the purpose of the research situated in a larger paradigm for the following reasons. One way of analysing narratives is to place emphasis on the *what* of narrative production or the content of personal narratives (Creswell and Poth, 2015), rather than 'how' or 'to whom' (Reissman, 2008). Referring to the *what* is a thematic approach that is probably the most common method of narrative analysis (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). Hence, what a story is all about or emphasises as paramount is the story content (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). In this research, the narratives were analysed thematically.

Narrative thematic analysis is the analysis of the content of the stories to identify the underlying themes or patterns, such as the motifs used in the narratives, the various types of stories, and the genre or style of the story (Allen, 2017). According to Reissman (2008), TA focuses solely on the content of the data, particularly on stories that emerge during interview conversations. The data are interpreted in the context of themes developed by the investigator, which are influenced by prior and emergent theories, the purpose of the investigation, the data themselves, and other factors. The lives of individual narrators are generally not explored, except in terms of categories of power and subordination in the investigator's interpretive framework, such as the narrator's class, race, and gender positioning. It is assumed that the themes have similar meanings across different narratives and narrators, and that they go beyond the subjective and the specific. This enables researchers to develop themes that can be found in similar life events across different cultures and narratives (Allen, 2017). Alternatively, the absence of a particular theme in other stories can confirm its uniqueness to a particular culture or narrator. Unexpected outcomes and emotional states can also be included in the analysis of themes (Allen, 2017). Although some

researchers may use a pre-existing typology to identify themes, most rely on analytic induction for thematic narrative analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Allen, 2017).

4.9.2 Thematic Analysis Procedures

Simply telling an engaging story is insufficient to persuade researchers and policymakers of the significance of one's data and findings in a world that relies on evidence (Reissman, 2008). While a few quotes from participants can be helpful, the researcher must use various analytical tools to support her argument (Guest et al., 2012). This involves discussing the structure of the data and presenting numerical data, in addition to creating an interesting narrative (Guest et al., 2012). The following paragraphs will explain the analytical procedures the researcher used when coding and analysing the narratives through TA.

The analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure of qualitative analysis. Because the present study adopts narrative research, the themes were developed by searching for them across the stories sharing the same cultural background to look for similar life events (Allen, 2017). Analysing the narratives thematically took an analytical approach (Allen, 2017) through closely examining the data extracts to generate codes and develop themes (explained below). In fact, there is no one right way of analysing the narratives thematically (Reissman, 2008); indeed, it focused on the act of ostracism, the coping mechanisms, and the outcomes of WO.

There are several *decisions*, discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006), that need to be considered by the researcher before and during the analysis process. It is crucial to highlight them before detailing the coding processes. One of them is deciding on what counts as *a theme*, where the issue of prevalence/frequency/occurrence is a central angle in making this decision. Deciding on the prevalence has no right or wrong way but must be clear (Bell and Bryman, 2022). Because determining **prevalence** in TA is flexible and is still debatable in terms of how and why a researcher presents prevalence of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the researcher determined the prevalence by examining the frequency of themes across the data extracts. Specifically, the researcher looked at the shared perception of ostracism across the narratives, as the purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the cultural interpretation of social cues related to the phenomenon of ostracism.

Moreover, in narrative analysis, some researchers consider the distribution, that is, for example, the number of narrators who rely on religious or political explanation (Reissman, 2008). Because the number of individuals who relied on religious or cultural explanation to articulate their experiences of ostracism was notable, distribution was considered as part of determining the prevalence. For instance, twelve out of fifteen participants considered religion as one of the most effective coping mechanisms that helped them cope with ostracism. Therefore, the themes identified reflect the entire data set that describe the predominant beliefs on how ostracism is culturally interpreted by the majority of participants. That is, it captures the important idea in relation to the overall research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which is 'cultural differences'.

In addition, because organisational narratives gather collective storytelling practices rather than individuals, it includes the exploration of written or spoken accounts of connected events. Thus, narratives are used to make sense of the organisational processes generated by participants' accounts (Bell and Bryman, 2022). Put differently, the formation of the themes was based on repetition of topics mentioned by participants, topics that were recurring again and again. However, it was important to ensure that these repetitive patterns were relevant to the research questions and the research focus, which aimed to provide interpretive stories rather than a mere summary of topics (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the development of themes was not merely based on prevalence. Some notions revealed by only a few participants were found to be interesting and highly reflective of the culture, so they were noted as additional cultural insights to provide 'themes richness' (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Another decision revolves around the level of the themes to be identified (Braun and Clarke, 2006). **Latent level**, which refers to the underlying conceptualisations, ideologies, ideas, and assumptions that informs or shape the semantic content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021), was chosen for this study. This goes beyond the surface meanings of the data, and involves an interpretation of the data that gives the data its particular form and meaning. The development of themes at the latent level is not just based on a description of the data, but is informed by theoretical assumptions and meanings that underpin what is articulated in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) by providing conceptual interpretation to makes sense of what the participants are saying (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

For instance, culture helped to leverage the critical evaluation, which in return validated such knowledge drawn from the information offered by the interviewees and their perspectives (Edwards et al., 2014) and supported the latent analysis of the data, with cultural theories being considered throughout the process. One notable recurring code was the mention of God's name, which was labelled as 'religion.' By defining religion and recognising its frequent occurrence in participants' accounts, the researcher used this code for further discussions on how participants' belief systems shaped their past and current experiences with WO. Therefore, recognising that the characterisation of the code 'God' is only partially contextual, it is acknowledged that this specific code captures meaning at both the semantic level and the latent level. Doing so contributed to the credibility and transparency of the analyses process, as the researcher was able to clearly link between the data and the identified themes, which enhanced analysis reliability as the analysis was based on both participants' own words and statements as well as the interpretation of the data content.

From a critical realist perspective, it is understood that the interview findings cannot simply be accepted at face value. Instead, it is necessary to identify patterns in the data and critically scrutinise alternative interpretations of processes (Edwards et al., 2014). This is because perceiving reality directly is unachievable, as it goes through the filter of our brains, language, culture, methods, and similar factors (Wiltshire and Ronkainen, 2021). From that stance, the third decision made concerning the **epistemological perspective** was adopting CR views for this research, see Chapter 3. In fact, narrative analysis is expected to take various forms, because researchers depend on diverse epistemologies and theories (Reissman, 2008). Positioning narratives among a realism approach has been always there since the early days (Reissman, 2008). Within the realist framework, narrative accounts serve as a primary source of information for the researcher's analytical descriptions of societies, cultures and individual experiences and lives (Reissman, 2008). As a CR researcher, the researcher can theorise experiences, meaning, and motivations in a straightforward way, because a simple relationship is assumed between experiences and meaning as well as language, which enables meaning and experiences articulation (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As a consequence, realism goes hand in hand with the latent level of coding, because CR emphasises the importance of understanding the underlying structures and mechanisms that shape social phenomena (Edwards et al., 2014). Moreover, in this research the participants are considered as 'subjects' not 'experts' of the field. Consequently, despite the CR view of

them as a valuable source of social research, they also have significant limitations associated with, for example, vantage points, preoccupations, and interest (Edwards et al., 2014). Ontologically, interviewees' accounts pave a way into structure, but not to the whole account or deep access to structures according to CR standpoint. Thus, approaching the data inductively and through latent approach is the way forward to gaining enough knowledge about a certain phenomenon.

Though in thematic narratives language is used as a resource rather than a topic of enquiry, it is sometimes significant to bring to attention the metaphors used by participants that were overlooked (Reissman, 2008). Thus, in this research, local, regional and religious quotes were used more often by most interviewees to describe their experiences, which the researcher found highly relevant in explaining the cultural and religious impact on how people perceive and cope with ostracism.

A final decision to be made before and during the coding process was **the application of the thematic analysis** (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher analysed the data inductively, where the analysis is influenced by the researcher's experience in gathering and analysing data. This approach is data-driven and based on building knowledge from the bottom up, rather than relying solely on pre-existing theories or the perspectives of the investigator (Creswell and Poth, 2015; Giraldez Hayes, 2021). Indeed, most thematic narrative analyses adopt *inductive analysis* (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Kim, 2019). The inductive approach began by emphasising the cultural influence beyond what the literature had discussed, especially that the topic of silent treatment is new to the Omani context and participants shared what they perceive as ostracism. Thus, the researcher coded the data according to what was believed by the participants to be an act of ostracism, to avoid being restricted by theoretical typologies and miss what could contribute to the theory from a cultural lens.

Nevertheless, starting off the inductive reasoning by reviewing literature to discover ideas and theories, then critique or improve them, is a valuable end in itself (Edwards et al., 2014), where researchers do not start out empty handed, nor attempt to confirm predetermined categories, but rather seek out new insights (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). In other words, prior theory guides the enquiry in all narratives, but also the researcher searches for novel theoretical insights driven by the data (Riessman, 2008). Thus, prior to data examination and throughout the coding process, reading more about Omani culture and organisational

practices aids the inductive process. This involves breaking down and reconstructing meanings in a way that enhances the researcher's initial implications, ultimately increasing validity. Coding with an open mind, the researcher was able to identify the cultural impacts that were subconsciously taken for granted (Cho and Trent, 2006), but which are culturally related, providing appealing insights that strike the ear, such as 'greetings' and 'consultation', to capture the broadest exploratory net. This contributes to the formulation and interpretation of themes. Repeatedly reading the text, noting down significant excerpts, and keeping records of inferences, assists in capturing something interesting and important about the text (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). Only later on did the researcher separate the codes found to be culturally-specific from the ones already mentioned in the literature.

To justify the choice of inductive analysis, CR researchers basically aim to generate a theoretical explanation for the social world, and accept that some perspectives of the world are more accurate than others (Edwards et al., 2014). For example, the researcher does think that modern explanation for cultural impact on human behaviours from the Omani people themselves better represents reality than how other outsiders explain the Omani culture or speak on their behalf. In fact, none of Hofstede's work included Oman (Moideenkutty et al., 2011), meaning that there is limited knowledge of the research domain because the area is under-researched. Therefore, it is believed that the collected data has pragmatic use as a measure of validity, for it provides a basis for other scholars in social sciences to build upon this researcher's findings (Riessman, 2008), and perhaps transfer the culturally situated knowledge to other similar populations, circumstances or settings (Tracy, 2010). Thereby, the research process is highly inductive (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011).

4.9.3 The Coding Process

The coding process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of TA coding, with a greater flexibility to fit the data's narrative nature where data flow resembles a story. These steps are:

1. Familiarising the researcher with the data.
2. Generation of initial codes.
3. Themes searching.
4. Themes reviewing.

5. Defining themes and naming them.
6. Report production (steps 4 & 5 are explained in Chapters 5 and 7).

The researcher did not follow strict or formal parameters to identify themes as it is not necessary in TA to follow linear procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2019), nor in narrative analysis (Reissman, 2008). Indeed, looking for a particular set of guidelines in narrative thematic analysis will only lead to disappointment (Reissman, 2008). Though the researcher tried to be systematic in following the phases of TA, moving between the steps, back and forth in a non-linear way to finalise the codes and themes was inevitable and necessary. This became particularly essential because the main objective of the coding process was to uncover contextual insights embedded in the texts, addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. These insights might not emerge through a straightforward linear approach but instead through revisiting the data.

First, to familiarise herself with the data, the researcher began with reading the transcripts line by line and making notes of the most repetitive words across the data sets, both using computer software (Nvivo) and manually, to allow a full immersion with the data and pay attention to data meaningfulness rather than frequencies (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Emphasising the particulars through engaging in the meaning-making of the data helped to identify codes that include broader categories beyond interviewees words (Creswell and Poth, 2015). Careful coding of interview transcripts is vital to find the context of discovery or context of justification (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). More than a hundred codes were initially generated semantically and explicitly, and labelled as either one word or a phrase, such as ‘perpetrators’ characteristics’, ‘intensity of ostracism’, ‘cyber ostracism’, ‘avoidance’, etc., reflecting interviewees’ meanings and relevance to research questions, see Appendix 4.5.

Later, the researcher counted the frequencies of these codes using Nvivo 21 and noted them down (eg, invisible (11)). One benefit of using a computer software is that it allows quick codes searching, and increases efficiency by making the process of coding faster (Clarke and Braun, 2013), which helped the researcher to easily apply the next steps. After that, the researcher grouped the similar codes together with the quotes that exhibited overlapping meaning into separate clusters of codes and labelled them, see Appendix 4.6. For instance,

similar codes such as ‘appreciation’, ‘reward’, ‘bonus’, ‘recognition’, etc., were all grouped together and labelled as ‘lack of appreciation’.

At this stage, the researcher transitioned from coding to the exploration of potential themes. In narratives, identifying a word or a phrase is not enough to represent a theme, but often a prolonged passage of text is enough (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). According to Clarke and Braun (2013), theme searching is an active process in which themes are generated and constructed, rather than simply discovered as pre-existing elements within the data. This is particularly important considering that narratives are collaborative constructions between the narrator and the investigator (Kirkman, 2002; Reissman, 2008; Creswell and Poth, 2015). As a result, the researcher bears the responsibility of generating meaningful themes that effectively convey the interviewees’ stories as they desire them to be told, while also explaining the crucial aspect of the phenomenon (Reissman, 2008). Thus, the main activity conducted in this stage was to either combine or remove overlapping codes that had similar meaning, hence the number of codes was reduced as redundancy was eliminated, and a broad topic was identified that explained the code clusters. For example, the codes ‘lack of consultation’, ‘religious ostracism’, and ‘cold greetings’ were all combined under one code named ‘cultural-specific ostracism’, see Appendix 4.7.

Similar clusters of codes then formed meaningful sub-themes. Because the interview questions can be used to guide the coding and analysis of the data in the initial stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the researcher reviewed the sub-themes and observed that they exhibited either the experiences of WO in different forms, including both expected and unexpected ones, or the interviewees’ responses to WO and their coping mechanisms, or the resulting outcomes of feeling excluded.

Listening to the tape recordings during the analytical process to accurately capture the spoken words and obtaining a detailed account of the exact language used by individuals is strongly recommended by Riessman (2008) for enhancing analysis and persuasion. To achieve this, the researcher examined the transcripts while referring to the tape-recorded conversations whenever necessary. Only after identifying when the interviewees’ accounts converged thematically (Riessman, 2008) were potential themes developed. By being reflexive and taking the insider role, the researcher contrasted between the generated themes and the pre-existing theories on ostracism (Ferris et al., 2008; 2017; Robinson et al., 2013; Howard et al.,

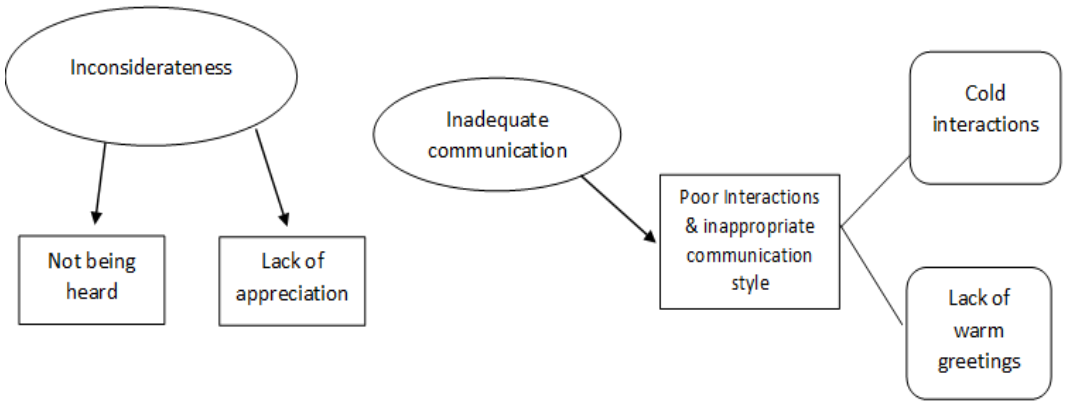
2020). Similar themes were combined together, and diverse ones were separated or discarded based on excessive overlap and distinguished cultural factors (eg, power-distance, religion, and potential theoretical contributions). Basically, the formation of the themes and sub-themes at this stage followed two steps, *level 1* and *level 2***.**

Level 1 involves reviewing the coded data extracts to assess whether they form a coherent pattern. If the candidate themes demonstrate a coherent pattern, the analysis moves on to the second level. However, if the candidate themes do not fit, the researcher must consider whether the theme itself is problematic or if some data extracts within the theme do not align (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In such cases, the themes may be reworked, new themes may be created, or the ones that do not fit well to an existing theme may be assigned to another existing theme or discarded (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Hence, further revisiting of the codes under each theme was undertaken to compile the similar ones and insert them into the most relevant themes. Some codes, however, fit into more than one theme, while others were discarded.

Level 2 follows a similar process but considers the entire data set. At this level, the researcher evaluates the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set as a whole, aiming for an accurate representation of the meanings present (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The entire data set is reviewed to ensure that the themes align with the data, and the research questions and any additional data that was missed in earlier coding stages is coded. The outcome of this stage concerned the forms of ostracism, the coping mechanisms, and the consequences of WO. For example, the common forms of ostracism already known from the literature were noted and separately grouped from the ones seeming to be culturally specific, using Nvivo. Therefore, a new sub-theme under the coping mechanisms theme, such as '*religion*', was prominent and identified. However, the researcher stopped coding and refining when she noticed that more refinement did not add any substantial contribution. Therefore, at this stage a thematic map was generated from an initial thematic map and its accurate representation of the data set was also checked, see Figure 4.1.

However, the most challenging step started at this stage when finalising the key and final themes. A closer look at the data indicates that some themes should be categorised as first-order, second-order and third-order themes that TA typically involves (Terry et al., 2017).

Figure 4.1: Developed Thematic map, Showing two main Themes that Represent 'The Forms of Ostracism'



The researcher begins with a fundamental level of descriptive coding with minimal level of interpretation, as explained above, and gradually progresses towards a more interpretative level derived from theoretical assumption. In other words, the broad higher-order codes (the third-order themes) provide a general perspective of the more detailed lower-order codes (first- and second-order themes) (Nowell et al., 2017). Thus, the first- and second- order themes were data driven, supported by statements and quotations using an inductive approach. While the second-order themes were developed with more level of interpretation than the first-order coding, they were still driven by data (Nowell et al., 2017).

The difference is that, when developing the second-order themes, superordinate constructs were captured which represented the overall meaning of the first-order themes, and they also reflected issues such as power, conflict, and cultural norms within the texts (Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson, 2013), while the third-order themes, which the researcher called the overarching themes, were theoretically driven and thus deductively analysed (Nowell et al., 2017). Initially, the researcher identified twelve first-order themes representing the forms of ostracism, see Appendix 4.8, which she further classified into four second-order themes, while for the coping mechanisms she initially identified eleven first-order themes that were then classified into seven second-order themes.

Upon completion, final thematic map was developed, see Appendix 4.9. The overarching themes were identified by drawing on relevant theories to aid the interpretation of the data, with caution that these themes must still be grounded in the data (Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson, 2013). Finally, the first-order themes in 'forms of ostracism' were reduced to nine

themes leading to four second-order themes, whereas twelve first-order themes were identified under the coping mechanisms leading to six second-order themes. The final key themes reflecting the third-order themes or overarching themes under 'the forms of ostracism' were named as: *underemployment* and *ineffective communication*, while *emotional-focused coping* and *problem-focused coping* illustrate the coping mechanisms, discussed in the following chapter.

The key themes did not only have good titles, but they captured a central organising concept that unifies the data extracts (Clarke and Braun, 2013). The overarching themes tell something about the data pattern in relation to the research questions, have boundaries, are not too narrow or too broad, and most importantly, they contribute to the overall story (Clarke and Braun, 2013). In addition, the choice of the theme was based on enabling a theoretical contribution to the literature upon understanding of the data in relation to the research focus (Bell and Bryman, 2022).

4.10 Summary

In summary, this chapter explained the methodology employed for Study 1. It commenced by introducing narrative research as the research design of Study 1, methods of conducting interviews, and the coding procedures, specifically focusing on the analysis of narratives through thematic narrative analysis. Also, the chapter underscored the ethical considerations undertaken by the researcher throughout the process, as well as the researcher's reflexivity and positionality within this study. The following chapter will discuss the findings of Study 1 by presenting the emerged themes.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings (Study 1)

5.1 Introduction

The results chapter of this qualitative study reviews the findings obtained from in-depth interviews with Omani participants and the key themes that emerged from data analysis, shedding light on the various forms of workplace ostracism they encountered, and the coping mechanisms employed to overcome the negative consequences of such experiences, which answers the first and the second research questions. Through the lens of the interviewees' narratives, the findings revealed interesting cultural-specific factors; providing a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of WO and the strategies employees employ to cope with its adverse effects in an Arab Gulf context. Following this, the chapter provides a summary discussion of the exploration of the themes in relation to the third research question.

5.2 Themes Representation

The process of reorganising the stories told by the interviewees into a general framework is called re-storying, in which the researcher takes an active role and reorganises the narratives in a way that makes sense (Reissman, 2008; Daiute, 2014). Despite the data being thematically analysed by focusing on 'what' was told rather than 'how' it was told (Reissman, 2008; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Allen, 2017), re-storying participants' stories to make sense to the audience by unfolding the context was an integral step to accurately represent the themes.

However, it must be noted that the current study focused on the target perspective, not the perpetrator perspective; thus, it yields the targets' felt and perceived ostracism, supported by the actual incidents of behavioural WO as evidence of the targets' actual experience of ostracism according to their narratives. Yet, it is important to bear in mind the possible bias in the interviewees' responses. However, to minimise this issue and ensure credibility, multivocality was used by showing varied voices based on interpreting participants' points of view (Tracy, 2010). In other words, multivocality arises by scrutinising social behaviour

from the interviewees' perspective. The researchers are demanded to provide a thick description of participants' actions and their contextual significance to construct meaning. As such, researchers avoid imposing their own interpretations but instead focus on viewpoints that differ from the majority's narratives or the researcher's stance (Tracy, 2010).

Based on TA of fifteen interviews, four key themes were identified in relation to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, outlined in Chapter 1. The central purpose of Study 1 revolves around answering RQ1 as a starting point, followed by addressing the rest of questions accordingly.

5.2.1 Findings: RQ1

RQ1: How is workplace ostracism experienced in the Arabian Gulf States, and what cultural-specific forms of workplace ostracism are encountered there?

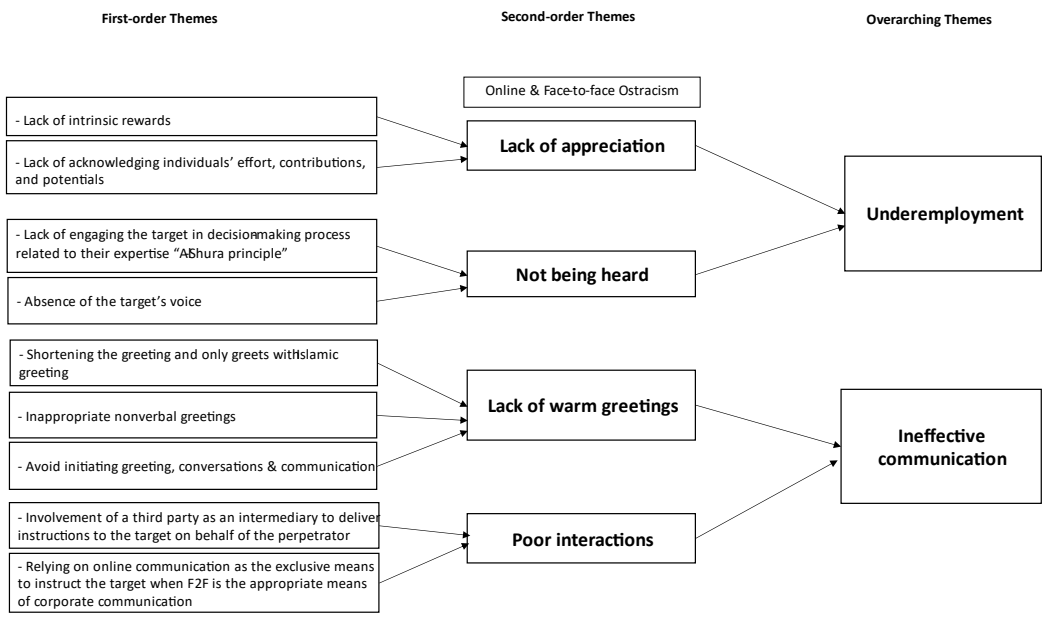
Upon collecting data, it became evident that the phenomenon of WO is indeed experienced in the Arab Gulf. However, it possesses familiarity with workplace dynamics in Arabian contexts, resembling those observed in Western settings. Yet, interesting insights have emerged from analysis revealing a few culturally significant aspects concerning the forms of WO. A thorough discussion of the similarities and differences of WO between the Arab Gulf contexts and the Western contexts is provided at the end of the chapter addressing RQ3 and in Chapter 7. However, discussion of RQ1 and RQ2 will only present the key themes of Study 1. The analysis of the data unveiled two key themes, illustrating **the forms of ostracism** narrated by the participants. These are: *underemployment* and *ineffective communication*, see Figure 5.1.

Among them, most themes are particularly relevant to the Omani context, and some overlap with the Western context. For example, 'ineffective communication' is found to be a unique cultural manifestation of WO, whereas for 'underemployment' only the sub-theme of 'not being heard' stands out as a cultural-specific form of WO. The first-order themes demonstrate how the behavioural forms of ostracism represented by the second-order themes reflect the overarching themes. Each theme is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Underemployment

This theme outlines the behavioural acts of ostracism experienced by participants at work. The theme also highlights how cultural norms, characteristics, and settings, as well as organisational background, can influence the various forms of ostracism encountered by interviewees in the workplace, particularly when power differences are at play.

Figure 5.1: Final Themes Emerged from the data on the Forms of Workplace Ostracism



To elaborate, participants frequently conveyed experiences of being silenced, *not heard,* and *not appreciated*, which reflect the issue of underemployment. For example, these reported instances of ostracism align with the concept of underemployment, which refers to various employment situations that workers find unsatisfactory (Heyes and Tomlinson, 2021). This is because the act of ostracising them made them feel 'underutilised,' a sentiment that arises when workers perceive that they are performing below their full capabilities (Heyes and Tomlinson, 2021). This feeling was particularly pronounced among highly educated participants occupying middle-level managerial positions, as they were often denied opportunities to utilise their full potential. Consequently, interviewees consistently reported not being consulted in the decision-making process, which was identified as a salient form of ostracism with cultural implications.

The results indicate that leaders, both the target's direct managers or top management, were the primary source of ostracism (86%), followed by co-workers, then subordinates. Of this percentage, 80% of the leaders were male. It is important to note that some participants experienced ostracism from multiple sources simultaneously or in different workplaces. The following paragraphs represent second-order themes detailing a range of first-order themes of workplace ostracism experienced by Omani workers.

Lack of appreciation

To begin with, nearly all of those interviewed (93.3%) indicated that they felt they were not appreciated, forming a second-order theme of underemployment. This is reflected by the first-order theme when participants reported the absence of acknowledgement for their effort, contributions, and potential. As an illustration, Yasir, serving as the Operations Manager in a well-known private organisation, and his team faced persistent ostracism after expressing their disagreement with their manager to carry out a specific task. Due to their refusal to comply with that particular order, Yasir and his colleagues felt undervalued by their manager. They perceived this lack of appreciation through their exclusion from nominations in recognition competitions within the company, despite believing they had performed exceptionally well:

> If there were nominations for something and a group member was among the nominees, he would remove him from the list of nominees and decline the nomination. As a result, it felt like we were being 'blacklisted'. (Yasir)

Another angle of the same issue is when Noor, Auditor for a bank, mentioned that her manager excluded her from group emails sent to higher management to hide her name, whereas he copied her in only when top management were not included in that email, despite the fact that they all worked together on the same task. Added to that, if the top management sent her manager feedback on their job via email, he would not forward it to her, rather he would summarise the email and send it to Noor individually, which made her feel that all her effort was not being acknowledged:

> He excludes our names from the circulation of the minutes. He does not copy us in emails. Also, when he sends the final solution to the committee, he does not copy us as the audit team, he sends it directly to them… I am not involved with the

> management anymore, I used to be involved before he came along. (Noor)

Weam is a Civil Engineer for an oil and gas engineering and construction company, and her educational major is architecture, which overlaps with engineering as she mentioned. Therefore, the management team, including her direct manager, ostracised her by underestimating her capabilities to work on tasks related to engineering, as she stated:

> They were giving me filing tasks or asking me to insert types of drawings into Excel sheets and other tasks that were not related to engineering. It had nothing to do with engineering... They did not give me any chance… I felt like I was only being used as a decoration and not making any good use of me. (Weam)

The same issue faced Lamis, HR Administrator for a public company, who felt ostracised by the management by them not giving her the chance to prove herself and take on more tasks:

> He thinks I am unproductive, loser, and useless… He used to give me usual and basic stuff, not challenging ones. Even when I used to submit my recommendations and proposals to him, thinking they were excellent ideas and believing he would implement them, he wouldn't even say something like: this is a good idea. We would love to apply it, but there is no budget for it or something like that. I would have accepted it. Instead, he does not even pay my ideas any attention. (Lamis)

Assigning Salma, a PhD holder and Head of Department (HOD) in a Ministry, to dysfunctional, inactive committees or to ones she is not specialist in mirrors her feeling of not utilising her full potential by the perpetrator, her manager, as she commented: "I saw several times my name in committees that have nothing to do with my specialisation at all. At least talk to me about it, ask me if I am okay with it."

Additionally, intrinsic rewards seem to be an important need for some participants (40%), even more than tangible rewards, and not receiving expected intrinsic rewards was marked as a first-order theme of not being appreciated. For example, when Aisha, Middle Manager in a reputed private oil company, accomplished a remarkable achievement by outperforming her peers in an international examination, she expected recognition at least via an email from her manager, but when the acknowledgment did not take place, she felt unappreciated:

> I remember they said: for all of you in this department to be promoted, you have to be a [redacted for anonymity] certified by the international organisation, [organisation name redacted for anonymity] and pass the course. So, they sent all of us abroad to Dubai for a course and to London. All of them failed the course… I'm the only one who passed, and I was certified. When he knew he ignored it, usually they embrace it… they would roll out an email to celebrate, but they did not as if I didn't pass. (Aisha)

Another example, Shihab, Production Supervisor for an oil and gas company, was rewarded and promoted, yet he still felt ostracised by not receiving a word of thanks from his managers for all the effort he was exerting. Thus, the absence of intangible rewards and recognition is viewed as a form of ostracism, according to his statement:

> Particular people feel that my effort is part of my job, so you don't actually need to get anything in return, nor to be recognised because this is basically part of your job… I mean, when you give someone a thing, and he thanks you, you feel good, but here we always exert an effort to hear the word thank you; they see your effort, but we don't get it. I mean, they don't care about it as they think it''s not an important issue and not a great deal to consider. (Shihab)

Not being heard

Another form of ostracism reported by most participants (86.6%) is the feeling of not being heard, forming as second-order theme of underemployment. Not being heard is reflected in the first-order themes detailing the specific behaviours of WO. One of them is a prominent manifestation of a culturally-specific type of ostracism known as the '**Al-Shura' principle**, an Arabic word for consultation. This cultural significance of the 'Shura' principle stems from the notion that, in the Arab world, consultation is not just a routine practice; it is deeply ingrained as a principle in Islam (Almoharby and Neal, 2013) which pervades Arabs' lives in all aspects (Hall, 1959). Essentially, the overall response to the first question of 'can you tell me what happened?' was unexpectedly relevant to the issue of engaging in the decision-making process and the consequences resulting from disengagement in the decision-making process, which is the absence of one's voice. Interviewees indicated that they were not invited to provide input for critical decisions with which they believed they should be involved. They also mentioned not being included in discussions when the matter directly affected them, as well as not having a say when a decision is made. This is found to be the most notable form

of ostracism experienced by the interviewees and the most frequent issue arising across the accounts, discussed thoroughly in Section 5.3.1 and Chapter 7 as a significant theoretical contribution.

To illustrate, Salma, HOD researcher in a Ministry, who was ostracised by her manager, expressed how she felt left out by not being engaged in work discussion, despite her having a PhD in the field of discussion:

> I am the only one she does not discuss any matter with. She never discusses things with me, she only discusses them with my colleagues. She goes to them and asks them what do you think if you participate here and there and so on? Do you accept? Do you want to go? (Salma)

In addition, Aisha, Middle Manager in a private oil company, studied her master's degree abroad and returned to the company hoping to be promoted and to add value to the department. She wanted to share her experience and knowledge to improve the department; however, despite her qualification, her manager did not allow her to engage in the decision-making concerning issues within her expertise:

> For me, I know everything, I know the history already, and I know how to process [redacted for anonymity] issues. So, when I keep on going to him to talk …I was like: now, it has been a year. Nobody reported any [redacted for anonymity] reports, let us start the process. He replies: it's not your business when it's ready, when it's the time, I'll tell you. You just go do your job. What should I do? Actually, my job is [redacted for anonymity]! (Aisha)

In like fashion, Yasir, the Operations Manager in a private organisation, and his team members were ostracised by their manager for airing their opposing opinion to their manager's decision. Their job is critical, and any decision made regarding operations would directly affect the flow of the work and the customers. Consequently, Yasir and his team expected to be consulted when taking such decision and to have their view taken seriously as per their experience. So, Yasir felt his expertise was not counted:

> I have an opinion but no one listens to it, that hurts. I know this place very well because I am here every single day, so I know everything about it. Therefore, we were supposed to participate in the decision-making. Do you know when you feel powerless? That is it. (Yasir)

Despite Yumna, Associate Professor HOD at a public university college, having remarkable achievements locally and internationally, she feels she is not appropriately engaged by the top management in critical decision-making processes. She said:

> I am not part of the decision-making process, which is why I withdrew myself… I had suggested some flexible ideas in person that could have addressed certain issues while also giving students an opportunity to stand out, but my request was turned down. (Yumna)

Anwar, HR Manager in a private company, was ostracised by top management by being arbitrarily moved to another department without any consultation, advance notice, or discussion, leaving him with a strong sense of exclusion and ostracism. He expressed his dissatisfaction, stating:

> Before making any decision, they should have engaged in a discussion with me, clarified the reasons, consulted me, and sought my opinion on whether I wanted to make the move. Despite being a manager, I have dedicated four years to their company, and I am an employee who has contributed significant value. I am valuable. (Anwar)

Table 5.1 sets out more examples of participants' statements reflecting underemployment theme.

Table 5.1: Indicative Evidence from the data Representing Lack of Appreciation and not Being Heard as Underemployment Forms of Ostracism

Forms of Ostracism	Participant	Exemplary Evidence
Lack of appreciation and not being heard	Aisha	My only motivation was when somebody compliments me at work or when I achieve something, a new certification at work or a new promotion… those things at work, they were my main, I would say, satisfaction.
	Najat	Even when my suggestion is good for the company, he does not take it, he takes the one against my opinion. For example, they were hinting indirectly that [my] suggestion is unworthy as it's coming from a loser.
	Nadir	When someone does not appreciate your role, you start to question yourself, am I not good enough? Even though you know that it's not true.

Noor	This treatment made me feel like a hamster inside the wheel. I am not progressing to the next level because of him, and he is not empowering me. He does not delegate to me any tasks. I am just doing my job that supports his positions in front of the committee members.

Taken as a whole, it can be theorised from the ostracising experiences of participants that they feel *underemployed*, as they perceive that their jobs hinder them from fully utilising their skills, knowledge, experience and discretion (McKee-Ryan and Harvey, 2011). Particularly, participants feel *underengaged*, which describes workers who believe their current performance falls below the level they are capable of achieving (Heyes and Tomlinson, 2021). Also, it can be inferred to the feeling of being *overqualified* with no prospects when workers believe they possess the skills to handle more challenging tasks than what is expected in their current job. They also perceive limited opportunities for advancing in their career (Heyes and Tomlinson, 2021), leading them to feel ostracised and neglected.

The next paragraphs will explain the second theme generated as another distinguished form of WO that is 'ineffective communication'.

Ineffective communication

This theme delves into the communicational issues reported by interviewees, highlighting how poor communication is perceived as a form of ostracism. This can manifest as a breakdown in communication between the target and perpetrators, with communication being used as a weapon to exclude the target. In this context, ineffective communication does not refer to the objective failure of sending or receiving information, but to the subjective emotional and behavioural interaction between the target and perpetrators that results in the communication process being weakened or distorted, as perceived by the receiver, thereby intentionally disrupting the continuity of perceived appropriate communication between the parties involved.

Two ways of intentionally ostracising the target in a form of ineffective communication occur via greetings as a daily social interaction at work, and the use of a third-party to communicate with the target, as indications of 'poor interactions.' These two elements emerged as crucial contextual factors influencing the perception of WO in Arab Gulf States contexts.

Lack of warm greetings

The issue of **greetings** stands out as a unique second-order theme of ineffective communication. This is because Islam instructs its followers to greet each other whenever they meet as a day-to-day event, indicating that the best Muslim is the one who initiate greetings and the good Muslim interlocutor is the one who replies to the greeting with a better one. Islamic greeting is not only a duty a Muslim is required to perform, but a token of courtesy and politeness (Emery, 2000; Bouchara, 2015), especially among Arab Muslims given that their daily speech behaviour is strongly influenced by The Qur'an (Bouchara, 2015), perhaps because Arabic is the language of Qur'an. Almost all their speech acts, such as expressing gratitude, giving compliments, and greeting others, involve the use of religion, typically with a respectful reference to God (Bouchara, 2015).

Omani culture typically includes a daily greeting practice, starting with the Islamic greeting "Al-Salam Aliykum wa rahmatu-Allah wa baraktuh," meaning 'May the peace, the mercy, and the blessings of God be upon you', which precedes any human interactions (Bouchara, 2015). However, usually people shorten the greeting to "Al-Salam Aliykum," meaning 'peace be upon you'. Culturally, in the Arab Gulf the Islamic greeting is followed by a set of questions on family, group, work and other topics in normal settings (Emery, 2000). Hence, it is a process that follows certain steps and stages, which both greeter and greetee hold in the same degree of importance. In fact, the non-verbal aspects of greetings, such as facial expressions (Emery, 2000; Rababah and Malkawi, 2012) and the concept of who initiates the greeting first (Nasser Abbas, 2022), also carry significance in the greeting process within Arab Muslim cultures.

The striking observation is that although all participants (100%) reported in one way or another a greeting issue as a form of ostracism, none has experienced 'a complete ostracism', because either the perpetrator would still greet the target with the Islamic greeting, or the target will initiate the Islamic greeting when silence occurs, ending complete ostracism. In other cases, not being completely ostracised is due to professional norms expectations that entail the perpetrator to greet the target in an acceptable manner in certain professional settings. The ostracising behaviour is then seen when the greeting process is incomplete, or when it is performed with inappropriate non-verbal gestures, or when it is not initiated at all serving as the first-order themes; in other words, when it is shortened (ie, not extended with

more questions as part of cultural norms), and cold, which the interviewees call ‘a warm greeting’. This raises a concern and a red flag that something unusual is happening, especially if the Islamic greeting is not communicated. More detail on greeting as a unique culture-specific form of ostracism and a theoretical contribution is provided in Section 5.3.1 and Chapter 7 respectively.

It is strongly evident that Islamic values play a significant role in the intensity of ostracism because of the Islamic duty of greeting each other, believing that greetings go to God and are for God, as described by Najat, Sales Manager for a private construction company, when narrating an incident concerning the Islamic greeting which she encountered when she had a departmental meeting that included the perpetrator, her manager:

> That particular day no one was there except me. I was there half an hour earlier. He came in later and did not even say *Al-Salam Aliykum*. So, I joked around, broke the silence and told him greetings is for God. (Najat)

Adil, Senior Manager for an oil and gas company, was ostracised by his colleague who is also one of his best friends. He felt he was being ostracised when the greeting process was shortened, which is culturally inappropriate. For that reason, the friendly interactions had stopped from both parties and turned into formal treatment, instigating the feeling of ostracism:

> We used to talk a lot with each other and joke around with the rest of our colleagues… now, we don’t side talk with each other nor talk about anything except work and professional conversations. I only say *Al-Salam Aliykum* and that is it just because greetings are for God. (Adil)

In addition, Rayya, HOD in a public organisation, experienced ostracism from both a colleague and a group of employees, who accused her of showing favouritism toward certain subordinates. She pointed out that she missed the warm greetings she used to receive from her colleague after a conflict between the two had occurred, noting that the greetings had become brief when she said:

> He avoided me in a political way. So, he would only go like *Al-Salam Aliykum*, how are you, then disappears. He does not stay longer after he greets me, he immediately walks away. (Rayya)

Beyond the verbal component of the greeting, one feels ostracised from the non-verbal communication during the greeting process, which marks as first-order theme to lack of greeting, as Yasir, the Operations Manager stated:

> The greeting is part of the culture, so even if someone is upset with you, it should be still easy to say *Al-Salam Aliykum*, though it shows he is upset from the tone of voice when he greets. So, I don't think that greeting by itself would tell that [meaning being upset with someone]…hmm… no, it will indeed give you an impression that someone is upset from the tone of voice and facial expression when he greets. (Yasir)

Likewise, Eyad, Manager of a bank branch, sensed exclusion from his manager's non-verbal greeting, interpreting it as inappropriate and unfriendly, as well as the greeting being shortened, as he stated: "her treatment was very rigid, extremely rigid, no greetings; instead, she gets down to business immediately and discuss business matters directly without greeting me properly." Similarly, Salma, HOD in a Ministry, explained feeling ostracised when she perceived the non-verbal greeting by her manager to be "cold" as she described: "everyone knows she is loud, but now when she sees me, she is like: *how are you Salma*? in a very low tone with a cold heart and goes on her way."

Interestingly, when put in cultural settings, one must stop the ostracising behaviour and greet the target to avoid social inappropriateness and cultural awkwardness, as Nadir, HR Manager for a reputed oil and gas company, stated: "he then stopped saying *Al-Salam Aliykum* to me and only gave me a very quick eye contact. Unless he was put in a situation where he must greet me, [then] he would say it."

An integral issue concerning greeting in Muslim Arab societies is the issue of who first initiates the greeting. This factor has emerged as a first-order theme explaining lack of warm greeting as a way of ineffective communication. Thus, beside the importance of the verbal Islamic component of the greeting process, the length of the greeting apart from the Islamic component, the appropriateness of the non-verbal greeting, the issue of who first initiates the greeting, also have religious implications which, when absent, instigates the feeling of ostracism, as the following narratives indicate.

For example, Shihab, Production Supervisor for a private oil and gas company, describes his perpetrator's ostracising act, who occupies the same supervisory level as Shihab:

> I was the one who used to take the initiative and greet him. Once, I noticed I was in the parking lots inside my car, and he was still in his car. We had just arrived. So, I stopped to wave my hand and say *Al-Salam Aliykum*, but he walked away from me and did not even stop to greet me properly. (Shihab)

Similarly, Yumna, Associate Professor, expressed why the lack of warm greeting by her perpetrator made her feel ostracised, especially as she was the one who always initiated the greeting:

> I felt the way she is greeting me has changed, as if she was forced to do that. She does say *Al-Salam Aliykum*, but not the way I am used to. Most of the time I am the one initiating the greetings, not her. (Yumna)

Lamis, HR Administrator, had experienced a similar situation, as she was constantly the one who initiated the greeting to her manager:

> I am the one who kept insisting on greeting him and say *Al-Salam Aliykum* every time I see him… but I still say *Al-Salam Aliykum*, because greetings are for God. (Lamis)

Poor interactions

Poor interaction is another noteworthy second-order theme of the overarching theme of ineffective communication. It is a discovery which emerged as a distinctive contextual element shaping Omanis' perception of ostracism in terms of ineffective communication. This pertains to the involvement of **a third-party**, where individuals feel ostracised when communication between the perpetrator and the target is hindered by the ostraciser's reluctance to directly approach the target for work-related discussions. Instead, the ostraciser opts for intermediaries or online systems only to communicate with the target, even in situations where direct F2F or a phone call is deemed appropriate and expected in that organisational setting. An extensive discussion of the issue of a third-party as a significant contextual form of ostracism, and a theoretical contribution is provided in in Section 5.3.1 and Chapter 7.

Using an intermediary person to instruct or communicate with the target instead of approaching the target directly had emerged as a first-order theme of the behavioural WO reflecting poor interaction. For example, Anwar is an HR Manager who works in a private company. Anwar was arbitrarily transferred to another department he is not specialised in,

without prior notice or discussion, neither was he directly told about the decision. He commented that, after the decision had taken place, the management avoided him when he tried to approach them for clarification by deferring the issue to the board of directors and by asking him to approach the top management through his direct manager, preventing Anwar from directly approaching the General Manager (GM):

> They issued a memo, that if anyone wants to discuss any issue, he/she should talk to the Deputy General Manager who will deliver it to the GM. So, by doing that they avoided any direct communication with me. There are no emails at all between us. If they wanted to approach me, they communicate with my manager, who in turns send it to me. It was not so hierarchically rigid the way it is now. (Anwar)

Likewise, Shihab, Production Supervisor for a private oil and gas company, collaborates closely with a colleague who shares the same supervisory position in the oil field. Shihab experienced embarrassment when the colleague, who acted as a perpetrator, publicly demonstrated that Shihab was being ostracised by seeking information directly from Shihab's team instead of approaching Shihab directly, either in person or through a phone call. This situation was particularly awkward considering that both individuals had interdependent tasks, held the same managerial level, worked in close proximity to each other, and their offices were right next to each other:

> He does not discuss with me anything; instead, he discusses issues with my subordinates and talks with those who report to me who then come back to tell me what happened… now I can say a whole year has passed and not even a single time I received a phone call from him to discuss any task, unless I am the one calling. (Shihab)

Using online methods as the sole communication means to deal with the target, when F2F is appropriate and common in the corporation, is another first-order theme signifying poor interaction as one form of WO. For instance, Salma, HOD in a Ministry, whose job entails working on research development and researcher projects and who was ostracised by her direct female manager, experienced both. Her tasks were assigned using an online system and a third-party by her ostraciser, in cooperation with some members of the top management:

> At the beginning they used to give me direct assignment from the GM to me. After this lobby was created it became impossible to do that again… She asks my colleagues to tell me what tasks I am supposed to do. (Salma)

Additionally, her manager stopped instructing her through a phone call and started using an online system instead to reach out to Salma, which made her feel disrespected and ostracised:

> We have this internal assignment system, but she won't come and tell me F2F, she would use that system to let me know what assignments I should do by writing in it: do so and so. There are no conversations, nor discussions. Whereas if she only picked up the phone to tell me about the assignments, we would have saved a lot of time and finished them earlier. Now look at what happened! only because she does not want to ring me up, all emails are bouncing back and forth … If she has only picked up the phone, we would have finalised the tasks. (Salma)

This view was echoed by another informant, Noor, Auditor for a bank, whose job is critical and requires regular feedback from top management. Her job is based on teamwork in a team that includes herself, her manager and a few other colleagues. Noor was excluded and ignored when her manager sent her colleague to inform her of what she needed to do, rather than approaching her directly, despite their offices being close to each other:

> Even if the subjects are directly related to me, my manager won't approach me to discuss them with me. Instead, he sends my male colleague to tell me. Also, he does not update me with the new information and things going on, he does not involve me to be specific. (Noor)

Lamyaa, Middle Manager, who works in a large private company, is a similar case. She used to lead her team before her manager was appointed and took over. Lamyaa remarked that her manager used emails to communicate with her rather than approach her in person as she does with other team members: "Now, if she wants me to do something for work, she will send me an email instead of coming to me and tell me F2F."

Table 5.2 illustrates more examples of participants' statements reflecting ineffective communication theme.

Table 5.2: Indicative Evidence from the data Representing lack of warm Greetings and poor Interactions as Ineffective Communication Forms of Ostracism

Form of Ostracism	Participant	Exemplary Evidence
Lack of warm greetings and poor interactions	Weam	He wouldn't dare to join us if I were there; he would only say: *Al-Salam Aliykum*. Especially if I am alone, he will not dare to come near me. He will initiate a conversation only if he sees me with my colleague; a newcomer who does not know him well or our history.
	Yasir	There was 'coldness' compared to the old days… You know it feels different when your boss used to converse with you freely and friendly without feeling tensed about what to say and how to say it. You feel comfortable in that relationship.
	Anwar	If accidentally happened that we meet, they respond in a cold manner to my greetings.
	Salma	They [colleagues] came and told me oh, your manager wants you to do this and that, imagine, through my colleagues! I told them, she did not discuss it with me or tell me directly, why would I do it? No one asked me to do anything, so I won't do it.
	Rayya	He stopped the F2F communication with me. Instead, whenever there is a work-related issue, he sends me emails only, no calls, no approaching me directly.

The above themes illustrate the prevalent forms of ostracism as described by the interviewees, emphasising culturally sensitive perspectives on WO which will be extensively discussed when addressing RQ3.

The second part of the interviews centre on questioning Omanis about the coping strategies they adopt, with the objective of investigating the contextual and cultural factors that may have influenced how employees address workplace ostracism. This portion presents the analysis of the interviewees' coping mechanisms, addressing RQ2 as follows.

5.2.2 Findings: RQ2

RQ2: How do employees cope with workplace ostracism in the Arabian Gulf States?

When participants were asked about the strategies they adopt to cope with WO, the narratives generated two overarching themes based on the most prevalent coping strategies. Participants showed a considerable number of attempts to deal with the negative effects resulting from

experiencing ostracism. These strategies ranged between *problem-focused* and *emotional-focused*, see Figure 5.2. However, the coping mechanisms that were highlighted as unique contextual coping mechanisms were **religion**, **avoidance**, and **withdrawal**, as discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

Emotional-focused coping

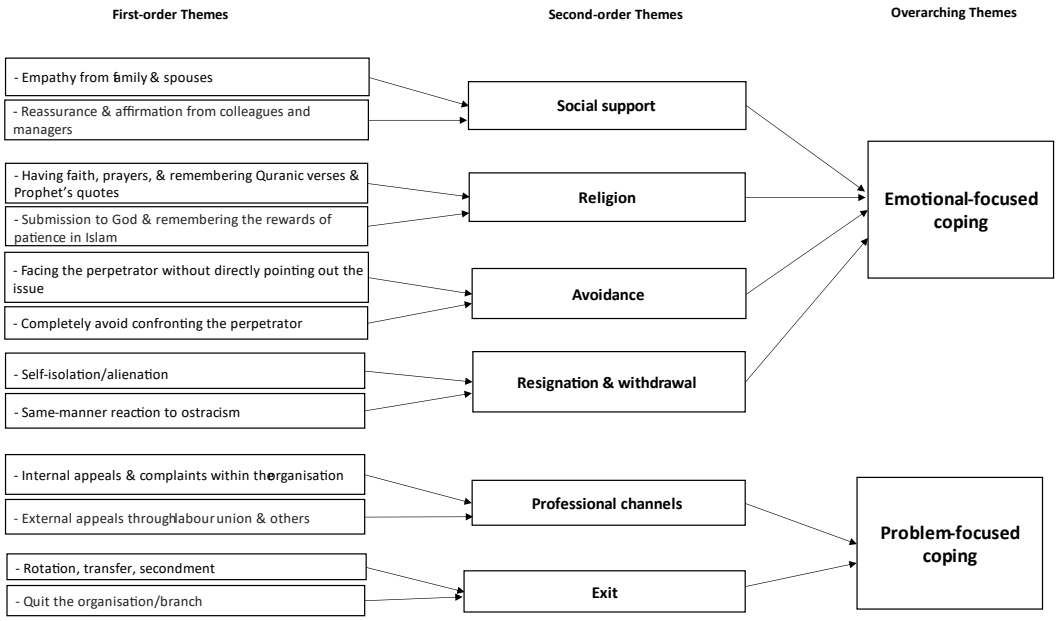
This overarching theme focuses on a set of psychological strategies or techniques that individuals use to manage or regulate the emotions that arise from being excluded or ignored by one's colleagues or superiors. These coping strategies focus on changing one's emotional reaction or negative emotional states to a problem, rather than directly solving the problem itself (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Emotional-focused coping in this particular context is typically used when an individual feels overwhelmed by a situation and cannot change the situation itself due to cultural barriers. Instead, they focus on managing their emotional response to the situation (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), which in this case involved seeking social support, engaging in spirituality, avoiding conflict and the source of unpleasant situation, or resignation to self-isolation and same manner reaction to ostracism. This theme includes four second-order themes: social support, religion, avoidance, and resignation and withdrawal. Each second-order theme represents one emotional coping mechanism. Second-order themes include first-order themes that represent the varying facets of the second-order theme.

Social support

Seeking emotional reassurance, affirmation and empathy from the targets' support systems turned out to be the coping mechanisms most used by almost all participants (93%). The study results show that social support from family, friends, colleagues and managers did play a significant role in alleviating the experiences of ostracism through extending emotional empathy to the targets' social pain.

For instance, when Shihab, Production Supervisor, who was ostracised by his peer, discussed the issue of ostracism with his colleagues they advised him to ignore it: "my friends, they always tell me to ignore what is happening. They say things like: don't say anything, or try to avoid the wrongdoer... Every time I vent to them, they are like: ignore, just ignore."

Figure 5.2: Final Themes Emerged from that data on the Coping Mechanisms with Workplace Ostracism



The same advice was given to Eyad, Manager at a bank branch, by his colleagues when they witnessed the ostracising behaviours from his manager:

> People always advise you to avoid, avoid, and avoid [repeatedly]. They always advice you to avoid problems. But for me, I can't ignore it, it's not me, it was affecting me…I spoke with my colleague and asked him if what he witnessed is right. He said no, it's not right. I asked him what do you think I should do? He told me try to change yourself. I tried to imitate what my colleagues do, which is ingratiation behaviours, but I failed because I simply do not do that, it's not my personality. (Eyad)

Adil, Senior Manager, faced ostracism stemming from the use of dark humour with a close friend and colleague. In response, he sought intervention from his family, friends, and the perpetrator's siblings to resolve the issue. Despite unsuccessful attempts, their support encouraged him to let go and move on:

> His eldest brother got involved to resolve the dispute, he approached me, telling me that he tried his best to fix the problem, but his brother [the perpetrator] did not allow that…I explained the situation to all of them, and they all took my side that it is not worth all that repellence. If I was guilty and everyone took his side, it would have been harder for me to

> cope and all of them would have blamed me. However, all of them told me to forget about it and let go. They told me it is not worth all my attempts to fix the issue. They said you were close friends that share the same room, class, car and office and he abandoned your friendship for that! They said he is not worth my attention. (Adil)

The impact of the ostracism experienced by Aisha, Middle Manager, significantly extended into her personal life and influenced her marriage. However, her understanding husband recognised that her anger at home originated from toxic behaviours experienced at work. Consequently, he provided emotional and financial support:

> I noticed a lot of conflict between me and my husband during that period for silly reasons, because I'm passing that toxic energy to home. I remember one day before I resigned, my husband asked me: *how much is your salary? A thousand rials? two thousand rials? Tell me, I'm willing to give you that. Just quit, quit this job. It's not good for you, either change it or just get out of that organisation. Because it's not taking us anywhere*, as he said, *it's not helping our relationship. You are coming back home every single day feeling sick. You can't live your life like that*… he was right, so I resigned. (Aisha)

Likewise, when Anwar, HR Manager, realised that the effects of ostracism spilled over to his personal life, he decided to share the suffering with his wife, who supported him:

> What I did I just told my wife about it so that she knows when I am not myself. I told my wife because she used to see me a different person. Because lately I was not myself. Therefore, before she noticed why I am behaving that way I told her x y z happened, it made my life easier when I told her, she supported me… my mother also told me: *it does no worth it to drain your energy for work*, literally. (Anwar)

Noor, Auditor for a bank, carefully chose who to talk to about her experience, and she noted that her husband stood out as one of the most supportive individuals. His support played a crucial role in helping her perceive the issue from a different perspective:

> I used to complain to my husband and he supported me. I was asking him questions about the perpetrator's behaviours to ensure if it's typical men attitude that I as a female might not understand, or if it is right to do so. His response would be: *no, that is wrong. He should not have done that*. Sometimes, he would say *yes, he has the right to do this and that*. He was neutral. So, I selected the people that I want to talk to. (Noor)

A single lady, Weam, Civil Engineer, was receiving support from her father, who advised her not to give up in the face of ostracism:

> My father gave some advice once. He told me if you kept silent, you would remain at the same level your entire life, but if you keep on trying, though you will be exhausted; you will get to advance in your career. Because they [the perpetrator] are trying to test your water … are you going to stay silent and continue to feel the pain? (Weam)

Lamis, HR Administrator, was being ostracised by a Senior Manager. However, her direct manager witnessed the ostracising behaviour and Lamis saw her as an essential source of support, providing her with some relief:

> My line manager was very supportive, incredibly supportive, and so classy… she always tries to calm me down, tell me to stay composed and that we should not change our manners or ethics for him [the perpetrator] to like us. (Lamis)

Table 5.3 displays more examples of the participants' social support as a significant coping mechanism in buffering the effects of ostracism.

Table 5.3: Indicative Evidence from the data Representing Social Support as an Emotional-focused Coping Mechanisms Theme

Coping Strategy	Participant	Exemplary Evidence
Social support	Anwar	Because I was the HR Manager, I have good connections with employees. I have excellent relationships with most of them. This had made my life easier here. I also gained respect and support from them because they know this is unfair, they are aware of the company's mess. So, this helped me to cope with the situation.
	Najat	My family, they were supportive and tell me things like *it's ok, don't worry* and things like that. They also gave me solutions.
	Salma	Two of my family members told me: *May God be with you* and so on. They asked me to talk to someone from the security authority or the monitoring authority.
	Aisha	My family, my parents, they don't support an employment or a corporate life. They believe in business. So, they kept on telling me: *we told you quit your job, do something.* So, I did.
	Noor	I was assigned to a coach and I was telling her some challenges I am facing with my manager…I have two friends at work. One of them passed away. She was bullied a lot by her manager. So, we used to vent to each other.

	Lamyaa	My mother is an old person, so I could not share with her my work issues…so, I talked to my friends about it… and the GM was very supportive emotionally.

Religion

Beside social support, seeking spiritual help through religious techniques and practices was a prominent strategy to cope with ostracism. Most (80%) participants' answer to the question of coping mechanisms was related to religion regardless of the inferred participants' degree of religiosity, marked as the second-order theme of the emotional-focused coping. For example, remembering Prophet Mohammed's (pbuh) sayings and Qur'anic verses, prayers, supplication and submission to God, and remembering the rewards of patience in Islam were top religious strategy adopted by most informants, reflecting first-order theme. Specifically, the most salient religious way of coping according to the interviewees' accounts was continuance remembrance of Allah (God in Arabic).

For instance, Yumna, Associate Professor, who was ostracised by her colleague and the management, kept recalling that: "Allah exists" every time she experienced injustice due to ostracism, to remind herself that God is watching and will never fail her: "Believe me if you… submit to God, you will eventually receive all your rights."

When Adil, Senior Manager, abandoned his efforts to seek forgiveness from the perpetrator, who was both his colleague and close friend, his support network assisted him in dealing with the rejection and ostracism experience. They reminded him of what religion requires in terms of social relationships as a way to cope: "they tried to advise me … and keep reminding me that a Muslim should not hold any grudges against others and so on."

Nadir, HR Manager, believes that Allah has asked Muslims to be proactive in the face of difficulties and should not stay still if they are able to change things for the better, so he decided to take an action to cope with ostracism when he recalled Prophet Mohammed's (pbuh) quote:

> I remember what Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) said: "*who amongst you sees something abominable should modify it with the help of his hand; and if he has not strength enough to do it, then he should do it with his tongue, and if he has not strength*

> *enough to do it, even then he should abhor it from his heart, and that is the least of faith*." (Nadir)

In addition, Lamis, HR Administrator, holds the belief that exercising patience and turning to Allah in supplication is the remedy for situations beyond her control. She remembered that patience is a beautiful virtue in Islam, and she personally identifies herself as 'patient' when confronted with the distressing reality of ostracism:

> I always submit my complaints to Allah… Patience comes from Allah. Allah said in the Holy Qur'an, "*Only those who are patient shall receive their reward in full, without reckoning*"[9]. So, each time, Allah wants to test our patience, I remember that he will reward us greatly in return for that patience, for all the time we remained patient.

Coping with ostracism through the remembrance of God takes various forms, and one of these involves prayers, which Muslims are obligated to perform five times a day under normal circumstances. During prayer, Muslims are encouraged to turn their faces and hearts to Allah, expressing their desires and communicating with Him in any language (Ali, 2009). Rayya, the HOD in a public organisation who experienced ostracism from a colleague and some subordinates, performed daily prayers and Al-Tahajjud prayer[10] as a means to vent and express her frustration stemming from the experience of being ostracised: "I used to get upset a lot and ask Allah in my prayers why? Why this is happening to me? What did I do? What crime did I commit? Then I collapsed."

Remembering God allows participants to count their blessings and cognitively give the events of ostracism different meanings; positive meanings, because they religiously believe that everything that happens to them happens for a reason, as demonstrated by Aisha, Middle Manager: "I realised, that [ostracism] was a sign from Allah. I believe in God's signs to us. I greatly thank Allah for going through this experience." Aisha's account served as an inspiration, building on the earlier statement she told her story of comprehending God's message behind the ostracising experience. She shared the story of leaving her job and

[9] Source: The Qur'an, Surah/Chapter: Al-Zumor, Verse: 10, Page: 456

[10] Night prayers performed voluntarily by Muslims after the last obligatory prayer of the day, to seek closeness to God, forgiveness, guidance, blessings, and to strengthen one's faith and spirituality (Mujiburrohman, 2014).

establishing her own business, a decision that ultimately enhanced her personal, marital, and mental wellbeing.

Similarly, Lamyaa, Middle Manager described how she reflected on her ostracism experience which occurred right after she returned from studying abroad in organisational psychology. She said that she believed that God led her to this experience to grow and use the knowledge she acquired to become a wiser person through learning:

> I always thank Allah for the awareness I have from my education and my experience. Studying psychology has helped a lot to shape my thinking and become critical. It helped me to become objective and avoid labeling people…Thanks to Allah. (Lamyaa)

In the same way, remembering God was a comfort to Salma, the HOD, and resigned her to the feeling of tranquillity and serenity that everything will be okay, because she believes that no one can harm anyone else without God's will and that someday God will show her the hidden wisdom behind all the unpleasant events she witnessed, and only then will she understand 'why':

> I always say damn the devil; livelihood is from Allah. I always remember what Prophet Mohammed (phub) said: "*you know that whatever has befallen you, could not have passed you by; and whatever has passed you by, could not have befallen you*" So, that made me realise that all what is happening for me today is happening for a reason, and that shall we know, if not today then tomorrow. If not tomorrow, then next month or next year, but In-sha'Allah[11] we will eventually know. (Salma)

It appears that the belief in the wisdom behind everything planned by God served as motivation for Eyad, Manager at a bank branch, who experienced ostracism from his direct manager. Reflecting on the ostracising actions of his superior, he expressed a desire to improve both as a manager and as a Muslim. As a consequence, when offered a managerial position in an Islamic bank, he accepted the offer and resigned from his previous position:

> Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) said that he was sent by Allah to complement noble morals. Also, if you compare how many

[11] Islamic/Arabic phrase meaning: 'God willing' or 'if God wills'. It is a prevalent cultural value in the Arab world to have a strong belief in fatalism, so it is frequent to hear Muslims say "In-sha' Allah" (Ghanem et al., 2016).

> times the verses of moral were mentioned in the Holy Qur'an you will realise they were way much more than the ones on instructions. Because worshipping God is done through practicing good manners and morals. (Eyad)

Another religious coping strategy employed to deal with WO is to constantly bear in mind that perfection is an attribute exclusive to Allah, and humans are prone to making mistakes. Recognising that everyone, except Allah, is fallible and acknowledging the need for forgiveness is a key aspect of this approach, as Shihab, Production Supervisor, said: "We as human beings make mistakes because we are imperfect; only Allah is perfect. We always make mistakes."

Table 5.4 shows more examples on the use of Islamic techniques to deal with the negative emotional consequences of ostracism.

Table 5.4: Indicative Evidence from the data Representing Religious Coping mechanism as one Emotional-focused Coping

Coping Strategy	Participant	Exemplary Evidence
Religious copying mechanisms	Aisha	I practice specific breathing and I repeat Allah's name 'Al-Salam'[12] to heal my heart… so yeah, I started practicing all these things to heal myself from the inside because it will reflect on the outside… I also applied both the Western way and the Islamic way.
	Lamis	At first, I thought maybe my voice tone was low; other times, I remember what Prophet Mohammed (phub) said: *"And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet in return with one better than it or at least return it in a like manner"*. So, when I insisted and started greeting him [the perpetrator] loudly, he had responded.
	Najat	I reminded myself: Najat, it's essential to overcome and address this situation because Allah is a witness to everything and understands your struggles; otherwise, you might consider letting go.
	Salma	The coping mechanisms I use is mostly like that, I recall the verses from the Holy Qur'an, and remember that Allah exists, he is 'Al-Rahim'[13], he is fair to everyone. So, if there is something belongs to me I will definitely have it one day.

[12] In Islam, God has 99 names and attributes besides Allah. One of them is 'Al-Salam', meaning 'The Peace' (Samat, 2001).

[13] In Islam, God has 99 names and attributes besides Allah. One of them is 'Al-Rahim', meaning 'The most Merciful' (Samat, 2001).

	And if I was a wrong-doer Allah will forgive me. At the end I trust Allah, that all will be better and no one can hurt me without Allah's will.

Avoidance

Participants' inclination towards avoidance behaviours in response to ostracism (66.6%) was identified as an interesting second-order emotional coping mechanism. However, interestingly, one first-order theme describing the behaviours of avoidance manifested when participants were asked about confronting the perpetrator regarding ostracism. The instances of confrontation were apparently 'confrontation in disguise.' Genuine confrontation did not occur; and avoidance remained prevalent. In other words, the primary issue was indirectly addressed.

On the other end of the spectrum, an extreme form of avoidance coping reflecting another first-order theme was observed when participants completely refrained from confronting the perpetrator through any means to avoid conflict. In fact, only 20% of participants used direct confrontation as one of their coping mechanisms, underscoring the prevalence of avoidance as a prominent coping strategy in such workplaces.

As an example, when Najat, Sales Manager for a private construction company, chose to confront her manager about the lack of involvement in activities and the absence of updates on the latest property quotations, she did not receive the response she had anticipated: "I tried to solve it. So, I first faced them and asked if there is an issue that I should be aware of, but there was no response, no clear answer… When I confronted them why I was not invited they made up excuses."

Because Rayya was the HOD and the perpetrators were subordinates it was easier for her to confront them, given her role superiority. Nonetheless, due to high power-distance of collectivist societies, she expected them to avoid transparency and honesty if she met them F2F, so she suggested the following: "I confronted them. I told them, if there is something you dislike about me or unhappy with just say it. If you can't face me, write it down on a paper and I will reply." However, that did not happen and they continued to ostracise her.

Due to Yumna, Associate Professor and HOD, holding more authority than one of her ostracisers, who is a subordinate, she brought up the matter of being excluded by the ostraciser from an important email. This communication included higher authorities and was related to a high-profile project they collaborated on:

> I was smarter than her and I replied to the email, copying the deanship by forwarding a previous email explaining what we did, the date we started the task, and so on. I said I was chairing this committee, so I wonder why my name was not added into that document. (Yumna)

Evidently, Yumna did not directly address the question to the individual responsible for removing her name (the perpetrator), even though she was aware of her action. Instead, she directed the email to everyone else, including the ostraciser. Ultimately, Yumna's contribution was recognised, but the perpetrator continued to avoid her even more following this incident.

Furthermore, only after Noor was advised by her vocational coach to confront her manager for excluding her from a meeting that she was supposed to be invited to, as a Senior Auditor who worked on the report the meeting to discuss, did she do so, albeit indirectly, saying that she did not have the courage to speak directly about it. Expectedly, she received no response, but avoidance:

> He called me to his office to ask about something, and I took the chance to ask him how was the meeting… Then, I took the chance and told him that it would be beneficial if we get involved in other meetings, but he immediately changed the subject and never did anything! (Noor)

The confrontational approach of Eyad, Manager at a bank branch, resembled that of Noor; indirect and lacking openness, describing avoidance as a cultural norm: "There is no such thing as confrontation here [Oman]. If she was not responding, I go to her in person and tell her I sent you an email and I am waiting for your reply."

Seemingly, power-distance did play a compelling cultural role, in the participants' choice to interfere in the so-called 'confrontation' or to avoid it completely. For instance, the perpetrator in the case of Lamis, HR Administrator, was not her direct manager but a person of higher ranking she deals with on an almost daily basis. So, being an administrator made

her fear confrontation: “I was afraid of confronting him. I know it is wrong, but I could not talk.”

Yasir, Operations Manager, had a similar view of complete confrontation avoidance to avoid making things worse. Yasir’s perpetrator was also among the top management, as he narrated:

> You can confront someone with a low tone of voice and a nice way of saying it; you don’t have to shout; you can nicely deliver the information. No one wants to be in a position where someone yells at him. There should be mutual respect. Yet, in general, confrontation is viewed [in Oman] as an issue that has its consequences. It can leave behind a negative impact… I avoid confrontation to avoid sensitivity and future consequences. (Yasir)

When Shihab, Production Supervisor, was questioned about why he didn’t directly address his colleague, who was also the source of ostracism and held an equal managerial level and authority, his view on confrontation aligned with Yasir’s, despite the similar power they both possess:

> I don’t want that [confrontation] because if that happens, it will appear as a complaint instead of a solution and this is something I want to avoid… Then what later will happen is that he will start searching for a mistake for me or a trap to fall into, and I will do the same, so instead of having teamwork that will turn into a war. So that is why I refused to speak to him about the matter. (Shihab)

It is undeniable that avoidance of confrontation by participants, stems from their fear of worsening the situation and continuing the ostracism behaviours which had been experienced by Weam, Civil Engineer, when she decided to cope with ostracism by stepping up and expressing her need to learn and develop her skills that she was being deprived of, as she said: “all my colleagues are silent…I tried to resist, so when they saw I was swimming upstream they made my life even worse and preferred my silent colleagues over me.” Table 5.5 provides more examples from the data extracts on avoidance as a coping strategy.

Table 5.5: Indicative Evidence from the data Representing Avoidance as one Emotional-focused Coping Mechanism Theme

Coping Strategy	Participant	Exemplary Evidence
Avoidance	Yasir	I avoid straightforward confrontation and only speak around the subject but not directly point out the issue.
	Anwar	Unfortunately, the majority prefer silence over confrontation. This is at least from my experience. Only a few of people have the courage like me to use confrontation over silence if conflict or an issue occurs, only a few people.
	Noor	I used to approach him in person to ask if there is something I need to improve, work on, or amend, tell me I will do it.
	Najat	I tried to solve it. So, I first asked if there is an issue that I should be aware of, but there was no response, no clear answer... Maybe if we professionally meet and confront each other we will realise that there is a misunderstanding or something like that.

Resignation and withdrawal

Resignation and withdrawal represent another second-order theme of the emotional-focused coping with WO. Some evidence of **resignation** as one emotional-focused coping was found. It is worth mentioning that in this case resignation does not mean resigning from one's job, but resigning from all attempts to solve the issue by giving up and accepting the situation or resigning into social isolation and alienation at work, as explained in Chapter 2 (Williams, 2009). That stage is reached when participants feel they have no control over their situation and that their efforts to reconnect with the perpetrator are unsuccessful, which is reflected as a first-order theme. A similar second-order emotional coping strategy to the previous one is **withdrawal**. It indicates the participants' disengagement from their relationship with the perpetrator by minimising the ways of dealing and interacting with them that emerged as the first-order theme, describing specifically the behavioural forms of withdrawal. In other words, it subsumes the equal and same manner reaction to ostracism with ostracism through excluding and ignoring the perpetrator. However, in this setting the two terms will be used interchangeably, as the accounts show overlap of techniques and the aim is to keep participants' stories intact.

It is crucial to distinguish between withdrawal and avoidance discussed above; the latter specifically involves efforts to avoid direct confrontation with the perpetrator, while withdrawal involves efforts to minimise any interaction with the perpetrator.

The overall response to the question of how participants coped with ostracism was as expected. Just over half of the respondents (53.3%) indicated that they surrendered to the situation and accepted it, resigned themselves to isolation, responded to ostracism by ostracising the perpetrator in a similar manner, or employed a combination of these strategies. It is noteworthy to emphasise that **reacting to ostracism in a like manner**, in particular has emerged as a distinctive form of withdrawal behaviour as a response to ostracism. Williams's (2009) explanation of withdrawal behaviour did not involve responding to ostracism with ostracism. Therefore, this has emerged as a novel form of withdrawal behaviour.

One example of this is Lamis, HR Administrator, who resigned herself mentally, continuously hoping for improvement and eagerly awaiting positive changes to take place:

> We were patient and had tolerated that leadership style, hoping for things to change and for another leader to step up. We keep saying in-sha'Allah, maybe someone better will come, someone who does not want to gossip or let other people's gossips affects him and all that dirty politics that people play to get them to top management positions…We don't want someone who plays malicious politics. (Lamis)

Another approach of psychological resignation was that of Rayya, the HOD who was ostracised by a group of subordinates and a colleague of her. She gave up on hoping for situations to improve and for the ostracisers to stop that behaviour, so she resigned herself to self-isolation and had minimal interactions with them:

> I stopped socialising with them, and I don't hang out with them anymore. I only attend if I have to give condolences or for happy occasions, in which case I buy a gift and send it with someone else. Otherwise, I apologise and make excuses such as being busy to avoid unpleasant situations. I limit my interactions to my duties as a colleague; nothing more. Our relationships are now superficial because I don't like their behaviour when we all meet. (Rayya)

One-way Adil, Senior Manager, used to cope with ostracism was to deal with the ostraciser in the same manner; ignore him, don't acknowledge his existence and exclude him in return:

"after some time I gave up on him… he wanted to treat me silently, so I started avoiding him even more than he did… as a reaction I became exactly like him, because I felt that I have done all I could to resolve this issue and so I rest my case.'

Anwar, the HR Manager who was arbitrary transferred elsewhere without any discussion with him of the reasons behind that decision, coped with such exclusionary ostracism through resigning to isolation and withdrawal behaviour in the same manner:

> After making that decision, I isolated myself and avoided them in the same way they avoided me. I tried my best not to see them F2F because all I wanted was to maintain a positive wellbeing. Now, I only do the minimum required of me because of them. I come in and out of the building in a way that makes it easy to avoid them, leaving no chance for us to run into each other. (Anwar)

During the Covid-19 pandemic, working remotely was one effective way to cope for Najat, Sales Manager, to stay away from her ostracisers and minimise interaction with them:

> So, one of the options was to quit but due to the pandemic it was hard to find another job at that time, so I decided to stay longer at the company. I used to prefer work over taking vacations but during the lockdown I felt so happy because finally I can stay at home away from them. I was happy staying at home and feeling comfortable about it because my productivity at home was doubled than when I was physically at work. (Najat)

Nadir, HR Manager, explained that, due to his ostraciser's power, all his attempts to persuade the perpetrator to stop the ostracising behaviours had failed. So, he finally decided to stay away while still maintain professional relationship: "There is an Omani saying that says 'distance brings happiness'… I decided not to interact with this person anymore, unless there is something urgent or important. So, I tried to avoid him. He tries to avoid me, of course." Table 5.6 shows more examples of how participants resigned and withdraw themselves as two emotional-focused coping strategies with WO.

The next overarching theme will discuss different types of coping mechanisms used by participants besides emotional focused-coping, characterised as pragmatic and practical strategies for solving ostracism. Notwithstanding these, emotional-focused coping remains the most widely applied strategy used by the participants according to the narratives.

Table 5.6: Indicative Evidence from the data Representing Resignation and Withdrawal as two Emotional-focused Coping

Coping Strategy	Participant	Exemplary Evidence
Resignation and withdrawal	Najat	So, I reacted in the same way. When I go to the meeting, I don't talk to them, I only deal with them when work requires that… I avoided socialising with them and their gatherings. Emotionally and physically, I avoided any kind of social gatherings or events.
	Eyad	I don't feel like treating her friendly as I do with others. I avoid going to her in person too… I tried different approaches, but nothing had worked out. I tried my best but I failed.
	Lamis	After I learned how the laws protect me and preserve my rights and duties, I slowly withdrew myself from this atmosphere.
	Shihab	I try not to have any conversation with him or any mutual tasks together. In general, I avoid him. I avoid communicating with him by any means.
	Lamyaa	This is why I avoid any conversation with her in the meetings, because she will either attack you or treat you as invisible… try to minimise interactions with that person [referring to any ostraciser in general]. After she avoided me, I was relieved because I was looking for a distance between me and her.
	Yumna	That is why I withdrew myself… I have my own office besides this one which is for the HOD, but I use this office most of the time to avoid the hassle outside.

Problem-focused coping

This overarching theme refers to a set of coping mechanisms that aim to directly address the problem at hand, rather than focusing on one's emotional support to it as seen above. Problem-focused coping strategies are usually adopted when the problem is easy to change (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In this context, problem-focused coping techniques involve practical strategies for resolving or alleviating the ostracism experience. This is reflected in the first-order themes, such as seeking help from trained professionals such as HR admin, labour trade union, or a third person from management, to help address the ostracism experience. It also involves taking the exit approach through quitting the organisation, or transferring to a different department or branch within the same organisation, rotation plan, or a temporary secondment.

Professional channels

Some interviewees sought assistance through official channels to address grievances and put an end to exclusionary behaviours, which was identified as a second-order theme. Within this channel, participants engaged with a third-party within the organisation, who could be a manager, colleague, or a mutual friend among colleagues. It is noteworthy that this approach was mostly taken to resolve the issue more informally, deviating from the formalities associated with raising the matter officially. Culturally, seeking the intervention of a third person in a case of conflict is a common practice in the Arab context (Hall, 1995), which expected to lead to positive outcomes in resolving disputes, as confrontation and professional complaints are generally seen as unfavourable options (Jahanzeb et al., 2018). Nevertheless, according to the narratives, not all attempts to seek help from professional channels yielded positive results.

For instance, Aisha, Middle Manager, was both bullied and ostracised by her direct manager, who held cultural entitlement as an 'Al-Shaikh,' indicating his power inside and outside the organisation. Aisha tried different strategies to help her solve the problem before quitting. Due to her ostraciser's societal class and organisational position, she preferred to approach a third-party first. Therefore, she approached the CEO as a third person, which had paid off, albeit temporarily:

> I've requested a meeting with the CEO. So, I met him. He laughed loudly and literally said: *you fell into the trap of that Sheikh*. He literally said that! He said if he talked to you in a bad way or told you anything, just tell him go to X [himself]. He gave me that power. (Aisha)

To the contrary, Adil, Senior Manager, who was ostracised by his best friend and colleague, was disappointed by his manager's negative position when he conformed to his ostraciser's request to split the tasks between them, only to avoid working with Adil directly as they normally did, saying that his manager was supposed to interfere and solve the issue as a third person:

> I believe that the manager's position was negative. I mean if I were the manager, I would have taken a hands-on approach by interfering myself to work with X in a way that restores everything to its normal state; especially that he knows we are

> friends not only colleagues. I mean we were not strangers to each other but friends… He should have sat and listen to each of us alone to figure out the problem then solve it. He did not support me at all. He gave up to the reality and accepted what is available, though he could have done more. (Adil)

Proactively, when Shihab, Production Supervisor, was affected by his colleague's ostracising behaviours, which included hiding information and not working collaboratively as required by the job in the oil field, he proposed a solution to their mutual manager as a third-party in order to reach a common middle ground solution:

> I spoke to our manager. I explained to him the story, and he said I have noticed for a while that there has been no communication between you. So, I proposed to hold a supervisory level meeting at least thrice a week so we can know what is going on. (Shihab)

Shihab believed that having a thrice-weekly meeting with his colleague would keep him informed about all task updates from the responsible party, avoiding the need to directly address the issue or approach the ostraciser himself. However, he noted that the manager did not agree with his proposal. Instead, the manager instructed him to resolve the issue independently with his peer.

Apparently, dealing with ostracism at work is viewed as a personal problem rather than a professional problem, explaining why approaching a third-party at work environments is not always an effective solution. As Salma, HOD researcher, said:

> They don't consider clashes between you and your manager as complaints. They see them as something personal between you and him/her and believe that you must sort it out yourselves together. They won't interfere. They also told me once that because we are both females, we messed up things [laughter]. (Salma)

This perspective was backed by another interviewee, Yasir, Operations Manager, who said: "We do not have anything to do. What to do? Complain? Even the complaint won't be seen as a professional complaint or a serious matter… because the silent treatment is something no one can notice."

Lamis, HR Administrator, approached a family friend who works at the same managerial level as the perpetrator in the same company she works for, the GM of the HR department.

This friend indirectly asked the perpetrator to be more lenient with his employees. Lamis recalled:

> I once vented about that to one of the GMs, also a very good family friend... As far as I am aware, he spoke to the CEO to inform the GM that he should watch his attitude towards his employees, without referring to me or the exact story. (Lamis)

Salma, who is HOD in the research and development department at a Ministry, took a similar route to cope with ostracism activated by her manager, but received nothing in return, just like other interviewees, despite approaching the Minister herself:

> I tried to deliver my voice that I am being treated unfairly. There has been injustice done on me. There is corruption in the system, and in this type of corruption, it is hard for someone outside the system to see it. I can see it because I operate from within, I am in that system. I tried to air my voice in a way or another wherever I can but there is no 'echo'. I approached the top of the pyramid, the Minister himself but nothing has happened. He asked me: *have you spoken to X* [her perpetrator] *about it*! Come on! If she listens, I would not have approached you. (Salma)

However, because third-party interference ended up being fruitless in most accounts, just under half (47%) of the participants escalated the issue to either the HR or labour trade union. Seemingly, the culture of avoidance to a large extent pervades the Omani organisations across sectors, such that even people with legitimate power to take actions prefer to take either the laid-back stand or a passive path away from confrontation in dealing with disputes to avoid as much conflict as possible. Statement of Aisha, Middle Manager, regarding what happened when she approached the director after she appealed to the CEO:

> Even the retired director, who is at the same level as him, was trying to tell me: *Can we find any way out of this so that we don't go head-to-head with him? Can I give you an idea? How about I second you to one of our subsidiaries?* I was like, *ok*. (Aisha).

Lamyaa, who is ostracised by her manager, who avoids approaching her directly and disregards her inputs, tried to approach top management, but her attempt was not successful: "We complained against her. I went to the management with my colleagues, holding my notebook full of evidence against her, but they have done nothing for us."

Beside approaching top management, Najat, Sales Manager, approached the HR and described her experience as follows:

> I raised this issue to the GM but he kept telling me talk to x y z, they were giving me too many unacceptable excuses. So, I approached the HR and their role is to solve this issue, but they have done nothing to me either. HR is only a title and useless. (Najat)

Therefore, Najat escalated the issue to the labour union:

> I sent an email to one of the HR team and since then they avoided me why?...because I told them if this treatment is repeated again, I will take it further and appeal for discredit and emotional damage cases. I know my rights very well…I told them you are accountable in front of Allah for this treatment… So, I went to the Ministry of Labour to discuss the issue and I was angry. I told them that I tolerated everything they did to me and now I won't deal with this. I told them, I am not scared of you, I am only being respectful, but the treatment you are giving me is disrespectful.

Aisha, Middle Manager, sought the same professional channels by following the chain of command, step by step, to seek a solution for being mistreated and ostracised by her manager, 'The Sheikh', who snubbed her repeatedly. The following quote explains her situation with the HR:

> I was like, OK, let me escalate it one by one. Let me start first with the HR, so I went to them…they know how powerful he is and how he can harm them. So, one of the ladies in the HR at a managerial level told me: *Aisha, if there is any way you can avoid him or go anywhere else, go… trust me, don't fight with this guy, this guy is really bad. If he kept you on his mind, he will ruin your career*. And I told her, I can't, this is my right. Who is he to do this to me? (Aisha)

An exception is the experience of Weam, Civil Engineer, which was the only narrative demonstrating success in approaching professional channel. First, she tried to exert more effort, work on weekends, express her opinion in meetings, ask more questions in order to learn, and chose to work from the office during the pandemic to stay closer to her managers and earn their trust. However, she said that when all attempts had failed, rather than resigning to self-isolation she complained to the contractor (a company that outsources to the company Weam works for) - and that had finally worked out:

> I complained. I went to the contractor. So, they have threatened our company and told them, if you don't do this and that we will terminate the contract with you. So, after they were threatened, they are now scared and fear the contractor. (Weam)

Apparently, only some participants approached professional channels, while the rest did not because they do not trust the HR department, as they commented, or because they wanted to exercise social precaution due to the cultural impact when issues are raised against those in higher positions. Noor exempted the HR from her list of support and preferred to withdraw completely:

> Excuse me for saying this but the HR is not matured enough to resolve such issues. I mean, I worked in many companies, but the HR in all of them is unfortunately not smart enough [laughter]… the culture of the company does not support such things. It's totally the opposite. If you complain it will back fire on you. It will increase ostracism and avoidance behaviour, and will create hatred. So, it was not the ideal solution. (Noor)

Further evidence is provided by the experience of Salma, HOD in a Ministry, when she was called by the Ministry Undersecretary to discuss some issues and she took the advantage of that meeting to raise her issue, considering the Undersecretary a professional channel to address her issue. However, when her manager was informed, she started ostracising her more. Therefore, Salma asked for a transfer to a different centre but her manager kept declining her request:

> The Undersecretary called for me and asked me what happened, so X [the perpetrator] thought that I went to complain, and she fired back to me and was like: you went to complain, this is not good and so on. So, now she is playing politics with the GM… what follows was bad, it was indeed bad. (Salma)

In the same manner, Shihab, Production Manager, was reluctant to discuss the issue of silent treatment through professional channels, believing that it would not result in any positive outcome. Moreover, he considered it culturally unacceptable to raise personal issues at work, especially when such issues are raised by a 'man', as he remarked:

> Usually these matters are, as you called them 'silent', so they are unclear. Therefore, when you appeal about the silent

> treatment, what are you going to say? I am complaining about silent treatment?! [laughter] I am so sorry, I did not mean to underestimate your research, it's very important indeed, but it sounds funny for me to ask him why don't you talk to me. And if I appealed officially, they would say: *Oh, lion shame on you*! [laughter][14] . (Shihab)

Evidently, the interviewees' approaches in handling ostracism leaned more towards emotional responses than pragmatic solutions, reflecting a prevalent culture of avoidance ingrained in both national and organisational cultures. Overall, the narratives suggest that participants want to avoid being perceived as 'troublemakers' lacking interpersonal skills when expressing grievances, regardless of the seriousness of the issue. Table 5.7 sets out more examples of the participants' approach of professional channels.

Table 5.7: Indicative Evidence from the data Representing Professional Channels as a Problem-focused Coping Mechanism

Coping Strategy	Participant	Exemplary Evidence
Professional channels	Aisha	The easiest way is to escalate it the right way. So, I went to HR. The funny thing is that our HR was like a mafia, I will call it a mafia because it was literally mafia… There are so many elements that were missing in it. It was not professional, nor fair.
	Nadir	I did complain to his [the perpetrator's] manager many times, his manager kept telling me that he is coaching him. I expressed all my disappointments and frustrations with this manager to his senior manager who kept on telling me he's coaching him… He told me that he would coach him to become a better leader. But, the same incident was repeated one after the other. It's enough, this is a hopeless case! Goodbye.
	Eyad	I spoke to the top management [regarding Eyad's request to his perpetrator to sign off his resignation letter] and he talked to her. She told him: *ok, let him wait for two more months.*
	Lamis	The labour trade union helped us to be mindful of all the bylaws we need to know to defend our rights… but I have never complained formally.

[14] A local Omani sarcastic metaphor which refers to a cowardly man and insults a man's masculinity and manhood when used.

Exit

Remarkably, some participants have gone through all professional channels and ended up with the exit approach, while others chose to take the exit directly. This particular coping mechanism appeared as a prominent second-order theme reflecting problem-focused coping. The overall response to the question of 'how did you cope with ostracism' was quite expected. A number of participants (47%) preferred to quit and take the easiest shortcut – exit –to overcome ostracism with 'least damages', either to a completely new organisation, or within the same organisation (ie, a different branch or department/unit/temporary secondment). Obviously, participants prefer to quit leaving behind no conflict or bad reputation rather than confront the perpetrator or stay and suffer, while a few participants (27%) are actively looking for a new job elsewhere and many have had already job interviews.

Noor, the Auditor, who was ostracised by her manager by not engaging her in decision-making, nor invite her to meetings with the board of directors to discuss the auditing report, and use a third-party to instruct her left the organisation after she had been rotated across the departments within the company as a temporary 'break' from being ostracised: "The rotation strategy helped me change the environment for a couple of months before I returned to the auditing department again, facing ostracism. So, that balances out the relief and ostracism [laughter]." Nevertheless, turnover was the ideal solution for her and had ended the ostracising behaviours as she recalled:

> Finally, the company I am with now offered me a job, and I immediately accepted it. The offer was better, and the position was better. I have never regretted my decision… I got a better offer; I was not functioning in a comfortable environment back there. So, what happened is that the ostracism I experienced drove me to the next level; it pushed me to quit and look for a better opportunity somewhere else because I believe I don't belong there. (Noor)

A similar pattern of coping with ostracism was seen in the case of Aisha, the Middle Manager who opted to leave the organisation. Initially, she went for a secondment to distance herself from her ostraciser, her manager. Later, she explored the option of moving permanently to a different directorate; unfortunately, he suspended the decision. Finally, she decided to quit

the organisation as she realised that challenging her ostraciser's power by staying in the same place would not improve the situation:

> I was also actively looking for a job elsewhere within the subsidiary, within the group…then, I gave them my resignation letter and he [the perpetrator] was so happy, beyond happy he would fly, I think, because he thinks he's the winner and I am the loser of this war. Anyway, I moved out of his place, and I started to live my life, and started my own business. (Aisha)

A similar coping technique is the experience of Eyad, the banker who did not take a long time to decide that quitting was the only solution to end the ostracising behaviour from his boss:

> I reached to a convincing conclusion that there is no way I stay more here. I must resign. There wasn't any hope that things will improve, so I must take the next step. I always have plan B and it was the right time to implement plan B. Therefore, later I received an offer to work in an Islamic banking, so I accepted it. (Eyad)

Najat, Sales Manager, was actively looking for a job during the pandemic, but limited opportunities were available at that time. Later, when it was over, she finally received a job offer and quit, ending the ostracising behaviours. Despite the fact that the company she quit from was well-known, she prioritised her peace of mind over continuing to suffer from WO: "One-hundred percent of the reason behind the resignation was the treatment I received there, although the previous company was bigger and well-known." Table 5.8 illustrates more examples of the participants' exit approach and intention to leave as ways to cope with WO.

Table 5.8: Indicative Evidence from the data Representing exit Strategy and Intention to Leave as Problem-focused Coping Mechanisms

Coping Strategy	Participant	Exemplary Evidence
Exit/ turnover intention	Anwar	So, I went out and I had to accept it. But, from that moment I crossed the company out. To be honest, I am looking for another job. I did many interviews and just waiting for an opportunity to leave.
	Nadir	I changed my role so that I don't often have to interact with him. I looked at it as a way out for me. So yes, you would contemplate whether the complaint will be seriously looked at. But another thing I could do is just to change my discipline.

Noor	For me as an ambitious person, this kind of management is not suitable for me. Therefore, there is no point even to change the department, the only solution is to resign.
Yumna	I got the opportunity to be a Dean elsewhere but I am loyal to this place, though it's very frustrating here…I got another offer elsewhere, so I am considering quitting to a place that appreciates my energy.
Adil	So, I moved to a different place, I resigned to my current position.

The preceding paragraphs presented the themes that emerged from the narratives in response to RQ1 and RQ2. The following discussion will answer RQ3 by shedding light on how these findings underscore coping mechanisms employed by interviewees in the Arab context as culturally-specific distinct from that known the Western context.

5.3 Discussion: RQ3

RQ3: How cultural and contextualising factors might have contributed to the way Arabian Gulf States employees cope with ostracism?

In order to answer RQ3, discussion of RQ1 regarding culturally-specific forms of ostracism, and RQ2 concerning how Arab employees respond to such forms of ostracism is necessary, paving the way to discussing RQ3.

5.3.1 The Forms of Ostracism

While the commonly recognised forms of WO were originally conceptualised within a Western framework and primarily focused on a limited range of behaviours outlined in Chapter 2 and summarised in the well-known WO scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008) (see Appendix 2.1), such as being ignored, treated as invisible, excluded from invitations and conversations, avoiding eye contact, or leaving the place when the target enters, these narratives reveal distinct forms of ostracism, answering RQ1 that are uniquely tied to specific cultural contexts not found in the Western context. This provides fresh insights into how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds perceive workplace ostracism. These culturally-specific forms of WO are explained in the light of the 'Al-Shura' principle, the greeting process, and third-party involvement. As noted earlier that leaders have shown to be the main source of ostracism as expected, ultimately shaping the emerged forms of WO.

The 'Al-Shura' principle

One intriguing regional construct that emerged from the exploration of narratives is the 'Al-Shura' principle. Study 1 marked participants' relatively higher reference to their leaders' lack of engaging them in decision-making process as the main source of ostracism, known as 'Al-Shura' in Arabic, as a profound *form of ostracism*. Al-Shura has a cultural significance as the principle of consultation in the Omani context; deeply rooted in socio-religious factors. For Muslims, practicing Al-Shura is a fundamental submission to the divine instruction by God: "…and who [conduct] their affairs by mutual consultation"[15]. Al-Shura as an Islamic pillar is widely practiced by Omanis due to God's explicit guidance to Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) to consult his companions (Al-Farsi, 2010). God instructs the Prophet (pbuh) to seek the advice of his companions, teaching him the qualities a leader must possess to earn trust among followers: "…So, pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him][16]" (Almoharby, 2010).

In its simplest interpretation, Al-Shura entails participation in decision-making that leads to consensus through consultation (Almoharby, 2010). This process emphasises group participation and considers factors such as status, age, or educational background in decision-making (Budhwar et al., 2019). The theoretical framework of Al-Shura implies that Muslims refrain from making decisions until substantial discussions have taken place over a sufficient period, and consultation has been sought (Almoharby, 2010). A recent qualitative research study was undertaken in an Arab country to investigate the leadership practices within successful Arab institutions. The findings indicated that the Al-Shura principle was among the six key practices adopted by Arab leaders that contributed to the success of the organisations (El Odessy, 2023). Al-Shura is widely practiced in private spheres in Oman, from home to public life to organisations (Jones, 2007). This notion aligns with the results of Al Jahwari and Budhwar's (2021) multiple-case study on Omani employees' needs, revealing that the need for information and consultation ranked third among employees aged 26-40. This desire for consultation is further supported by a study indicating that Omani employees

[15] Source: The Qur'an, Sura/Chapter: Al-Shura, Verse: 38, Page: 262.
[16] Source: The Qur'an, Sura/Chapter: Al-Imran, Verse: 159, Page: 71.

in various travel agencies identified exclusion from the decision-making process and development as their top workplace challenge (Pineda and Maderazo, 2018).

Leadership practices in Oman are seen as a way of effective communication that significantly involves consultation. For example, one key quality of leadership in Oman is the ability to effectively communicate with others particularly those who are led (Al Asmi and Caldwell, 2018). This is important to generate follower trust, because understanding one another as team members along with the leader helps improve organisations and their working relationships leading to better productivity and satisfaction (Al Asmi and Caldwell, 2018). However, this has to do with the characteristics of 'in-groups' which includes the extended family and friends, tribe members, extending to a shared place of origin such as a village. The 'in-group' reinforces consultation, obedience to seniors, F2F interactions, loyalty and personal connections network. This is how the 'in-group' is emphasised. While the 'out-group' consists of any member or group outside that social group (Common, 2011). Hence, leadership modification depends on the group status. For instance, managers tend to stress on tasks over relationships with the 'out-group' but among the 'in-group' where relationships are directive, they are also paternalistic and welfare-oriented relationships (Aycan et al., 2007; Common, 2011; Budhwar et al., 2019). In other words, leaders exercise authoritarian leadership styles within hierarchical settings with the 'out-group', and democratic group consensus making with the 'in-group' (Al-Jarradi, 2011). Therefore, in these scenarios, the feeling of being excluded when not involved in decision-making by leaders implies a cultural perception of being associated with the 'out-group,' leading to a sense of ostracism. Perhaps, in this situation, it could be an indication of leaders' favoritism, resulting in a perception of ostracism, mediated by jealousy, as highlighted in a study conducted on an Arab Gulf State (Mohd Shamsudin et al., 2024).

Employees' need to be consulted was found to resonate with Western cultures. For example, a qualitative study with company directors across different European countries indicates that a considerable number of the directors expressed support for the principles associated with participative leadership (Lo and Stark, 2021), such as involving seeking followers' suggestions, considering their inputs, and adjusting proposals based on follower objections (Dorfman et al., 1997). Their organisations were guided by participative leadership philosophies, values, and beliefs, which played a significant role in cultivating an

institutional culture that aimed at enhancing trust, communication, engagement, and the promotion of inter-team relationships. This was achieved by overcoming traditional hierarchical barriers within their organisations (Lo and Stark, 2021). Another study in a Western context characterised by high individualism, participative leadership emerged as the strongest predictor of follower performance targeting employees of all levels. However, interestingly, the study indicates no significant impact on subordinate satisfaction (Dorfman et al., 1997). On the other hand, unlike the Omani setting in which deficiency in participative leadership was found to strongly correlate with a sense of ostracism, significantly affecting participants' job satisfaction and ultimately resulting in either an intention to leave or the actual act of turnover. This emphasises the significance of the Al-Shura principle to Arab employees' satisfaction.

The emergence of the 'Al-Shura' principle serves as a noteworthy cultural form of ostracism and an emerged contextual construct in the field of WO. Because consultation holds great significance for Arabs, particularly Muslim Arabs, failing to consult with employees or involve them in decision-making, especially when the issue pertains to their expertise, is perceived as a prominent socio-cultural manifestation of ostracism specific to the Gulf Arab context. This is because it goes against cultural norms of collective decision-making and the religious practice of seeking others' opinions (Almoharby, 2010).

The greeting process

A greeting is a communicative action where the speaker conveys their attitude and emotions towards the listener, influenced by a specific social context (Nasser Abbas, 2022). Greetings serve as the cornerstone of social communication, acting as a crucial starting point for establishing open social relations (Zhu and Liu, 2020). In some instances, the appropriateness of greetings directly influences the potential for further communication between two parties. The adequacy of greetings ensures smooth social communication, with the primary aim of expressing concern, respect, and politeness to others. This, in turn, strengthens normal interpersonal communication and preserves social relations among individuals. Indeed, it is evident that greetings play an exceptionally significant role in social communication (Zhu and Liu, 2020).

The literature on ostracism suggests that ostracism is perceived when greetings go unanswered (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2013). However, lack of a warm greeting, indicative of 'ineffective communication' theme, has emerged as a significant contextual manifestation of ostracism at work with cultural and religious roots. When considering socio-religious factors, the data suggests that greetings as a form of ostracism, signifying dysfunctional communication, is more complex than it may seem, and goes beyond not responding to a greeting. It transcends beyond verbal-greeting to non-verbal greeting, and pertains to the issue of who initiates the greeting, all of which is described as 'warmth of greetings'. These types of greetings, significantly and uniquely contribute to the feeling of ostracism.

Notably, none of the interviewees reported experiencing complete ostracism. One potential explanation could be attributed to the Islamic greeting component, which directs attention toward the target, albeit to a lesser extent. For example, *the verbal-greeting* process in Oman comprises two elements: *the Islamic greeting*, which signifies compliance with religious instructions, and *a cultural aspect* that involves asking several questions about the circumstances of the other party, as noted earlier. Because greeting hold religious significance and sanction, it is more likely a justification behind the absence of complete ostracism in theses contexts.

On the contrary, it was inferred that Western greetings revolve around 'maintaining privacy'. Generally, Western greetings avoid personal enquiries about age, work, career, family, and emotions (Zhu and Liu, 2020). In fact, the British are well-known for their tendency to use formal greeting in their interactions more than informal greetings, compared to the Americans (Nasser Abbas, 2022). These formal greetings involve phrases such as 'pleased to meet you' (Crystal and Russ, 2010). They convey less information than Asian greetings, which involve personal questions characterised by interrogative questions aimed at showing warmth to the other party (Zhu and Liu, 2020). This interrogative greeting, unique to Asian cultures, lacks a counterpart in English greetings, leaving Westerners confused about Asian communication styles (Zhu and Liu, 2020). To them, such interrogation is an invasion of their personal space, while to Asians its part of showing concern to the other party (Zhu and Liu, 2020). Thus, because Western greetings are simpler and more basic, many Westerners perceive such inquisitive questions as intrusive (Zhu and Liu, 2020). Consequently, the

British, who place great importance on personal space, often initiate greetings with safe topics such as discussing the weather or praising the other party to avoid intruding on the other party's privacy (Zhu and Liu, 2020). This behaviour reflects the impact of individualism-collectivism, where Westerners emphasise personal privacy, while Eastern individuals prioritise concern for others' affairs (Zhu and Liu, 2020). Hence, in collectivistic contexts, greeting even strangers implies a sense of unity with the rest of the community, where individuals are seen as part of a whole and connected, rather than as separate selves (Hofstede, 2001).

While the act of greeting itself is universal across cultures and languages, the manner in which it is performed is not (Spencer-Oatey, 2018). One prominent expression of ostracism narrated by the interviewees is the lack of appropriate *non-verbal greeting*, describing it as 'cold' or 'rude'. In fact, beside that greeting signifying politeness, it involves more than saying the right thing; body language and gestures, including knowledge of local norms governing greetings, are also vital (Penton, 2014). Nonverbal greetings involve characteristic bodily movements which carry significant social relevance described as 'warm greeting' by participants. Exteroceptive cues, such as awareness of non-verbal greeting behaviour, are culture-specific bodily actions that may be reflected in different greeting types and levels of greeting intimacy and competency (Payne-Allen and Pfeifer, 2022). For example, Mediterranean greetings have traditionally been associated with greater physical closeness, cordiality, and passion relative to northern European cultures (Penton, 2014). When greeting is involved, compared to other European countries, the British are stereotyped as cold, reserved and detached (Penton, 2014), perhaps because the former group's way of greetings involves physical and emotional intimacy (Crystal and Russ, 2010; Penton, 2014), and are less concerned with private space (Zhu and Liu, 2020).

Beside verbal and non-verbal greeting, the issue of who constantly *initiates the greeting* seems to hold vital cultural and religious implication referred to by interviewees. For instance, religiously, Muslims are encouraged to initiate greeting according to the teachings of the Prophet of Islam (pbuh): "…the better of the two is one who is the first to greet the other" (Prophet Mohammed, cited in Al-Bukhari and Muslim, 1592, Hadith 82), while culturally it is typical for younger people to initiate greetings to older people, employee to

employer, and lower status to higher status (Emery, 2000). Generally, initiating a greeting indicates that the relationship remains unchanged (Nasser Abbas, 2022).

Taken as a whole, the complex nature of greetings as a process of communication explains why the absence of a warm greeting, including not only the verbal aspect that by itself involves integral underlying process and non-verbal aspects, but also the aspect of who initiates the greeting, emerges as a notable form of ostracism that carries cultural significance beyond mere non-response to greeting. This complication is associated with greeting in such cultures.

Third-party involvement

The most conspicuous observation to emerge from the data comparison that significantly contributes to the cultural understanding of WO is that targets reported feeling ostracised when ostracisers opted for third-party communication, either by sending someone to take the message to the target on behalf of the ostraciser, or solely relying on technology to send a message. This occurred even when F2F interactions or phone calls would have been more appropriate organisationally and were previously established as the standard mode of communication between organisational members. This finding is marked as the first instance where ostracism involves the use of a third-party as a means of communication to avoid direct interaction with the target, rather than omission of communication, presenting a unique contextual factor in explaining WO.

Indirect communication through a third-party proposes that the perpetrator does engage with the target but opts for non-face-to-face methods, such as emails or corporate communication systems, when organisational norms and physical work environments encourage direct interactions. In Western formal communication contexts, online modes of communication are socially acceptable, expected, and favoured, in contrast to the Eastern context, where F2F communication is preferred in formal communication (Richardson and Smith, 2007). The current study argues that the perpetrator might instruct the target through an official online corporate system with minimal context, intentionally avoiding direct interaction, which is perceived as ostracism by the target. Essentially, while existing literature concentrates on the neglect of using technology for online communication with the target by not responding to the target's communication online (Zadro, 2004), Study 1 findings indicate that

communication does indeed exist; however, the way the message is communicated, by using a third-party, is deemed an ostracising act. The second type of third-party involves an individual who goes between the target and the perpetrator. This occurs when the perpetrator delegates a colleague to convey a message to the target, rather than approaching them directly.

One rationale for categorising this particular act as a form of ostracism stems from the influenced perception that Omani leaders emphasise on F2F communication within the inner circle of subordinates (Common, 2011). That is to say, when these messages are conveyed to individuals who have been ostracised, primarily through a third-party (via technology or a colleague), it sends a message to the targets that they are outcasts, and that can intensify their feeling of exclusion or marginalisation. This is particularly pronounced in HCC, such as Arab cultures, where the distinction between insiders and outsiders is emphasised more than in LCC such as the UK (Hall, 1989). In the former contexts, a significant portion of information is either embedded in the physical environment or internalised by individuals, with only a small portion transmitted explicitly through coded messages (Hall, 1989). While employing technology may be viewed as an act of commission rather than a passive omission, which ostracism constitutes, it remains arguable that individuals from HCC generally favour F2F communication, particularly for formal issues (Chua and Gudykunst, 1987; Hall, 1989).

Conversely, those from LCC often prefer email communication (Richardson and Smith, 2007). In addition, in contrast to Western countries that prioritise accuracy and precision over symbolism, oral cultures such as Arab societies place more importance on symbolism than on accuracy and precision (Zaharna, 1990). Listeners in these cultures actively participate in constructing meaning during oral exchanges and aim to understand the overall meaning rather than just the content (Zaharna, 1990). Zaharna (1990) argued that, due to the listeners' heightened involvement, the stylistic and relational aspects of a message may be more important than the informational aspects. Thus, the emotional impact of an oral message may be valued more than its cognitive merits, as speakers try to elicit emotional and participatory responses from the listener (Zaharna, 1990). This is true, as F2F communication is a means of conveying non-verbal messages in addition to words in HCC (Hall, 1989). Therefore, it is argued that intentionally approaching the target through the means of a third-party whether mere online or via a colleague implies not only a distortion of the message sent as the

emotional component is missing, but holds a deeply cultural rooted indirect message, which is interpreted as ostracism.

The aforementioned culturally distinctive forms of ostracism might also have influenced the cultural-specific coping mechanisms most effective in addressing such forms of ostracism. Subsequent paragraphs will discuss RQ2 illustrating how contextual factors shaped the strategies of Arab Gulf employees in dealing with ostracism, leading to answers to RQ3.

Conservation of resources theory

Examining the above-mentioned forms of ostracism reveals that they contribute to theory development by reinforcing existing theories, such as the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory. COR suggests that workplace ostracism causes deprivation of resources and information, leading to further losses like diminished work relationships and reduced access to crucial resources and advice (Robinson et al., 2013). This, in turn, results in another type of workplace ostracism known as information exclusion (Zimmerman et al., 2016) and fosters knowledge withholding behavior (Zhao et al., 2016; Riaz et al., 2019).

The COR theory has not been extensively discussed in the area of WO, indicating a need for more studies to incorporate such theories. However, this study builds upon the COR theory. For instance, excluding someone from decision-making processes where their input is necessary, avoiding greetings and thereby preventing elaborate conversations, and having a third-party deliver instructions instead of approaching the target directly all reinforce COR by depriving ostracised employees of resources, necessary advice, knowledge and work relationships (Robinson et al., 2013). In light of the COR theory, ostracised employees lose not only environmental resources such as physical or social ones (Riaz and Hussain, 2019) but also personal resources such as self-esteem, inner peace, health, and close attachments (Yang and Treadway, 2018). Consequently, this study's findings expand our understanding of COR, emphasising the significant consequences of these forms of WO and illustrating the profound impact of resource loss at both organisational and personal levels when ostracism occurs.

5.3.2 The Coping Mechanisms

Four main types of emotion-focused coping mechanisms were distinguished: social support, religion, avoidance, and withdrawal. Particularly, religion, avoidance, and withdrawal were identified as unique local and contextual coping strategies. Not only identified coping strategies are frequently highlighted as the primary coping mechanisms across the narratives; they also underscore the need for further exploration in future studies to fill the void in the literature of WO and CCR.

One of the Study 1 aims underpinning RQ2 is to explore how employees in the Arab Gulf work environments cope with ostracism and what are the contextual factors impacted by the way people handled the unpleasant experience of ostracism, in order to form the basis of constructing the coping mechanisms component in a cross-cultural survey questionnaire for the upcoming study, especially given that the available studies on such aspects were taken mostly from Western countries or Asian contexts, such as China, with minimal reference to Arab coping mechanisms with WO, particularly Arabs of the Gulf. In response to the call made by Uskul and Over (2017), advocating for research to explore whether responses to ostracism exhibit unique patterns within collectivistic cultural contexts, distinct from those already documented in the West, this study successfully identified coping mechanisms among Gulf Arabs that align with those observed in the West, those employed by Westerners but not identified in this study, and culturally-specific coping mechanisms specific to the Arab context.

Coping strategies similar to the West

The following coping strategies are claimed to resemble those in the Western context; yet their frequency of use and the specific behavioural type of the coping mechanism vary across cultures due to contextual influences, as will be elaborated in the subsequent paragraphs.

Problem-focused coping vs. emotional-focused coping

In alignment with those observed in the West, although coping mechanisms, such as problem-focused coping (Hofstede, 2001), and emotional-focused coping (Ma and Bellmore, 2016), generally resemble those identified in literature from Western contexts, there are variations in the *frequency* of their occurrence between the two cultures, and *the type* of emotional-focused coping. For example, researchers argue that collectivists tend to cope with stress

primarily through emotional means (Hofstede, 2001; Ma and Bellmore, 2016), while problem-focused coping is the predominant approach used by individualists (Hofstede, 2001). Study 1 findings corroborate these claims. As mentioned above, problem-focused coping strategies are usually adopted when the problem is easy to change (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). However, since it is hard to know who is responsible for the ostracising behaviour (Ferris et al., 2016) giving the ambiguous nature of ostracism (Ferris et al., 2017) and the ostraciser can easily deny it happened in the first place (Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2016; 2017); not to mention that the main source of ostracism was mainly participants' managers where power-distance comes into play, the tendency to seek for emotional-focused coping over problem-focused coping justifies the choice. This highlights the implications of power-distance and confrontation avoidance as cultural nuances, and affecting the types of coping mechanisms used to deal with such phenomenon.

Nevertheless, as problem-focused coping is extensively employed in Western contexts (Hofstede, 2001) and less prevalent in Arab contexts, as backed up by this finding, and, given that this thesis aims to investigate the cross-cultural applicability of perceptions of WO and its coping mechanisms, problem-focused coping was excluded from the integration process.

Social support

Accordingly, the type of emotional-focused coping has shown some variances between the Westerners and Arabs were found, particularly social support. For instance, the source of social support sought by participants of Study 1 was mainly *emotional* (ie, receiving support from friends or family) while only a few participants sought support for *instrumental* reasons (ie, seeking support for problem-solving ways) mainly through managers, and is classified by some scholars as one type of problem-focused techniques (Carver et al., 1989). Hence, despite that social support as a coping mechanism is typically used cross-culturally (Farley et al., 2023), the type of social support (eg, emotional vs. instrumental) is marked as the principal distinction between the West and Arabs, confirming Mao et al. (2018) argument that employees restore the impairment of ostracism through strategies they perceive to be valuable in their cultural background.

The cross-cultural nuance in terms of the type of social support can be attributed to the fact that Eastern Asian employees cope better with ostracism through social support Mao et al.

(2018). The authors argued that employees of high power-distance cultures, relative to lower power-distance cultures, intend to socially connect more with others when ostracised (Mao et al., 2018). When they are ostracised, they are better protected against a single ostracism experience and recover more easily with social support (Mao et al., 2018), such as seeking support from their manager and colleagues, wherein accessing these resources proved to better prepare the ostracised employee to cope with work demands (Bedi, 2021). For instance, in a meta-analysis included collectivistic and individualistic cultures, social support was found to be effective for the targets of WO when it received from colleagues or supervisors (Bedi, 2021). To the contrary, because of the perception of ostracism originating from colleagues and managers, their support is unlikely to result in beneficial effects, according to a study conducted in a highly collectivistic Eastern country (Xia et al., 2019). Instead, assistance from one's life partner seems to have a positive impact (Xia et al., 2019).

No empirical evidence, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, supports these claims in Arab contexts, except for this study showing the high tendency for Gulf Arab employees to seek emotional social support as their fundamental coping strategy, including family members and friends in coping with WO. Hence, it is crucial to identify social support as a variable to measure for the next study to explore cultural nuances in that aspect.

Coping strategies employed by Westerners but not by Gulf Arabs

In terms of coping strategies employed by Westerners but not identified in this study, studies on WO conducted in Western contexts have predominantly argued that the targets of WO cope with it by either engaging in pro- or anti- social behaviours (Ferris et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2013; Scott et al., 2015; Sommer et al., 2021).

Anti-social behaviours

Extant literature argues that collectivists are less likely to resort to coping strategies utilising anti-social behaviours in response to ostracism, while individualists are more inclined towards anti-social behaviours (Pfundmair et al., 2015b; Liu and Xia, 2016), such as aggression and hostility (Hippel et al., 2005; Wesselmann and Williams, 2017; Mao et al., 2018; Bedi, 2021), CWB which includes mistreatment and harassment (Gelfand et al., 2017), incivility (Ferris et al., 2016), and WDB (Robinson and Schabram, 2019). In agreement with

this claim and the researcher's expectation, Study 1 findings did not provide evidence supporting engagement in anti-social behaviour, aligning with previous research. It is worth noting, however, that participants might have hesitated to report such deviant behaviours as being unethical behaviours that carries serious implications.

Pro-social behaviours

Similarly, Study 1 failed to uncover other coping strategies documented in the literature, such as pro-social behaviours. For example, given the high interdependence among Arabs, with a strong emphasis on social networks and relationships (Hofstede, 2001), the anticipation was that pro-social behaviours such as OCB would emerge as a predominant coping strategy. This expectation originated from the findings by Li et al. (2021) that the connection between WO and OCB is particularly prominent in collectivist culture. However, the analysis did not show any support for that claim. On the contrary, it lends support to Bedi's (2021) meta-analysis, including both collectivist and individualistic countries, which indicates that WO is the least predictor of OCB. In addition, it has been argued that the target of ostracism will behave prosaically by leaning more towards conforming, obeying, and complying to others (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017). According to Western theorisation, this could be interpreted from perpetrator-target status. For example, if the target's status is low, they are prone to behave socially because employees seek to avoid ostracism from powerful people, and that increasing one's in- and extra-role behaviours would be rewarded by top management (Robinson and Schabram, 2019). However, contrary to this claim, Study 1's findings did not align with this expectation. Despite the superior status of the ostracisers over the targets in most cases, the anticipated pro-social behaviour did not materialise.

Coping mechanisms specific to Gulf Arab context

In addition to the similarities and differences with the Western context, there are supplementary coping mechanisms not documented in existing literature, rather, these were identified as additional coping strategies specific to the context under investigation, beyond those discussed in the literature, underscoring the significant role of culture as a reliable predictor of coping (Adam and Ward, 2016). These are: religion, avoidance, and withdrawal.

Religion

Religious coping stands out as the most striking cultural-specific coping mechanism. Despite the notion that religious significance changes over time and place, it is still outstanding that religion is a remarkable issue for people across cultures (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). Therefore, when examining a social negative issue such as ostracism, the role of religion becomes important to incorporate (Aydin et al., 2010).

One explanation is that Arabs assign a greater importance to religion in comparison to non-Arab Muslims and Western individuals, who generally adopt a more secular stance (Hall, 1959; Abdel-Khalek and Lester, 2013). According to Hall's classic work on cross-cultures, Westerners tend to segregate religion and minimise its social impact compared to other societies (Hall, 1959). For instance, in the Middle-East, Islam holds a more pervasive influence than Christianity does in contemporary Europe (Hall, 1959). Specifically, Omani organisations widely observe Islamic practices, given that Islam is the sole religion for Omanis (Al Asmi and Caldwell, 2018). Thus, since Arabic is the language revealed in the Qur'an, and the exclusive embrace of Islam as the predominant religion in the Arab Gulf region, in contrast to other Arab nations that accommodate various religions, there is justification as to why the Arab Gulf States in particular exhibit a greater conservatism and compliance with Islamic values. Therefore, the findings of this study is argued to mirror the shared religious values among all citizens of the Gulf in this context. Yet, the frequent reliance on religious coping mechanisms might be attributed to the 'Arab Mind', which is well articulated in Islam (Suleiman, 2016). As mentioned in Chapter 2, both Hofstede's (1983) and Hall's (1959) seminal works on culture argue that culture serves as the programming of the mind, distinguishing individuals within a group based on the value systems held by a person that serve as a mental software. This is particularly applicable in Arab societies, where there is heightened societal pressure to adhere to religious practices (Abdel-Khalek and Lester, 2013). Nonetheless, while the previous claim is applicable at an organisational level, on a personal level interviewees' consistent reference in the narrative to religious coping, underscores its notable prevalence in people's everyday lives.

Indeed, the relationship between religion and culture is reciprocal, with each shaping and influencing the other (Cohen et al., 2016). In collectivist societies, for example, religious identity extends beyond mere faith, including community involvement, ethnic identity, and adherence to traditions (Cohen et al., 2016). Cohen et al. (2016) contend that Eastern

religions tend to exhibit more collectivistic traits, influenced by the collectivistic cultures in which they are embedded. For instance, in the case of Muslims, the practice of performing prayers five times a day serves as a daily ritual that also brings individuals together with fellow Muslim worshippers, as these prayers are scheduled at specific times throughout the day (Achour et al., 2016). Consequently, Islam as a faith is closely intertwined with social support, with daily prayers not only serving as a consistent reminder of God's presence and protection, but as a reminder of the availability of other fellow Muslims as a support system (Achour et al., 2016). This provides another explanation of why religion emerges as a crucial coping mechanism for Muslims, and Arab Gulf Muslims in particular.

In contrast, Western countries often lack these distinctive features and expressions of religion, resulting in a gradual diminishing presence of religion in people's lives cohort after cohort (Crockett and Voas, 2006; Kaasa and Minkov, 2020). In Western societies today, two influential cultural factors that pose challenges to spirituality are materialism and individualism (Eckersley, 2007). Materialism, by promoting the significance of wealth and possessions in life, acts as a cultural antagonist to spirituality, distorting its expression. Historically, individualism emerged as a movement aimed at liberating individuals from social regulations, including worship institutions such as churches (Eckersley, 2007). Despite providing new opportunities for personal experience and growth, it is also generating anxiety due to social disconnection associated with the belief that we are entirely self-sufficient and disconnected from others (Eckersley, 2007). For that reason, the use of religious coping mechanism emerged as a significant contextual factor from the data collected in Study 1.

A review on cross-cultural research conducted by Tarakeshwar et al. (2003) underscored the significance of incorporating religious coping mechanisms into cross-cultural research due to its impact not only on alleviating distress differently among different religions, but also that it differs across countries that embrace the same religions, marking the importance of cultural heritage when religious coping is activated. As a result, the effectiveness of religious coping is contingent on the nature of the situation being coped with, supporting the argument made by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the cultural context in which religion is being adopted, and on the level of religiosity. Therefore, religion should be included in cross-cultural research for its association with culture, social support and emotion regulation (Vishkin et al., 2019).

Many studies have showcased the impact of cultural dimensions and related concepts on stress coping (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). Nevertheless, the explicit interplay between religion and culture is not readily evident in the vast majority of these cross-cultural dimensions (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). It is noteworthy that religion as a coping mechanism is then a compelling area of exploration within cross-cultural research (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003; Vishkin et al., 2019). Therefore, due to the significance of incorporating religion as a coping mechanism in CCR, specifically in the literature of ostracism (Aydin et al., 2010), the discrepancy between Western contexts and Arab contexts on the importance of religion on all aspects of individuals' lives necessitates the cruciality of considering religious coping as a fundamental variable to measure in Study 2. Especially that religion as a coping mechanism with ostracism is not yet addressed (Aydin et al., 2010).

Avoidance

This study uncovered a widespread adoption of confrontation avoidance by participants as a common response to WO. In a culture that avoids conflict, individuals typically suppress any expression of conflict, and the only approved approach to handling conflict involves a passive and agreeable management style (Gelfand et al., 2012). The passive management style was evident in the analysis, suggesting that avoidance is not only a strategy employed by those engaging in the ostracising behaviours but is also embraced by professional bodies such as the HR when approached by the targets, and by third parties, such as managers acting as intermediaries. This signifies that organisational cultures in Arab Gulf states tend to heavily lean towards avoidance, supporting the argument put forth by Tjosvold and Sun (2002) that conflict avoidance is prevalent in collectivist societies due to the emphasis on prioritising relationships and harmony. Also, direct confrontation with those engaging in the ostracising behaviours may be perceived as impolite in collectivist cultures (Jahanzeb and Fatima, 2018). In conflict-avoidant organisational cultures, the available options for resolving interpersonal tensions may be limited, leading organisational members to resort to passive and less visible means of expressing disapproval (Robinson et al., 2013). Hence, the culture of avoidance among Arabs (Hall, 1989) is observed to have extended into their workplaces, giving rise to an organisational culture characterised by avoidance, and justifying the prevalence of avoidance as a coping mechanism with WO.

Specifically, this finding aligns with the results of Hans and Bariki (2012), indicating that Omani organisational culture is characterised by conflict avoidance, and with Al Zidjaly's (2017) findings that Omanis prefer non-confrontational strategies to express disapproval to save face. Interestingly, despite the common practice of using a third-party to resolve conflicts in Arab societies (Hall, 1989), it appears that, in work contexts, relying on a third-party is not effective, and participants deemed complete conflict-avoidance as the safest way to cope at work, possibly to avoid the repercussions that may arise from conflicting with higher authorities, given the inherent high power-distance nature in such contexts.

On the other hand, Western research typically perceives conflict-avoidance as one, largely, ineffective approach (Tjosvold and Sun, 2002). For example, a classic survey study on conflict-avoidance among middle-managers was carried out in five European nations, including the UK, and yielded the following results. Generally, managers from cultures characterised by low power-distance, such as the UK, exhibit a greater tendency for problem-solving in their conflict behaviour with superiors compared to managers from high power-distance European cultures. Moreover, British middle-managers were found to be less inclined than their counterparts in other countries to avoid conflict interactions (van Oudenhoven et al., 1998).

Indeed, avoidance behaviours and their effectiveness in responding to ostracism were not clearly addressed in the literature of workplace ostracism, or in CCR. Specifically, avoidance was mainly discussed as a mere cognitive reaction to ostracism (eg., Williams, 2009; Pfundmair et al., 2015a) which did not include behavioural responses such as avoiding incidents of confrontation with the ostraciser. In addition, literature on avoidance as a cognitive strategy was only conducted in non-work context, marking avoidance behaviour by employees as a contextual coping mechanism not yet discussed in cross-cultural work settings. Hence, conflict and confrontation avoidance as a way to cope with WO, and the degree to which it is used across cultures, are argued to be a result of cultural impact. Therefore, avoidant coping forms an important coping strategy to measure for the next study.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal has emerged as another dominant coping strategy adopted by the interviewees. Withdrawal is defined as actions taken by dissatisfied employees to decrease the time

dedicated to their specific work duties (Hanisch and Hulin, 1990) as a manifestation of job dissatisfaction (Waters and Roach, 1971; Mobley, 1977) classifying withdrawal as a form of conflict-avoidance (Tjosvold and Sun, 2002). This constitutes behaviours such as being absent, arriving late to work, taking long breaks, taking fake sick leave, and ultimately resigning from the job (Hanischand Hulin, 1990; Glazer et al., 2021).

Previous social psychology research on ostracism has discussed withdrawal as self-withdrawing from situations (Zadro, 2004), leading to acceptance of social isolation and loneliness (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017), and giving up on attempts to end the ostracising behaviours, generally alienation, or resignation in the face of coping failures (Williams, 2009). According to Williams' temporal threat model (2009) discussed in Chapter 2, withdrawal is positioned as the last reaction to ostracism. Precisely, the resignation stage, including withdrawal behaviours, represents the latest and least-explored segment of Williams's (2009) model (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017). The targets of ostracism may engage in withdrawal behaviours to escape the psychological pain (Robinson et al., 2013; Sommer et al., 2021).

In the context of workplace ostracism, scholars characterise withdrawal behaviours as a negative outcome of WO (O'Reilly and Robinson, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013; Srivastava et al., 2024), an attempt to avoid further hurt (Sommer et al., 2021) through lack of social interaction (Van Kleef et al., 2010), and as contributing less to the organisation (Robinson et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2020). For example, when withdrawal is conceptualised as neglecting work-related responsibilities as a negative outcome of workplace incivility, males in a high individualistic Western country were found to withdraw more than females from their responsibilities when they were treated uncivilly in the workplace (Loi et al., 2015). In a highly collectivistic country, positive significant correlation between WO and withdrawal was found when withdrawal was measured as leaving the organisation (Srivastava et al., 2024). Generally, withdrawal as an outcome of WO was discussed in terms of absenteeism, reduced performance, turnover, etc. (Glazer et al., 2021), but none of the studies examine withdrawal as a *same-manner reaction to ostracism*, leading to a lack of a clear definition in the literature. For that reason, it is argued that withdrawal is one of the context-specific coping mechanisms beside religion and avoidance.

As a consequence, the conceptualisation of withdrawal as a coping mechanism has taken a divergent turn. For example, this study discovered that participants' withdrawal behaviours were expressed as coping mechanisms with WO, rather than outcomes or types of avoidance. Instead, participants' withdrawal behaviours provided clear distinction between avoidance, resignation, withdrawal and turnover. For example, interviewees display similar reactions to ostracism, such as intentionally excluding and ignoring the perpetrator by engaging in complete ostracism directed back at the perpetrator in a similar manner as a form of silent revenge. In other words, Study 1 findings suggest that withdrawal is not merely a passive behaviour involving complete resignation and alienation (Williams, 2009), but rather a form of silent retaliatory behaviour towards the perpetrator. Hence, the definition of withdrawal as a coping mechanism, particularly same manner reaction to ostracism is rooted in the qualitative data, adding a new insight into the conceptualisation of withdrawal as a 'retaliatory ostracism'.

For example, Study 1 introduces the concept of retaliatory ostracism into the conceptualisation of withdrawal, different from its extant conceptualisation. For example, withdrawal is viewed as refraining from engaging in OCB as a form of retaliatory ostracism (Mao et al., 2018). While existing literature recognises 'retaliatory ostracism' in the context of seeking revenge as a one-way action from the perpetrator to the target, serving as a punitive strategy to harm the target (Robinson et al., 2013), it did not view it as the other way around. Hence, prior research vaguely conceptualises retaliatory ostracism. Cross-cultural studies suggest that the willingness to engage in retaliatory ostracism following an episode of ostracism is contingent on cultural norms and rules (Schaafsma, 2017). For instance, individualistic cultures may express a desire to retaliate through anti-social behaviours (Robinson et al., 2013; Schaafsma, 2017). On the other hand, in the Gulf Arab context, as evident by this study, perhaps due to high avoidance behaviour and fear of power, it seems that retaliatory ostracism does not include to overt anti-social behaviour, rather it manifests in like-manner ostracism by giving the perpetrator 'the silent treatment'. Yet, the precise meaning and manifestations of withdrawal in the form of retaliatory ostracism, particularly in Arab societies, remain poorly understood. In essence, the study addresses the gap in understanding the cultural conceptualisation of withdrawal behaviours within the framework of retaliatory ostracism.

It is prudent to note the differences between withdrawal and avoidance to clarify the argued conceptualisation of withdrawal. The interplay between withdrawal and avoidance is obvious, providing equal significance to both constructs that should be measured separately as two distinct constructs in the upcoming study. For example, while both avoidance and withdrawal overlap as the extant literature addresses, according to the qualitative findings it is assumed that the distinction between avoidance and withdrawal lies in their actions and motives. In terms of actions, avoidance involves defensive silence as an attempt to disregard any conflict or chance of confrontation between the perpetrator and the target when encountering the ostraciser. As a result, if ostracism does occur, the individual copes with it not only by ignoring the fact that it happened (ie, cognitive reappraisal and distracting one's thoughts from the unfavourable events) as a way of regulating emotions, similar to extant literature (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), but also by completely avoiding any source of conflict with the perpetrator arising from direct confrontation in order to avoid further harm and conflict. On the other side of the coin, withdrawal is a form of silent 'revenge' which involves, as noted above, responding to an action with a similar one and also involves stepping back from all events that may involve encountering the individual ostracising them. In other words, avoidance might still include engagements with the ostraciser, but with careful consideration to avoid discussing the issue of ostracism to prevent potential conflicts. On the other hand, withdrawal entails counter-behaviour of purposeful complete ostracism, where avoidance of any interaction with the perpetrator is intended to cause similar pain to the perpetrator by threatening their belonging needs. While, in terms of motives, it appears from the narratives that the motive behind avoidance is to avoid making problems to prevent future ostracism. Whereas the motive behind withdrawal is to cause emotional harm to the ostraciser.

Social exchange theory (SET)

Social exchange theory is a theoretical perspective that broadly describes the process in which two or more parties exchange resources according to specific rules and how these exchanges impact the quality of their relationships. One type of resources exchange is 'socioemotional resource' (Foa and Foa, 1980). Socioemotional resources relate to one's identification with and standing in a group (Cropanzano and Ambrose, 2001). Socioemotional resources are often intangible, such as assistance, social approval, and

compliance (Blau, 1964). Social exchanges are governed by various norms, including the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), which states that parties respond to others' actions in kind, whether positive or negative. Specifically, it suggests that social exchange relationships trigger emotional responses, which influence the strength of individuals' connections and attachments to their exchange partners (Lawler et al., 2006). These connections, in turn, shape collective behaviors in response to the initial actions, such as prosocial behavior and ongoing team membership.

SET is one of the most applied theories used for ostracism (Liu and Xia, 2016). For example, in an experimental design study targeting a heterogeneous sample of employees working in teams to examine the impact of ostracism in the light of SET, (Spoelma et al., 2021) found that WO positively relates to whistleblowing behavior. However, this research further advances the development of SET in the context of workplace ostracism by confirming that employees' emotional and behavioral responses to ostracism are reciprocal. This means that employees, as evident in this research, may react to being ostracised by similarly ostracising the perpetrator, a reaction referred to as withdrawal behavior in this context.

5.4 Summary

This chapter described the results of thematic narrative analysis of the initial phase in the MMR, Study 1, focusing on the outcomes of the qualitative component within the ESD. The analysis emphasised two aspects under scrutiny: the forms of workplace ostracism and the coping mechanisms utilised by employees in Omani working environments. Thematic narrative analysis of the data unveiled key themes within each aspect, providing intriguing insights into the influence of culture and context on the phenomenon of workplace ostracism, answering RQ1, and the coping mechanisms adopted in the Gulf Arab culture, answering RQ2. The presentation of the key themes is followed by a discussion on how contextual factors played a role in shaping the findings of Study 1, providing answers to RQ3.

To sum up, the findings indicate that WO shares general similarities across cultures, underscoring its universal nature. Nevertheless, the presence of cultural nuances reveals interesting insights into culture-specific forms of WO and the coping strategies employees utilised.

Chapter 6: The Quantitative Study (Study 2)

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the findings of phase one within the mixed-methods approach illustrating the emerged themes developed from analysing the qualitative data. This chapter embarks upon the second stage of the ESD, explaining both phase 2 (the integration phase) and phase 3 (the quantitative study). It marks a significant transition, as it delves deeper into the quantitative research, complementing the qualitative insights from the previous phase by answering the last and overall research question RQ4.

This chapter serves as a critical integration of the two methods employed for this MMR. It starts with introducing the formulation of research hypotheses based upon Study one's results, description of the hypothesised model, and the survey design, selection of sampling methods, the development and refinement of the survey questionnaire, and the examination of the reliability and validity of the data. Furthermore, it describes the ethical considerations underlying research integrity of this work, followed by data collection methods. It also illustrates descriptive statistics to gain insights into the characteristics of the data drawn from Omani and British samples. Finally, this chapter will report the results of the quantitative analysis, paving the way for the synthesis of integrated quantitative and qualitative findings in the discussion section of this cross-cultural mixed-methods study.

6.2 Formulating Research Hypotheses

This study is an extension of the previous one and aims to employ a complementary quantitative method as part of this MMR, with the goal of examining whether the new insights gained from the phenomenon of ostracism found in an Arab context are applicable to the Western context. This section explains the second phase of the ESD, known as the integration phase, as illustrated in Figure 3.1. ESD entails integrating variables identified in the first study to guide the development of the second study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009), specifically in the formulation of hypotheses for this study. Hence, the chosen instrument for the quantitative component within this MMR is a survey design, justified in later paragraphs.

This section will detail the formulation of hypotheses derived from the findings of Study 1, aimed at constructing a cross-cultural questionnaire to be tested in wider samples.

The psychological outcomes of workplace ostracism

Workplace ostracism

A meta-analysis conducted by Howard et al. (2020) uncovered a strong correlation between workplace ostracism and multiple psychological outcomes. For instance, the study identified a statistically significant positive association between WO and adverse effects on wellbeing, job tension, and negative emotions. It is posited that the hurtful psychological consequences of WO would be mitigated among targets who remain unaware of their ostracised status. Conversely, when targets perceive themselves as subject to ostracism, a higher likelihood of experiencing negative consequences is anticipated, regardless of the occurrence of actual ostracism (Robinson et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2020).

The interviewees expressed experiencing lower morale, dissatisfaction with their jobs, and a decline in overall wellbeing due to feelings of ostracism at work, that led many of them to resign. Based on the analysis of the data and a comprehensive review of existing literature on the effects of WO, it is expected that WO will significantly correlate with reduced job satisfaction and negative wellbeing. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 1a: Workplace ostracism is negatively associated with (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction.

Workplace ostracism across cultures

Researchers have only recently recognised that although the forms of ostracism are similar across cultures, responding to and coping with ostracism might be culture-specific (Schaafsma, 2017).

Chapter 2 presents studies illustrating that when ostracism is perceived as a breach of inclusion norms, individuals respond negatively (Uskul and Over, 2017). Conversely, if ostracism aligns with the established norm, the situation is perceived as less threatening, leading to a reduction in negative reactions (Uskul and Over, 2017). For example, certain Asian countries exhibit greater tolerance for deviant behaviours, treating them with indifference, in contrast to European countries where a deviant individual within an

organisation is perceived as dangerous and unacceptable (Hofstede, 1984). In the exploration of ostracism, researchers have turned to Hofstede's (1980) concept of power-distance to explain the influence of culture on the experience of ostracism. Employees who endorse the value of power-distance may demonstrate reduced aversion to ostracism, as they exhibit greater tolerance for interpersonal mistreatment from authority figures such as supervisors or senior colleagues in the workplace (Wu et al., 2016). In addition, there are variations in the level of sensitivity to ostracism observed across cultures (Pfundmair et al., 2015a; Sommer et al., 2017). A mixed-methods study in the UK identified 22 most prevalent negative behaviours among healthcare employees and found that socially isolating behaviours such as being ignored was one of the reported behaviours (Carter et al., 2013). It has been proposed that individuals with a strong sense of individualism tend to be more responsive to how they are treated by others (Li et al., 2021). In contrast, several studies have indicated that individual-level rejection sensitivity is more pronounced in collectivist East-Asian societies compared to individualistic European Americans (Uskul and Over, 2017). Consequently, there is currently conflicting evidence regarding whether ostracism is more prevalent and severe in individualistic or collectivistic societies.

The qualitative findings indicate that none of the participants encountered complete ostracism, primarily due to cultural norms promoting social interaction and inclusive behaviours within the community, and most importantly, religious norms, mandating greetings even with strangers, which further contribute to a substantial reduction in the prevalence of ostracism in that particular context. In addition to that and given the lesser prevalence of ostracism suggested by the qualitative results, it is anticipated that ostracism is more pronounced in the UK. This expectation is grounded in the UK's greater ethnic and religious diversity, a larger population of immigrants, and the presence of various sub-cultures, factors likely to contribute to a higher level of ostracism within British workplaces.

Hypothesis 1b: Workplace ostracism is more prevalent in the UK than is in Oman.

The moderating effect of nationality and coping mechanisms

In social sciences, the concept of moderation is pivotal for testing theories that seek to explain the interactive influence of multiple variables in predicting a dependent variable (Dawson and Richter, 2006). *A moderator* is a factor that defines the circumstances in which a particular predictor is connected to an outcome. This moderator clarifies 'when' a dependent

variable (DV) and independent variable (IV) exhibit a connection (Baron and Kenny, 1986; Aiken et al., 1991). *Moderation* involves the concept of an interaction effect, in which the introduction of a moderating variable alters either the direction or the extent of the association between two variables. This moderation effect can be: (a) enhancing, wherein an increase in the moderator intensifies the impact of the predictor (IV) on the outcome (DV), or (b) buffering, wherein an increase in the moderator decreases the influence of the predictor on the outcome (Aiken et al., 1991).

Following from the previous discussion on moderation, the subsequent presented variables encompassing nationality and the coping mechanisms are expected to serve as moderators that moderate the relationship between workplace ostracism, serving as the predictor (IV), and the outcomes of WO (DVs): wellbeing and job satisfaction.

National identity and workplace ostracism

Oman vs. the UK

One gap found in the literature was the relatively limited knowledge about WO in the Arab world, emphasising the importance for scholars to acknowledge the distinctive national identity when examining such phenomenon. This recognition becomes crucial instead of incorporating collectivism-individualism dimension overly relied on in cross-cultural literature developed by Hofstede (2001), including workplace ostracism studies. As discussed in Chapter 2, previous research on ostracism within the framework of individualism-collectivism dimension produced conflicting findings. This inconsistency emphasised the researcher's belief in the importance of considering cultural factors beyond Hofstede's cultural dimensions such as national identity as a crucial indicator of cultural distinctions. This is particularly relevant given the rising sense of national pride in European identity within Europe (Antonsich and Holland, 2014), and the strong attachment to the Arabian identity and traditions among Omanis (Al-Barwani and Albeely, 2007). Furthermore, it challenges the notion that culture is inherently intrinsic to individuals, or merely a psychological variable (Hofstede, 1983); instead, it posits that culture exists externally to individuals (Schwartz, 2014), especially in contemporary modern societies. Hence, incorporating nationality is expected to significantly influence the effects of WO due to the argued impact of the shared cultural heritage and national characteristics bounded by

a territory (Marchesi et al., 2021) that is shared by a group of people regardless of their ethnicities.

Therefore, it is anticipated that national identity will strongly influence the relationship between WO and both wellbeing and job satisfaction. Building on the findings of Study 1 and Hypotheses 1a and 1b, which suggest that WO is detrimental and is more prevalent in the West compared to Arabs, it follows that the negative impact of WO will be stronger among British employees than among Omani employees, the two selected nationalities for this study, as clarified in Chapter 2.

Hypothesis 2a: Nationality will moderate the relationship between WO and (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction, such that the relationship will be more negative in the British context than in the Omani context.

Coping mechanisms

It is necessary for research on WO to clearly determine which variables moderate the experience of ostracism, and the target's responses in a given culture (Uskul and Over, 2017). Robinson and colleagues (2013) call for the exploration of coping strategies and mechanisms that support psychological recovery following instances of ostracism. The qualitative data unveiled numerous coping strategies embraced by the majority of the interviewees, with some being identified as culturally-specific, as detailed in Chapter 5. The following coping strategies have been selected to function as moderators between WO and its adverse consequences as they have specifically emerged from Study 1 as the common utilised coping mechanisms. Thus, it is proposed that the following coping mechanisms act as moderators, influencing the impact of WO on wellbeing and job satisfaction. These coping mechanisms were chosen not only for their relevance within the studied cultural context but also with the aim of investigating whether particularly the culturally-specific coping strategies are similarly prevalent in Western settings or not.

Social support and religion

There is limited understanding of social support as a moderator in the context of WO and its adverse effects (Howard et al., 2020; Glazer et al., 2021), with existing studies primarily investigated in Western workplaces. For instance, Fiset and colleagues (2017) conducted two studies where social support served as a moderator between WO and turnover intention. They

discovered that external social support (from non-work connections such as family, friends, and significant others) played a moderating role in the relationship between WO and turnover intention. In their first study involving full-time working adults in the USA, individuals experiencing ostracism had less tendency to consider leaving their organisation when external support was high. However, their second study, conducted with full-time working adults in Canada, revealed that external support increased the connection between WO and turnover intention. The authors suggested that cultural factors could potentially explain these divergent findings, emphasising the role of national identity argued for this study. Therefore, more CCR is needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of social support as a moderator in the context of WO (Glazer et al., 2021).

Additionally, research suggests that the tendency to turn to religious coping tends to be more prevalent in collectivist societies due to cultural traditions (Bardi and Guerra, 2011). In contrast, as the significance of religion in Western societies is declining over time (Crockett and Voas, 2006; Kaasa and Minkov, 2020), it is forecasted that Westerners will rely less on religious coping compared to Arabs.

The interviewees in Study 1 frequently employed social support and religious practices as their primary coping mechanisms. Consistent with the qualitative results and in alignment with the recommendations of Howard and colleagues (2020), and Aydin et al. (2010), who emphasise the significance of investigating social support and religion as coping strategies for WO, respectively, it is expected that receiving higher levels of social support and employing more religious coping strategies will lead to increased job satisfaction and overall wellbeing. Consequently, social support and religion are regarded as moderators, expecting to play a role in moderating the impact of WO on both job satisfaction and wellbeing.

Hypothesis 2b: Social support and religion will moderate the relationship between WO and (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction, such that the relationship will be less negative for those who receive higher social support and engage in religious coping.

Avoidance and withdrawal

Avoidance is a strong predictor of job satisfaction (Ferris et al., 2013; Liu and Xia, 2016). Likewise, the qualitative results indicated that individuals who employed avoidance as a strategy to avoid direct confrontation reported lower levels of wellbeing and increased job

dissatisfaction. Hence, it can be inferred that avoidance is a predictor of both lower job satisfaction and a reduced mental health serving as a moderator between WO and job satisfaction and wellbeing. In such a case, it is assumed that avoidance will moderate the influence of WO on both job satisfaction and wellbeing.

O'Reilly et al. (2015) discovered a positive association between WO and withdrawal. However, an employee who finds satisfaction in their job and the workplace is unlikely to exhibit withdrawal behaviours (Serfraz et al., 2022). Similarly, nations characterised by high individualism, reduced withdrawal behaviours among employees are linked to the servant leadership style that involves leaders who support and empower their followers, and address their needs and wellbeing (Hunter et al., 2013). On the contrary, withdrawal tendencies tend to manifest in organisations that display increasing discrimination towards non-affiliates, characterised by unequal opportunities, rights imbalances, lack of advancement, absence of bonuses, and similar issues (Serfraz et al., 2022). Working in such an environment is detrimental to both employees' wellbeing such as emotional exhaustion (Serfraz et al., 2022), and the overall job satisfaction. In addition, employees who experience WO tend to be less committed and withdraw from their organisation, possibly due to low wellbeing or the perception of being unwanted (Howard et al., 2020).

Contrary to the proposition made by Robinson and colleagues (2013), testing whether withdrawal is a pragmatic outcome of WO within an organisational context, it is hypothesised that withdrawal behaviour, is a coping mechanism, resulting in reduced job satisfaction and negative wellbeing. Consequently, it is suggested that WO is more likely to predict withdrawal and therefore, engaging in withdrawal behaviour predicts wellbeing and job satisfaction. As a coping mechanism, it is anticipated that withdrawal moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and wellbeing as well as job satisfaction shown in the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2c: Avoidance and withdrawal will moderate the relationship between WO and (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction, such that the relationship will be more negative for those who engage in higher avoidance, and withdrawal.

The collective effects of workplace ostracism

The literature exploring the influence of culture on wellbeing and job satisfaction presents both converging and divergent findings, as detailed in Chapter 2. It has also highlighted those cultural distinctions, including the role of nationality, impacting the experience of ostracism (Marchesi et al., 2021). Moreover, Study 1 revealed that interviewees from the same nationality reported low levels of wellbeing and job satisfaction when subjected to ostracism. However, it remains uncertain whether the shared cultural heritage namely, nationality significantly contributes to predicting the negative impact of WO on wellbeing and job satisfaction. To investigate this, it is argued that examining the determined coping mechanisms within the context of nationality will further strengthen the moderating relationship between WO and its outcomes.

As the qualitative results demonstrated the positive influence of social support and religious practices in alleviating the adverse effects of WO, while also revealing the detrimental impact of withdrawal and avoidance in worsening the negative outcomes of WO in a specific context, it is aimed to investigate whether these same effects hold true in another opposing context of individuals of the same nationality. To elaborate, it is argued that in both cultures, employees' social support and engagement in religious practices mitigates, whereas the employees' avoidance and withdrawal behaviours exacerbated, the negative outcomes of WO: low job satisfaction and negative wellbeing. In other words, it is expected that the negative outcomes of employees' ostracism of both nationalities are worse for employees who perceive low levels of social support and engage in low levels of religious coping, more avoidance behaviours and more withdrawal behaviours. This suggests that the moderating effects of employees' coping mechanisms and their nationalities do not operate independently of one another. Rather, they may jointly affect the relationships between the experience of employees' ostracism and its outcomes (ie, a three-way interaction). It is, therefore, expected that social support and religious practices should allow employees to better cope with WO, whereas employees with more avoidance and withdrawal behaviours are expected to be less able to cope with WO increasing the negative effects of WO on them.

To clarify, in the context of **nationality**, the following is expected:

1. It is expected that those receiving less **social support** (similar for both Westerners and citizens of the Arab Gulf States), will suffer from greater job dissatisfaction and diminished level of wellbeing.
2. On the contrary, it is expected that those who use more **religious** strategies (Arabs) to cope with WO will experience higher job satisfaction and maintain a higher level of wellbeing than those who engage in minimal or no religious coping (the Westerners).
3. Conversely, it is expected that those who engage in more **avoidance** and **withdrawal** behaviours (Arabs) will experience lower job satisfaction and lower wellbeing than those who engage in lower avoidance and withdrawal behaviours (the Westerners). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 3: High workplace ostracism, nationality, and all coping mechanisms will interact to predict (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction, such that Omani's who use more religious coping will experience higher wellbeing and job satisfaction, than UK employees who use religious coping. However, it is expected that Omani employees who use more avoidance and withdrawal will experience lower wellbeing and job satisfaction, than UK employees who engage in these coping behaviours.

6.3 Method

6.3.1 The Hypothesised Model

The formulation of hypotheses is an integral part of the integration process, that constitutes the second phase of the ESD primarily driven by the data collected in the qualitative phase. This section outlines the hypothesised model developed to test the hypotheses identified in the previous section, which is the three-way interaction model, see Figure 6.1.

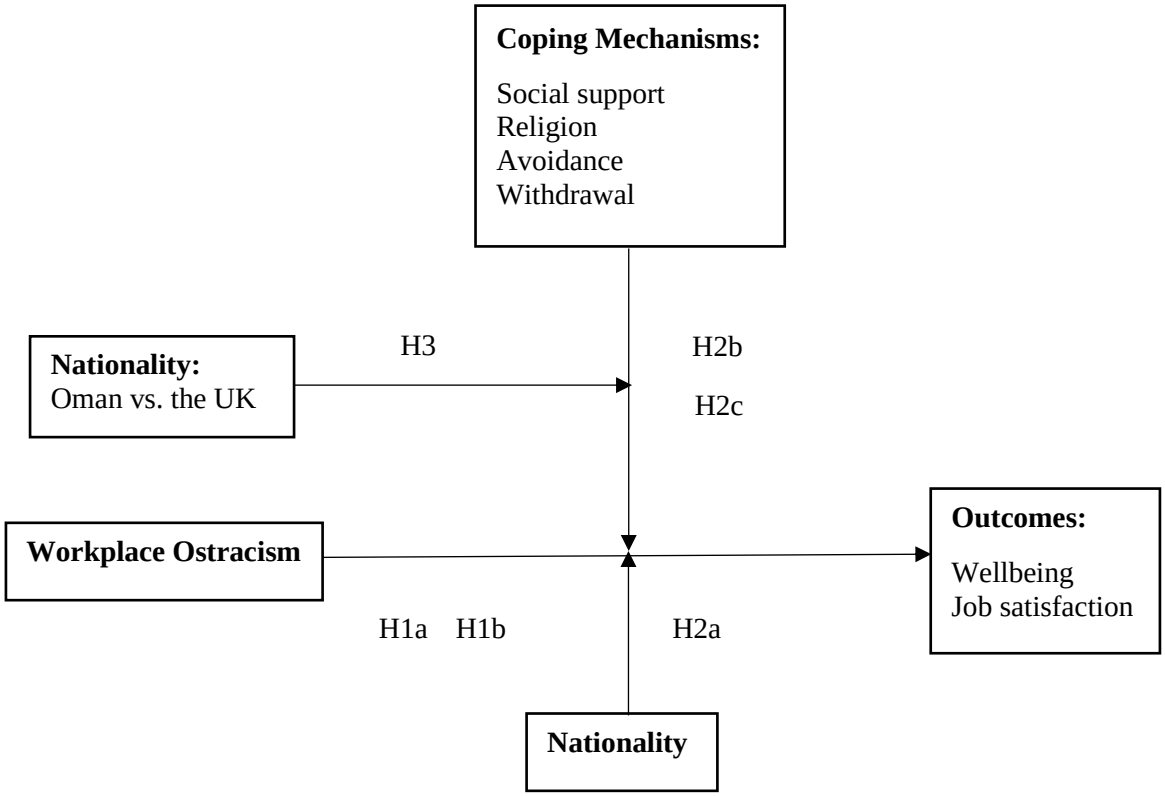
Researchers commonly employ three-way interactions within moderated multiple regression analysis to evaluate the collective impact of three independent variables on a dependent variable (Dawson and Richter, 2006). Variable Z acts as a moderator in the relationship between an independent variable X and a dependent variable Y, where the strength of this relationship fluctuates across different levels of Z. Z can be either a categorical or a

continuous variable (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Often, the connection between X and Y may depend on more than one variable (Dawson, 2014). The fundamental concept and rationale behind moderation can thus be extended from two-way interactions to more complex three-way interactions, in which the association between X and Y is contingent not only on Z but also on an additional moderator variable, W (alongside the interplay of Z and W) (Dawson, 2014). These complex contingency theories help to investigate the combined interplay of multiple variables and can be utilised to assess typologies, configurational theories or more complicated contingency theories that have been widely used in the field of psychology, OB etc. (Dawson and Richter, 2006).

Drawing on the proposed three-way interaction model of WO as shown in Figure 6.1, and on cultural perspectives and earlier reasoning of the previous findings, this study examines the relationship between WO (Y) as the main predictor (IV) and job satisfaction and wellbeing (Xs) as two dependent variables (DVs) by focusing on the moderating role of the coping mechanisms (Ws) and nationality (Z) as a strengthening moderator to this relationship serving as an additional predictor. This assumption proposes employees' nationality as a possible candidate moderator that is expected to strengthen the moderating effect of the coping mechanisms on the outcomes of WO.

The current study further investigates the complex three-way interaction among workplace ostracism, the coping mechanisms (social support, religion, avoidance, and withdrawal), and cultural identity (nationality) on employees' job satisfaction and wellbeing, see Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: The Hypothesised Model of the Three-way Interaction



6.3.2 Questionnaire Development

While Section 6.2 described the hypotheses development, this section outlines in detail the process of approaching the interim phase (Phase 2) of developing a quantitative instrument within the MMR, particularly the selection of questionnaire items of each chosen variable.

The integration phase

Chapter 3 briefly explained the exploratory sequential design (ESD) including its three phases, see Figure 3.1. In ESD, the integration phase involves using the initial qualitative findings to construct a new or modified quantitative feature such as an instrument to be tested quantitatively. Once the concluding quantitative stage is finalised, the researcher merges the two sets of interconnected outcomes and derives comprehensive conclusions about how the quantitative outcomes were developed based on the qualitatively informed instrument or materials (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).

To amplify, the actual integration process involves transitioning from the qualitative results to the development of the quantitative component that follows the preliminary qualitative

phase (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Within this constructive and connective process, making critical choices regarding which facets of the qualitative findings to build upon, as well as the nature of the quantitative element to be created must be taken (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). In the current study, integration was based on the key sub-themes developed in phase one, serving as a foundation to establish a novel quantitative aspect rooted in participants' culture and viewpoints to test its transferability. For instance, the key themes (see Figure 5.1 & Figure 5.2) were supported by key quotations and statements from the interviewees. Consequently, these quotations reflecting each key theme and variables were used to develop items for the questionnaire. In other words, qualitative data undergo a process of transforming key findings into variables, with values determined by decisions made regarding dichotomous, frequency-based, volume-related, or intensity-related counts, or measurements associated with each aspect during the conversion process (Bazeley, 2017).

All the key themes emerged mainly reflected a consensus among interviewees, and the culturally-specific factors. Therefore, all sub-themes were counted and transformed into variables to be tested, except for the problem-focused coping theme as indicated in Chapter 5. Initially, all the context-rich statements made by interviewees for each sub-theme, that are first-order themes, were compiled. Subsequently, filtration of these statements was based on the richness of quotations that fully captured the intended aspect of the variable to be tested and retained the potential statements. Thus, prior to deciding which quotations should be transformed into an item, a process of quotations filtration took place. Following that, statements that were found to overlap with existing scale items were discarded. This process was done through a joint display table used to list the variables intended to be measured in one column, the interviewees' most informative quotations representing the variables in another column, and the proposed items built upon these variables in a third column, see Appendix 6.1.

The developed survey questionnaire

The instrument comprised seven measures. However, all constructs constituted a subscale of the survey instrument except for 'withdrawal' where two comprehensive items were developed based directly on the content of the interviews.

The adopted scales consist of validated, pre-established measures (such as workplace ostracism, social support, religious coping mechanisms, avoidance, job satisfaction, and

wellbeing). Notably, the widely recognised WO comprised 10 scale items developed by Ferris and colleagues (2008) to assess various forms of ostracism, see Appendix 2.1. However, an additional 6 items were included based on sub-themes representing various forms of ostracism not captured in the well-known established scale of WO. As a result, the WO scale was expanded to 16 items, marking the most significant integration process for this study. The developed items are:

1. Others did not greet you warmly when you met.
2. Others avoided initiating conversation with you.
3. Others communicated task instructions to you only through formal online channels, (eg, email).
4. Your manager instructed your colleagues to inform you about your work-related tasks.
5. Others acknowledge your contribution, efforts, and potential.
6. You are not actively engaged in the decision-making process related to your expertise and experience.

The inclusion of these additional items aimed to test whether the forms of workplace ostracism and the identified coping mechanisms are experienced within a broader context, examining whether they can be generalised or if they represent a culturally unique phenomenon.

6.4 Reliability and Validity of the data

In a cross-cultural context, a solid grasp of ethnographic insights is vital for both the creation and interpretation of survey data (Bazeley, 2017). In fact, this integration point of developing items for a culturally sensitive questionnaire was not free of challenges. For example, because local knowledge obtained through exploratory qualitative methods is essential for ensuring that issues are comprehended and framed in a manner that resonates with the local population (Bazeley, 2018), a close scrutiny of the items in relation to the contextual meaning they can reveal cross-culturally was carried out with caution. This approach ensures that the questions formulated to evaluate theoretical concepts are expressed in a language and context that is not only meaningful but also culturally sensitive (Bazeley, 2017) to ensure face validity. For example, the item ‘Others did not greet you warmly when you meet’ in the Arabian Muslim

culture reflects two elements: the Islamic greeting and the subsequent process of asking questions which are both integral complements of the daily greeting in Oman (Emery, 2000), as explained in Chapter 5. However, because greetings in the West do not include a religious component and follow-up greeting questions are not seen as an integral daily process, the above-stated item was considered appropriate to capture the intended meaning of measuring 'warm greeting' in both contexts. For example, it was assumed that the Omani respondents would perceive this statement as inquiring about their wellbeing beyond the Islamic greeting when they are greeted, whereas for the Brits, a warm greeting might entail avoiding being 'blunt' in their response to a greeting by not opening up. It is expected that both cultures would also consider a warm greeting to involve appropriate body language associated with the greeting, in a manner where the greeting is not perceived as 'cold,' with a 'fake smile' as described by some interviewees.

Furthermore, the development of the questionnaire was carefully designed to minimise common-method bias (CMB). For example, by measuring the constructs using different scale format, number of scale points and anchor labels (Podsakoff et al., 2012). In addition, the scale items were improved by reducing the ambiguity of the questions, making the questions simple, clear, specific and concise (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Moreover, to mitigate potential bias, the development of the items involved 'balancing' both positively worded (where agreement suggests a higher score on the fundamental concept) and negatively worded (where agreement indicates a lower score on the fundamental concept) assessments for each construct (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Three versions of the survey questionnaire were created: one in English for the British participants and two versions for the Omanis, one in English, modified and the other one was translated to Arabic. As some Omanis have a first language other than Arabic, considering the various languages spoken in Oman, the Arabic version might not be comprehensible to all, particularly the older group. Additionally, there exists a significant difference between written classical Arabic and the spoken dialect language. Therefore, completing the survey in classical Arabic could be challenging, even for those whose first language is Arabic. So, respondents were given the freedom to choose any of the available two versions to answer the survey. The researcher translated the scale items into Arabic. However, the items needed to be clearly understood when translated from one language to another and have valid and

reliable psychometric properties, while also taking advantage of the richness of the qualitative data findings when translated into a different language. In order to avoid relevant translation issues and reduce any distortion of meaning (Bazeley, 2018), following the translation of the items, the researcher sought the expertise of an Associate Professor in Arabic language and literature, as well as a professional translator, to review the translated items and ensure that they convey the same meaning as the original English text.

Prior to collecting data, ensuring that the scale items measure the concepts and the hypothetical constructs content validity was provided (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017) by presenting the survey questionnaire to a select group of interviewees from the previous study, as well as to a few Native English speakers from the UK, in order to assess the questionnaire's readability and determine an acceptable length. This was also done to reduce response bias that might arise from fatigue or boredom when responding to a lengthy questionnaire which refers to the consistent inclination to alter responses on rating scales, causing the recorded scores to deviate from the actual score of the respondent (Fischer, 2004). This can happen through the selection of either very high or very low answers (extreme or modesty response bias), or by shifting responses towards either end of the scale, known as the acquiescence response bias (Fischer, 2004). Acquiescence stands as one of the most prevalent response biases and pertains to an individual's tendency to agree with a statement regardless of its substance (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Schaffer and Riordan, 2003). Especially given that this is a cross-cultural survey questionnaire, controlling for such biases is crucial (Hofstede, 1980). Thus, based on the pilot study result, the research team judgment, and cultural appropriateness, the survey was reduced in length from 59 to 41, see Appendix 6.2. Reliability test of each variable is provided in Section 6.9.

6.5 Survey Design

The quantitative stage of this study follows a *survey design*. A survey design offers a quantitative way to examine trends, attitudes, and opinions within a population or explore connections between different variables of a sample within that population. This design enables researchers to address main questions such as descriptive questions, which seek to determine proportions or percentages within the population. Another question is questions related to the relationships between variables, investigating whether there are positive associations between different factors (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017).

The goal of a survey design is to obtain a significant amount of quantitative or quantifiable data related to two or more variables, typically numerous variables. These data are then analysed to identify patterns and relationships between the variables (Bell et al., 2022). The primary purpose of this study is to empirically evaluate whether the perceived phenomenon of workplace ostracism is similar across cultures or is perceived differently under certain conditions in a sample of two distinct cultures.

Survey research plays a significant role in social science inquiries in the 21st century. Surveys serve as a means to measure a wide range of topics, including sensitive topics (Stockemer et al., 2019). This approach enables us to make comparisons between social norms and ideals in different regions such as Western countries and Southeast Asia (Stockemer, 2019). Moreover, survey research is not limited to addressing research questions independently; it can also complement other research methods such as qualitative case studies or mixed-methods wherein surveys are used sometimes to confirm the conclusions derived from interviews in a previous stage within MMR (Stockemer, 2019). In addition, survey design yield rapid turnaround data with limited resources (Bell et al., 2022).

Other paradigms (eg, non-manipulated ostracism) need to be applied when measuring ostracism to avoid CMB (Rudert and Greifeneder, 2019). As a consequence, a cross-sectional survey design is deemed the best method for the quantitative part to the current study. *Cross-sectional design* involves gathering data from multiple cases, often a substantial number, through self-completion survey questionnaires as an example in which the respondents provide answers without the presence of the researcher (Bell et al., 2022) at a single point of time, not repeated (Stockemer, 2019).

Yet, cross-sectional surveys are not limited to capturing one-time events. For example, researchers often employ them to explore various research questions (Stockemer, 2019). Conducting the same study at regular intervals with the same or different individuals can be logistically complex, time-consuming, and expensive. As a result, cross-sectional studies often become the preferred choice for many researchers (Stockemer, 2019). In many cases, the application of cross-sectional surveys can be justified from a theoretical standpoint, which is in this case to diversify the methods used to measure ostracism apart from online experiments. Such studies still enable researchers to make inferences about the relationships

between independent and dependent variables (Stockemer, 2019; Bell et al., 2022) which the current study aims to test.

6.6 Sampling Frame

This section explains the sampling frame employed for this study including the process of selecting population and sample size determination, followed by an explanation of variable measures.

6.6.1 Sampling Type and Design

A *population* refers to the entire group of respondents from which the researcher wants information on (Stockemer, 2019). The population of interest for this study is actively full-time and part-time working employees across all industries. An estimation of the populations of both working samples (Oman and the UK) was forecasted according to the available secondary data and statistics[17].

The decision on sampling methods depends on the type of research instrument used for the study (Clark et al., 2021) as well other factors as such availability of online service providers, availability of resources, and the cultural differences between the two samples. Thus, different sampling procedures was used for each population explained below.

Sampling the Omani population

Due to the absence of online service providers that help to facilitate the recruitment of the targeted sample in Oman, the type of sampling for this population was a *nonprobability sample*, also referred to as *a convenience sample*, involves selecting participants based on their availability and convenience (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). In this case, the researcher distributed the survey using her social media account, LinkedIn. Social media often serves as a type of convenience sampling, especially when researchers approach their own social media contacts to conduct surveys. This approach resembles *snowball sampling*, as interactions with a social media post on a public page or group can spread across the

[17] Statistics on employment in the UK constituting the population for this study was taken from the website of the Office for National Statistics: www.ons.gov.uk , while for the Omani population, statistics on employment were obtained from the website of National Center for Statistics and Information: www.ncsi.gov.om.

network users, potentially reaching to the researcher's friends and their contacts who might also share the information directly to them (Bell et al., 2022).

While some researchers claim that nonprobability sampling is less desirable compared to random sampling (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017), others contend that non-probability sampling is as precise as probability sampling, especially when attempting to approach hard-to-reach participants (Bell et al., 2022). Historically, internet users have often been considered a biased sample of the population due to characteristics such as higher education, wealth, youthfulness, and lack of diversity in terms of ethnicity (Hargittai and Karaoglu, 2018). Nevertheless, in situations where a sampling framework is absent, the most effective approach to create a suitable sample is by distributing a questionnaire invitation through relevant online platforms or sharing it on websites and social media channels (Hargittai and Karaoglu, 2018). Therefore, it was assumed that in the Omani context only a specific age range uses LinkedIn, and those of higher education while older individuals and workers with lower levels of education utilise alternative online platforms such as WhatsApp which inclines that some participants within the inclusion criteria might be excluded. Hence, the researcher used WhatsApp as the second online platform, incorporated within the snowball sampling method, to distribute the survey to individuals who might not possess a LinkedIn account or find using WhatsApp more convenient. This choice was influenced by the widespread use of WhatsApp across all age ranges within Omani society over other platforms.

Furthermore, given the sensitivity of the researched topic, employing social media platforms to invite individuals, unknown to the researcher enhances the likelihood of anonymity (Hargittai and Karaoglu, 2018). This assumption is believed to have motivated participants to join the study, expecting that their responses to remain anonymous, thus increasing data confidentiality (Bell et al., 2022). In addition, despite the effectiveness of using online platforms to reach a large sample size at no cost, one issue with this approach was the difficulty in measuring response rates (Hewson, 2017). For instance, the targeted sample size took a month to achieve. Approximately 650 Omani respondents completed the surveys, but due to missing data from partially completed questionnaires, these were excluded, resulting in a final sample of only 333 respondents. To address the low response rate, and expedite the process, the researcher informed potential participants about the study before sending the survey link and asked them to distribute it. This practice has been found to be an effective

method in conducting online surveys, enhancing response rates. Additionally, following up with participants to remind them to participate in the survey at least once has been highlighted as an effective approach (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017).

Sampling the British population

On the other hand, the sampling method for the UK population was based on *probability sampling*, specifically *a simple random sample*. Probability sampling involves the selection of a sample using simple random selection, ensuring that every unit in the population has a known probability of being chosen (Clark et al., 2021). This method is considered to produce a representative sample.

The primary aim of probability sampling is to minimise sampling error, which refers to differences between the population and the sample that might occur despite the random selection of the sample due to the methods of selection (Clark et al., 2021). In many social settings, it is challenging to match the characteristics of a sample to those of a population and to avoid sampling error, making randomisation crucial in overcoming the influence of both known and unknown factors by selecting cases randomly (Stockemer, 2019; Clark et al., 2021). A detailed method of recruiting respondents is provided in the subsequent sections.

The data collection method used was an internet survey administered online. Conducting the survey online proved advantageous, as participants could access the survey link conveniently through their mobile phones or any other electronic devices (Bell et al., 2022). A third-party commercial application service provider, Qualtrics, was employed to design the survey in both languages. However, for British participants recruitment, they were recruited through Prolific, a service provider for participants' recruitments in exchange for fees. While all Omani participants were invited via the LinkedIn page tool and WhatsApp text message and took part in the survey voluntarily without any monetary incentive, see Section 6.8.

6.6.2 Sample Size

A *sample* is a subset of the population that the researcher investigates to collect data (Stockemer, 2019). In practice, the decision on sample size should not be based solely on its magnitude to enhance the likelihood of sample precision, but also on a range of estimates such as the nature of the variables that constitute the research instrument and population

heterogeneity (Clark et al., 2021), and the specific analysis plans and objectives of the current study (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). Therefore, after reviewing the workforce statistics for both the Oman and UK population, the sample size was determined based on aggregate estimates and theories as follows:

1. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) determined the relationship between the population and the sample size. They contend that as the population grows, the sample size also increases, but the rate of increase diminishes. Eventually, the sample size relatively stabilises at slightly over 380 cases. Particularly, they argued that if the population is expected to be a million or over (N = 1000000), then the sample size representative of the population is 384.
2. On the other hand, Heo and Leon (2010) argued that identifying the required sample size is based on the statistical models used for analysing data to test the variables. Hence, the sample size required to identify an effect size in a three-way interaction is precisely four times larger than the sample size required to detect the same effect size in a two-way interaction (Heo and Leon, 2010). Thus, it was inferred from this study that achieving large sample size enough for obtaining more robust and reliable results when dealing with complex statistical models such as the three-way interactions is essential. In addition, large sample size increases accuracy of the inferences made (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017).
3. A third means used to identify the required sample size was via examining empirical studies that used three-way interaction (eg, Sun et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2020). It was found that researchers used samples ranges between 407-480. However, studies on ostracism, aggression and bullying that adopted a three-way interaction (eg, Zhao et al., 2016; Fiset et al., 2017; Blomberg and Rosander, 2020; Weng et al., 2020; Al-Shamaileh et al., 2022; Cruz et al., 2022) used sample size ranges between 135 to over 1000. Thus, there is relatively variation in the optimal sample size for this type of statistical model.
4. However, in survey research, following sample sizes used in previous studies are not the best approach. Therefore, power analysis was found to be the optimal solution in obtaining a sufficient sample size (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). G*power software program was used which determines that the sample size should be (n= 271).

5. Finally, since this study is part of a cross-cultural research, taking into consideration this factor is essential when determining the sample size so that it represents the samples at the cultural level and the individual level. For example, there is a possibility that existing differences might not be found when sample size is small, leading to low statistical power (Fischer and Poortinga, 2018). Low statistical power in cross-cultural samples, does not only mean a reduced likelihood of detecting statistically significant effect, but a reduced likelihood that a detected significant effect is truly genuine and replicable, rather than being a result of random fluctuations (Fischer and Poortinga, 2018). Therefore, based on the above G*Power calculation, it was figured that in each country, the targeted sample should be at least 271 with a total of n= 542.

6.7 Ethical Considerations

The researcher upheld ethical considerations at all stages of the study: before commencing the research, during data collection, while analysing the data, and when reporting the results.

Prior to commencing the data collection, ethical approvals from the ethics committee at University of Leeds Business School, and the National Centre for Statistics and Information in Oman were granted. Critically, when the research involves sensitive topics, researchers have a greater responsibility to implement additional safeguards to ensure robust and reliable procedures that protect research participants. In fact, as the online venue becomes more widely recognised as public, the researcher's responsibility to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of individuals using that venue, as well as seek their informed consent, reduced. Hewson and co-workers (2016) proposed that data intentionally shared in publicly accessible internet platforms, can be employed by researchers without requiring informed consent, as long as the respondents' anonymity is protected. Indeed, gaining informed consent by explaining necessary information on participants right to remain anonymous, withdraw, and so was clearly outlined using simple language and ensuring the information are not excessively lengthy (Hewson et al., 2016; J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017).

In addition, choosing a site for research only based on personal interest in the outcomes is not advisable. Thus, in order to maintain objectivity required for quantitative research (Hewson et al., 2016; J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017), participants from all sectors

and industries were invited to participate, and no question in the survey determined the sector or held any interest to the researcher.

However, despite the significant advantages of online surveys, challenges persist, especially in the context of cross-cultural surveys. For instance, adherence to the customs and norms of indigenous cultures stands as an essential ethical consideration, encompassing respect for culture, religion, gender, and other variations among participants and sites (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). Consequently, slight modifications were made, particularly concerning gender and religious enquiries, to ensure consideration of cultural sensitivity within the Omani sample. For example, an item under religious coping referencing the 'Bible' was omitted in the Omani questionnaire, since all Omanis follow Islam. Modification concerning gender types was also taken into account in the Omani questionnaire.

Because participation in the survey occurs independently of the researcher (Bell et al., 2022), it becomes challenging to verify the age of the Omani respondents recruited through social networks rather than via a web-based service provider. Legal and ethical requirements mandate a minimum age for participants to consent to research (Hewson et al., 2016). To address this issue, the researcher ensured that only participants aged 18 and above were invited and clearly outlined the required age range and employment status for the sample by adding a text box for the respondents to insert their age. However, none of the respondents were aged under 18.

Additionally, given the sensitive nature of the research topic and the survey questions, answering the survey was expected to evoke negative emotions and painful experiences. Some participants from both samples indeed conveyed this concern to the researcher through the contact details provided in the information page. Consequently, the researcher guided them to useful links offered by the survey for emotional support to both sets of participants, which they could access if needed. Finally, when analysing the data, the researcher ensures the transparent reporting of contrary findings by allowing the 'surprising findings' to emerge naturally even if they were contrary to expectations.

6.8 Data Collection

Using online survey service providers offered a wide range of response options for various types of questions, including scale response, matrix response, and multiple choice (Sue and

Ritter, 2016; Bell et al., 2022). It also provided customer support for any technical issues encountered by both the researcher and respondents and provided feedback for enquires that aided for a better designed survey conducted in both languages, Arabic and English. For instance, Qualtrics was not entirely accommodating to the Arabic language; nevertheless, all issues encountered by the researcher were promptly resolved upon contacting the provider. Moreover, by paying certain fees to recruit respondents, the online survey via service providers allowed the choice of sampling features to generate the needed sample (Sue and Ritter, 2016) and reduces the likeability of errors when processing the data (Bell et al., 2022) not to mention the rapid responses received in less than two hours achieving the sample size targeted. Furthermore, employing an online survey enabled diverse distribution options, where the researcher could use the published link to either upload the survey online (Sue and Ritter, 2016; Bell et al., 2022) or copy it to WhatsApp, a method employed for inviting Omani participants.

The survey was administered to employees drawn from various sectors (public and private). The total sample consisted of 736 respondents (403 British and 333 Omani) with an overall response rate of 51% for the Omani sample. The mean age of the respondents was 37.63. Of the sample, 35.2% respondents were males, 43.75% were bachelor's degree holders, while 30.97% with postgraduate holders. In terms of the employment contract type, 85% of the respondents were full-time employees. The Omani sample was 60.2% female, mean age = 39, postgraduate = 50.8%. While the UK sample was 17% male, mean age = 37, postgraduate = 24%. The sample shows relatively a balanced distribution between the two nationalities given the larger population of the British workforce compared to the Omani workforce.

6.9 Measures

The survey adopted Likert-style responses for all subcategories, with higher scores within these subcategories indicating increased levels of WO, adoption of coping mechanisms, job satisfaction, and wellbeing. The modified scale of workplace ostracism constituting 16 items (WO-16) were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1= Never to 7= Always. Whereas the items for the coping mechanisms were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= Does not apply to 5= Used always. Items for wellbeing were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= Never to 5= All the time. Finally, items for job

satisfaction were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= Strongly disagree to 5= Strongly agree, see Appendix 6.2.

The incorporation of reversed items has become a topic of debate in recent years. Reversed items are those necessitating recoding to ensure that all scale items exhibit a consistent directional relationship with the focal construct (Weijters et al., 2013). It directly addressed the application of these items as a method to mitigate the impact of acquiescence (Vigil Colet et al., 2020). A consequence of this inclination is the challenge in distinguishing whether a high score on a questionnaire reflects a high trait level or merely a propensity to agree with questionnaire items (Schaffer and Riordan, 2003). Thus, to improve internal consistency of the measure and reliability analysis (Field, 2017), both wellbeing and job satisfaction variables items were reversed improving the overall reliability of the questionnaire as shown below.

Workplace ostracism was calculated by assessing self-report 10-items measures developed by Ferris and colleagues (2008). This scale has been successfully used in past studies (ie, Wu et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2013; Yang and Treadway, 2016; Chung and Kim, 2017) merged with the six additional items derived from phase one as part of the intragrain process listed earlier. The WO 10-items demonstrated high internal reliability (Cronbach's α = .801), as did the WO 16-item version (Cronbach's α = .800).

Social support was measured using Carver et al. (1989) scale, speficially one item from the catogry seeking social support for instrumental resoans: "I talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem" and two items derived from seeking social support for emotional reasons: "I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives", and "I get sympathy and understanding from someone". The measure demonstrated good internal reliability (Cronbach's α =.798).

Religion was evaluated using 4-items measures of religious coping out of the original 15 items developed by Amer and colleagues (2008). Items included: "I prayed for strength", "I looked for a lesson from God in the situation", and "I recalled a passage from a religious text (eg, Bible, Qur'an)", and "I prayed to get my mind off my problem/s." The measure demonstrated high internal reliability (Cronbach's α =.816).

Avoidance was measured using previously validated Fitzgerald's (1990) 4-items scale measure. Items included: "I tried to just forget it", "I ignored it", "I pretended I did not notice", and "I tried to avoid the perpetrator." The measure demonstrated high internal reliability (Cronbach's α =.803).

Withdrawal two-items were developed directly from the qualitative data using interviewees' direct quotations. The two items are: "I attempted to ostracise the perpetrator", and "I stopped socialising with people." The measure demonstrated good internal reliability (Cronbach's α =.796).

Job satisfaction was calculated using Cammann and colleagues' (1979) 3-items measure. Items included: "All in all, I am satisfied with my job", "In general, I like working here", and "In general, I don't like my job". The measure demonstrated high internal reliability (Cronbach's α =.802).

Wellbeing was measured using the short form of Warr's (1990) depression-enthusiasm continuum of affective wellbeing. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which their job, over the past month, had made them feel: "tense", "calm", "relaxed", "worried", "anxious", and "comfortable". The measure demonstrated high internal reliability (Cronbach's α =.800).

Nationality participants were directly asked to write their nationality in a text box where (Omanis coded as 0, British coded as 1).

Control variables. Respondents were asked to indicate their gender (females coded as 0, male coded as 1), their employment contract type (part-time jobs coded as 1, full-time jobs coded as 2), and their educational level (secondary school education coded as 1, bachelor's degree coded as 2, and postgraduate degree coded as 3). Regarding age and tenure, respondents were requested to enter their age and tenure numerically into a text box.

6.10 Results

6.10.1 Data Preparation

Data screening involved addressing missing data and checking for outliers and normal distribution (Field, 2017). However, when dealing with a large sample, outliers become a greater concern compared to the issue of normality (Field, 2017). The data did not reveal any extreme outliers. Since all elements were attended through self-reported measures simultaneously by the same respondents, the potential issue of CMB could arise. Besides other measures taken to reduce CMB as noted earlier, this concern could be evaluated using Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The results indicated that two primary components were derived with eigenvalues greater than 1. The first primary component explained 32.749%, while the second primary component explained 46.457% of the total variance, suggesting that CMB was not a critical concern for this study.

Furthermore, because there are several predictors in this model, it was essential to examine multicollinearity to assess whether there is a significant correlation among the predictors (Field, 2017). For this purpose, the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance statistics were examined for each of the predictors concerning both wellbeing and job satisfaction. Results indicated that the VIF was less than 10, while the tolerance statistics were above 0.1, suggesting no cause for concern (Field, 2017).

6.10.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 6.1 displays the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of all the variables. Zero-order correlations indicate that demographic variables: age, gender, tenure, education and contract type correlate significantly with the study variables, therefore, they were included as controls in the subsequent analysis. Age correlated with higher wellbeing (r= .13, p<.01). Gender correlated with lower wellbeing (r= -.16, p<.01). Educational level correlated with lower religious coping (r= -.18, p<.01). Contract type correlated with higher religious coping (r= .21, p<.01). Whereas tenure correlated with higher religious coping (r= .27, p<.01), and higher wellbeing (r= .09, p<.05).

Congruent with the hypotheses, WO-16 correlated significantly with lower job satisfaction (r=-.42, p<.01), and lower wellbeing (r=-.44, p<.01). Withdrawal correlated significantly with lower job satisfaction (r=-.33, p<.01), and lower wellbeing (r=-.35, p<.01). Social support correlated significantly with lower job satisfaction (r=-.11, p<.01), and lower wellbeing (r=-.24, p<.01). While avoidance correlated significantly with lower job satisfaction (r=-.26, p<.01), and lower wellbeing (r=-.28, p<.01). However, religion

correlated significantly with lower job satisfaction (r=-.12, p<.01), and lower wellbeing (r=-.09, p<.01).

The hypothesised model was tested using regression analysis which is a statistical tool for examining relationships between variables. Typically, the goal is to determine the causal impact of one variable on another (Sykes, 1993). Specifically, multiple regression is employed which permits the inclusion of additional factors separately in the analysis, enabling the estimation of the effect of each factor. This approach is valuable for quantifying the impact of various simultaneous influences on a single dependent variable. Moreover, due to the potential bias from omitted variables in simple regression, multiple regression is often necessary even when the researcher is solely interested in the effects of one independent variable (Sykes, 1993). Particularly, this study runs the moderated multiple linear regression to analyse the data. In order to test the moderated multiple linear regression, IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows v29.0 was used. Specifically, the interactions among WO, nationality, and the coping mechanisms were analysed via PROCESS tool on SPSS (Hayes, 2018), as it is the best way to tackle moderation (Field, 2017). This analysis appears to be the preferred statistical method for evaluating interaction effects within the field of organisational sciences (Aguinis and Gottfredson, 2010). It stands out as one of the most commonly used, if not the foremost, approach for examining hypotheses related to interaction effects (Aguinis and Gottfredson, 2010).

Since PROCESS was used to conduct the moderated multiple regression analysis and test the hypotheses, centering of variables around their grand mean was performed automatically. This action facilitated the interpretation of main effects in the models containing interaction terms (Field, 2017) for both the 2-way and 3-way interactions.

Findings revealed interesting results. In support of Hypothesis 1a, the regression analysis showed, taking into account the control variables, that WO-16 was associated with lower job satisfaction (β= -.513, p < .001), and lower wellbeing (β= -.516, p < .001). The direction was as expected revealing that high ostracism experienced by employees is associated with lower job satisfaction and negative wellbeing.

Independent sample T-test was conducted to compare workplace ostracism between the Omani and the British employees. There were significant differences (t (731) = 4.1, p < .001)

in the scores with mean score for Omanis (*M*= 2.14, *SD*= .89) was higher than British employees (*M*= 1.89, *SD*= 1.72). The magnitude of the differences in the means is (*mean difference*= .24, 95%, *CI*: .26 to .36) was significant. Hence, Hypothesis 1b is not supported. Contrary to expectation, results indicate that perceived ostracism is more prevalent in the Omani work environments than in the UK (F= 15.8, $p < .001$). This suggests that Omani employees perceived to encounter more ostracising behaviours than the British employees.

Table 6.1: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Intercorrelations Among all Variables

	Variable	Mean	SD	Pearson Correlations												
				1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**
1	Age	37.6	9.89	1												
2	[a]Gender	1.65	.49	-.09*	1											
3	[b]Edu	2.76	.79	.15**	-.08*	1										
4	[c]Contract	1.85	.36	-.02	-.18**	-.15**	1									
5	Tenure	9.79	8.01	.57**	-.11**	.08*	.13**	1								
6	WO-16	2.00	.81	.01	.05	.02	.01	.02	1							
7	Withd	1.99	.84	-.08	.01	-.06	.05	-.05	.50**	1						
8	SP	2.42	1.06	-.03	.04	-.00	.06	.01	.39**	.45**	1					
9	Avoid	2.7	1.22	.02	.03	-.01	.01	.04	.48**	.56**	.48**	1				
10	RLG	2.47	1.43	.07	-.02	-.18**	.21**	.27**	.32**	.34**	.44**	.42**	1			
11	JOB	3.68	.99	.02	.01	.03	.03	.06	-.42**	-.33**	-.11**	-.26**	-.12**	1		
12	Wellb	3.08	.86	.13**	-.16**	.03	.01	.09*	-.44**	-.35**	-.24**	-.28**	-.09*	.52**	1	
13	[d]Nation	.55	.49	-.08*	.09*	.26**	-.32**	-.34**	-.15**	-.18**	-.19**	-.10**	-.66**	.05	-.03	1

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$

Notes. Edu= Education, WO-16= WO 16-items scale, Withd= Withdrawal, SP= Social support, Avoid= Avoidance, RLG= religion, JOB= job satisfaction, and Wellb= Wellbeing. [a]Gender ("0" female; "1" male). [b]Education ("1" secondary school education; "2"; bachelor's degree "3" postgraduate degree). [c]Contract type ("1" part-time; "2" full-time). [d]Nationality ("0" Omani; "1" British).

Two-way interactions

Two-way interactions were explored for the expanded WO-16 item scale to test H2a, H2b, and H2c. Simple moderation two-way interactions using moderated regression analysis provided support to Hypothesis 2a, and Hypothesis 2b. The interactions were in the expected direction. However, no support was found to Hypothesis 2c. To test the slopes significance, unstandardised regression coefficients from the regression equations were used to plot the effect of the IV (workplace ostracism) on the outcome variables, DVs (job satisfaction and wellbeing). The results of the simple slopes are presented in Figures 6.2-6.8 using Dawson's Excel Worksheet (Dawason and Ritcher, 2006). The results of the moderation analysis indicating the unstandardised regression beta coefficients are presented in Table 6.2.

Nationality was proposed to be a strengthening moderator (Z) in the hypothesised model, see Figure 6.1. However, to test the significance of nationality as the primary cultural factor presumed for this study, a two-way interaction was proposed to test the simple moderation effect of nationality on the relationship between WO and wellbeing and job satisfaction. As predicted, national identity; Omani and British significantly moderated the relationship between WO and lower wellbeing, and lower job satisfaction, accounting for an additional 0.80%, and 2.1% of the total variance ($F= 6.3569$, $p< .01$), and ($F= 16.0318$, $p< .01$) respectively. Remarkably, WO exerts a greater adverse impact on the wellbeing and job satisfaction of British employees compared to Omani employees, despite the finding above suggesting that WO is more pronounced in Oman than the UK workplaces, see Figure 6.2 & 6.3. Accordingly, Hypothesis 2a is supported.

Table 6.2: Results of Experienced Workplace Ostracism 2-way Moderation Analyses

	Wellbeing					Job Satisfaction				
Control variables										
Age	.01*	.00**	.00*	.00*	.01*	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
[a]Gender	-.25**	-.25**	-.25**	-.25**	-.25**	.10	.11	.11	.13	.13
[b]Education	.02	.02	.02	.02	.04	.08	.07	.07	.08	.08
[c]Contract type	-.07	-.08	-0.07	-.08	-.11	.08	.09	.11	.10	.10
Tenure	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01*	.01*	.01*	.01*	.01*
IV										
WO-16	-.71**	-.66**	-.46**	-.75**	-.39**	-.98**	-.86**	-.34*	-.90**	-.34**
Moderators										
Social support	-.21**					-.19*				
Religion		-.14*					-.24**			
Withdrawal			-.23*					-.05		
Avoidance				-.27**					-.27**	
[d]Nationality					.31					.82**
Two-way interaction										
WO-16 x Social support	.09*					.13**				
WO-16 x Religion		.06*					.11**			
WO-16 x Withdrawal			.03					-.06		
WO-16 x Avoidance				.09*					.12**	
WO-16 x Nationality					-.20*					-.38**
R^2	.25	.25	.27	.27	.26	.22	.23	.23	.22	.23

Notes. *p< .05, **p< .01; the figures indicate the unstandardised regression (β) beta coefficients. [a]Gender ("0" female; "1" male;). [b]Education ("1" secondary school education; "2" bachelor's degree; "3" postgraduate degree). [c]Contract type ("1" part-time; "2" full-time). [d]Nationality ("0" Omani; "1" British).

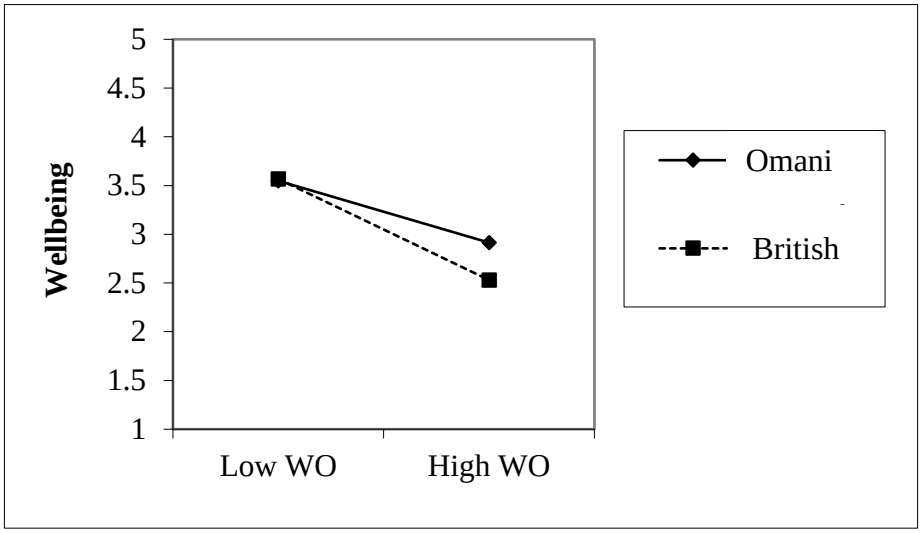


Figure 6.2: The Moderated Effect of Nationality on the Relationship Between WO and Wellbeing

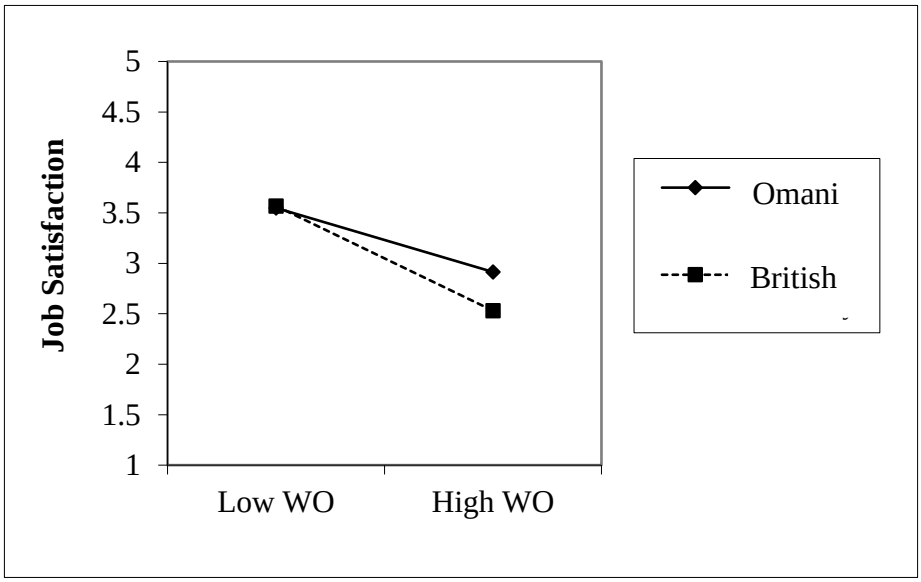


Figure 6.3: The Moderated Effect of Nationality on the Relationship Between WO and Job Satisfaction

Social support significantly moderated the impact of WO on wellbeing, and job satisfaction. It accounted for an additional 0.55% of the variance (F=4.3858, $p< .01$), and 0.94% (F=7.0434, $p< .01$) respectively. However, Omani employees are found to seek more social support ($M= 2.65$, $SD= 1.05$) than the British ($M= 2.24$, $SD= 1.03$), see Figure 6.4 & 6.5.

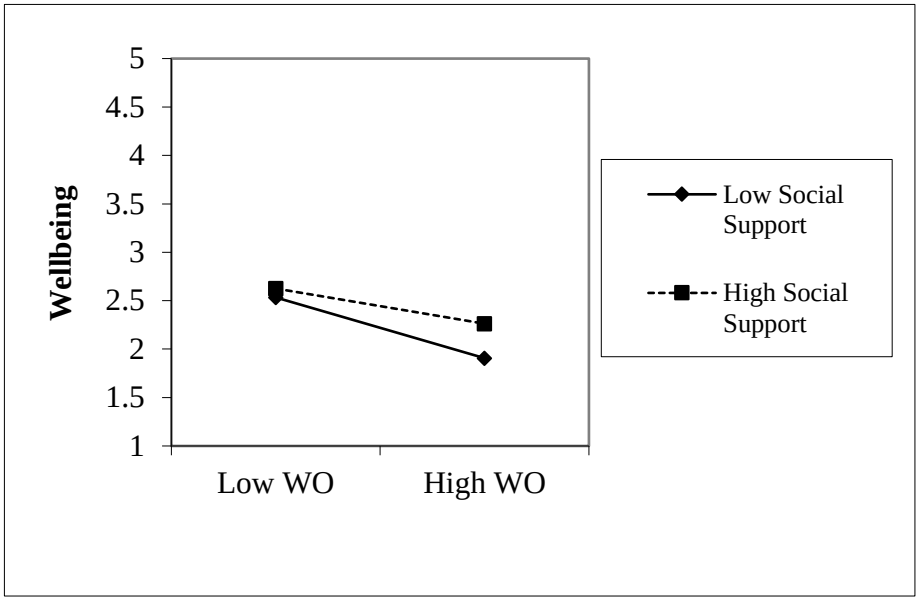


Figure 6.4: The Moderated Effect of Social Support on the Relationship Between WO and Wellbeing

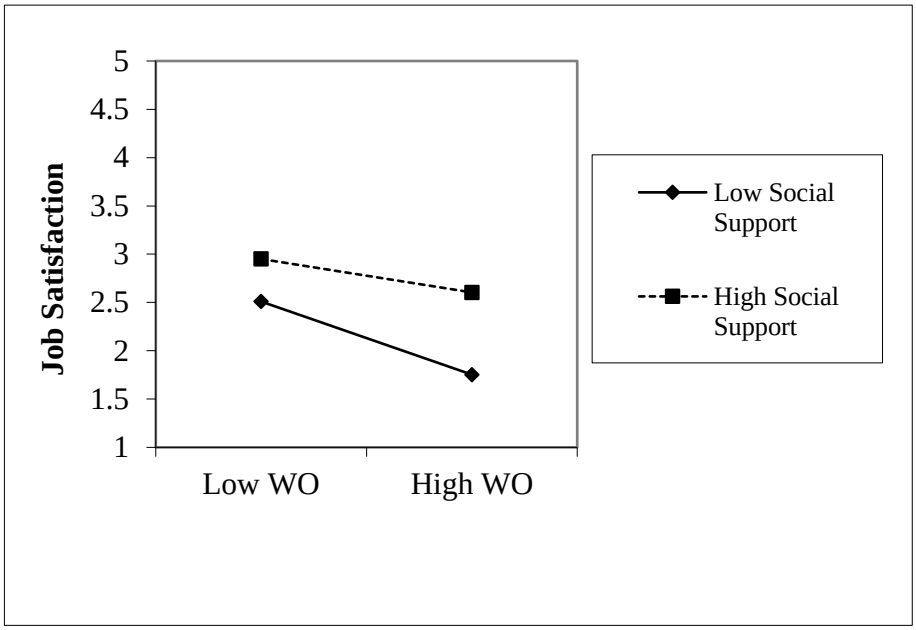


Figure 6.5: The Moderated Effect of Social Support on the Relationship Between WO and Job Satisfaction

In addition, religion significantly moderated the impact of WO on wellbeing and job satisfaction accounting for an additional 0.68% of the variance (F= 5.3528, $p < 0.01$), and 1.56% (F= 11.7807, $p < 0.01$) respectively. In fact, significant variance in terms of religious coping was found among the two groups (F= 141.604, $p < 0.001$) wherein Omanis are found to adopt more religious coping than the British. The mean scores for Omanis (*M*= 3.51, *SD*= 1.36) was higher than the British (*M*= 1.62, *SD*= .77), see Figure 6.6 & 6.7.

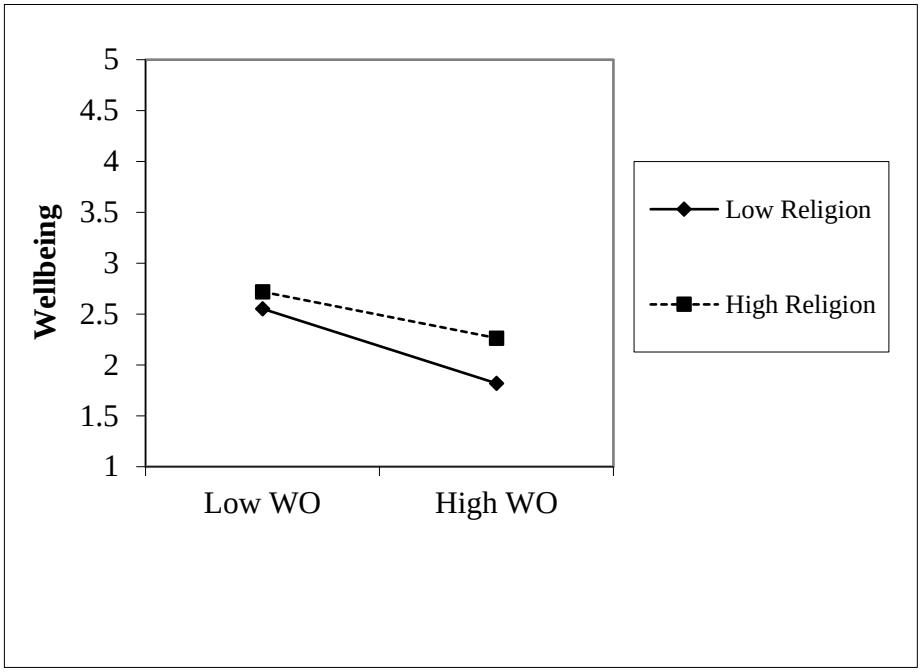


Figure 6.6: The Moderated Effect of Religion on the Relationship Between WO and Wellbeing

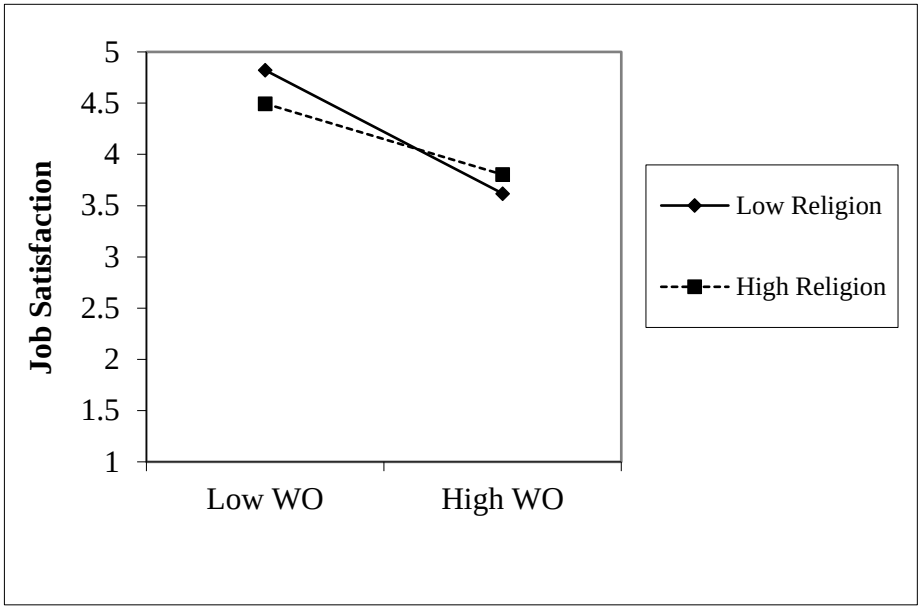


Figure 6.7: The Moderated Effect of Religion on the Relationship Between WO and Job Satisfaction

The simple slopes suggest that, as the levels of WO increases, engaging in more coping strategies (ie, seeking social support and using religious coping) significantly buffer the negative outcomes of WO. In support to H2b expectation, the relationship between WO and wellbeing and job satisfaction was less negative for those who received higher social support and engaged in more religious coping. Moreover, the impact of religious coping on the outcomes of WO revealed some interesting findings. For example, utilising religious coping

as a response to WO is evidently found to have a significant effect on job satisfaction than wellbeing, see Figure 6.6 & 6.7. The slope is less steep when participants adopt higher religious coping, attenuating the negative impact WO has on job satisfaction. Strikingly, greater utilisation of religious strategies was evident to be the most effective coping mechanism in mitigating the negative effects of WO on job satisfaction, far outweighing the influence of social support as a coping strategy for WO on job satisfaction.

As per Hypothesis 2c, avoidance significantly associated with lower wellbeing, and lower job satisfaction, accounting for an additional 0.94%, and 0.91% of the total variance ($F= 7.5221$, $p < 0.01$), and ($F= 6.9041$, $p < 0.01$) respectively. Contrary to expectations, the relationship between WO and wellbeing and job satisfaction was less negative for those who engage in more avoidant coping; thus, the interactions were not in the expected direction, see Figure 6.8 & 6.9. However, only avoidance significantly moderates the impact of WO on wellbeing and job satisfaction, whereas, withdrawal did not reach statistical significance, providing no support to H2c. As predicted, Omani employees are found to use more avoidance behaviours ($M= 2.84$, $SD= 1.22$) than the British ($M= 2.58$, $SD= 1.22$).

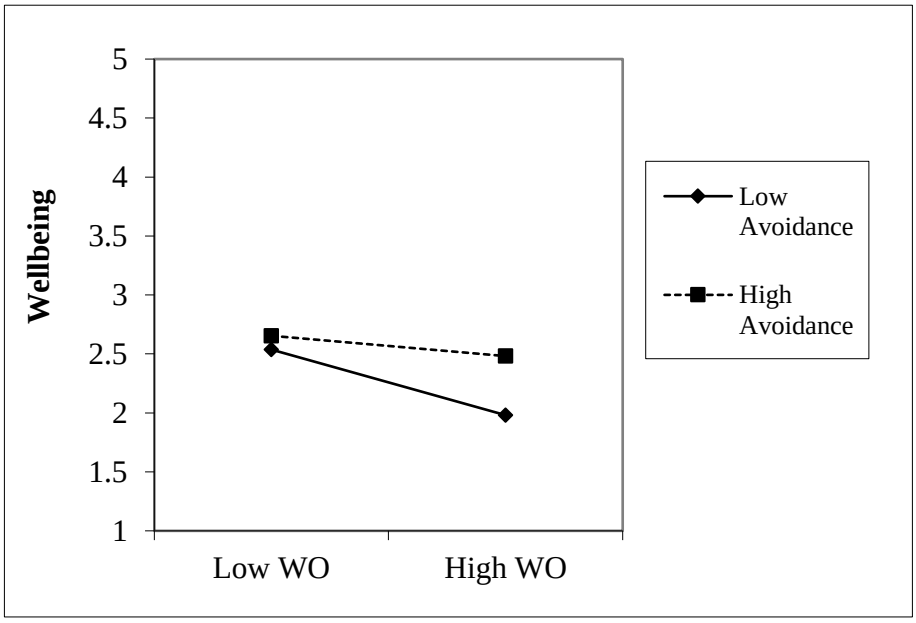


Figure 6.8: The Moderated Effect of Avoidance on the Relationship Between WO and Wellbeing

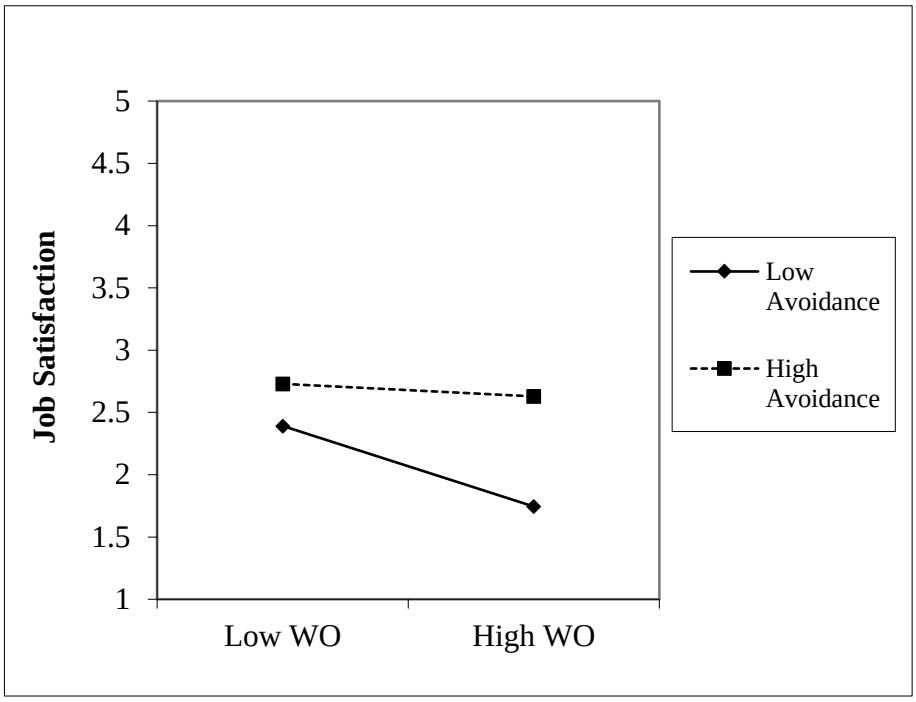


Figure 6.9: The Moderated Effect of Avoidance on the Relationship Between WO and Job Satisfaction

Three-way interactions

To further probe the three-way interaction in Model 3 on PROCESS, the results demonstrated only one significant interaction illustrated in Table 6.3. To better understand the nature of the identified three-way interactions, simple slopes were created and plotted using Dawson's Excel Worksheet (Dawason and Ritcher, 2006). Study 2 did not find empirical support for the three-way interaction. Workplace ostracism, nationality, social support, religion, and withdrawal did not interact to predict wellbeing and job satisfaction. Only the three-way interaction of WO, nationality and avoidance on job satisfaction was significant, explaining an additional 0.55% of the total variance ($F=4.2537$, $p < 0.05$). In addition, WO, nationality and avoidance significantly interacted to predict wellbeing explaining an additional of 0.86% of the total variance ($F=7.1159$, $p < 0.05$). However, the interactions were in the expected direction only for the British employees. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. To see the impact of these interactions between the two nationalities see Figure 6.10 & 6.11.

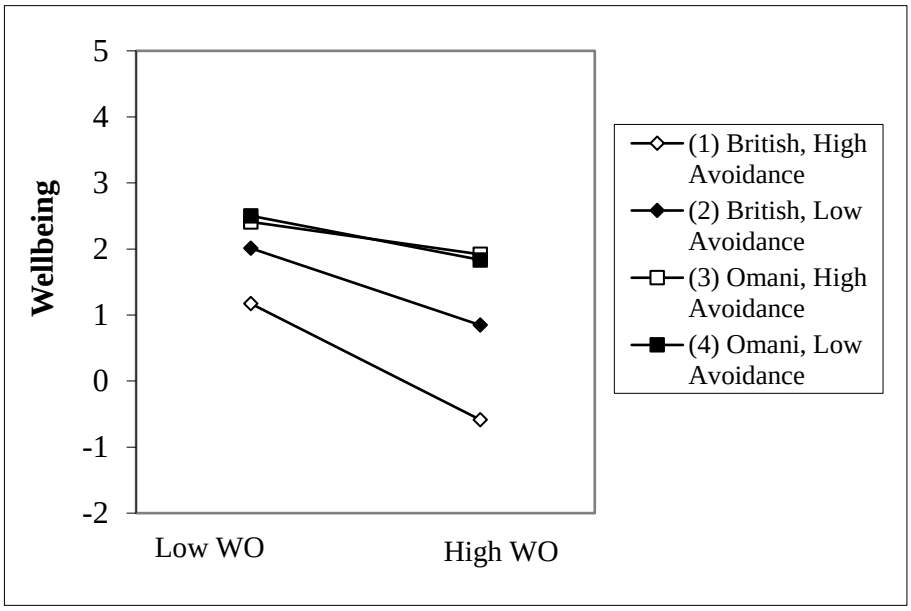


Figure 6.10: Plot of Three-way Interaction Between Workplace Ostracism, Nationality, Avoidance with Wellbeing

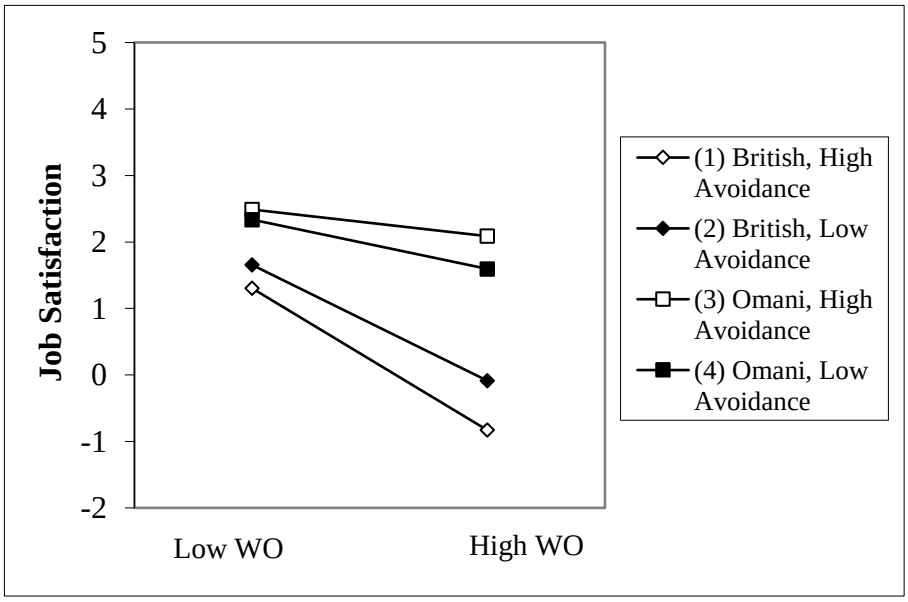


Figure 6.11: Plot of Three-way Interaction Between Workplace ostracism, Nationality, Avoidance with Job Satisfaction

Table 6.3: Results of Experienced Workplace Ostracism 3-way Moderation Analyses

	Wellbeing				Job Satisfaction			
Control variables								
Age	.01*	.01*	.01*	.01*	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
[a]Gender	-.24**	-.25**	-.24**	-.23**	.10	.11	.12	.13
[b]Education	.04	.03	.04	.04	.07	.07	.08	.07
[c]Contract type	-.11	-.11	-.11	-.12	.09	.08	.09	.09
Tenure	.00	.00	-.00	.00	.01*	.01**	.01	.01*
IV								
WO-16	-.62**	-.42*	-.33*	-.93**	-.70**	-.52	.06	-.93**
Moderators								
Social support	-.22				-.16			
Religioin		-.05				-.13		
Withdrawal			-.31*				-.05	
Avoidance				-.40**				-.46**
[d]Nationality	.01	.41	.14	-.79	.56	.44		
Three-way interaction								
WO-16 x Nationality x Social support	-.04				-.02			
WO-16 x Nationality x Religion		.01				-.05		
WO-16 x Nationality x Withdrawal			.02				.08	
WO-16 x Nationality x Avoidance				-.19**				-.18*
R^2	.26	.26	.28	.29	.24	.23	.26	.25

Notes. *p< .05, **p< .01; the figures indicate the unstandardised regression (β) beta coefficients. [a]Gender ("0" female; "1" male;). [b]Education ("1" secondary school education; "2" bachelor's degree; "3" postgraduate degree). [c]Contract type ("1" part time; "2" full-time). [d]Nationality ("0" Omani; "1" British).

Interestingly, it can be observed from Figure 6.10 & 6.11 that engaging in higher avoidance as a coping mechanism with WO was only detrimental for the British employees' leading to reduced wellbeing and job satisfaction. On the contrary, higher avoidance behaviours seem to buffer the negative impact of WO, namely negative wellbeing and job dissatisfaction for Omani employees. By examining the results of the independent sample T-test to compare the means of the two groups, it is evident that the British exhibit fewer avoidance behaviours than the Omanis, as predicated. Taken together, these patterns provide no support for Hypothesis 3, see Table 6.3. The support for each of the proposed hypotheses is summarised in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Summary of Support for Hypotheses

Hypothesis	**Supported?**	**Supported Hypothesis**
H1a: Workplace ostracism is negatively associated with (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction.	Supported	Workplace ostracism is negatively associated with lower wellbeing, and lower job satisfaction.
H1b: Workplace ostracism is more prevalent in the UK than is in Oman.	Not supported	-
H2a: Nationality will moderate the relationship between WO and (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction, such that the relationship will be more negative in the British context than in the Omani context.	Supported	Nationality moderated the relationship between WO and wellbeing, and job satisfaction, such that the relationship was more negative in the British context than in the Omani context.
H2b: Social support and religion will moderate the relationship between WO and (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction, such that the relationship will be less negative for those who receive higher social support and engage in religious coping.	Supported	- Social support moderated the relationship between WO and wellbeing, and job satisfaction, such that the relationship was less negative for those who received higher social support. - Religion moderated the relationship between WO wellbeing, and job satisfaction, such that the relationship was less negative for those who engaged in religious coping.

H2c: Avoidance and withdrawal will moderate the relationship between WO and (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction, such that the relationship will be more negative for those who engage in higher avoidance, and withdrawal behaviours.	Not supported	Avoidance moderated the relationship between WO and wellbeing, and job satisfaction.
H3: High workplace ostracism, nationality, and all coping mechanisms will interact to predict (a) wellbeing, and (b) job satisfaction, such that Omani's who use more religious coping will experience higher wellbeing and job satisfaction, than UK employees who use religious coping. However, it is expected that Omani employees who use more avoidance and withdrawal will experience lower wellbeing and job satisfaction, than UK employees who engage in these coping behaviours.	Not supported	High workplace ostracism, nationality, and avoidance interacted to predict wellbeing, and job satisfaction.

6.11 Findings: RQ4

Pertaining to the overarching research question, RQ4, Study 2 offers answers to this question resulting from the integration of the two data sets obtained from the qualitative study in Phase 1 and the quantitative study in Phase 3. Discussion of this cross-cultural mixed-methods research results is elucidated in the following passages.

RQ4: How does the experience of workplace ostracism differ in the Arabian Gulf States workplaces, compared to the Western workplaces?

The study reported in this research utilised a survey design to explore the conditions under which ostracised employees may experience low job satisfaction and negative wellbeing in both cultures and the most effective coping mechanisms they used to cope with WO. As hypothesised, it was found that: (1) workplace ostracism is positively related to low job satisfaction and negative wellbeing, (2) workplace ostracism is perceived to be more prevalent in Omani work environments than in British work environment, (3) the effect of WO on employees' wellbeing and job satisfaction is more severe for British employees than

for Omani employees, (4) both Omani and British nationality, and avoidance strengthened the negative effects of WO on job satisfaction and wellbeing, (5) the Omani and British nationality and avoidance jointly moderated the impact of WO on job satisfaction and wellbeing, (6) none of the two nationalities and social support, religion, and withdrawal jointly moderated the influence of WO on job satisfaction and wellbeing. The current study complements Study1 in identifying the occurrence contexts of WO. As such, this study provided a better understanding of why and when ostracised employees experience less job satisfaction and negative wellbeing in two opposing cultural settings.

Nationality as a cultural dimension

The overall trend in the literature on nationalism concerns the role of nationality on work-related outcomes (Köllen and Kopf, 2022), which was supported. Nationality emerged as a significant predictor for both wellbeing and job satisfaction, aligning with Marchesi's et al. (2021) call to incorporate nationality as a factor in understanding cultural differences, particularly in its evident influence on the experience of ostracism. Thus, this is in good agreement with Du Toit et al. (2018) arguing that it is impossible to separate national culture from the person and the phenomenon as they actively contribute to shaping the context, they live in. As such, nationality represents a typical value to citizens. It is part of our identity that describes 'who I am' (Hofstede, 1983). Since people feel that national and regional differences are reality, they are a reality (Hofstede, 1983). The evidence found in this study points to the significance of nationality to management for political, sociological and psychological reasons (Hofstede, 1983). Thus, the role of nationality is deemed a vital cultural factor in understanding cultural variations (Schwartz, 2014; Marchesi et al., 2021), how employees might differ in their experience of WO, and in their response to the similar experience of WO, according to their cultural identity, namely nationality.

The prevalence of WO

Although sensitivity to exclusion is universal, is subject to cultural variations (Uskul and Over, 2017). Chapter 2 explored the contradictory findings from prior studies regarding the degree of sensitivity to ostracism across cultures and its subsequent impact (Pfundmair et al., 2015a; Sommer et al., 2017). According to the current study findings, workplace ostracism is found to be more prevalent in Omani workplaces compares to British workplaces. These findings refute previous results reported in Study 1 wherein participants did not encounter

full ostracism. This could be relatively attributed to the modified WO-16 scale items with newly developed items derived from contextual factors concerning the forms of ostracism, which probably have resonated more significantly with Omanis more than the British. However, one potential explanation to why ostracism is perceived to be more common in Omani workplaces than in British workplaces may relate to social norms, explaining why employees might interpret ostracism even if their colleagues' actions are non-purposeful (Yang and Treadway, 2018). Reports of ostracism are more likely to be prevalent in collectivistic cultures because its more perceived to be the case due to the high emphasise of social norms stressing direct and frequent interactions which contradicts the values of belonging to a collective society (Wu et al., 2016). For example, Arabs subscribe to the belief that "all strangers are kin," allowing for easy conversation and interaction with strangers (O'Neill, 2016). Generally, studies indicate that individuals from collectivistic cultures, when compared to those from individualistic cultures, tend to be more willing to trust strangers and effortlessly form new friendships (Schaafsma, 2017). Specifically, Omanis place less emphasis on interpersonal similarities with those who are dissimilar in the workplace (Toh and Srinivas, 2012), thereby, there is minimal conflict among them (Neal, 2010). Therefore, different groups in Oman appear to collaborate well, describing the culture as tolerant, relaxed, and a laid-back diversity culture (Neal, 2010). In contrast, British politeness, characterised by respecting others' privacy and maintaining personal space (Crystal and Russ, 2010), influences how individuals in the UK behave towards strangers, friends, relatives, and others (Yousif and Korte, 1995). Thus, if a person gets physically closer to a British person, the latter may perceive it as impoliteness, interpreting it as invading one's privacy, while such situations may be perceived as normal and acceptable in another culture (Ponton, 2014). Hence, due to cultural norms, inclusionary behaviours in collectivist cultures such as speaking to strangers or getting physically close, are not perceived as an invasion of privacy, rather as welcoming gestures (Emery, 2000; Nydell, 2018).

As a consequence, the cultural emphasis on individualism, where individuals are expected to 'mind their own business', is normatively accepted and is not necessarily interpreted as ostracism in a given culture. This makes it potentially challenging in a Western context to differentiate between actual ostracism and social norms surrounding respecting others' privacy. Especially given that individualists define self-concept as independent from others and their self-esteem is derived from one self-uniqueness (Schaafsma, 2017), unlike

collectivists that derive their identity from social group (Jahanzeb et al., 2018). As a result, due to the consistent interactions within the Arab Gulf region even with unfamiliar ones and given the notion that Arab hospitality and welcoming culture stands as one of the most prominent characteristics of Arab cultures (Sobh et al., 2013), instances of unintentional ostracism may be perceived as actual ostracism by the recipient as Arabs are constantly under the pressure to have concerns for others in all settings, which makes them more alert to instances of ostracism. This may explain the higher reports by Omani employees of ostracism incidents compares to the British. Put differently, a person from a collectivistic society may easily feel ostracised and notice the instance of ostracism if a culturally accepted norm is absent in their daily interactions, even if it is unintentional due to high social expectation of constant interactional involvement, and the social processes one should be aware of to show politeness and inclusiveness to the other party such as greetings and direct communication.

Conversely, cultural practices such as the process of greetings and F2F interaction do not carry the same weight in Western nations. For instance, the preceding chapter underscored the significance of greetings as an etiquette extending from verbal to non-verbal forms, and the initiation of greetings, thus confirming earlier research on the importance of the greeting process in Oman (Emery, 2000). Consequently, Arabs may exhibit greater social awareness towards these cultural cues compared to their Western counterparts, potentially perceiving themselves as more ostracised for picking up on numerous social cues and interpreting them as ostracism, whereas the British might not even notice them as they are not part of their culture. This is because what may be considered as ostracism within one context might not necessarily be perceived the same way in another context (Robinson et al., 2013). In fact, being a member of an individualistic culture means taking fewer behavioural cues from others and behaving in a more extraverted manner (Hofstede, 2001), which implies that highest attentiveness and sensitivity of collectivists to social cues than the Westerners. Indedd, culture is similar to stimuli that people face every day, making them attentive to different things differently, either consciously or unconsciously, such as to individuals or groups, spiritual or material concerns (Schwartz, 2014). Thus, this finding is in contrast to Yang and Treadway's (2016) argument that collectivists are less likely to be ostracised and perceive being ostracised compares to the individualists.

The effectiveness of coping mechanisms

In light of Glazer et al.'s (2021) suggestion to explore social support as a moderator in the field of CCR, particularly in relation to WO (Howard et al., 2020), this study enhanced our understanding of the significance of social support for the target of WO, assisting them in alleviating the painful effects of WO. Consequently, it becomes evident that social support serves as an effective coping strategy for dealing with WO across different cultures, corroborating the findings of Study 1. Similarly, cross-cultural researchers urged to include religion as a coping mechanism in the studies of social phenomenon as a significant cultural variance (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003; Vishkin et al., 2019). Particularly, Aydin and co-workers (2010) advocated for the incorporation of religion as a coping mechanism within the field of WO, aiming to address the gap in the literature regarding the importance of religion in individuals' daily lives, which inherently influences their coping strategies to overcome distress. In response to this call, the present study filled this void by presenting evidence of the efficacy of religious coping in alleviating the adverse effects of WO on the ostracised employees, especially job satisfaction, which are consistent with previous results from Study 1.

On the other hand, withdrawal is conceptualised in this study as the same manner reaction to ostracism, did not significantly moderate the relationship between WO and wellbeing and job satisfaction. This outcome can be explained through the conservation of resource theory (COR), discussed in Chapter 4. As mentioned, COR posits that experiencing ostracism in the workplace results in resource and information deprivation, leading to subsequent losses such as work relationships and access to essential resources and advice (Robinson et al., 2013), information exclusion (Zimmerman et al., 2016), and knowledge withholding behaviour (Zhao et al., 2016; Riaz et al., 2019). Hence, the potential loss of resources that employees facing ostracism may encounter if they choose to completely shun the perpetrator might motivate them to adopt coping mechanisms aimed at preserving their resource access. However, this is rendered difficult if withdrawal is the chosen coping mechanism; therefore, it is expected that employees deemed withdrawal as the most ineffective coping strategy due to the potential costs associates with it. Furthermore, given that this study examines ostracism within workplace settings, where perpetrators are typically the target's managers or colleagues, interaction with one's manager or colleagues is often necessary for task completion. Hence, avoiding interaction with these parties may be inevitable. Consequently, withdrawal may be more commonly employed in contexts outside of the workplace, where

communication between the parties involved is not constrained by work-related requirements and goals accomplishments. In other words, endorsing other coping mechanisms with WO but withdrawal may indicate that coping strategies that are directed toward the source of ostracism (ie, expectedly their manager) bear more pragmatic meaning to employees of both groups than did coping strategies that are directed towards a different source of ostracism (ie, someone outside of the workplace).

In contrast to prediction, for Omani ostracised employees with high avoidance behaviours, the impact of WO on both job satisfaction and wellbeing was less negative compared to the British. On the other hand, for ostracised British employees with higher avoidance behaviours, the effect of WO on job satisfaction and wellbeing was more negative than when they engage in less avoidance behaviours. That is to say, the increased involvement in avoidance behaviours resulted in a more unfavorable consequences for the British, conversely contributing to an improved consequences for the Omanis. To elaborate, when faced with WO, British employees who exhibit more avoidance behaviours have worsen their mental health and satisfaction with their job. Whereas Omanis exhibiting more avoidance behaviours in the face of WO have higher job satisfaction and wellbeing. On the contrary, Omani employees who exhibited less avoidance behaviours, experienced worse wellbeing and lower job satisfaction when facing such ostracism. While ostracised British employees who exhibited less avoidance behaviours, experienced better wellbeing and higher job satisfaction. Intriguingly, avoidance behaviours are not always deemed an aversive coping mechanism due to sensitivity to cultural differences.

The prominence of avoidance behaviours

It is concluded that nationality impacted the level of avoidance adopted in each cultural setting. As noted, Omanis engage in more avoidance behaviours than the British. This result could be attributed to two reasons. First, for Omanis, avoiding confrontational behaviours maintains the appearance of peace, as it is seen as an approach to save face (Al Zidjaly, 2017) and positive social reputation (Chen, 2018), given that confrontation in such cultures is viewed as rude and impolite (Jahanzeb and Fatima, 2018). The results align with prior research which highlights that collectivist societies tend to avoid confrontation (Chua, 1987; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 2001) to avoid undesirable consequences associated with confrontation in such cultural settings. Congruent with the literature (Hans and Bariki, 2012), and the

inferences made from Study 1, the findings confirm that Omani organisational culture is conflict-avoidant justifying the prevalence of avoidance behaviours. On the other side, in the British work environments, avoidance is evident to be ineffective for dealing with work conflict (Tjosvold and Sun, 2002), therefore, it is less prevalent in such contexts.

Second, gender differences could be another explanation. For example, most respondents were females (64.8%). Women workers tend to prioritise friendly atmosphere, cooperation, and friendly manager in comparison to men workers who prioritise advancement and earnings (Hofstede, 2001). Hence, it is very possible for women to embrace avoidance behaviours and choose to stay silent about their encounters with WO. This could be a strategic approach to preserve friendliness and prevent future instances of ostracism, especially that assertive behaviour by women is perceived as bossy, resulting in a higher likelihood for women to experience ostracism compared to men with similar assertive qualities (Howard et al., 2020). More detail on avoidance as a prominent coping emerged from the current study is provided in Chapter 7.

The severity of workplace ostracism

Two-way interactions demonstrated that the effects of high workplace ostracism are more negative for British employees compared to Omanis. In other words, the findings indicate that the detrimental effects of WO are more severe on British employees than on Omanis. Also, three-way interactions indicate that despite avoidance being considered a negative coping strategy (Carver et al., 1989), it seems to contribute positively to Omanis' wellbeing. Initially, the researcher anticipated that this thesis would explore why excessive involvement with avoidance behaviour is harmful in Arab societies, aiming to call for a more transparent approach to conflict resolution rather than avoidance. However, to her surprise, the results indicate the opposite of her initial expectations. This finding marks a significant result, demonstrating that avoidance behaviour not only appears to be widespread in Arab Gulf workplaces, as expected, but is also more beneficial for Omanis when compared to situations with less avoidance, which was not expected.

This result could be attributed to the notion than even if Arabs resort to negative coping strategies such as avoidance that result in higher stress, their families and friends protect them from further decline of their wellbeing and the potentially harmful negative coping mechanisms that could result in more severe health and behavioural issues (Alkaid Albqoor

et al., 2023). This aligns with both Study 1, which revealed the frequency of emotional social support sought by participants, particularly from family, and Study 2, which showed that Omanis receive higher levels of social support compared to their British counterparts. It is then, appears that participants are able to avoid the negative emotional consequences caused by avoidance by venting to their support systems.

Indeed, the adoption of avoidance strategies such as cognitive appraisal over other coping mechanisms depends on cultural background and religious affiliation (Aydin et al., 2010; Mao et al., 2018). Specifically, religiosity was argued to be a leading force to adopting more abstract thinking (Zimmer et al., 2016). This supports the observation from the literature that avoidance behaviour is one coping mechanism utilised after experiencing ostracism by collectivists (Pfundmair et al., 2015a) particularly the use of abstract thinking, as one form of avoidance (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), which helps the target of ostracism to view this experience from a more positive perspective, thus experience more positive affect (Pfundmair et al., 2015a). This is argued to be the case, due to alignment with Study 1 outcomes that religious coping was one of the most prominent coping strategies adopted by interviewees, and Study 2 results showing Omani employees to utilise more religious coping than the British.

Furthermore, masculinity-femininity cultural dimension provides one justification as it affects the meaning of work in people's lives. For example, Arab countries are classified as feminist countries due to religion where life quality and concerns for relationships are more emphasised. Whereas the UK is classified as a masculine culture in which performance, competition, and material rewards are more emphasised (Hofstede, 2001). These characteristics are carried over from home to school to workplaces. Also, masculinity is about ego enhancement, while femininity is about relationship enhancement, irrespective of group ties (Hofstede, 2001). Since Arab nations have more feminine cultural orientation, displaying more avoidance behaviours is not just assumed a reflection of the feminine cultural dimension asserting social connection, but is also assumed as a self-protective behaviour used to protect social harmony, avoid direct confrontation, and restore employees' need for control, meaningful existence and power when encountering WO (Jahanzeb et al., 2018). The results support the concept of masculinity cultures which represents the West to have more burnout symptoms among healthy employees while fewer burnout symptoms among healthy employees are found in a feminist culture that represents Arab work environments as a result

of differences in characteristics of masculinity-femininity cultural dimension (Hofstede, 2001).

Since managers emerged to be the main source of ostracism, power-distance cultural dimension could be one possible explanation. Power-distance is the extent to which people accept that power in institutions and organisations is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1983). Consequences of WO may differ, depending on whether ostracism comes from the co-workers or the supervisors (Mao et al., 2018). In certain cultures, such as collectivistic cultures, individuals with higher power who engage in ostracism often perceive themselves as having legitimate authority over others, making the resulting exclusion appear more justified. They rely on this unequal power dynamic to rationalise and defend their mistreatment of others (Mao et al., 2018). Consequently, it is plausible to anticipate that victims of WO within such societies may come to accept this unjust treatment and are less likely to view it as immorally treatment (Wu et al., 2016; Mao et al., 2018). Hence, in societies characterised by a greater power-distance, those perpetrating ostracism may experience less dehumanisation compared to their counterparts in societies with lower power-distance (Mao et al., 2018). Simultaneously, the targets in high power-distance societies may endure less perceived threat and experience less pain, as they may interpret such treatment as an inherent aspect of their societal structure (Mao et al., 2018). As a consequence, they are more tolerant to ostracism enacted form higher authorities such as managers or senior colleagues (Wu et al., 2016; Mao et al., 2018). This is particularly noteworthy considering that, in individualistic cultures, tolerance towards CWB is unacceptable. This contrasts with collectivistic cultures, where CWBs are typically ignored (Hofstede, 1984). Therefore, it is argued that when individualists are ostracised, they are less inclined to tolerate being ignored, thus experiencing more negative affect that adversely impact their wellbeing and job satisfaction. On the contrary, as collectivists are more acceptable to power imbalances, they appear to be more tolerant of WO, experiencing lesser adverse effects on their mental health and job satisfaction.

Meta-inferences

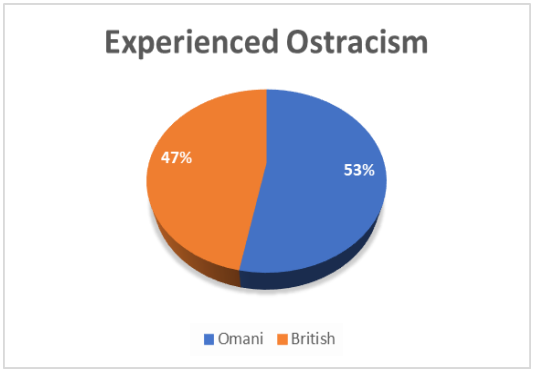
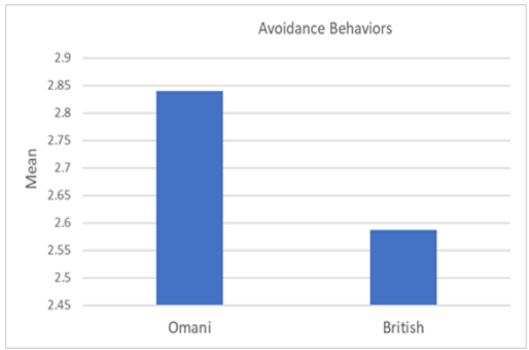
By integrating empirical data of the two studies and specifically merging them (Fetters et al., 2013), meta-inferences were drawn from the mixed-methods interpretation illustrated in a joint table, see Table 6.5. Generally, the MMR findings are only partially consistent with the

QUAL findings. These results inexplicably indicate that, although the literature suggests a significant influence of social support (Howard et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023) and religion (Emam and Al-Lawati, 2014; Hales et al., 2016) in alleviating the adverse effects of WO on employees, these two coping strategies did not interact with workplace ostracism and nationality in predicting wellbeing and job satisfaction, as predicted in Hypothesis 3. These results diverge from the qualitative findings discussed in Chapter 5 that highlighted social support and religious coping mechanisms as the most significant coping strategies adopted by participants. This may be due to the fact that social support and religion constructs items tested in this study were limited to only a few aspects of the constructs, assessing only a subset of a variety of sub aspects under each construct (ie, only one item of the instrumental social support and two items of the emotional social support) in alignment with participants from the qualitative study description of these constructs. Likwise, religious coping consists mainly of three domanis (social, behavioural, and cognitive) (Adam and Ward, 2016). However, in this study, items under the religious coping construct only measured some aspects of the behavioural and cognitive religious coping, particularly coping to find meaning, to gain comfort, and to gain control (Amer et al., 2008) according to participants' narratives on religious coping they engaged in. Thus, since both social support and religion are broader constructs with specific categories, perhaps the impact of the untested categories of both constructs might have had effects on the interaction if included. As such, the qualitative findings provided information about the spectrum of opinions on the forms of WO and the tactics participants used to cope with it from a singular culture, but the scales in particular were illustrative showing the existence of polarisation of opinions about these factors among two cultural groups.

Overall, this cross-cultural mixed-methods study underscored the prevalence of workplace ostracism across distinct cultures, its detrimental effects, the most effective coping mechanisms, as well as the severity of WO in two culturally different countries: Oman and the UK. It illustrated the universality of workplace ostracism across cultures, while also revealing cultural nuances in terms of how WO is perceived, its types, frequences, and effectiveness of coping strategies and their impact on employees' wellbeing and job satisfaction. It affirmed the notion that what may be effective in one cultural context may not be as effective in another (Bouchara, 2015). This was evident by the result of the current study that avoidance, despite being considered a passive and negative coping strategy

(Fitzgerald, 1990), appears to be beneficial in certain cultural contexts but not in others, highlighting the importance of nationality as a cultural dimension in shaping cultural differences when examining social phenomena.

Table 6.5: Joint Display Visual Indicating the Final Cross-cultural Mixed-methods Interpretation of the Exploratory Sequential Design

Workplace Ostracism Across Cultures		
***Study 1:* Qualitative themes showing Omani employees' experience with WO.** **RQ1:** How is workplace ostracism experienced in the Arabian Gulf States, and what cultural-specific forms of workplace ostracism are encountered there?	***Study 2:* Quantitative results showing workplace ostracism experienced by Omanis and British employees across various industries, as well as the extent to which both groups engage in the identified coping mechanisms derived from Study 1.** **RQ4:** How does the experience of workplace ostracism differ in the Arabian Gulf States workplaces, compared to the Western workplaces?	**Mixed-methods findings interpretation (meta-inferences)**
Theme 1: Underemployment → • Lack of appreaction • Not being heared **Theme 2:** Ineffective communication → • Lack of warm greetings • Poor interactions		The observed phenomenon of workplace ostracism in Study 1(Phase 1: QUAL), explored through interviews with Omanis (*N*=15), unveiled distinctive contextual *forms* of WO illustrated in Theme 1 and 2, along with *emotion-focused coping* represented in Theme 3. Subsequently, these nuanced dimensions of WO and the coping strategies were employed to formulate items for a survey questionnaire (Phase 2: integration) for a questionnaire study (Study 2) conducted in two samples, Oman and the UK (*N*=736) (Phase 3: QUANT). Contrary to expectation, Omanis experienced heightened WO than the British. Further analysis utilising a 3-way interaction revealed that the differences in findings across datasets were indicative of only one significant coping mechanism: avoidance. Specifically, when nationality influenced the modified WO-16 scale items, it had a detrimental impact on wellbeing and job satisfaction, with the British participants reported significantly lower wellbeing and job satisfaction compared to the Omanis, despite employing less avoidance behaviours than the Omanis. Thus, MMR findings are only partially consistent with the QUAL findings.
Qualitative themes showing Omani employees' coping mechanisms with WO: **RQ2:** How do employees cope with workplace ostracism in the Arabian Gulf States? **RQ3:** How cultural and contextualising factors might have contributed to the way Arabian Gulf States employees cope with ostracism?		
Theme 3: Emotion-focused coping → • Social support • Religion • Avoidance • Withdrawal		

6.12 Summary

Chapter 6 reviews the second and third phase of this mixed-methods research, particularly the integration phase (Phase 2) and the questionnaire development phase (Phase 3) serves as part of the ESD. Phase 2, the integration process, mainly demonstrated the conversion of interviewees' quotes from Study 1 to design items for a new culturally sensitive survey questionnaire, followed by the development of hypotheses and finalising the cross-cultural survey design utilised for Phase 3, representing Study 2. The developed cross-sectional questionnaire contains established scales, along with new items directly derived from defined themes to measure an expanded dimension of workplace ostracism in a broader context. Furthermore, it addresses the reliability and validity concerns regarding the new measure.

The chapter demonstrates a hypothesised model adopted to test the formulated hypotheses. This model represents a three-way interaction developed to examine the complex interactions assumed between the variables hypothesised to significantly impact WO. Additionally, the chapter details the sampling frame used for this study, which involves determining sampling strategies, and sample size. It discussed the ethical considerations taken into account in conducting such a sensitive study in two distinct cultures.

Finally, this chapter answered RQ4 that focuses on examining cross-cultural differences in shaping the phenomenon of WO. In this chapter, results of the second study were presented within two independent cultural samples, Oman and the UK and reveals the outcomes after hypotheses testing. The results offer support for certain hypotheses but fail to support others. Similarly, meta-inferences interpreted from this MMR demonstrated partial consistency with Study 1.

The following chapter will delve into a discussion of the key thesis contributions drawn from the current cross-cultural mixed-methods study.

Chapter 7: General Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The overarching aim of the research is to investigate cultural nuances impacting the experience of workplace ostracism in both Arab Gulf States and the West. To address this, a cross-cultural mixed-methods research approach was employed, particularly exploratory sequential design. ESD involved two studies: the first (Study 1) utilised a qualitative component to identify culturally unique factors concerning WO, while the second (Study 2) incorporated a quantitative component to assess whether reported ostracism experiences among Arabs align with the Western conceptualisation of workplace ostracism. Generally, similarities in forms of ostracism and coping mechanisms were identified across cultures, with some culturally-specific nuances.

This chapter highlights the main findings and the key thesis contributions. First, it delves into discussing the general findings from Study 1, which underwent a thematic narrative analysis of 15 interviews with Omani employees described in Chapter 5. Findings from Study 1 answered RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. Second, it explains the general findings resulting from the integration phase that led to Study 2. The analysis is based on a cross-cultural survey questionnaire developed through testing hypotheses formulated and explained in Chapter 6. This study answered the central RQ4.

Chapter 7 further discusses the integrated MMR findings in light of the theoretical contributions of this thesis. The last part of the chapter considers the strengths and limitations of the research. Future research directions and practical implications for policymakers are suggested, and thesis conclusions are drawn.

7.2 Main Findings

The mixed-methods approach employed for this study has helped to tackle the diverse challenges associated with conducting cross-cultural research on WO. Study 1 utilises the self-identified perceptions of workplace ostracism from an underrepresented Arab Gulf State sample (Omanis) taking the perspective of the targets to guide the development of Study 2

utilising cross-cultural survey questionnaire administered to both Omanis and the British as two opposing cultures to capture maximum variations. This approach incorporates a high level of respondent participation, enhancing the cultural nuances and significance of the measure. This, in turn, contributes to better addressing the research questions and increases the feasibility and acceptability of the modified workplace ostracism scale items that was integrated with the one developed by Ferris et al. (2008) for potential application in a broader context, given the scale's internal consistency and validity. Taken together, synthesis of the qualitative and quantitative data allowed for identification of divergent and convergent findings. For instance, the emergence of novel contextual forms of workplace ostracism was linked to the introduction of the 'Al-Shura' principle, the greeting process, and the involvement of a third-party in perpetrator-target communication. Likewise, novel contextual coping mechanisms were religious coping, avoidance, and withdrawal behaviours manifested in a similar fashion of ostracism. This methodology led to a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between contextual factors and the phenomenon of WO among two culturally distinct samples.

Study 1

Results from Study 1 revealed descriptive information about how individuals construe themselves as being ostracised and how they cope with it. The study was based on data collected from Omani employees who provided information about the phenomenon of ostracism they experienced at work as the targets of ostracism mainly from their managers and the ways they adapted with such negative experience. Several culturally-specific forms of ostracism were generated from this investigation apart from the widely discussed forms of ostracism in the literature (ie, Ferris et al., 2008; 2017; Robinson et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2020). This suggests that Omanis employees, despite being new to the theoretical concept of 'silent treatment' characterised by the phenomenon of WO as all participants stated, can still identify the behaviours omitted by those perpetrating ostracism towards them. The ability of individuals to distinguish silent treatment from other overt forms of mistreatment implies the existence of ostracism in a distinct context, as recognised in the Western context. However, it also suggests that ostracism takes on broader dimensions influenced by specific contexts. This aligns with existing literature emphasising the need to explore ostracism in various contexts for a comprehensive understanding (Schaafsma, 2017; Mao et al., 2018). Participants employed both behavioural and emotional tactics to navigate the unpleasant

situations arising from the experience of ostracism, indicating that their perceptions and coping mechanisms were shaped not only by cultural norms and heritage but also by contextual factors such as religion.

Two key themes emerged from Study 1 concerning the forms of WO: underemployment and ineffective communication. The important findings from Study 1 reflected in the theme 'underemployment' indicate that the failure to involve employees in decision-making processes is viewed as ostracising, linked to the principle of 'Al-Shura,' signifying consultation is well-rooted in Islamic principles particularly concerning Islamic leadership. While the theme 'ineffective communication' indicates that the culturally and contextually unique manifestations of workplace ostracism in the Arab Gulf context involve the absence of warm greetings, and the usage of a third-party whether a colleague or an online mode of communication to send a message by the perpetrator to the target as the only way to communicate with the target, signifies ostracism. Additionally, the study sheds light on significant findings related to coping mechanisms, highlighting the contextual significance of religion as a coping strategy, confrontation avoidance, and withdrawal as a reaction to ostracism in a similar manner. These findings are important because they demonstrate the cultural distinctions in the perception of WO and in the way people across cultures deal with it.

Study 2

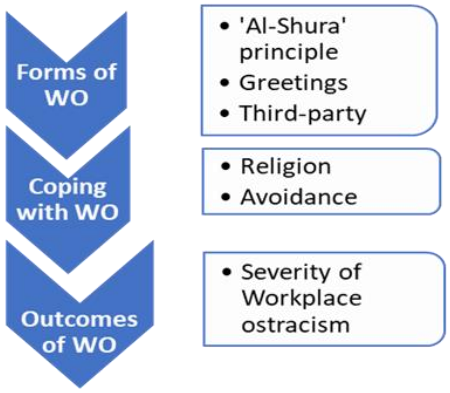
Study 2 highlights the significance of WO and nationality as a cultural factor in predicting employees' outcomes, namely wellbeing and job satisfaction. This reinforces the incorporation of national identity as a strengthening moderator to the manifestation of WO and as a predictor of outcomes. Additionally, this study underscores the moderating roles of the emerged coping mechanisms such as social support, religion, avoidance, and withdrawal within the proposed model. Three main findings were identified (a) interestingly, ostracism was more prevalent in Omani workplaces than in the UK, yet it seemed to exert a stronger impact on employees' wellbeing and job satisfaction in the UK than Oman, (b) as anticipated, several coping factors (ie, social support, religion) buffered the impact of ostracism on wellbeing and job satisfaction, however, the buffering effect of religion on job satisfaction seems to have an even more positive impact than social support, marking religion as the most effective coping strategy. A three-way interaction effect was observed between ostracism,

nationality, avoidance, and outcomes, such that engaging in avoidance behaviour seemed to have a beneficial effect for Omani employees, but a negative impact for British employees, highlighting a remarkable contribution of the role of avoidance coping in different cultural settings. Next section, key theoretical contributions is introduced.

7.3 Theoretical Contributions

From prior research there has been little discussion on ostracism across various workplace contexts; thus, others call for more research on ostracism taking into consideration organisational factors (Robinson et al., 2013), and cultural factors (Schaafsma, 2017; Uskul and Over, 2017). This call for more research on WO aims to gather additional evidence on the factors contributing to employees' satisfaction (Jensen and Raver, 2018), and wellbeing (Ferris et al., 2016). Reflecting their calls, this thesis advances our knowledge and understanding of WO phenomenon by exploring a new avenue of research, investigating a broader dimension of WO by considering other boundary conditions as urged by scholars (Smith et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2020), and contextual factors through employing various methods. Specifically, the findings of this research have broadened the understanding of workplace ostracism by incorporating insights from diverse disciplines, and feed into them with knowledge, including cross-cultural literature, religious studies, sociology studies, and inter-cultural communication studies. In fact, each discipline builds into one another in a way the following paragraphs will explain. From that sense, this thesis contributes to the extant theory in a number of notable ways concerning the forms of workplace ostracism, the coping mechanisms with WO, and the outcomes of WO, as shown in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: A Summary of the Thesis's Contributions to the Literature on Workplace Ostracism



7.3.1 Contributions to the Forms of Workplace Ostracism

From a theoretical perspective, the research presented in this thesis enhances our comprehension of workplace ostracism by leveraging cultural literature to extend existing research in this cultural domain. Specifically, the thesis primarily enhances the CCR by incorporating indigenous constructs into the ostracism theory that carries distinct meanings of job attitude and work phenomenon different to that of known universal constructs (Gelfand et al., 2017). A notable development in CCR and OB involves a concentrated effort to understand work behaviours using local constructs, which are specific to each culture because they describe job attitudes in distinct ways across different societies (Gelfand et al., 2017). The adoption of MMR has also allowed the development of context-related constructs as argued by Bamberger (2008). By seeking insights into these locally indigenous constructs, it becomes possible to construct more comprehensive theories applicable across diverse cultures (Smith et al., 2012). The creation and understanding of such indigenous constructs are not only significant for scientific purposes but also crucial for fostering sustainable national and organisational development, if they were well utilised and understood (Smith et al., 2012). Chapter 2 highlights that while there has been much research regarding ostracism in cross-cultural contexts, to date the body of research regarding the development of constructs based on indigenous knowledge is still lacking in depth (Gelfand et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012). Additionally, synthesising these constructs is crucial to ensure they are not deficient, that is not missing critical dimension relevant in other cultures (Smith et al., 2012). This approach introduces fresh perspectives to explore nuances in various contexts beyond those previously known.

‘Al-Shura’ principle

The central contribution of this thesis is its theoretical enhancement into the CCR on WO through the identification of contextual forms of workplace ostracism. One intriguing local construct that emerged from the exploration of narratives is ‘Al-Shura’ principle, which refers to consultation. Chapter 5 provides a rationale for why employees feel ostracised when excluded from the decision-making process. However, the interesting facet of this particular form of WO as a contribution is not only associated with the emergence of such local construct, but why it has materialised.

The general argument regarding societies with high power-distance such as Arab societies, is that in cultures characterised by high power-distance, centralised decision-making by managers is generally accepted and has indeed evident to contribute to employees' satisfaction (Hofstede, 2001). In fact, in nations with high power-distance, employees viewed their managers primarily as well-intentioned autocrats, while in low power-distance countries, subordinates perceived their managers as resourceful democrats (Hofstede, 2001). Consequently, Hofstede (2001) argued that the level of power-distance is directly correlated with the participative nature of the management system, indicating that in countries with low power-distance such as Western countries, the management tended to be more participative, while in high power-distance countries such as Arab countries, the management tends to be less participative. Also, in high power-distance countries, subordinates anticipate and accept a more directive approach, expecting to be informed rather than consulted (Hofstede, 2001). Furthermore, in high power-distance countries, middle-managers relied less on personal experience and subordinates and more on formal rules when addressing everyday issues. On the other hand, subordinates in low power-distance countries expressed a preference for 'consultative managers' who would involve them in decision-making processes affecting their work (Hofstede, 2001).

One could argue that given the prevalence of directive rather than consultative management styles in Arab workplaces, employees' needs to be consulted should not have emerged as a significant form of ostracism. However, two main reasons justify this finding, signifying the principle of Al-Shura as a remarkable contribution. First, while Hofstede (2001) argued that individuals from collectivist societies accept autocratic leadership, wherein managers make key decisions without consulting subordinates due to high power-distance, it appears that non-Arab individuals from other collectivist societies, seem to accept autocratic leadership (C.M. Siddique and H.F. Siddique, 2019). This could be attributed to the claim that, in comparison to East Asians, Arabs share more similarities with Westerners, in that both groups exhibit high levels of assertiveness (Kitayama et al., 2022), explaining the need for decision-making involvement. At the same time, seeking consultation is the product of both, Islamic teachings and Arab culture (Almoharby, 2010). Thereby, there appears to be resistance to the autocratic practice in Arab Gulf States. This resistance arises due to a clash between Arab cultural values and Islamic practices emphasising consultation (Almoharby, 2010) with the prevailing organisational practices in the Arab Gulf countries reflecting high power-distance.

In the Arab Gulf States, managers still seem to seek less input from their subordinates (C.M. Siddique and H.F. Siddique, 2019). This is to say that the prevailing autocratic leadership in Arab Gulf States (C.M. Siddique and H.F. Siddique, 2019) as a result of high power-distance, contradicts Islamic leadership and Arab values of seeking consensus and consultation, as well as Arabs assertive quality, thereby, instigating the feeling of ostracism when employees are not involved in the decision-making process. Hence, Al-Shura principle emerges as a particular form of ostracism as it was not discussed in the literature due to the prevalence of consultative and participative leadership in the Western workplaces (Hofstede, 2001).

Second, claiming that management in Oman is traditional using power and coercion supported by power-distance dimension by Hofstede is a narrow interpretation of the impact of culture on management practices in Oman (Al-Jarradi, 2011). Because organisational culture in Oman is subsumed within large Arab management research while Oman is a unique case (Common, 2011). The context of the Omani culture; however, appears to complicate the conceptualisation of management within organisations, challenging the Western theorisation on Arab autocratic leadership style (Al-Jarradi, 2011). For example, in Oman leadership largely represents a democratic approach and is much more constructive in a way that makes it proceed many other leadership systems elsewhere in the world, actively adopting the system of 'Al-Shura' (Almoharby, 2010). Consequently, since democratic style seems to be widely practiced in Oman, distinguishing it from the rest of the Arab world and the Gulf States, Omani employees are then expect to work under consultative leaders prior to joining labor force. But, when faced with autocratic leaders opposite to the claimed prevailing participative leaders, the feeling of ostracism occurs, and the lack of engagement in decision-making will appear as a dominant form of consultation as revealed by Study 1.

In essence, this thesis contributes to WO literature by challenging Hofstede's (2001) argument that highly collectivist cultures passively accept coercion stemming from high power-distance, offering a more nuanced interpretation based on managerial practices in Arab organisations, as evidenced in this study and in previous research on Omani organisations (eg, Neal, 2005; Almoharby, 2010; Common, 2011; Al-Jarradi, 2011), particularly as one of the top needs for Omani employees is to be informed and consulted (Al-Jahwari and Budhwar, 2016). This affirms that Arab workplaces represent a unique form of collectivism striving to uphold collectivist values while adapting to globalisation pressures for a more consultative approach. Consequently, there is pressure on Arab leaders to align

with Western theories of consultation by involving employees in decision-making processes, in line with Islamic teachings and Arabian values (Almoharby, 2010; C.M. Siddique and H.F. Siddique, 2019), to avoid perpetrating ostracism at work. However, such practices are not yet widely implemented in the Arab Gulf region, leading to a higher degree of non-consultative approaches, resulting in work stress, job dissatisfaction (C.M. Siddique and H.F. Siddique, 2019), and consequently perceived WO.

Having that said, it is argued this research contributes to the understanding of 'consultation' as an inclusionary behaviour, whereby its absence is deemed an ostracising behaviour for Gulf Arabs as a sign of being silenced. To the researcher's knowledge, there has not been any previous literature on decision-making process as part of WO. Previous work on Western contexts only experimented how ostracism impairs good and risky decision-making; adversely influencing decision-making strategies (Balliet and Ferris, 2013; Buelow et al., 2015; Byrne et al., 2016; Buelow and Wirth, 2017). It has been argued, therefore, that poor decision-making by the target is an outcome of ostracism in the Western work environments. This is because consultative leadership in the West should primarily enhance organisational performance (Al-Jarradi, 2011) which was evident in various Western workplaces, but not job satisfaction (Dorfman et al., 1997), contrary to the findings of this study where consultative management is primarily linked to employees' job satisfaction. However, this thesis argues that lack of engagement in decision-making can be treated as a unique cultural form of ostracism, and 'Al-Shura' is a unique local construct to consider, which has not yet empirically found to resonate with a distinct culture. The current literature of cross-cultural studies on WO has not yet recognised this particular form of ostracism in any cultural contexts. It is thus argued that such conceptualising of workplace ostracism from cultural lenses through contextual constructs identification generates novel and impactful theoretical insights into empirical CCR; hence allowing the recognition of gaps in the literature.

Greetings

The patterns of behaviours in any given culture can be drawn by many factors including greetings (Hall, 1989). Lack of warm greeting comprises verbal greeting, non-verbal gestures, and who initiates greeting emerged as an interesting cultural form of workplace ostracism in Study 1.

Greeting is essential to understand WO, because it fulfills a psychological expectation of being recognised by others, at least to some extent (Zhu and Liu, 2020). Similarly, greetings can be used to express respect, gain attention, draw attention to something, and minimise threats (Nasser Abbas, 2022). Importantly, greetings have the power to either establish or destroy social relations between individuals, acknowledging them as integral components of society or as individual factors within the social environment (Zhu and Liu, 2020). Therefore, greeting stands as an intriguing contribution to the theory of WO.

The lack of greeting etiquette and the warmth conveyed in greetings, which extends beyond simply not responding to a greeting, constitutes another fundamental theoretical contribution to the understanding of WO regarding the perceived forms of ostracism in the Arab Gulf States. This is because the greeting process, carries significant importance to Arabs, particularly Arab Muslims, due to the involvement of *Islamic greetings* and the religious connotations associated with greeting one another. As indicated in Chapters 5, the greeting process includes verbal and non-verbal elements, with the initiation of greetings holding equal importance. Therefore, greetings hold special significance in Arab culture, especially the Islamic component of the greeting as they have religious sanctions and serve as the commencement of all human interactions (Emery, 2000). Because the Holy Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) specifically instructs Muslims to exchange greetings and respond to a greeting with added interest (Emery, 2000).

Omani society internalises powerfully the 'ideology of politeness' that turns out to be more than only a matter of elegance or superficial grace, but a core social identity (Jones, 2007). This is obvious as authenticity within Omanis resides to be in the social expression of oneself (Jones, 2007). In the Arab world, *non-verbal gestures* and etiquette during greetings hold more significance than the verbal greeting itself (Emery, 2000; Rababah and Malkawi, 2012) apart from the Islamic greeting. If a greeting lacks a smile and eye contact, or an appropriate gesture, it is perceived as conveying hostility and a lack of intimacy, which can negatively affect the relationship between individuals (Rababah and Malkawi, 2012). Because these non-verbal gestures, similar to the Islamic greeting (ie, Al-Salam Aliykum) are deeply rooted in the spiritual and religious commitment of practicing Muslims (Achour et al., 2016). For example, a cross-cultural study shows that both the British and the Arab Gulf assign high importance to nonverbal greetings, however, variations in the perceived appropriateness of

such greetings were observed arising from cultural and religious factors (Alshahrani and Dewaele, 2021).

The literature extensively covers both verbal and non-verbal greetings for both Arabs and Westerners; however, not in the area of WO. In addition, *the initiation of greetings* holds particular uniqueness and significance for Arabs, especially Muslims, due to its religious implications. While extant literature did consider not initiating conversation as part of complete ostracism in a Western context (Zadro, 2004), the socio-religious component of not initiating greetings, in particular, takes a wider turn in the Arab context. This religious and cultural connotation provides an explanation for why ostracism is perceived to be less prevalent in the West compared to the Arab Gulf States. This is due to the absence of norms regarding the initiation of greetings and the associated implications in such contexts that only exist and deemed significant in the Arab Muslim context but not the West.

This thesis, then, sheds light into socio-religious factors related to greeting as a form of WO, highlighting the significant role of religious values in shaping the phenomenon of WO in Arab societies. What is considered a polite gesture in greetings deeply rooted in one culture might not be perceived similarly in another culture (Bouchara, 2015). Taken as a whole, this study unfolded all facets of greeting by emphasising the importance of verbal greetings, avoid shortening greetings, responding with a better greeting, using culturally appropriate nonverbal greetings, and initiating greetings in the manifestation of WO. Despite the current call to perceive ostracism as a communication issue (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022), previous work on cross-cultural ostracism, including the work of Pelliccio and Walker (2022) and Pelliccio and Brown (2020), have failed to address greeting as a communication process, however, this thesis enriched the area of ostracism as communication. Consequently, greeting found to be extremely important to consider in the area of ostracism as an ineffective communication across cultures due to its implications in cross-cultural work environments; where workers of different cultural backgrounds need to be aware of other people's normative cultural appropriateness during the conduct of communication which includes greetings (Bouchara, 2015) in order to distinguish whether perceived ostracism has actually occurred or was a product of an acceptable cultural norm.

Third-party

Study 1 showed that the usage of a third-party, whether a middleperson to send messages to the target on behalf of the ostraciser or a sole reliance on technological means such as emails, is deemed as inappropriate means of communication, thereby perceived as a form of ostracism. The usage of a third-party is considered an ineffective mode of communication when the norm implies direct interaction between the perpetrator and the target as the appropriate means of communication. This empirical evidence contributes to the current body of knowledge about workplace ostracism as ineffective communication, adding new insight into intercultural communication literature. It is now known that ostracism is not merely an absence of communication, but a dysfunction in communication *if* perceived as a threat to someone's inclusion by the one receiving the message (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022), given that WO threatens one's need for belonging (Robinson et al., 2013).

The utilisation of a third-party via online methods or an intermediary person indicate the absence F2F communication which has emerged as an intriguing form of ostracism due to cultural implications emphasising direct F2F communication as a way of acknowledging employees by their leaders in Oman (Common, 2011). This contextually specific form of ostracism significantly contributes to the literature on workplace ostracism in cross-cultural settings, as it aids in understanding, from an inter-communication standpoint in particular, how ostracism manifests as a deficiency in communication. There is a limited understanding of how ostracism is communicated between individuals and the process of interpreting an ostracism message in various contexts (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022). Nevertheless, this research makes a valuable contribution to it.

As explained in Chapter 5, the first type of third-party is online. Extant literature has predominantly explored cases where individuals are ignored or excluded while using online communication platforms and networks (ie, Wesselmann et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022; Tang and Duan, 2023) known as 'cyber ostracism' (Williams, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013). Others argue that the targets of ostracism at work often have poor interactions with colleagues and supervisors (Xia et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the contribution offered by this particular form of ostracism extends beyond simply ignoring one's online correspondence. On the other side of the coin, the usage of third-party does involve using online communication, but as a way to intentionally ostracise someone to avoid direct F2F interaction with the target. This

type of ostracism may not be recognised as such in the Western context, highlighting the cultural significance in interpreting social cues related to workplace ostracism. Another novel aspect of a third-party is the involvement of intermediary (ie, a colleague) to facilitate communication between the target and the perpetrator. This represents a significant contribution to the literature on WO, as no previous studies have explored how this intermediary role manifests as a form of ostracism. Hence, it contributes to the field of CCR, particularly in the field of intercultural communication.

This suggests an important theoretical implication; whether a message is harsh or subtle, or the means of communication is appropriate, if the recipient interprets it as a threat to their inclusion in social interactions or a threat to their social standing, it is then deemed an interpersonal ostracism message (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022). Because ostracism can be communicated by any forms using any channel, and that forms affects the making sense of the ostracising event which is to a large extent dependent on the ostracism message receiver's interpretation (Pelliccio and Brown, 2020). Nevertheless, this area of ostracism as an interpersonal communication message in work contexts is neglected in the literature opening up a new avenue for exploration. It remains unclear how the involvement and disinvolvement of a third-party is interpreted as an act of ostracism in Western workplaces, as well as in rest of Arab work environments, beyond the insights provided by this study. The results from the current study and the extant literature diverge, suggesting that an area where this thesis holds implications is the exploration of ostracism as a message conveyed indirectly through a third-party, whether it be an individual or an online platform by the perpetrator.

For example, traditionally, ostracism was conceptualised as non-interactional and a pure neglect towards the targets distinguishing it from the broad dysfunctional behaviours such as workplace incivility, harassment, deviance, bullying, and social undermining that might include some acts of exclusion and mistreatment, still, they are primarily interactional (Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2017). Likewise, while others argue that ostracism is generally not overt or blunt, which constitutes omission of an appropriate action, rather than commission of a negative action, and that any negative actions or words are outside the scope of ostracism (Ferris et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2013; Sharma and Dhar, 2023), this study challenges this assumption when culturally significant conceptualisation of WO was taken into account. To exemplify, the use of a third-party is an example of negative action commission. Nevertheless, this particular action cannot be categorised as bullying or

aggression, for instance, as it lacks a clear message of exclusion or uncivil behaviour that could be reported as misconduct. However, the interpersonal message of ostracism received by the recipient regarding the motives behind such an action, as an embedded covert strategy to ostracise the recipient without concrete evidence, is thought-provoking.

Take as a whole, determining the appropriate level of contextualisation in a given situation poses a significant challenge when communicating across different contexts (Hall, 1959). Despite the traditional conceptualisation of WO as omission of an appropriate action (Robinson et al., 2013), more recently, researchers have developed theories that recognised ostracism as how it is communicated between individuals and the process of interpreting an ostracism message in various contexts, bringing the construct into communication literature (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022) particularly, the inter-cultural communication literature. Thus, realising what ostracism constitutes, is essential to understand its conceptual boundaries and how it differs from other related constructs (Sharma and Dhar, 2022). Because if the construct's measurement fails to capture its conceptual distinctiveness, it becomes impossible to obtain knowledge about its antecedents and outcomes (Hershcovis, 2011). Therefore, this thesis contributes to a broader conceptualisation of the third-party as a means of ostracising others, adding fresh knowledge to the body of WO, specifically to the definition of ostracism. Consequently, this study contributes to the field of intercultural communication by expanding on the understanding of ostracism as a potential mode of communication, particularly when interpreted as such by the targeted employee.

As noted, this research broadens the definition of ostracism by presenting evidence that, contrary to the traditional view of ostracism as an act of omission (Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2017), it can also involve the commission of actions. Specifically, ostracism can include sending indirect ostracising messages through a third-party or conducting greetings in a way that passively harms the target. Similarly, Chapter 2 explores the distinctions between rejection-based exclusion and ostracism-based exclusion. While the former involves negative attention (eg, angry or cold responses) and the latter involves no attention, this research suggests that ostracism can involve a certain level of attention, however, vague, passive, and ambiguous (Wesselmann et al., 2019). This is because this attention, according to this study's findings, does not involve a direct engagement from the perpetrator, rather a third-party involvement which exemplifies this nuanced form of ostracism. Therefore, this research extends the existing definition of ostracism by proposing that it is not merely an

omission of action but can also be a passive commission of action, adding a novel dimension to the concept that has not been previously explored, and challenges the notion the ostracism's integral feature is the 'act of omission' (Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2017).

This notable extension of the definition of ostracism entails suggesting an amendment to the current well-known definition proposed by Robinson and colleagues (2013) to include the act of commission as following: "workplace ostracism occurs when an individual or group *omits* to take actions that engage another organisational member when it is socially appropriate to do so… Such as when an individual or group fails to acknowledge, include, select, or invite another individual or group. It also occurs when an individual or group choose to *commit* an ostracising behaviour towards another organisational member through involving a third-party to communicate with the target, when approaching the target directly is appropriate to do so".

This research, therefore, urges future studies to explore how ostracism can develop as an act of commission rather than simply an act of omission. This also highlights the importance of cultural considerations in investigating such constructs.

7.3.2 Contributions to the Coping with Workplace Ostracism

Research into how various cultures deal with ostracism is still unexplored (Schaafsma, 2017). Nonetheless, this thesis theoretically adds to the literature on workplace ostracism by unpacking the contextual identification of coping mechanisms and identifying the most effective coping strategies across cultures as revealed by this MMR finding. The contextual coping mechanisms that emerged to have significant impact after the integration of the two sets of data are religion and avoidance.

Religion

Study 1 unveiled that religious coping ranked as the second most frequently adopted coping strategy among Arab interviewees. Building on this finding, Study 2 corroborated it and demonstrated that religious coping did indeed emerge as the most effective coping mechanism in mitigating the adverse effects of WO for employees across two different cultures, particularly with job satisfaction when two-way interactions was adopted. However, as noted, it was observed that Omanis were significantly utilising more religious coping strategies to a considerable degree compared to the British. This result outweighed the impact

of social support, which was another investigated coping strategy that emerged as the most adopted coping strategy in Study 1. This discovery constitutes a notable theoretical contribution to the understanding of coping mechanisms with WO, given that religious coping has been overlooked in both CCR (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003) and studies on ostracism (Aydin et al., 2010).

Indeed, the relationship between religion and culture is reciprocal, with each shaping and influencing the other (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003; Cohen et al., 2016). Cross-cultural variability can be observed within countries, spanning across ethnic/racial, state, or socioeconomic status, and religious categories (Gelfand et al, 2017). However, the interplay between religion and culture is not overtly evident in the vast majority of these cross-cultural dimensions (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). Tarakeshwar and co-workers (2003) contend that the inclusion of religion in cross-cultural research is essential for four reasons: (a) religion holds a significant place in individuals' lives across diverse cultures, (b) it has proven to be a robust predictor of crucial aspects of life globally, (c) religion exerts a strong influence on cross-cultural dimensions, and (d) cultural factors also impact and shape religious beliefs and practices. Despite this interest, no one to the best of the researcher's knowledge has studied religion as a coping mechanism with ostracism nor in the context of work environments. Thus, the present thesis draws on the literature of religious studies and incorporated it into the literature of cross-cultural workplace ostracism. Precisely, this thesis extends its contribution to CCR to include religious studies, representing a noteworthy and imperative addition.

Religious coping emerged as a contextual coping adding insights into to the field of CCR because in collectivist societies, religion extends beyond mere faith, including community involvement, ethnic identity, and adherence to traditions (Cohen et al., 2016). Cohen et al. (2016) argue that Eastern religions tend to exhibit more collectivistic traits influenced by the collectivistic cultures they are embedded in. Thus, because adherence to Islamic values prevails in the Arab world (Hall, 1959), studies conducted have demonstrated the effectiveness of religious coping in enhancing psychological wellbeing, happiness, and overall life satisfaction among Arab Gulf individuals, particularly when facing work stressors (Emam and Al-Lawati, 2014; Hossain and Rizvi, 2016; Eatamadi and Napier, 2023; Koburtay and Abualigah, 2023).

On the other hand, contemporary discourses in the Western world characterised by high individualism have mainly centred around ‘atheism’ as the main type of non-religious belief (Lee, 2015). In fact, the absence of readily available non-religious categories in today’s British society is seen as a cultural challenge. Although this challenge might not be pressing when other cultural and economic assets are widely accessible, it could become problematic in different situations such as social exclusion and not being heard (Lee, 2015). Thus, non-religious identities in the West carry a dual effect where they both empower and disempower the individuals who possess them (Lee, 2015). For example, studies on religious coping, predominantly conducted within Christian communities, have pinpointed certain religious beliefs. For instance, a belief in a benevolent and forgiving God is linked to improved health, while interpreting situations as divine punishment and questioning God’s powers is associated with poorer mental and physical wellbeing (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). This justifies the prominence of religious coping and the positive impact of having faith in God on employees’ overall wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Thus, results of this study improved our understanding on how culture and religion interactions play out in employees’ mental wellbeing and job satisfaction when dealing with work stressors such as workplace ostracism. Because this study is cross-cultural one that examined a religiously heterogenous sample such as the UK, including religious measure was crucial to the improvements of theories in cross-cultural literature (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003) which this thesis has achieved. Besides, the comparison of outcomes between a secular nation (the UK) and a conservative, collectivistic country, highly responsive to religious practices (Oman) yielded promising findings and valuable contributions. This has enhanced our comprehension of the role of religion in coping with WO. Hence, this research is considered the pioneering effort in incorporating religious coping as a mechanism to address ostracism in work environments, particularly in cross-cultural samples.

Avoidance

One of the primary coping mechanisms observed in Study 1 was avoidance behaviour, particularly manifested through reluctance to confront the ostraciser. Interestingly, in Study 2, three-way interaction provided support solely for avoidance, which significantly interacted with nationality and workplace ostracism, indicating it as the most significant coping mechanism with WO across cultures. However, as detailed in Chapter 6, low avoidance only

mitigated the negative impact of WO for the British but not for the Omanis. Conversely, high avoidance emerged as the strategy that buffers the negative effect of WO for Omanis. Therefore, the significance of avoidant strategy as a response to ostracism and the variant impact of it on the two different cultures appears to be an imperative contribution.

This study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of avoidance as a coping mechanism for ostracism and its varying effects on wellbeing and job satisfaction across different cultures. Despite initial expectations that avoidance would be more prevalent in the Arab context and less so in the Western context, as confirmed by this study, the most striking finding and contribution lies in its impact, especially that this particular aspect of coping has not been yet investigated (Robinson et al., 2013). To explain, given that avoidance is considered a passive coping strategy (Fitzgerald, 1990), it was anticipated to negatively affect wellbeing and job satisfaction in both cultures, irrespective of the extent to which each culture employs it. In fact, avoidance in Study 2 included both cognitive avoidance, such as attempts to simply forget or ignore the issue, and behavioural avoidance, implying confrontation avoidance.

This surprising finding could be attributed to Arab's deep commitment to their ingroup. For example, Arabs rely heavily on one another as they cannot survive without their groups which creates a strong sense of interdependence among them (Kitayama et al., 2022). Simultaneously, they also exhibit personal strength and power (Kitayama et al., 2022). The need for interdependence may prevent them from engaging in confrontational behaviours that could strain relationships with others. While their personal strength and power might help them to preserve positive wellbeing when avoidance is adopted. Interestingly, as noted in Chapter 6, despite avoidance coping generally leads to negative consequences, family support for Arabs evident to prevent further decline in their wellbeing caused by avoidant coping (Alkaid Albqoor et al., 2023). To add, avoidant coping might be beneficial for their mental wellbeing compared to less avoidant approaches, as their self-esteem is closely tied to their healthy relationships with others (Schaafsma, 2017). In contrast to Westerners, who often seek self-enhancement (marked by attitudinal coherence and consistency) through enhancing their independent selves apart from others, Arabs focus on demonstrating their resourcefulness for the protection of their ingroup, thus reaffirming their interdependence (Kitayama et al., 2022). To investigate this notion, the researchers, Kitayama et al. (2022) primed either a sense of individualism or collectivism among participants. They achieved

this by instructing participants to either list their differences from family and friends (known to prime individualism) or their similarities to them (known to collectivism). Among Westerners, when the mindset of individualism was encouraged, they exhibited stronger self-enhancement compared to when the mindset of collectivism was encouraged. In contrast, Arabs demonstrated the opposite trend, they engaged in greater self-enhancement when the mindset of collectivism, rather than individualism, was primed. This suggests that because Arabs have strong ties to their group, avoiding conflict appears to be more beneficial for their mental wellbeing in order to maintain the overall wellbeing and harmony of the whole group so it does not affect the dynamic of future interdependence, nor threats one self-esteem when conflict occurs. Conversely, because Westerners maintain a greater degree of independence from social groups, expressing their needs directly through less avoidance behaviours may lead to improved self-esteem and thereby better mental health.

This intriguing finding underscores the importance of cultural variation not only in determining indigenous coping strategies across different cultures but also in identifying the most and least effective coping mechanisms when encountering the same adverse phenomenon but in two different cultural settings. Uskul and Over (2017) urged scholars to explore whether responses to ostracism exhibit distinct patterns within collectivistic cultural contexts, differing from those already observed in the West, given that the social norms governing acceptable inclusionary behaviours determine the perceived prevalence of ostracism and subsequent reactions to it. Adhering to this call, this thesis successfully confirms the notion that culture indeed induces different coping mechanism patterns in response to the same experienced phenomenon. Yet, when similar coping mechanisms are adopted in different cultures, they have varying impacts on the outcomes of the experienced phenomenon due to contextual factors.

In essence, this thesis enhances our understanding of coping mechanisms with WO in CCR by identifying the local types of coping strategies, and the most effective and ineffective coping strategies for each culture. Nevertheless, despite the intriguing findings concerning the beneficial impact of avoidance on Gulf Arab employees' wellbeing, and the discussed justifications to this finding, the reasons to why this is the case is still unknown, opening up new avenues for future research. The impact of avoidance as a coping strategy on employees' wellbeing and job satisfaction leads to the next most intriguing finding concerning the severity of WO in both cultures.

7.3.3 Contributions to the Outcomes of Workplace Ostracism

The severity of workplace ostracism

The thesis contribution to the outcomes of WO is deemed particularly fascinating based on this study's findings. Despite discovering that WO is relatively more prevalent in Oman compared to the UK, it paradoxically exerts a greater negative impact in the UK.

Previous discussions have highlighted the considerable disparity in the impact of WO between the British and the Omanis, thereby enriching our understanding of the varying degrees of harm caused by WO across different cultural contexts. For instance, Chapter 6 explained why this contrast exists, in terms of the cultural dimensions of collectivism-individualism, power-distance, and feminism-masculinity. However, within the Arab context, it is apparent that the reliance on religion notably distinguishes it from other collectivist societies (Hall, 1989), influencing the coping mechanisms chosen by Arabs. Therefore, the researcher's argument is that the findings of this thesis offer insights into why WO tends to have a lesser impact on Gulf Arab employees compared to Westerners beyond the cultural dimensions argued by Hofstede (2001). Hofstede (1983; 2001) overlooked religion and family structure as cultural factors distinguishing behavioural patterns across cultures. Thus, contributing to the understanding of the impact of WO within cross-cultural settings in the light of religion and familial support.

Because *religion* is evident to be the most effective coping mechanisms resulted from this study, the explanation of the severity discrepancy between the two groups can be made accordingly. It is argued that while avoidance, albeit negative, proved to mitigate the adverse effects of WO on Omani unexpectedly, its association with religion, evident in its widespread use among Omanis but not British employees, plays a significant role. For example, in numerous non-Western cultures including Arab cultures, the concept of wellbeing and happiness is not viewed with the same emphasis, understanding, or perceived necessity for taking actions. On the other hand, in the West, there is a societal pressure to diminish negative emotional experiences, whereas in many Arab cultures, distress is more readily tolerated, accepted, and embraced (Lambert et al., 2022). This is because in such cultures, distress may be interpreted as a spiritual challenge through which individuals are expected to navigate; hence, its presence is not psychologised but rather spiritualised. Regarded as a controversial

condition, distress and happiness may coexist more harmoniously, resulting in less urgency to minimise illbeing or enhance wellbeing on the contrary to the Western context (Lambert et al., 2022). This could be the case due to Islamic emphasis on the virtue of 'patience' in the face of hardship which is considered the highest moral and spiritual quality in Islam (Achour et al., 2016), referred to as 'the beautiful patience'. Patience in Islam includes endurance, perseverance, and emotional resilience (Alfain et al., 2021). Interestingly, the word 'patience' itself holds different meanings in the Qur'an such as patience in the face of disaster and patience with the bad treatment from people (Alfain et al., 2021). Patience is highlighted in more than a hundred times in the Qur'anic verses, underscoring its importance in fostering wellbeing (Alfain et al., 2021). This emphasis stems from God's promise to His subjects that any hardship in life will eventually be followed by ease, a virtue that was frequently mentioned by interviewees as a way to cope with ostracism. Hence, this entails that, to some extent, distress felt by Arabs is taken less seriously and delt with, with a religious mindset to diminish its negative impact, differently from how Westerners view distress.

Besides religion, avoidance might also have been paired with social support that found to be sought more by Omanis than the British, which may have reduced the impact of the adverse effect of WO. Particularly, support received from *family*. While familial coping is not the subject of this thesis; yet the frequent reference of family support in particular by participants in Study 1 as the fundamental component of their support system made it necessary to shed light on the role of Arab families in supporting other family members and contrast that with the Western context in an attempt to better understand the variance of wellbeing status across the two samples. Arabs serve as examples of high-context cultures, wherein a broad information network extends across family, colleagues, friends, and customers, all of whom are connected through close personal relationships. In contrast, in the West, a low-context culture possesses a narrower network and fragile relationships (E.T. Hall and M.R Hall, 2001). For instance, in the Arab world, the family serves as the fundamental safety net for its people (Kronfol et al., 2015), because family centrality and unity are hugely emphasised by Islam (Al-Barwani and Albeely, 2007). The constitutions of numerous Arab nations underscore the family's paramount importance as the cornerstone of society, while religious institutions, across various contexts, advocate for family cohesion. Guided by a moral code emphasising honoring and respecting elders, extended family structure has traditionally been pivotal in ensuring the wellbeing of individuals (Kronfol et al., 2015). For instance, in many

Arab societies, adult children, spouses, and other relatives offer tangible assistance and care to the elderly. As a return, older Arab parents are keen on sustaining support for their children even after they get married (Kronfol et al., 2015). Thus, the familial support in the Arab world is reciprocal extended for a lifetime. A survey conducted in an Arab Gulf State reveals high level of involvement and communication between parents and their children. The findings suggest that parents possess considerable knowledge of their children's affairs and demonstrate heightened attentiveness towards their wellbeing (Stocker and Khairia Ghuloum, 2014). On the whole, it appears that Gulf Arab parents are well-equipped to offer sufficient care to their children for a lifetime (Stocker and Khairia Ghuloum, 2014).

Unlike the Western societies, where the nuclear family structure may not align with other cultures (Tam et al., 2017) due to the earlier separation of parents and children, typically with an age range for children leaving home between 18 and 25 (South and Lei, 2015), whereas Arabs seldom experience loneliness at home due to strong familial bonds (Hall, 1989). This issue carries significant implications for youth leaving their parents' homes during this crucial period, impacting them even into their later adolescence (Goodkind et al., 2011). For instance, a qualitative study conducted in a highly individualistic culture revealed that adults who moved out of the system at a younger age seeking autonomy faced considerable challenges post-transition (Goodkind et al., 2011). The most cited challenge was the lack of social and emotional support from their family. They found that many of their families were not as supportive as expected, leading to trust issues, engaging in illegal activities, and a subsequent lack of support from friends. Interviewees also highlighted the need for ongoing counselling post-transition (Goodkind et al., 2011), a practice apparently common in the West but not prevalent in the Arab world. These various challenges they faced after leaving the system led many youths to express regret about their decision to leave home as it impacted their overall wellbeing (Goodkind et al., 2011). Especially given that the support received from a family member who understands one's needs and with whom there is an emotional connection differs from that received from a professional; the former is viewed more as a friend rather than a professional (Allen et al., 2024). This distinction in the centrality of family is argued to be a significant factor in explaining why the Arab Gulf enjoys much better wellbeing compared to the Britons.

Accordingly, Hofstede (2001) distinguishes between psychotherapy in Arabic collectivist cultures and Western individualistic cultures. He asserts that individuals with depression

from individualistic cultures tend to experience more guilt and struggle to cope with the stress of personal decision-making. In contrast, he argues that depressed individuals in collectivist societies can often maintain functionality because significant decisions are made collectively within their social networks, where an individual's depression is viewed as a family affair. This argument reinforces the researcher's previous assertion regarding the beneficial impact of family centrality and religious values, such as the application of the Al-Shura principle within the household transcending to organisations, in promoting positive wellbeing. Thus, it confirms the emergence of the absence of the 'Al-Shura' principle as a manifestation of workplace ostracism, highlighting how the extent of mutual decision-making and collective affairs not only influences people's perception of ostracism but also impacts the efficacy of coping strategies impacting the severity of WO. This provides theoretical perspectives that contribute to the field of cross-cultural employees' wellbeing as an outcome of WO.

7.4 Thesis Strengths and Limitations

This thesis possesses several strengths and limitations. While these studies offer valuable insights into the dynamics of WO across diverse cultural contexts through employing rigorous methodology as the main strength of this thesis, it is crucial to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the generalisability and transferability of the findings.

7.4.1 Thesis Strengths

There are two notable methodological strengths to the thesis. This thesis: (1) utilised mixed-methods research, and (2) adopted a cross-cultural study within the MMR. Cross-cultural research requires diverse methodological, samples, and epistemological diversity (Smith et al., 2012). Not only that the study of WO needs more cross-cultural research, but the latter itself needs more methodological diversity, particularly mixed-methods research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Bryman, 2006; Greene, 2008).

Mixed-methods research

Mixed-methods research provided a powerful tool for answering the research questions, particularly in the area of WO. Until now this methodology has not been applied in the field

of workplace ostracism. Moreover, within the MMR, a novel contribution to both the qualitative component and the quantitative comment is noteworthy. Study 1 employed *narrative approach*, an intriguing method that, despite its interest, suffers from application in the study of WO nor as part of MMR. The employment of narrative research provided exciting and surprising insights to the contextual dimension (Riessman, 2008) of the phenomenon of WO. Besides, by looking at the Quantitative strand, only limited research employed self-report to examine the detrimental impact of WO calling for more methodological diversity (Spector and Howard, 2021), which this thesis had achieved.

Cross-cultural study

One notable aspect of this thesis is its valuable contextual contribution to the existing knowledge on WO in the Middle-East, specifically in the Arab Gulf States. These states possess distinct cultural factors that set them apart from the rest of the Arab world and other East Asian countries, united by Islam as the predominant religion in the GCC, and the shared historical and Arab culture (Jones, 2007), significantly influencing how ostracism is perceived and coped with. Very limited work has been conducted on WO in Arab Gulf States (eg, Al-Dhuhouri and Shamsudin, 2023; Mohd Shamsudin et al., 2023) aimed at exploring the antecedents of ostracism in a single Gulf State. This indicates the substantial amount of work yet to be conducted in this region, highlighting the need for further investigation into cultural variations compared to the well-explored Western and East Asian context. Therefore, a noteworthy aspect of this research is its contextual strength, serving as a pioneering study and one of a kind on WO in the GCC states examining the forms of WO, the response to WO, and its impact, with a specific focus on Oman. This is particularly crucial as a country like Oman can challenge universal theories and assumptions related to organisational behaviours for its outstanding characteristics compares to the rest of the GGC states (Common, 2011).

7.4.2 Thesis Limitations

This thesis presents several limitations. First, this research relied on the perception of the target regarding the experience of WO encountered. Targets' perceptions can provide only a partial view of what actually occurs in any given context (Jensen and Raver, 2018). For the purpose of this thesis, however, the researcher was specifically interested in the target's

perspective of their interaction with the perpetrator in two specific contexts. Therefore, the semi-structured interviews in Study 1 represented the targets of ostracism point of view concerning the phenomenon of WO. The targets' self-report of WO was also relied on in Study 2. However, the lack of a perspective-taking approach, and relying solely on the target's narrative while neglecting the perpetrator's viewpoint, restricts access to the complete story. In other words, the narratives rely on self-reporting, introducing a bias that may not always accurately reflect the observed reality (J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2017). Thus, it is worth remembering that it takes "two to tango" in the dynamic of ostracism (Jensen and Raver, 2018).

Relatedly, research indicates that the negative impact of ostracism extends beyond the targets, affecting third-parties or observers as well (Arpin et al., 2017), highlighting its significance on the examination of WO, particularly in cross-cultural contexts (Mao et al., 2018). Therefore, incorporating a dyadic approach in comprehending ostracism which includes the observers and the perpetrators (Wesselmann et al., 2009; Gorman et al., 2017; Rudert et al., 2018; Fiset and Bhave, 2021; Spoelma et al., 2021) is essential for gaining insights into the reasons behind these occurrences and the conditions under which they unfold. Failure to consider both perspectives may introduce biases when individuals report their own experiences without taking into account the narrative from the other party involved. As a consequence, this thesis acknowledges potential biases that could arise due to taking a singular viewpoint in understanding WO.

Second, the convenience sample of the Omani employees in Study 2 may affect generalisability. Although the survey link was distributed online to reach out to as many employees as possible, the sample characteristics such as gender (the number of females outweigh the number of males) was uncontrolled limiting the representation of the population and may have subsequently marked changes in overall results. It is anticipated that if the sample was chosen randomly, similar to the British sample, the results would have offered improved generalisability, particularly considering the relatively smaller sample size of the Omani group compared to the British sample. Consequently, replicating the study using a random sample could enhance the generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, the sample size was adequately powered to detect the effects required for conducting the statistical analysis. Moreover, concerns about generalisability arise from the fact that data collection is confined to a single national culture among the GCC (Oman) and a single culture in the West

(the UK), casting some doubts about its universal applicability. Therefore, incorporating broader contexts that represents each end would more accurately capture the cultural nuances between the West and Arabs.

Third, in Study 2, a self-report questionnaire was employed in a cross-sectional design to assess WO, introducing the challenge of determining causality. Another issue this design introduces it the potential risk of CMB despite efforts to alleviate this bias, such as the procedural and the statistical strategies used to reduce CMB, see Section 6.4. Even though CMB is a recognised issue, especially in survey research, the subject continues to be of interest and is regarded as a consistent concern (Spector et al., 2019). This poses an issue since it can result in inaccurate assessments of a scale's reliability and convergent validity (Jordan and Troth, 2020). Another factor contributing to potential CMB is the response rate and response style. Although the sample size was deemed sufficient and large enough, the results from Study 2 might be influenced by the unequal response rates between the two samples. The response rates in the self-reported questionnaire in this study (ie, 51% vs. 100%, separately for Oman and the UK) could be itself a cultural function, irrespective of the issue of lacking a service provider in Oman. For example, Guo and Spina (2019) demonstrated that Asians exhibited a less extreme rejecting response style compared to the British when responding to surveys, with no differences observed in extreme affirming response styles. This discrepancy may introduce CMB (Fischer and Poortinga, 2018), potentially resulting in a loss of valuable insights into how the phenomenon of WO truly varies across the two cultures. Moreover, the prolonged response time, exceeding a month in the Omani context, may have been influenced by the sensitive nature of the study, potentially eliciting negative emotional distress among participants, leading to hesitancy in survey participation. This sentiment was expressed by one Omani respondent, stating, "I regret answering the survey and only had the courage to complete it days later." Nevertheless, the survey's introduction page (see Appendix 6.2) included resources for mental health support for the participants.

A final limitation that must be considered in cross-cultural research is whether it is appropriate to treat the UK culture as a whole entity given it also comprises various ethnicities including Arab British and Muslim British. The phenomenon of cultural diversity is not unique to the UK, given that Oman is also recognised for its diverse ethnic population (Al-Lamky, 2007) albeit not to the same extent as the UK. In Oman, similarities in heritage, religion, norms, and collectivistic values among sub-cultures are more pronounced, creating

a tighter cohesion between all Omani sub-cultures with a much fewer differences compared to the UK. Still, this challenge might have influenced the outcomes of the study.

7.5 Future Directions

Taking the aforementioned limitations into account, future research directions of the research can be made.

Future research should seek to investigate other unique types of WO not covered in this thesis, such as cyber ostracism and linguistics ostracism. The rational of treating cyber ostracism as unique and separate form of WO is that post-pandemic, working environment has been transformed into flexible work arrangement utilising more virtual teams and remote working (Mangla, 2021). These changes in physical working environment brought about challenges such as trust reduction, disrupted communication and limited collaboration (Mangla, 2021). Therefore, such factors were anticipated to trigger cyber ostracism within virtual teams, given that data collection of Study 1 was taken during the pandemic. Similarly, given other widely spoken languages besides Arabic in Oman as an impact of sub-cultures (Al Jahdhami, 2016), linguistic ostracism was expected to occur, initiated by bilingual employees (Robinson et al., 2013; Mao et al., 2018). However, these two types of ostracism did not materialise, therefore, they were excluded, but warrants investigation.

In addition, this thesis did not cover the antecedents of ostracism, making it essential to explore them. This is particularly crucial since wellbeing, an outcome in this thesis, can be an antecedent of WO as well, according to Howard et al. (2020). Also, considering the forecasted future growth of virtual work arrangements (Mangla, 2021), investigating organisational culture and structure (Robinson et al., 2013), organisational change, type, size, and physical work environments as potential antecedents of WO is also worth exploring.

Furthermore, as indicated by the findings of this MMR, which underscore the crucial role of communication in studying ostracism within work environments and the potential of ostracism being perceived as a deficit in interpersonal communication (Pelliccio and Walker, 2022), it becomes integral to investigate the implications of communication differences across cultures and the likelihood of influences this perception may have in expanding our knowledge on the phenomenon of WO across diverse cultural contexts. This represents a novel domain that remains uninvestigated. In pursuing this exploration, it is advisable to

incorporate Hall's low-high context cultural dimension, given its emphasis on distinctions in communicational means and messages among various cultures. This is especially true if the culture under investigation has sub-cultures (Leung and Cohen, 2011) whereby race and ethnicity-based stereotypes are dominant especially in White-dominated workplaces (Zimmerman et al., 2016) making it a promising area of investigation. Hence, this avenue of inquiry holds significant promise for enriching intercultural communication studies on WO.

Moreover, the primary goal of this thesis was to identify the most effective coping mechanism capable of mitigating the adverse effects of WO and promoting employees wellbeing while enhancing job satisfaction. Indeed, there remains a significant amount of work yet to be undertaken before we gain a thorough understanding of how ostracism is experienced across different cultures and how people act and respond to it (Schaafsma, 2017). However, the findings of the three-way interaction only establish a significant relationship between avoidance as a coping mechanism. Consequently, future research endeavors should explore additional coping mechanisms, such as problem-focused strategies (eg, seeking professional help), which were not covered in this thesis, and other local strategies of coping. This exploration is essential to determine which coping mechanisms work most effectively in specific cultural settings and under what conditions these strategies contribute to maintaining positive mental health and job satisfaction.

Given that the exploratory qualitative study in the Arab world revealed intriguing findings that contradict some aspects found in the West, future CCR research should include qualitative studies in a Western context. The qualitative component conducted in both cultures within MMR would help explore additional aspects of WO from a Western perspective and gain a richer understanding of the forms of WO and the coping mechanisms adopted by Westerners. This would allow comparison with the findings from the Arab world and develop unique themes. Subsequently, a survey could be designed to determine if these findings are replicable in a broader context.

In terms of methodology, there is a need for innovative approaches to study WO, particularly when examining the phenomenon from various perspectives such as that of the perpetrator, peers, observers, or through a dyad approach (Howard et al., 2020; Bedi, 2021). Three methodologies are proposed for future research. Of the three, two particularly effective methodologies for investigating WO are the intensive longitudinal design (Fischer and

Poortinga, 2018; Riaz et al., 2019; Howard et al., 2020; Bedi, 2021), and the time-lagged design (Spector and Howard, 2021). These approaches allow for a thorough exploration of whether variables under consideration in future studies are better characterised as moderators, antecedents, outcomes, or as variables occurring before or after instances of ostracism (Spector and Howard, 2021). Additionally, they enable the measurement of variables at two separate observation points (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and are particularly valuable in establishing correlations when examining WO over an extended timeframe (Spector and Howard, 2021). They are effective in aiding in the reduction of CMB risk, reduces causality determination issue caused by cross-sectional design by better capturing causal relationships, and increases validity of the conclusions concerning causality (Podsakoff et al., 2003). They are indeed a remedy solution to mitigate CMB by separating the measurement of the predictor (WO) and other variables (Peng and Zeng, 2017; Lyu and Zhu, 2019; Ma et al., 2022). Such designs in which potential antecedents are assessed prior to their presumed outcomes can establish proxy factors (Spector and Howard, 2021). These methods are also particularly recommended to identify cultural differences and norms emergence (Gelfand et al., 2006). To add, asking participants to report ostracism over a specific timespan may force participants to consider the actual behaviours performed over that time span, representing a better depiction of ostracism. As such, longitudinal design and a time-lagged design should allow examination of the influences of chronically ostracised employees over a specific period of time, and investigation of the most effective coping mechanism over time. Thereby, these two designs are recommended for future research.

The third recommended methodology for future measurement of WO similar to the other two noted above is cross-lagged panel designs, advocated by Ferris et al. (2016), and Sommer et al. (2021). A cross-lagged panel design refers to the examination of reciprocal causal effects using longitudinal data which is a widely used technique (Lucas, 2023), yet not in the area of WO. Cross-lagged correlation is currently the most popular design in many avenues of psychological research for determining causal effects obtained from longitudinal panel data. Most often cross-lagged correlation is used to identify a predominant causal influence, that is the causal winner (Rogosa, 1980). This particular design is recommended in the area of WO because it could be employed to probe the directionality of relationships proposed by researchers when measuring WO and other variables (Ferris et al., 2016). A cross-lagged design may particularly be interesting in that the mediating mechanisms responsible for a

reversed effect from one proposed outcome of WO to WO may not necessarily be the same as the mediating mechanism from WO to another proposed outcome of WO (Ferris et al., 2016). Such design would also allow for a more nuanced representation of the relationship among the ostracism event, moderator-mediator variable the event evokes in the employee, and the outcome behaviour that the employee engages in as a consequence. Hence, such a design can examine what impact, if any, temporal separation between ostracism and its outcomes has (Ferris et al., 2016).

Furthermore, this research extended the well-known scale developed by Ferris and colleagues (2008) by adding six items stemming from cultural nuances in how WO is conceptualised. Although the scale has been validated by running factor analysis tests, future research aiming to use the current developed scale in a different context should further validate this psychometric scale by conducting Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with a minimum of 300 participants (Robinson, 2018) from a different sample than the one used for the current study, to ensure robust factor analysis outcomes. This step should then be followed by obtaining feedback from participants to identify controversial or unclear items to be removed or revised (Robinson, 2018). It is also recommended to conduct Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) by administering the revised items to a new sample (e.g different cultural context) to verify the factor structure identified in the EFA with a minimum of 200 participants to ensure adequate statistical power, followed by internal reliability and validity tests (Robinson, 2018).

7.6 Practical Implications

Based on the findings of this thesis, there are promising benefits and opportunities for practitioners, managers of all levels, and human resource management in organisations.

The modified scale measure of WO-16 has a clear applied value. As ostracism is a subtle phenomenon (Williams, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2017), it may be challenging to identify individuals affected by it or those responsible for ostracising others (Ferris et al., 2016). Omani participants stated their unfamiliarity with the concept of silent treatment at work, highlighting the newness of this construct to organisational studies in the Arab context. Consequently, the scale developed in this study offers organisations a set of indicators for recognising the presence of such a silent phenomenon capturing broader

dimensions than the ones already known. The identification of the multi-facets of WO should aid the establishment of policies to avoid ostracism as an unhealthy phenomenon from occuring and to prevent norm violations and exclusion. Indeed, this is essential to prevent practitioners from mistakenly interpreting ostracism as acceptable behaviour or attributing it to personality differences, potentially overlooking malicious motives. Hence, recognising the importance of social context is vital because what one perceives as ostracism in one setting may not hold true in another context (Robinson et al., 2013). In other words, understanding the broader context when examining WO allows for the acknowledgment of disparities between perceived and actual ostracism (Robinson et al., 2013) which practitioners should be aware of. Such identification should raise awareness among policymakers that the negative aspects within organisations may not always be overt or tangible; rather, they can manifest through silence, as silence is not always golden (Ferris et al., 2008).

This thesis is consistent with previous literature which found that WO can be an important determinant of employees' wellbeing and job satisfaction (Mao et al., 2018; Howard et al., 2020). Practitioners in all sectors should therefore take approaches to reduce ostracism at work. There are multiple traditional measures that could be taken to prevent WO, such as cultivating a culture that encourages inclusive, open, transparent, and participatory environment (Luo et al., 2022). As such, in situations where WO occurred in any cultural work setting, organisations should give timely and proper psychological support (eg, through a mentor or an organisational psychologist), guidance to ease ostracised employees' distress, as well as establish impartial appeal channels to address their needs, and actively take an action whenever needed.

As evident, Study 1 found infective communication as a key theme pertaining to the forms of WO. While Study 2 found that utilising avoidance as a coping mechanism has demonstrated a significantly adverse impact on employees' wellbeing and job satisfaction for the British sample. This highlights contextual factors such as the usage of a third-party and greeting as the mode of communication, as well avoidance as a prominent strategy across the cultural settings under investigation, suggesting that dysfunctional communication fosters WO. To remedy this, alternative approaches to reduce the occurrence of WO, particularly concerning leadership and personality differences are listed. For example, given the strong association between leadership and ostracism (Howard et al., 2020), as supported by the findings of this thesis, managers are encouraged to enhance communication with

subordinates taking into consideration the appropriate means of communication in each culture. Training should also enhance the ability to tackle sensitive issues without direct confrontation, by 'addressing the elephant in the room' in a way that prevents causing discomfort for individuals engaged in ostracising behaviours, while still deal with the issue. At the same time, managers must be cautious not to inadvertently 'dance with the elephant,' a term used by one participant, Lamyaa to describe engaging in harmful political tactics and associated toxicity under the guise of maintaining harmony through avoidance. To counter this, educating employees should focus on avoiding the antecedents of WO rather than the ostracising behaviours themselves.

Transformational leaders are those who respond to employees' needs and empower them (Bass and Riggio, 2010), allowing them to openly discuss concerns without the fear of power dynamics due to power imbalance, especially in high power-distance cultures, or job security threats when addressing work-related issues such as ostracism. As noted earlier, three interviewees highlighted their hesitation to complain about ostracism, fearing it might be perceived as a weakness in their personalities. Therefore, practitioners should ensure that WO is not normalised, tolerated, or encouraged solely to avoid conflict, but is actively addressed because it negatively impacts the target's self-perception (Howard et al., 2020). Achieving this goal involves implementing both organisational-level interventions, such as mental health policies and programs, and individual-level interventions, such as stress management, mindfulness, recovery strategies, and multimodal interventions, which have proven effective when combined in promoting a positive, healthy work environment. These interventions contribute to increased job satisfaction, reduced emotional exhaustion, and better control of surface acting (Tetrick and Winslow, 2015). Additional interventions could encompass training for both managers and employees on effective communication skills, employee engagement, cultural competence and sensitivity, conflict resolution strategies, managing diversity, and hands-on leadership. However, since the thesis focuses on the perspective of the targets of ostracism, specific interventions for the ostracised employees should be considered. This might include ethics education to strengthen their self-regulatory mechanisms, assertiveness training, relaxation techniques training (Tetrick and Winslow, 2015), mentoring, and assistance in developing coping strategies tailored to their individual needs (Zhao et al., 2016).

Indeed, notwithstanding, achieving successful HRM remains unattainable unless it is in alignment with the requirements of its human capital, which forms the core of any organisation (Al-Jahwari and Budhwar, 2016). The present study underscored the prevalence of WO through the absence of consultation as one outstanding form. Interviewees stated reluctance to seek assistance from the HR department due to a lack of trust among colleagues and skepticism about HR's effectiveness. Consequently, implementing robust HR practices ensures the effective resolution of employees' concerns, particularly those of a sensitive nature such as ostracism. Therefore, it is crucial to underscore the role of HRM in facilitating employees' participation in decisions pertinent to both their personal affairs and organisational issues when such matters are raised to them, to prevent instances of WO. For example, despite the numerous benefits of 'Al-Shura' principle, such as enabling employees to realise their potential, fostering a sense of worthiness and necessity, consolidating loyalty, reducing suspicions and distrust among subordinates, and strengthening the manager-subordinate relationship by nurturing ownership and belonging senses – prerequisites for accurate decision implementation (Almoharby, 2010), HRM in Oman still faces challenges (Al-Jahwari and Budhwar, 2016). As such, there is a lack of strategies promoting inclusiveness and insufficient focused training in managing diversity or promoting inclusiveness in Omani workplaces (Al-Lamky, 2007; Goveas and Aslam, 2011). Additionally, the absence of a regulatory body to ensure compliance with the law and prevent tacit discriminatory practices in workplaces persists (Al-Lamky, 2007; Goveas and Aslam, 2011). Moreover, HRM practices in Oman encounter the challenge of a substantial increase in compliance with Islamic principles, while simultaneously adhering with the adoption of global standardised HRM practices and policies imposed by globalisation pressures (Budhwar et al., 2019).

Similarly, current evidence in the UK indicates that HR development typically takes a backseat in strategic discussions, with people issues not forming a top priority compared to marketing and finance, which have greater persuasive appeal (Gold et al., 2003). This poses an implication for managers to invest in HR development, so they actively attend to employees' concerns. This is only attainable when managers engage employees in the decision-making process wherein such practices are anticipated to significantly reduce WO, providing a pathway for effective HRM through participatory management. Furthermore, by encouraging employee voice, organisations can mitigate the adverse effects of employee

silence, defined as the deliberate withholding of work-related ideas, questions, or concerns from individuals capable of instigating change (Knoll et al., 2021). Breaking this silence caused by the feeling of ostracism through the promotion of employee participation not only fosters a sense of visibility, appreciation, worthiness, and inclusion among employees but is also anticipated to enhance organisational performance.

Practical implications, then suggest the adoption of strategies across all organisational levels to prevent WO, extending from leadership at the top of the hierarchical pyramid to the most junior employee, facilitated by the implementation of fair practices, policies, and effective HRM. Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter of this thesis which has synthesised the main findings from Study 1&2 presented in this thesis, integrating the overall results from this cross-cultural MMR that encompassed both narrative research in Study 1 and survey questionnaire in Study 2. The theoretical contributions of the research, the strengths and limitations and potential future research directions have been discussed, along practical implications of the findings.

7.7 Concluding Remarks

Five fundamental conclusions emerge from this research. Firstly, workplace ostracism, whether actual or perceived, *does* transcend cultural boundaries. Its sensitivity varies across cultures, underscoring its ambiguous nature as a misunderstood behaviour. From the target's perspective, one's perception of ostracism that threatens one's sense of belonging and inclusionary status is deemed as ostracism, as affirmed by Pelliccio and Walker (2022), whether it actually took place or not.

Secondly, cultural differences significantly influence the way employees perceive WO. These cultural variations in terms of nationality and context-specific factors determine the varied interpretation of 'silent treatment'. Despite commonalities, contextual nuances in various cultural settings highlights variations. These variations shed light on the importance of conducting indigenous research to explore the underlying mechanisms informing unique cultural forms of WO, the insightful cultural-specific strategies for coping, and identify the most effective coping mechanisms in each context, shaping local constructs different from universally known constructs mainly found in the West. Consequently, more mixed-methods research is essential to assess the divergence from Western theorisation, which is evidently

achievable when two datasets derived from opposing contexts are combined to comprehend a sensitive phenomenon such as ostracism. Narrative research is particularly valuable for a deeper understanding of WO from cultural indigenous lenses, offering fresh and unexpected insights within the broader MMR framework. This is particularly imperative as narrative research enabled the researcher to identify the distinctiveness of Arab Gulf behaviours, which bear similarities to those of both, the West and East Asia but diverge uniquely from the two contexts (Kitayama et al., 2022) due to Arab heritage and Islamic values (Hall, 1959).

A third conclusion emphasises cross-cultural variation in the efficacy of coping strategies. As evident, what may be effective in one culture may be detrimental in another. This cross-cultural study allows exploration of an intriguing result, that what may perceive as negative coping leading to poor mental health, seems to have an opposite positive impact in another culture, namely avoidant coping. Therefore, cultural variation plays a role in determining suitable coping mechanisms in each culture, influencing the effectiveness of these strategies across cultures. This aids the conclusion to the significance of identifying culturally-sensitive coping strategies which is a crucial area for further exploration.

The fourth conclusion raises questions about why WO appears more severe in the West than in the Arab Gulf States. This compelling outcome necessities reference to literature from other disciplines; contextual, economic, and socio-religious factors, such as religion and familial composition in order to provide thorough understanding to this question. Indeed, the current study concludes that the significant difference in positive wellbeing between Gulf Arabs and Westerners can be largely attributed to deeply ingrained collective values, the hospitable and warm Arab culture and heritage, continuous family support, and community cohesion, all derived from Islamic teachings and principles. These aspects are deeply incorporated into the lives of employees and organisational practices, including participative and consultative leadership styles guided by Islam, which differentiate the Arab contexts from other collectivist societies and Western societies, especially countries with high levels of individualism. Nevertheless, despite the researcher's attempt to answer the above question, there remains a need for further exploration into why this is the case.

A fifth and final conclusion invites the reader to draw an inference about the 'silent treatment' discussed in this thesis from a quote by the notable Arab writer and novelist, Ahlam Mostghanmi:

“At times, silence creates an impact within you that words just cannot.”

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Appendices

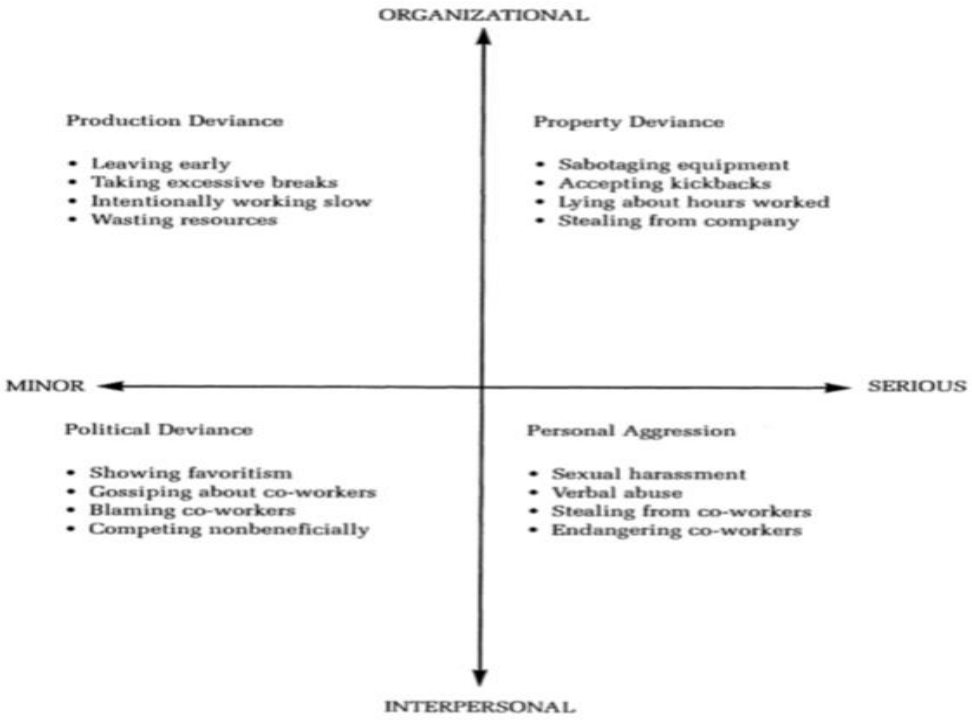
Appendix 2.1: Workplace Ostracism Items Measures, Adopted from (Ferris et al., 2008, p.1366)

Substantively Valid Ostracism Items

1. Others ignored you at work.
2. Others left the area when you entered.
3. Your greetings have gone unanswered at work.
4. You involuntarily sat alone in a crowded lunchroom at work.
5. Others avoided you at work.
6. You noticed others would not look at you at work.
7. Others at work shut you out of the conversation.
8. Others refused to talk to you at work.
9. Others at work treated you as if you weren't there.
10. Others at work did not invite you or ask you if you wanted anything when they went out for a coffee break.
11. You have been included in conversations at work (reverse coded).*
12. Others at work stopped talking to you.*
13. You had to be the one to start a conversation in order to be social at work.*

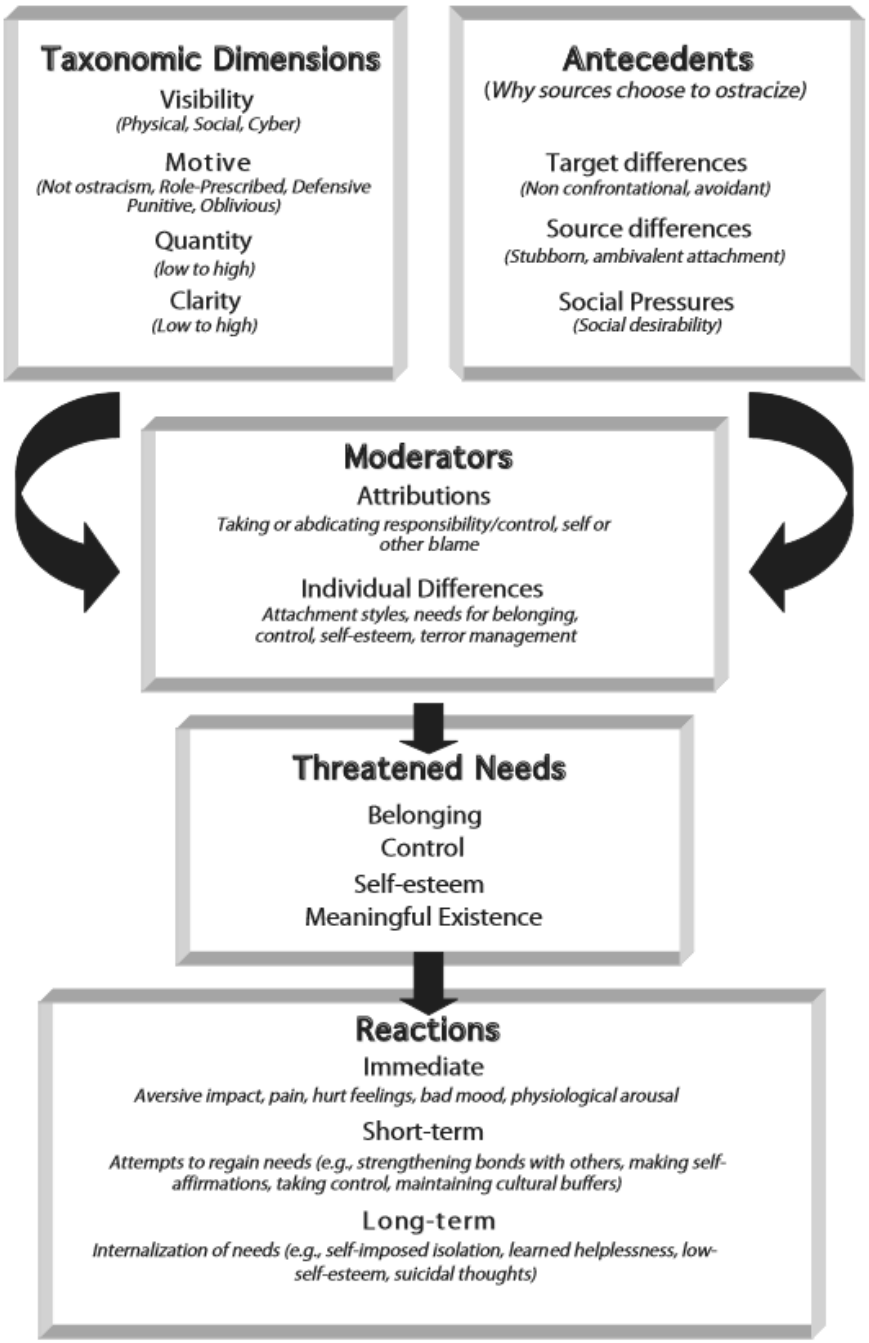
Note. On the basis of Bass, Cascio, and O'Connor (1974), we used a seven-point Likert-type response scale (1 = *Never,* 2 = *Once in a while,* 3 = *Sometimes,* 4 = *Fairly often,* 5 = *Often,* 6 = *Constantly,* 7 = *Always*). An asterisk indicates that an item was not included in the final scale.

Appendix 2.2: Typology of Workplace Deviant Behaviours, Adopted from (Robinson and Bennett, 1995, p.565)

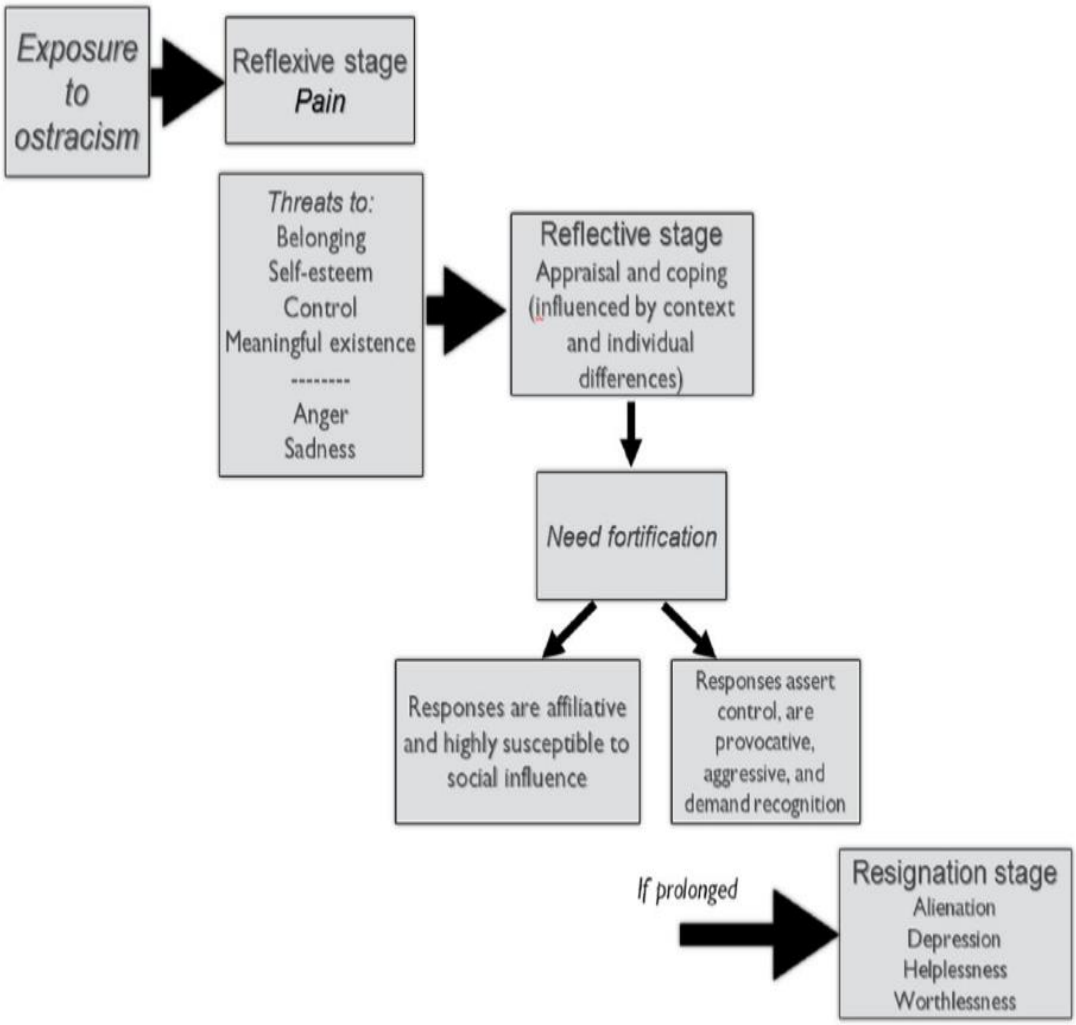


*These lists are not exhaustive. We provide a set of the most typical behaviors for each category for illustrative purposes only.

Appendix 2.3: Williams's Model of Ostracism, Adopted from (Williams, 2005, p.21)



Appendix 2.4: Williams's (2009) Temporal Threat Model, Adopted from (Wesselmann and Williams, 2017, p.697)



Appendix 4.1: Infographic

Appendix 4.2: Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions:

1. Can you tell me what happened?

   Probe:

   a. Tell me why that particular moment stands out?
   b. Do you think people noticed that? And how was their reaction? Did they do the same?

2. Do you know why you were (or are being) treated in this way?

   Prompt:
   a. Did you disagree with someone over how to carry out a task, etc.?
   b. Was it a continuous treatment of silence, or was it for an extended period?
   c. Have you communicated with the X after that? (ask about eye contact, email correspondence, greetings, physical ostracism, linguistic ostracism, meetings, online communication).

3. How did you react (or how are you reacting) to being treated this way?

   Prompt
   a. What impact has silent treatment had (or is having) on you; personally, and professionally? (ask about depression, well-being, lack of resources or lack of access to information or effects on performance and lack of social support).
   b. Did you talk (or are you talking) about it with anyone at work?
   c. How did you (are you coping) cope with it?

4. How was this situation resolved (or how could this situation be resolved)?

   Prompt:
   a. What else could be done to avoid engagement in silent treatment at work?
   b. How could managers and colleagues help prevent silent treatment?

5. According to what happened, was there a relationship between the characters'/you and X's cultural background and silent treatment at work?

   a. Were there any similarities or dissimilarities between the characters/you and X in terms of beliefs, cultural background, personality differences, the background that resulted in silent treatment?
   b. So, do you believe that due to similarity/dissimilarities, he/she/they/you engaged in silent treatment?

6. Do you think that the work environment or atmosphere was one reason behind the silent treatment?

   a. (Organisational structure) for example, do you think leadership, office layout, bureaucracies, policies and regulations, rewards and sanctions systems, remote working, affect the silent treatment?
   b. (Organisational culture) tell me how your organisation responds to disputes? How do you describe employees' recognition?
   c. Is your work environment stressful and highly interdependent? If yes how does that affect silent treatment in your opinion?

Appendix 4.3: Participants' Consent Form

Consent to take part in: The Antecedents and Consequence of Workplace Silent Treatment: A Cross-cultural Study.	Add your initials next to the statement if you agree
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet/ letter dated x/x/2021 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw during the interview at any time without giving any reason. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. Following the withdrawal, the data obtained from the interview will be destroyed.	
3. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.	
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be stored and used in relevant future research in an anonymised form.	
5. I understand that other genuine researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	
6. I understand that other researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	
7. I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by auditors from the University of Leeds where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.	
8. I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change during the project and, if necessary, afterwards.	
9. Within four weeks following the interview, I understand that I have the right to request my statements for inspection and to send any feedback or to withdraw data. After this period has passed, I will not be able to ask for any amendments of my statements nor to withdraw from the study.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	
Signature	
Date	

Appendix 4.4: Information Sheet for Participants

Information Sheet for Participants

The Antecedents and Consequences of Workplace Silent Treatment: A Cross-cultural Study.

You are invited to participate in a research project on silent treatment at work. Before deciding whether participate, please take time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish.

What is the purpose of the project?

Silent treatment occurs in almost every organisation where the active exchange of conversations between co-workers is absent, meaning not speaking to a person in their presence or over the internet. Receiving, giving, or observing silent treatment is common in work environments. The purpose of this study involves examining the nature of the silent treatment phenomenon in Omani and the UK workplaces to identify whether any cultural differences exist.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked about your views and experiences regarding the silent treatment at work in an interview that will last approximately one to two hours. If you needed a break during the interview or wish to continue the interview another day, you have the right to ask for that too.

You can choose the mode of interviewing at your convenience (eg, a face-to-face interview, online communication platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Team, etc. or over the phone). You can also select the time and place suitable for the interview.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview, and to decline to answer any question. If for any reasons you decided to withdraw from the study after the interview, please inform the researcher using her contact details below within one month. After this period has passed, withdrawal from the study would no longer be possible.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

While there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that taking an active role in this study by sharing your views and experiences will lead to self-management and even improved control of one's emotions.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no risks on the way the interview is conducted, or towards yourself. In other words, taking part in this study should not cause any physical or psychological discomfort. However, if you experienced any distress during the interview, you should bring that to the researcher's attention immediately. Any disclosure of bullying or harassment would be treated sympathetically within the interview. Also, if you feel upset at talking about silent treatment, we advise that you contact *Tatamman* https://www.psychcovid19oman.com/services to support you with mental health.

Use, dissemination and storage of research data

Data obtained from you will be stored securely in an online data storage software protected by a password known by only the researcher and her supervisors. Data will be dealt with professionally to protect your confidentiality as an interviewee. Your information will be kept confidential for three years for research purposes and after that will be destroyed.

What will happen to my personal information?

The researcher will not disclose your name or your organisation's name in any document. The researcher may include direct and translated quotations by you in the interview but not disclosing your name/organisation. Therefore, you will not be identified in any document that contains information received from you; instead, a pseudo name will be used to store and refer to your data.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Results of the research project will be published in academic papers, reports, and articles. They will also be presented in conferences. However, your name nor the name of your institution will be identified in any publication or conference.

By participating in this study, my supervisors and I will be glad to share our research findings with you. Thus, please let the researcher know if you would like to receive a copy of the findings' report by contacting myself and/or them using the information below.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The researcher will record the interview using an audio recording instrument with your permission in the case of a phone call interview and a face-to-face interview. Whereas if the interview was conducted through the online communication platforms, video recordings will be taking with your consent.
The recording will be kept confidential and stored in a protected online software accessible by only the researcher and her supervisors.
However, the audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be transcribed and translated. Once the interview has been transcribed – approximately one month following the interview – the audio recording will be deleted. They will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures upon your consent. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.
Shall you have any further concerns regarding your privacy and data security, please refer to The University of Leeds Privacy Notice for more information: https://dataprotection.leeds.ac.uk/research-participant-privacy-notice/#additional-notices-and-guidance-policies.

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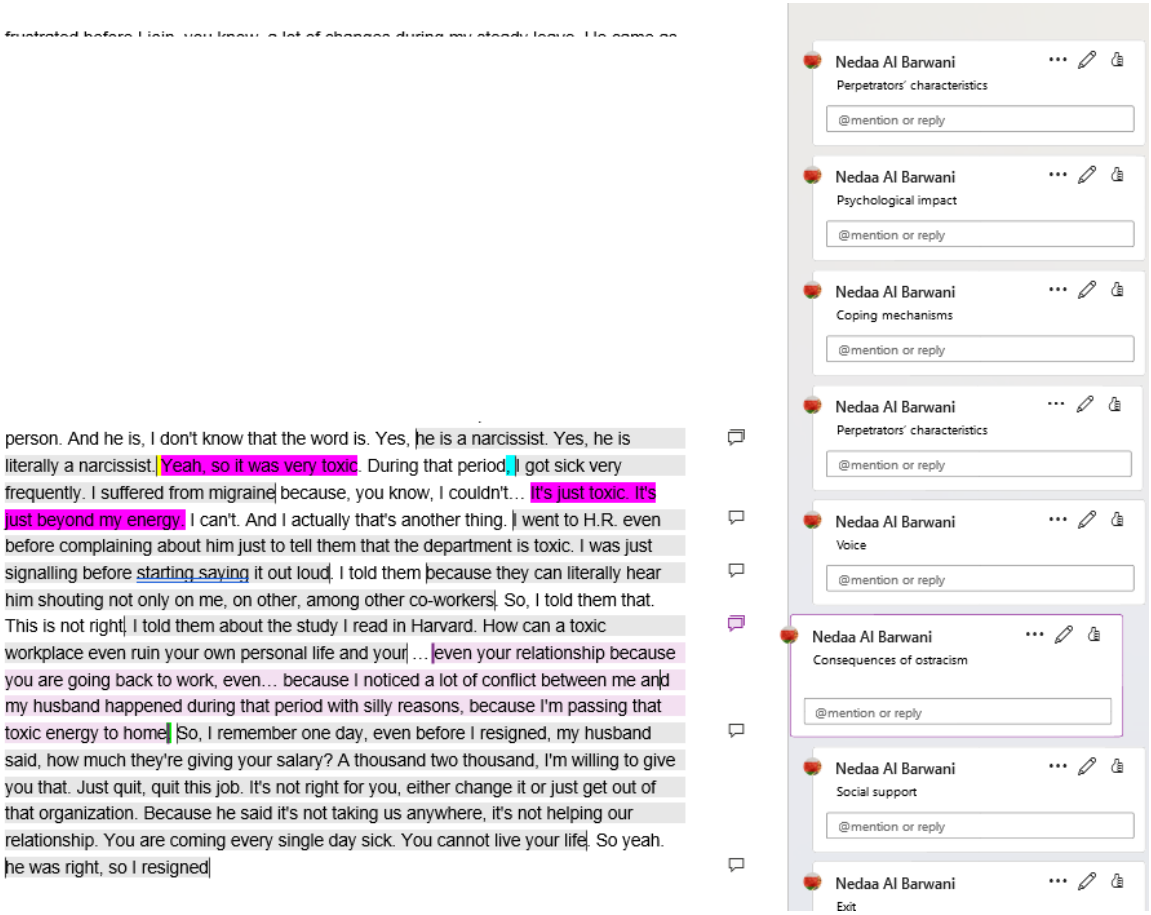
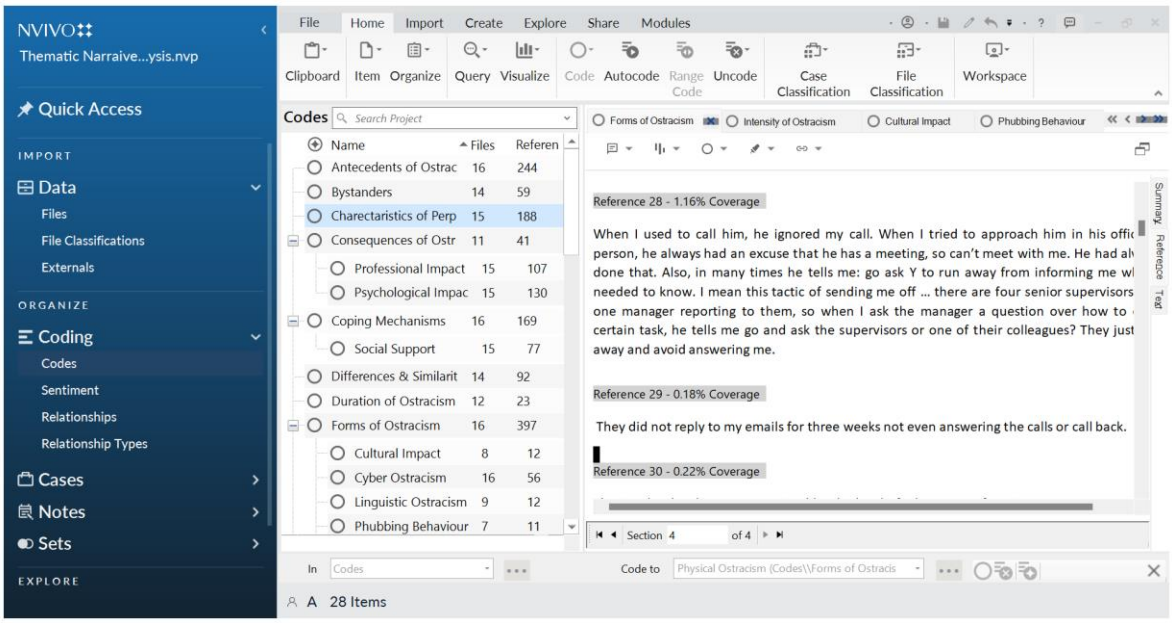
Appendix 4.5: Initial Codes



Appendix 4.6: List of a few Initial Codes with Their Frequencies



Appendix 4.7: Clusters of Codes Illustrating Forms of Ostracism

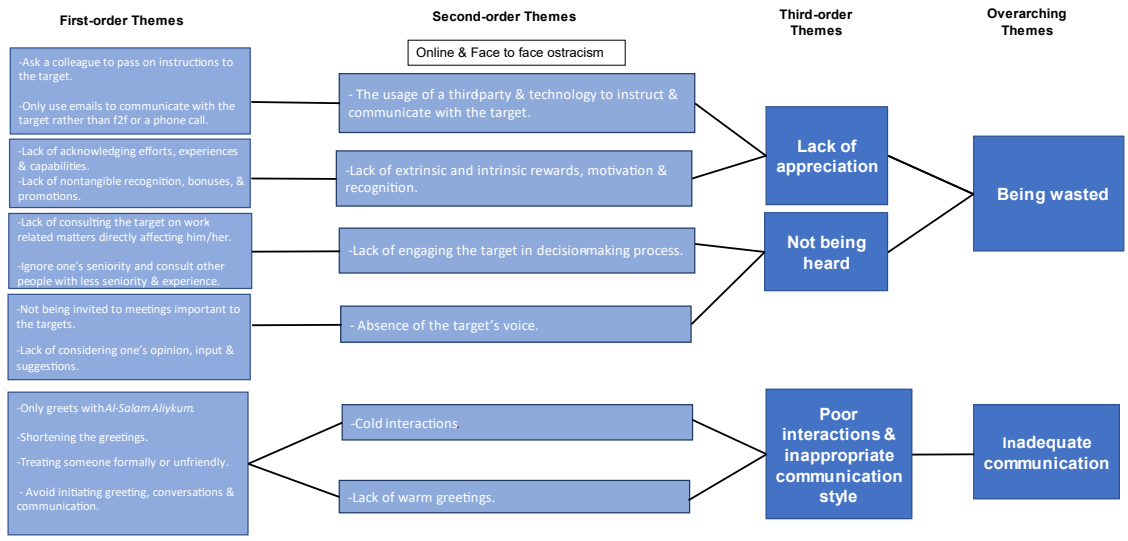
Forms of Ostracism	No. of Participants /15	By a Leader	Example of Codes
Lack of warm greetings	8	3	-Al-Salam Aliykum -Cold heart. -Shortening the greeting. -Goes down to business. -She does not greet me properly. - Answer with only a word or two.
Lack of considering one's opinion and input.	10	9	-He never invited me to attend the meeting with senior auditors. -In the meeting…He makes feel like an idiot.
Lack of considering one's experience and capabilities.	8	8	-If I raised my opinion in the meeting, he won't comment
Continuously postponing or avoiding meetings or discussions with the target	6	4	- There is no direct meetings with them. - I approached the GM to discuss this for three days in a row, but each time he told me he had a meeting and that I needed to wait.
Stopping, pausing or delaying someone's promotion/bonus/development/rotation/secondment/signing off letters.	7	7	-He said that I am not competent enough to head this directorate. -And they paused the promotion for me.
Treating someone formally after having an informal work relationship.	9	7	-He will insist that the manager separate us (Adil). - We used to hang out for reunion from time to time, he stopped coming to the outings
Never nominate the target when the target feels he/she deserves to be nominated.	10	10	-If there were nominations for something and a group member was one of the nominees, he would immediately eliminate him from the list of nominees. - When they ask the managers to suggest people for training or for recognition, she never adds my name to it.
Use a third person to deliver instructions or information to the target or follow a chain of command to instruct the target while approaching him/her directly is appropriate.	5	3	-She won't come and tell me about it, she would use that system to let me know what assignment. - He does not discuss with me anything; instead he discusses issues with my subordinates

Sub-theme 1: Lack of warm greetings

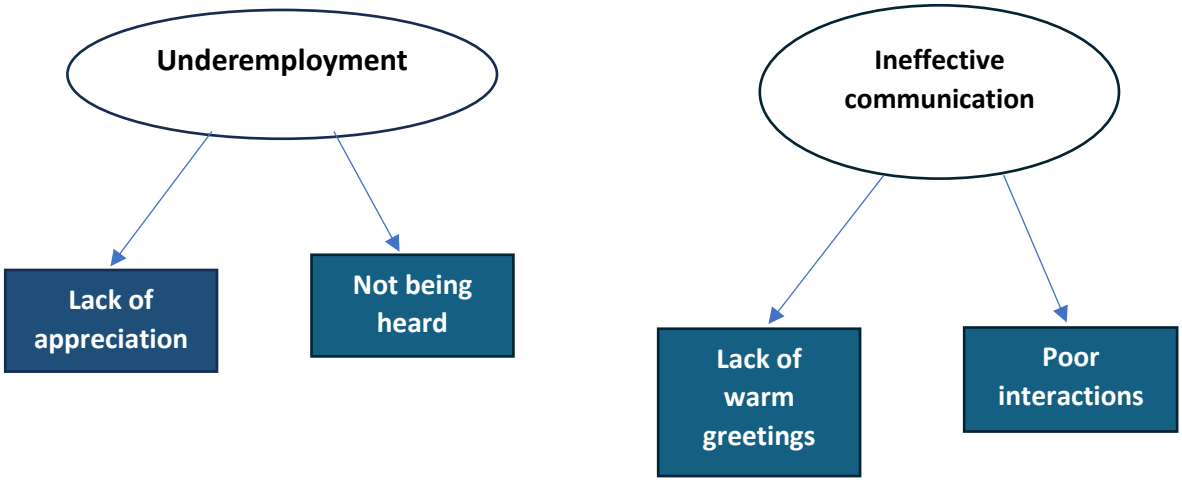
Sub-theme 2: Lack of recognition and appreciation

Sub-theme 3: Communication deficiency

Appendix 4.8: Potential Themes Representing Forms of Ostracism; Highlighting First, Second, and Third-order Themes



Appendix 4.9: Final Thematic map Representing Second-order Themes and Final Themes



Appendix 6.1: Joint Display of the Integration Process Undertaking During Phase 2 Prior to Final Refinement

Variable	Dimensions	Quotation	Corresponding Survey Items: (Never, sometimes, often, always) or (Strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree)
Integrating qualitive data on the forms of WO into building survey items			
Perpetrators	-Leaders -Colleagues -Subordinates	-He came as a director and my ex-manager was under him. My manager couldn't tolerate it, imagine within six months three managers resigned under his leadership. They couldn't tolerate to be under his directorate (leaders). - One of my colleagues… he started ostracising me since then, ignore me and avoid me whenever he sees me (colleagues). - I have one of the most outstanding faculty members… she constantly avoids me especially after I became the HOD (subordinates).	-My direct manager ostracises me. -The management ostracises me. -My colleagues ostracised me. -My subordinates ostracise me.
Lack of Appreciation	- Lack of intrinsic rewards & lack of acknowledging individuals' effort, contributions, and potentials.	-There is no bonus, nothing at all like that. The annual increments as you know are suspended due to the pandemic. The rewards are also suspended. Do you know that I have been promoted twice but never received any salary increment for ten months! Then when I finally received a salary increment, it was a slight increase, nothing to mention really & without counting retroaction (extrinsic reward). - When you give someone something and they reply with 'thank you,' you might feel like it's 'fair enough.'	1. **Lack of extrinsic rewards:** -My compensation package reflects the effort and contributions I make to the organisation. -I feel adequately rewarded for the work I do. -I have received a fair promotion or pay raise. 2. **Lack of intrinsic rewards:** -My effort for intrinsic rewards, it is not always acknowledged by others. - I feel demotivated to work when I put extra effort that goes unacknowledged. 3. **Motivation:**

		But here, when we exert effort for an intrinsic reward and others see our effort, we don't always get that recognition. Intangible rewards do exist, but their value varies depending on who the people are. Some may not care about them, seeing them as unimportant issue and not worth considering (intrinsic rewards). - You know, my motivation… my only motivation was when somebody compliments me at work or when I achieve something, a new certification at work or a new promotion, or, you know, those things at work, they were my main, I would say, satisfaction (motivation). - On the other hand, there are people who get recognised and rewarded by doing minimum work. How and why is that? We have no idea (recognition). -I mean, when you work and make great effort then get such treatment, that's stressful. I am not speaking about the monetary rewards; I am talking about when someone sees your work well done… I mean me as an employee, should I ask for promotion myself or intangible recognition?! it should come from them (recognition & all of the above).	-I am motivated to perform well at work. -My work environment is motivating. 4. **Recognition:** -I receive positive feedback or recognition for my work on a regular basis. -My efforts are recognised and valued by my manager and colleagues. -Recognition is given fairly and equitably among colleagues.
Poor Interaction	- Involvement of a third party as an intermediary to deliver instructions to the target on behalf of the perpetrator	-Even the subjects that are related directly to me, my manager won't approach me to talk about them with me, instead he sends my colleague to tell me (Third-party).	-I receive direct communication from my manager regarding my tasks ie, through face-to-face or telephone call.

	- Relying on online communication as the exclusive means to instruct the target when F2F is the appropriate means of corporate communication	- Even when there are task assignments, she needs to assign to us… we have internal assignment system, but she won't come and tell me about it, she would use that system to let me know what assignment I should do by writing: do so and so. There are no conversations, nor discussions. Whereas if she only picked up the phone to tell me about the assignments, we would have saved a lot of time and finished them earlier (Technology).	-My manager instructs my colleague to inform me about the tasks I am required to do. -My manager communicates task instructions to me only through formal online channels, such as email or the corporate system.
Not Being Heard	-Lack of engaging the target in decision-making process related to their expertise "Al-Shura principle".	-I have an opinion and when no one listen to it, it hurts. I know this place because I am here every day, so I know everything about it. Therefore, we were supposed to participate in the decision-making.	-Providing feedback on work-related matters is encouraged by my manager, colleagues, and team. -I am consulted by my manager and coworker regarding decisions that relate to my expertise and experience. -I am actively engaged in the decision-making process related to my expertise and experience. -My expertise, status and experience are taken into account in the decision-making process.
	- Absence of the target's voice.	-He is more open to that guy; he discusses with him issues and that guy tell us the information in return. We had never had a meeting with him, never! Even when the reports are issued, he never discusses with us what is in that report, though we as auditors worked on the report.	-I feel that my opinions and ideas are heard and respected by my managers and coworkers. -My manager regularly acknowledges and appreciates my contributions to the organisation. -Despite my experience and expertise, my manager seeks input from colleagues who lack experience and expertise in the field.
Lack of Warm Greetings	-Only greets with Al-Salam Aliykum.	-In the morning when he steps into the office, he would say: Al-Salam Aliykum. Because he is a	-My managers & colleagues initiate to greet me with the Islamic greeting when they see me.

Communication: "*the sharing of information, ideal or knowledge between people using accepted rules"* (Lawson et al., 2019, p30).		religious person, so he knows greeting is for Allah. Thus, he says Al-Salam Aliykum. But, not a warm greeting, a very cold one. I mean, he greets only as a Muslim duty he must do but he does not follow it up with other questions such as: how are you? How are the kids? And so on. There is nothing at all except: hi, which is the minimum level of greetings.	-My managers & colleagues responds to my Islamic greeting.* *Subject to change for the Brits sample.
	-Shortening the greetings.	I was the one who used to take the initiative and greet him. Once, I noticed I was in the parking lots inside my car, and he was still in his car. We had just arrived. So, I stopped to wave my hand and say Al-Salam Aliykum, but he walked away from me and did not even stop to greet me properly.	-My manager & colleagues warmly greet me when we meet. -My manager and colleagues inquire about my health and well-being when we greet each other.
	- Inappropriate nonverbal greetings.	Her treatment was very rigid, extremely rigid, no greetings; instead, she goes down to business immediately and discuss business matters directly without greeting me properly.	-My manager & colleagues discuss business issues with me directly without greeting me. - My manager and colleagues greet me properly before discussing business issues.
	- Avoid initiating conversations & communication.	There is no reaction at all. When he sees me, he passes by immediately, and intentionally avoids greeting me.	-I initiate conversation with my manager & colleagues when we run into each other. -My managers & colleagues initiate conversations with me when we run into each other. -My manager & colleagues avoid initiating conversation with me.
Integrating qualitive data on the coping mechanisms with WO into building survey items.			
Social support	-Empathy from family & spouses' empathy.	-Imagine every single day I would call my mom for at least 30 minutes just to cry, to tell her what's happening. And until one day my mom	-My family plays an important role in supporting me when I feel down.

		said, where are you taking this? Where do you want to take us? Isn't it enough how many now weeks & months you have been crying & crying but nothing has changed? (Family empathy). -I remember one day, even before I resigned, my husband said, how much they're paying you for as a salary? A thousand two thousands Rial? I'm willing to give you that. Just quit, quit this job. It's not right for you, either change it or just get out of that organisation. Because he said it's not taking us anywhere, it's not helping our relationship. You are coming every single day sick. You cannot live your life (Spouse empathy).	-My family supports me emotionally when I go through difficult times. -My spouse is a great source of comfort for me when I face emotional difficulties.
	- Reassurance & affirmation from colleagues and managers.	-I have at least ten colleagues who supports me in taking an active role against what we are going through. So, we continue to support one another by resisting this treatment (Colleagues' affirmation & reassurance). -My line manager was very supportive, incredibly supportive, and so classy. She told me once 'these are ad hoc tasks he is asking for; these are not our tasks. So, don't let him confuse you and your job. Just stay focused on what you are doing and in developing yourself. Whatever he does for you, try to keep it aside' (Managers' affirmation & reassurance).	-My colleagues reassure me emotionally when I suffer from works stressors. -The management understands my needs and frustrations. -The management affirms my contributions and capabilities.
Religion	-Having faith, prayers, & remembering	-The game -ostracism episodes- started over again. Yeah. So, I realised that was a sign from Allah. I believe	-Relying on my belief system helps me to cope with difficult situations.

	Quranic verses & Prophet's quotes.	in God's signs to us. I greatly thanks Allah for going through this experience (Having faith). - I used to get upset a lot and ask Allah when I pray: *why? Why this is happening to me? What did you I do? What crime did I commit?* I collapsed (Prayers). - I recall the verses from the Holy Qur'an, and that Allah exists and he is the merciest he is fair to everyone and so if there is something belongs to me I will definitely have it one day. And if I was a wrong doer Allah will forgive me (Remembering Quranic verses). -I remember what prophet Mohammed says '' *And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet in return with one better than it or at least return it in a like manner*.'' So, when I insisted and started greeting him loudly, he had responded (Remembering Prophet's quotes).	
	-Submission to God & Remembering the rewards of patience in Islam.	- But I always say: damn the devil, livelihood is from Allah… At the end I trust Allah, that all will be better and no one can hurt me without Allah's will (Submission to God). -We always try to lift each other's spirits and expect rewards in return. Patience comes from Allah. Allah said in the Holy Qur'an, '*Only those who are patient shall receive their reward in full, without reckoning'*. So, each time, Allah wants to test our patience and tells us that he will reward us in return for every time we remain patient (Reward of patience).	
Resignation	-Self-isolation/alienation	I then made my relationship with everyone superficial. I don't interfere into their	- I have resigned myself to isolation and have stopped socialising with people.

		lives, nor let them know about mine. I, only sometimes tell them the good news. At the end, I can't impose or intrude… I stopped socialising with them.	
Withdrawal	-Same-manner reaction to ostracism.	I stooped asking his forgiveness. After, a couple of months, I started treating him the same way, we both ostracised each other.	- I treat the perpetrator in the same manner as a reaction to their treatment of me.
Exit/turnover intention	-Rotation, transfer, secondment - Quit the organsiation/branch.	-The rotation strategy helped me a lot in changing the environment for a couple of months before I went back to my work again facing ostracism (rotation). -I tried to find first of all solutions by moving around the organisation just to not be within that department. This was the first solution came to my mind and it worked for a good amount of time (transfer to a different department/unit). - I accepted that offer to be seconded… I was seconded to company X (secondment).	-I requested a rotation within the organisation to overcome unfavorable situations. -I requested transfer across different/unit to overcome unfavorable situations. - I requested temporarily secondment to overcome unfavorable situations.
Avoidance	-Facing the perpetrator without directly pointing out the issue (indirect confrontation).	-That is why, I used to approach them in person to ask if there is something I need to improve, work on, or amend on my work I can do. - If she is not responsive, I will go to her in person and tell her that I have sent you an email & I am waiting for your reply.	- I prefer direct confrontation to deal with negative situations. -When I face the wrongdoer, I clearly express the issue that distresses me. - I prefer to talk about the issue that distresses me with the wrongdoer without directly pointing out the problem. - I tend to avoid confrontation or conflict when possible. - I prefer to let things go rather than causing a confrontation.
	-Completely avoid confronting the perpetrator	I was afraid of confronting him. I know it is wrong, but I could not talk	-I completely avoid direct confrontation. -I feel anxious or stressed when I am forced to confront people.

Appendix 6.2: The Modified Scale of Workplace Ostracism 16 Items Survey Questionnaire

Workplace Ostracism

Dear participant,

We would like to invite you to participate in a research study that aims to investigate the phenomenon of workplace ostracism, the strategies of coping with it, and its outcomes. Workplace ostracism refers to the act of excluding, avoiding, or ignoring an individual within a work setting.

Your participation in this study involves completing an online questionnaire that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and has received Ethics Committee approval from both the University of Leeds, the UK and The National Centre of Statistics in Oman. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous, and will only be used for research purposes.

To move through the survey, please use the Next and Back buttons located at the bottom of the page. Please avoid using the forward and back buttons on your web browser. Please note that by clicking the next button you give your consent to participate in the study.

We appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this study. Your valuable contributions will help us to better understand the experiences of workplace ostracism.

We hope that the results of this study will provide valuable insights into the ways in which organisations can support employees who experience workplace ostracism. If you would like a copy of the feedback report, please indicate this upon completion of the survey by contacting the emails below. Alternatively, If you want to be emailed a feedback report of the study results please provide your email in the below box.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time by closing down the survey. However, kindly note that once you have submitted your response, it will not be possible to withdraw the data provided.

Disclaimer: If you feel you are being ostracised please contact your union representative, or line manager or HR adviser. You can also find support on the following website: https://www.acas.org.uk/discrimination-bullying-and-harassment

Shall you have any further concerns regarding the study or the survey questionnaire, please don't hesitate to contact us on the following contact details.

Thank you for your help.

The primary investigator:
Nidaa Al-Barwani
Email: bnnhab@leeds.ac.uk

The investigator's primary supervisor:
Dr. Samuel Farley

The investigator's secondary supervisor:
Dr. Desmond Leach

Age:

_____

Nationality:

_____

Gender:

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (0)

What is your highest level of education?

- ○ Secondary school education (1)
- ○ Bachelor's degree (2)
- ○ Postgraduate degree (3)

Contract type:

- ○ Part-time (1)
- ○ Full-time (2)

Please indicate the overall number of years you have been in employment in your organization (if you have been at your organization for less than one year, please put 0 years):

_____

Workplace ostracism is defined as “the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others at work” (Ferris et al., 2008, p. 1348).

Based on this definition, please read the following statements carefully and select the response that best represents your opinion or experience over the last six month. Use the Likert scale provided below to rate each statement.

	Never (1)	Once in a while (2)	Sometimes (3)	Fairly often (4)	Often (5)	Constantly (6)	Always (7)
Others ignrored you at work. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others left the area when you entered. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your greetings have gone unanswered at work. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
You involuntarily sat alone in a crowded lunchroom at work. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others avoided you at work. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
You noticed others would not look at you at work. (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Others at work shut you out of the conversation. (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others refused to talk to you at work. (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others at work treated you as if you weren't there. (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others at work did not invite you or ask if you wanted anything when they went for a coffee break. (16)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others did not greet you warmly when you met. (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others avoided initiating conversation with you. (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others communicated task instructions to you only through formal online channels, e.g., email. (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your manager instructed your colleagues to inform you about your	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

work-related tasks. (13)							
Others acknowledge your contribution, efforts, and potential. (14)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
You are not actively engaged in the decision-making process related to your expertise and experience. (15)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please read each question carefully and select how often you have engaged in the following behaviors when you have experienced workplace ostracism.

	Does not apply (1)	Not used at all (2)	Used sometimes (3)	Used often (4)	Used always (5)
I attempted to ostracize the perpetrator. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I stopped socializing with people. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
I get sympathy and understanding from someone. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I confronted the perpetrator. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
I let the perpetrator know I did not like what was happening. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
I told the perpetrator to stop mistreating me. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
I tried to just forget it. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
I ignored it. (10)	○	○	○	○	○
I pretended I did not notice. (11)	○	○	○	○	○
I tried to avoid the perpetrator. (12)	○	○	○	○	○
I prayed for strength. (19)	○	○	○	○	○
I looked for a lesson from	○	○	○	○	○

God in the situation. (20)					
I recalled a passage from a religious text (e.g., Bible, Qur'an). (21)	○	○	○	○	○
I prayed to get my mind off my problem/s. (22)	○	○	○	○	○

During the past month how much of the time has your job made you feel:

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Sometimes (3)	Most of the time (4)	All the time (5)
Tense (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Calm (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Relaxed (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Worried (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Anxious (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Comfortable (6)	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
All in all, I am satisfied with my job. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
In general, I like working here. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
In general, I don't like my job. (3)	○	○	○	○	○